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Introduction

Mary, The Mother Of Freedom

Between 13th May and 13th October 1917, at Fatima, in the valley known as Cova da Iria, Portugal, Our Lady showed herself to three shepherd children – Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta – while the three were saying the Rosary Prayer. The message of these apparitions had an enormous impact upon the course of history during the 20th century, shaping the destiny of Europe in a specific way. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of these events, we have organised in our country several pilgrimages of penance, while special days of prayer and popular missions have been proposed. On 12th and 13th October 2017 the Faculty of Roman-Catholic Theology at the University of Bucharest organised a theological conference at national level with the purpose of celebrating one century from the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima. Thus the present volume collects the scientific papers presented on that occasion.

We should mention that in our country the first anniversary of these apparitions took place in 1942. Then we celebrated the 25 years jubilee. The Catholic Churches in Romania organised special days of adoration, fasting and prayer, accompanied by several theological events. However the World War II prevented this jubilee from being a vast event. The atmosphere of the Silver Jubilee was briefly sketched in Bishop Ioan Suciuc's book *The Virgin of Fatima*. He began writing this book in 1942 and published it one year later at the "Buna Vestire" Printing House in Blaj.

Another initiative regarding the apparitions at Fatima took place several years later in 1945. Hoping to end the horrors of war and to promote the spirit of peace the Jesuit Father Alexandru Horvath, parish priest at the St. Helen's Church in Bucharest, organised on 13th February 1945 in his own parish the first pilgrimage of penance

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dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima. Great numbers of faithful from all parishes in Bucharest took then part in this pilgrimage (Cf. the Review “*Raiul Copiilor*”, 4th March 1945, year II, no. 5-6, p. 56). From then until now, with few discontinuities, this devotion towards the Holy Mother of Fatima has been embraced by many Catholic faithful, and also by those Greek Orthodox believers who felt themselves closer to the Catholic Church, by means of reciting the Rosary Prayer, confession and active participation at the Holy Mass.

Three years ago, on 10th November 2015, on the occasion of celebrating 70 years from the beginnings of this Marian devotion, the Most Rev. Ioan Robu Metropolitan Archbishop of Bucharest issued a decree in order to confirm this practice and to establish St. Helen’s Church in Bucharest as a place for pilgrimages of penance in the honour of Our Lady of Fatima.

Eventually, on 12th and 13th October 2017, on the occasion of the anniversary of these apparitions, the Faculty of Roman-Catholic Theology at the University of Bucharest organised a national symposium in which there took part theology professors from the three Faculties of Roman-Catholic Theology in our country: the University in Bucharest, the *Babes-Bolyai* University in Cluj, and the *Al. I. Cuza* University in Iassi. We mention that this reunion in Bucharest of Theology professors from all over the country for a theological conference was the first of its kind held after 1900. Placing this initiative under the protection of the Holy Mother, the participants expressed their hope that the theological dialogue held between these faculties should be able to continue and to bring light in the hearts of those who strive to reach Jesus by the help of Saint Mary (cf. *John* 19:27).

The pages of this volume contain the papers presented at the Marian symposium held in Bucharest. Their order is in accordance with the basic theological formation in Catholic faculties. Thus, the first part, entitled “Mary in the history of Europe and in that of the Church”, comprises three papers that treat matters of religious anthropology, of Church history and of fundamental theology. In the

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second part, “Mary in the light of the Bible”, there are three papers with biblical character; while the last part, “Mary in the liturgy and theology of the Church”, contains three papers out of which one has a liturgical character and the other two are mainly belonging to the realm of mariology.

Each of these parts contains three articles. Thus, in the first part, which is dedicated to anthropological and historical aspects, the first article, “The Message of Fatima and the Fall of Communism”, signed by Wilhelm Dană, starts from the thesis according to which the communist system fell both because of its own economical errors and because of its having opposed the work of the Church in the world, attempting to eliminate God from the hearts of the people. The argumentation bears in mind the fact that the message of Fatima, which also targeted the dramatic aspects of communist atheism, was slowly yet efficiently received. The validity of this message was confirmed by several political and social events that took place in the USSR and in the countries belonging to the former communist block during the 20th century. After distinguishing between the final revelation in Jesus Christ and particular revelations, the author highlights that one hundred years ago at Fatima there took place a particular revelation set in a context of prayer. Therefore, in order to be understood, the reader has to reach himself the specific reference level of the event, i.e. the spiritual one. The challenge of the article is the following: if by its spirituality descended into history Fatima has boycotted the forcefully imposed ideologies of the 20th century, wouldn't be possible for nowadays Moscow, even if not believing in tears, to believe in Fatima?

The second article is entitled “Mary, an authentic source of spirituality” and signed by János Vik. The author considers that in the context of the apparitions at Fatima the Virgin Mary can be seen as a clean mirror of the divine mystery. The Immaculate Virgin lived in a perfect manner the contemplative stage of one's spiritual life. For a contemplative attitude, the innocent vision, which does not wish to attain anything special, is most specific. Contemplation as an attitude

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includes, besides this, pure trust and love, which does not expect anything from the others. Eventually, contemplation can also include suffering. We could assume that the three little shepherds at Fatima experienced themselves this contemplative attitude which enabled them to distinguish between the gifts of God and God Himself, the only one truly worth being adored.

In the third article, “Fatima 100. Historical aspects”, Fabian Doboş insists on several historical aspects that compose the chiaroscuro background of the apparitions picture. He firstly presents in brief the political context in which the event took place, describing afterwards in chronological manner the six apparitions of the Holy Mother.

The second part comprises again three articles; however, this time their scope is biblical. Thus, completing the articles in the first part, the fourth article, “Mary’s image, the image of the Church in *Luke 1:26-56*”, Hristofor-Tarciziu Şerban claims that in traditional Churches Saint Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has been enjoying a special status, essentially based on the Gospel’s texts. However, numerous other studies confirm that Saint Mary did not only represent the historical character that gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God, but is depicted in lines that recall by means of various expressive terms the chosen people and their calling throughout history. The author also intends to highlight, in a pre-figurative manner, the ecclesiological features of St. Mary at which the excerpt *Luke 1:26-56* may be alluding. Thus, the image of the Holy Mother appears, on the one hand, as a synthesis of numerous echoes from Old Testament texts that evoke the redeeming work of God amidst His chosen people, while, on the other hand, it appears as a programmatic projection within the new people born as the Body of Christ resurrected on the Pentecost Day, i.e. the Church.

In the fifth article, “Mary, the symbol of Israel in John’s Gospel”, Zoltán Olah starts from the fact that St. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, appears in the Gospel of John no more than two times. However, on both occasions Jesus calls her *woman*, which might sound intriguing

for the reader. It is no common way of addressing one's mother. The author attempts to clarify the role played by St. Mary within the Gospel of St. John and claims that in fact Mary is the symbol of Israel, the People of God, especially in that which refers to its sublime characteristics. The image and the role of Mary are not to divide but rather to unify the people of Israel and the new people of God. By her image and role, the Church is deeply rooted in God's Old Testament people. The Fathers of the Church understood this and perceived Mary not only as a pre-figuration of the Church but also as representing Israel itself.

The sixth article is entitled "Mary and the people of God in the *Book of Apocalypses (Ap 12)*". Here Iulian Faraoanu arrives at the conclusion that the Marian theme is comparatively less frequent in the last book of the Bible. The Twelfth Article could, however, be an exception. On the other hand, ecclesiological images often appear blended with theological and christological themes. Certain experts consider that a useful key in understanding the message of this book could be the very analysis of the images of the Church. The author attempts to partly unveil the concept of Church seen as the people of God in relation with Mary the Mother of the Church in the *Book of Apocalypses*. Moreover, the author strives to find an answer to several questions such as: which is the relation between the people of God and Mary? Can a mariological reference be inferred from the *Book of Apocalypses*?

The third part contains the last three articles of the work, which have a liturgical and ecclesiastic character. The title of this article is "Mary in the liturgy and theology of the Church". Here, in the seventh article, "The *Rorate* Liturgy in Transylvania. Historical and theological considerations", David Diosi analyses the best-known Advent Liturgy, the so-called *Rorate* Liturgy, which is always celebrated at dawn. There is an old and complex tradition among the faithful in Transylvania regarding this Liturgy. In this article the author presents the history of *Rorate* Liturgies and their development, while seeking an answer to the question why were they always

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celebrated at dawn. The main aim of the study is that of identifying and describing the tradition of this Transylvanian Liturgy.

In the third article, “The Mother of God with Dumitru Stăniloiaie”, Ștefan Lupu insists on several aspects of Father Stăniloiaie’s theology regarding the Holy Mother, more specifically on those essential points by which it differs from the approaches of other Romanian theologians. He presents the connection between the Holy Mother and the Son of God, then her *historicity*, her sanctity and the ecumenical perspective on her role. The thinking of Father Stăniloiaie on St. Mary or, as he used to say, on *theotokology* is to some extent in line with the theologians before him, but he had always sought aspects of actuality, of highlighting the connection of St. Mary with the Holy Trinity, with the Holy Spirit. Although Father Stăniloiaie repeatedly wrote about the Holy Mother, even if not extensive works such as books or studies, the author remarks that in his books and studies he has always maintained a warm approach, full of sensibility towards the Mother of God.

Finally, in the ninth article, “René Laurentin’s contribution to the mariology of the Vatican Council II”, Lucian Dîncă considers Father R. Laurentin as an outstanding authority in the field of post-conciliary mariology. As an argument he cites a long list of theological, dogmatical and mariological works. Moreover the hundreds of articles published in scientific reviews from all over the world are a proof for his effort to revigorate the realm of mariology, starting from biblical and patristic elements. Pope John XXIII invited him to be part of the Preparatory Theological Commission and afterwards from the Committee of expert theologians of the Second Vatican Council. The implementation of the Council’s decisions constituted one of the main preoccupations of this Marian theologian. Likewise, the study of the phenomenon of the Holy Virgin’s apparitions all over the Catholic world preoccupied him at the highest level, remaining unparalleled until today.

De Maria numquam satis! It will never be said enough about Mary! This is what St. Bernard was saying when addressing those who honoured St. Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of the

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Church. In the spiritual horizon of this exhortation we have also inscribed the publication of this volume. The book can be fruitfully read by all those who are devoted to the Holy Virgin of Fatima, by lay theologians as well as by ordained ones. Moreover, the work is also addressed to the larger public in Romania who, even if unaware, is the subject of a mystery of liberation at the opening of which, in 1989, the Mother of God played a special role. We hope that this volume will remain for all readers as a reminder that freedom is not an instrument or a condition for attaining other aims, but rather the highest aim of a life lived in community.

MARY IN THE HISTORY OF EUROPE AND IN THAT OF THE CHURCH

Does Fatima Have Any Message Of Hope For Us, Today?

Rev. Prof. Wilhelm DANCĂ¹

Abstract

In this article the author claims that the spirit is mightier than matter and that the communist society fell as the consequence of its attempting to eliminate God from the heart of people. The argumentation is developing on two parallel levels: on the one hand, it analyses the slow but efficient receiving of the message of Fatima until its completely being assumed, body and soul, by Pope John Paul II, and on the other hand it shows that the message was confirmed by certain political and social events that took place in the Soviet Union and in the countries belonging to the communist block during the 20th century. After the introduction, which distinguished between the definitive Revelation in Jesus Christ and the private revelations, the author wonders whether the Message of Fatima still has something to say to our contemporary society. Before answering, the first part of the article presents Fatima as a spiritual event of prayer that can only be comprehended at the spiritual level. Nevertheless, certain coincidences at the historical, religious and political level that took place during the second half of the 20th century make the contemporary man think, while orienting him towards the spiritual dimension of existence, especially if the religious education he received during childhood or youth was a precarious one. The second part presents the novelty of the revelations at Fatima in relation to those of La Salette and Lourdes, highlighting the special attention paid to the “conversion of Russia”. After explaining in its third part why Bolshevik

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Russia needed to convert, the author exposes some of its errors; the fourth part presents the Prayer of the Rosary as a proper spiritual instrument for fighting against the evilness of the communist ideologies – the Blessed Virgin of Fatima requested that this prayer was recited daily. Finally, the author wonders whether Our Lady of Fatima has contributed to the “fall of the Berlin Wall”. Transposing the debate to the realm of Christian anthropology, the author – following in the footsteps of John Paul II – elaborates the idea that the fundamental error of the Bolshevik communism was its intention to uproot the need of God from the heart of man. This shattered the hearts of the people, which, implicitly, led to the fall of the communist regime. In conclusion, the article invites to reflect on the destiny of men and nations in the horizon of the theology of history. If we are willing to accept that – in a certain way – by contaminating history with its own spirituality Fatima boycotted history, then Moscow could also believe in Fatima.

Keywords: Fatima, Moscow, John Paul II, the fall of communism, Rosary Prayer.

On 13 May 1917, at Fatima (Portugal), three shepherd children – Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia – saw the Blessed Virgin Mary, who asked them to pray for the conversion of Russia. In those times, for many Catholic believers from the West, the event of the private apparitions in itself did not mean anything new. More than half a century ago, two children, Melanie and Maxim, from La Salette (France) had seen the Blessed Virgin Mary on 19 September 1846, and were urged to live the Christian values, with a special emphasis on observing Sundays. Several years later, in 1858, a young girl, Bernadette, aged 14, from Lourdes (France) saw Saint Mary, the Immaculate Virgin, for 18 times, receiving from her requests of prayer and penance for the conversion of the sinners. This time, the novelty was a request to pray for the conversion of Russia. Indeed, the little shepherds received and passed on the message of the Lady *dressed in light*, according to whom if her request were heeded, “Russia would convert and people would enjoy peace, if not, it will spread its errors throughout the world, promoting wars and persecutions against the

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Church”². Moreover, “The good ones will be martyred, the Holy Father will suffer greatly, many nations will be destroyed”³.

In theological terms, that which happened at Fatima from 13 May until 13 October 1917 was a special spiritual event defined as *private revelation*. Unlike the definitive revelation brought about Christ, private revelations have the role of completing the ultimate revelation, the revelation of the New Testament and to assist the faithful to “live more fully by it in a certain period of history”⁴.

From an anthropological perspective, private revelations are visions of an interior order determined by a force that manifests itself beyond the human senses and which those receiving it are able to perceive within their inner being; this force perceived as an inner presence has as its equivalent an external sensorial manifestation⁵. The characteristic language of visions is a symbolical one, therefore, the message of private revelations is to be understood from the context of a whole vision and not from a single part of it. Starting from these

² The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima*, Vatican City 2000, in www.vatican.va/cfaith/documents (I followed the Romanian translation: Congregația pentru Doctrina Crediței, *Mesajul de la Fatima*, trad. Ovidiu Bișog, Editura *Presa Bună*, Iași 2000, 21; this Romanian version shall be used and cited further as MF).

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 66-67. A private revelation is different from the public one. For the Catholic theology the term *revelation* can be used to refer to the vital process, not only to its intellectual contents (communicating certain mysteries), by which God makes himself gradually known to his people. The public revelation is the revealing act of God, who presents himself to the knowledge of the entire world. God’s revelation, addressed to all mankind, has been completed in Christ. Nonetheless, the final revelation of Christ does not exclude a development of its comprehension. On the contrary. This is the context to which *private revelations*, such as the ones from Fatima, Lourdes or other places are inscribed; they do not complete the final revelation, but assist the faithful during a particular historical time to better understand it and to live the public revelation at a deeper level.

⁵ Cf. MF, 52.

images as a whole one can reach the heart of the *prophecy* contained in that particular revelation, which represents a calling or guidelines towards the fulfilment of God's will⁶. In other words, one could say that the message of Fatima invites us to reflect on the words of Jesus in the Gospel and to rely on his promises: "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn, 16: 33)⁷.

A question that spontaneously takes shape within our hearts is the following: does *Fatima* still have any message for the contemporary believer? Undoubtedly, for the Catholic Christians raised in the spirit of Marian devotions, Fatima is a pivotal spiritual event of the 20th century. Consequently, it is something to be believed, something bearing a message that continuously educates towards a deepening of the relation between Mary, the Mother of Christ, and the Church, our Mother. However, seeing that contemporary people are no longer brought up in a religious frame of mind, as it used to be within traditional societies, and as many contemporary Catholic Christians are sharing in the same situation, we wish to present in the following pages several reasons by which to prove that Fatima still makes one think, that Fatima still has a story to tell, that Fatima still remains a proof of the victory held by the spirit over the corrupting forces of history or, briefly said, that Fatima has boycotted the course of history.

Fatima – an event of prayer

The *story* about Fatima began one century ago, at Cova da Iria, near Fatima (Portugal) on 13 May 1917, when three young children happened to witness a series of supernatural phenomena of a mystical character. As it is known, religious phenomena can only be comprehended by situating ourselves at their specific referential level, i.e. the religious one. Any endeavour towards a rational, scientific

⁶ Cf. MF, 55.

⁷ Cf. MF, 64.

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argumentation is mainly bound to fail, as such approaches are in themselves methodologically unsuitable. The three young children were Lucia (aged 10), Jacinta (aged 7) and Francisco (aged 9). By means of their inner senses they were able to perceive Saint Mary and to speak to her. The Holy Virgin of Fatima entrusted them with a message containing an exhortation towards spiritual conversion; the entire world was called to convert, but especially Russia. As the human and cultural context of all these occurrences was so unsophisticated and yet so weighty its message, many felt reluctant about accepting the little shepherds' accounts.

Concretely, on 13th May 1917, Lucia, Jacinta and Francis went out herding their families' sheep on the mountain slopes near their home village. After lunch they prayed the Rosary⁸ as usual, after which they began to play. Suddenly they were interrupted by a lightening which came from nowhere, as the day was cloudless and clear. The children thought that a storm was approaching, so they gathered all their sheep and ran home. While still climbing down the slopes, another lightening crossed the sky. Running even faster they finally reached the valley. There – as if someone blocked their way – they all stopped still; an extraordinary light captured their attention; in front of them, above a bush, they saw a very beautiful Lady, entirely made of light⁹. This was the beginning of the series of apparitions at Fatima, which were to continue on every 13th day of the month, from May to October (without the one on 13 August¹⁰) – the last one

⁸ This prayer was composed by St. Dominic in the 8th century in order to help the illiterate people learn and meditate the main mysteries of Redemption contained in the New Testament. The Rosary is a prayer that invites one to contemplate the image of Jesus Christ together with Mary, his Mother.

⁹ Cf. I. SUCIU/ C.-F. SABAU, *Fecioara din Fatima (The Virgin of Fatima)*, Baia Mare 2017, 63-64.

¹⁰ The children failed to arrive on 13 August to meet with the Lady as they had previously been seized and prevented from going by the local authorities, who represented political parties unfavorable to the Catholic Church in general and, in

displaying the miracle of the dancing sun on the sky, a rare cosmic phenomenon witnessed by over 70.000 people, both the faithful and the curious. Some of these believed what they saw and accepted the children's account about the Lady *made of light*, others did not and remained sceptical or indifferent.

Although the Church has since authorised these apparitions, no one is compelled to accept their message. Still, being supernatural signs, private revelations or visions, they leave their traces throughout history and, by changing people's lives, they can change the course of history as well¹¹. Therefore, their existence cannot be objectively contested, on the one hand, and on the other, it continues to address people of all times. Moreover, being events of spiritual life in the shape of prayer, the apparitions at Fatima have altered the destinies of thousands and tens of thousands of people. Also from this point of view, the apparitions defend themselves in front of those who contest them by the effects they have produced in the spiritual lives of the faithful.

The core of the message at Fatima is its spiritual element. Similar to other revelations in the modern and contemporary history of the Church, these, too, occurred within a frame filled with prayer. Still, if by prayer we understand the *lifting of the human soul towards God*¹², then the three little shepherds at Fatima did not only contributed to a better awareness regarding man's relationship with God¹³, but – in a certain way – prepared the ground for man's more confidently relating to God as the Lord of history.

particular, to the spreading of the messages of these children. However, the Blessed Virgin was seen by them on 19 August 1917.

¹¹ T. BERTONE, "Presentation", in MF, 3.

¹² *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2559.

¹³ *Ibidem*, no. 2629.

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The Conversion of Russia

During the apparition on 13 of July 1917, the Lady *made of light* entrusted the young shepherds with a three-part message. The second¹⁴ part tells about the First World War, which was on the point of coming to an end and about the possibility that another world war broke out, even more destructive, during the pontificate of Pope Pius XI. For preventing the outburst of this second world war the Lady from the heavens said

“I will come to ask for the consecrating of Russia to my immaculate heart (...). If they accept my requests, Russia will convert and there will be peace; if not, it will spread its errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions against the Church. (...) The Holy Father will suffer greatly and many nations will be destroyed. Eventually, my immaculate heart will triumph, the Holy Father will consecrate Russia, which will convert and the world will enjoy a time of peace”¹⁵.

The request of consecrating Russia to her Immaculate Heart reached the Holy Father Pius XI in 1929 through the Bishop of Leiria. Out of diplomatic reasons, the request was not fulfilled. Lucia, who was living then in a monastery in Tuy (Spain), insisted in her letters towards her spiritual father J. B. Gonçalves that the Pope and all the Bishops in the world publicly consecrated Russia to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and to say prayers reparation so as to end the persecutions against the Christians in Russia and throughout the entire world. The Bishops in Portugal answered this request and on 13 May 1931 publicly consecrated the Portuguese nation to the Immaculate Heart. In several other letters from 1935 and 1936, Sister Lucia insisted again on the consecration of

¹⁴ The first part contains the vision of hell, while the third refers to the assassination of the Holy Father. This last part was eventually released in 2000.

¹⁵ MF, 21.

Russia. In 1937, the Bishop of Leiria wrote to Pope Pius XI: “Sister Lucia asks me to communicate to Your Sanctity that, based on a heavenly revelation, God promises to end the persecutions in Russia, if Your Sanctity agrees to accomplish a solemn public act of reparation and of consecrating Russia to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and to dispose that all the Bishops throughout the world do the same”¹⁶. As we know Pope Pius XI failed to consecrate Russia, even if at times he displayed a benevolent conduct towards Fatima¹⁷.

Meanwhile, Russia was spreading its errors regarding the Christian belief in God, the transcendental dignity of the human person, the political life in society. As we know, among the countries affected by the Russian influence was our country as well. Many innocent people in Romania have suffered during the Communist regime for their Christian faith, for their connection with the Church of Rome or for promoting a democracy founded on Christian principles and values.

The historical beginning of these errors was represented by the coup led by Vladimir Ilitch Lenin on the night between 24-25 October (6-7 November) 1917, two weeks after the least apparition of the Holy Mother at Fatima, when the Bolsheviks took over the political power in Russia. There followed a long civil war until 1920, when the anti-Bolshevik forces were annihilated, and hopes nourished by the February Revolution of 1917 for a democratic republic turned to nothing. During these years the foundation of the Soviet Union were laid, which in 1922 was to be proclaimed as state and which lasted until its dissolution in 1991. The socialist and liberal values of the Russian February Revolution of 1917 were replaced with the communist values and imposed by violence for almost 75 years.

¹⁶ Apud I. SUCIU/C.F. SABAU, *Fecioara din Fatima*, 407-408.

¹⁷ Commenting on this letter, the Pope would have said in a close circle of friends: “If I am said to be the Vicar of Christ on the earth, when God wants something from me, He can just tell me so!”. Apud I. SUCIU/C.F. SABAU, *Fecioara din Fatima*, 408.

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In a report on the anniversary of 70 years from the October Revolution, Mikhail Gorbachev recalls that during the first years of the Revolution “the methods employed in the struggle against the counter-revolution became rooted in the daily life. The priority of violence, of *exceptional situations*, assimilated by the *proletariat bureaucracy*, were already part of the daily life”¹⁸. After the times of Lenin, Stalin imposed an economical view that resulted in the eradication of the free market, of the private business spirit, of the ideological and political pluralism. Gorbachev sadly remarked that in soviet Russia there had been imposed “a state socialism of an essentially *barrack-like nature*”¹⁹. All the Stalinist measures taken in the economical field were extremely harsh on the peasants: “the forcefully requisition of the agricultural production and the forced collectivisation. A kind of serfdom system was created, that was to last for decades. Forced economy, the suppression of any heterodox vision, repression, justified in the beginning by the capitalist context, all became part of the system. The country was dominated by a totalitarian regime, based on state property, on the monopoly of one single ideology, on the power of a single party”²⁰.

From the religious point of view, the Russian people was subject to a grievous and humiliating experiment. The Bolsheviks thought of building a society without God. Commenting on the changes that took place in Russia beginning with October 1917, Patriarch Kirill I said: “The Revolution was a terrible crime, and those who deceived the people, manipulated them, created conflicts, pursued different ends from those they had declared. There was an agenda, of which people

¹⁸ M. GORBACHEV, *Amintiri. Viața mea înainte și după Perestroika*, (*Memories. My life before and after Perestroika*), translated from Russian by Justina Bandol, Bucharest 2015, 438.

¹⁹ *Idem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 439.

did not even think”²¹. Among others, the secret agenda of the Bolshevik power foresaw the elimination of the faith in God in people’s hearts and the destruction of the Church.

The Errors of Bolshevik Russia

In order to reach the ends of the Revolution, the Bolsheviks first focused on the weakening of the primary cell of the society and of the Church, i.e. the family. This diabolical work began in 1918 during the first phase of the Bolshevik Revolution and officially continued – by passing from one extreme to another – until the fall of Soviet Union in 1991. We refer to the so-called sexual revolution initiated by the Soviet commissar responsible with the public health of the soviets, Alexandra Mikhailovna Kollontai, known as the advocate of the *free love*. In the works dedicated to the emancipation of women from the oppression of men²², Kollontai insisted that family was a relic of the traditional and middle-class social customs and, therefore, women should be liberated from any ties with her family (be it her husband or her children), relations between sexes ought to be liberalised and the idea of family eliminated, as it was no longer compatible with the evolution degree of the communist society. Still, relationships between men and women were not completely free; certain rules were necessary²³. The spiral of evil opened during those times has caused

²¹ Apud I. ȚENE, “Rusia, prima victimă a revoluției bolșevice din 1917. Anticomunismul care unește!” (“Russia, the first victim of the Bolshevik Revolution. The unifying anti-communism”), in: *NapocaNews*, 22/02/2017.

²² Cf. A. M. KOLLONTAI, *Free Love*, London 1932; *Communism and the Family*, Sydney 1970; *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle: Love and the New Morality*, Bristol 1972.

²³ The men in the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) could at any time have sexual affairs with the women members of the same youth organization, while the women were only allowed three times a week. The children born out of these relationships were considered to be the children of the communist workers in Russia; the emancipated communist woman could, thus, continue with her work in the service of the society while the country, as mother, was taking care

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until today tens of millions of physical victims and a tremendous moral suffering, if we think of all the abortions, orphan children, divorces and destroyed families. Seeing all this, at Fatima the Lady *dressed in light* was sending a message through a little girl, Lucia, urging the world to put an end to the spread of evil, of destroying the human life as such, an evil also designed by a woman – A. M. Kollontai – but in the name of a liberty without God, without responsibility.

Meanwhile, soon after the coup in October 1917, the Bolshevik power began the mass and systematic persecution against the faithful. In a letter dated 19 March 1922 addressed to the members of the political Bureau, Lenin wrote:

“Confiscating valuables, especially from the richest monasteries and churches, should be accomplished with unfaltering determination, without exception and in the shortest time. The more representatives of the reactionary middle-class and clergy we manage to shoot, the better. We should attend to these matters right now, so as during the following decades not to even think of opposing any resistance”²⁴.

The figures describing the carnage of the clergy, of the lay faithful, of destroying churches, church-bells, icons, vestments and

of them in kindergartens and children's homes. The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League was founded on 29 October 1918. The youngest members were 14 years old and the upper age limit was 28, excepting the clerks, who could be older. Beginning with 1956, the 20th Congress of CPSU, the Komsomol started to disintegrate until through its several *glasnost* (transparency) and *perestroika* (reconstruction) reforms, M. Gorbachev decided in 1986 that the organization did not correspond any longer to its initial objectives.

²⁴ Cited from *The Archives of Kremlin*. The Political Bureau and the Church: 1922-1925, 2 vol., edited by N. N. POKROVSKI and S. G. PETROV, vol. 1, Novosibirsk-Moscova 1997, 141-143, cited by HH KIRILL I, “Despre mărturisirea credinței ortodoxe în sistemul ateu și despre semnificațiile libertății noastre astăzi” (“On the Testimony of Orthodox Faith in the Atheist System and on the Signification of Our Freedom Today”), 28/10/2017, see www.basilica.ro

sacred objects are shuddering. Between 1918 and 1939 tens of thousands of churches and monasteries were closed and transformed into shops, cinema halls or warehouses. Out of the 60,000 churches existing in 1917, in 1939 only 100 were still existing. Several schisms were infiltrated within the Church, of which the most notorious was the *Living Church of the Innovators*, which functioned until 1943. In schools, religion courses were replaced by courses of atheism. In 1929 the *Atheist* newspaper was founded, the official organism of the Central Union of the Atheists in the Soviet Union. Persecutions among clergymen reached tens of thousands, while lay victims reached hundreds of thousands. In 1938, more than 33,000 clerics were arrested and in 1938 more than 13,000 were sent to prison. Out of the total number of convictions 44% were sentenced to death in 1937, and in 1938 the figures raised to 59%. In 1939 only four Bishops had been left in Russia, persecuted as well. After a short break of about seven years, between 1943 and 1950, this atmosphere of persecution against the Church and the faithful in Russia went on, sometimes even worse than in the past²⁵. The changes started at the end of the '80s, more precisely with the installation of Mikhail Gorbachev as the president of the Soviet Union.

The resistance of the clergy and of the laity had been suppressed in a violent manner, in the spirit of terror that characterised the coup of October 1917. Even if the terrorist operations have deep roots throughout history, and such words like *terrorist* and *terrorism* have first been used during the French Revolution (1789-1799), with reference to the reign of terror initiated by the Bolshevik Revolutionary Government, the terrorist group Narodnaya Volya in Russia was the precursor of the socialist and anarchist revolutionary organisations, including the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party. Among others, Narodnaya Volya clandestinely organised the

²⁵ HH KIRILL I, *On the Testimony of Orthodox Faith*.

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assassination of the Tsar Alexander II (March 1881)²⁶. In the name of the noble ideal of turning towards the people, of serving the people, especially the most disfavoured ones, the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia made use of terrorist methods and techniques in order to impose its political and economic programme. During the times of Lenin, whose elder brother – Alexander Ulyanov – was a member of the terrorist group Narodnaya Volya, and especially after Stalin became President, the terrorist tactics evolved encompassing a very large range of criminal activities, from the assassination and intimidation of counter-revolutionary agents to the annihilation of representative political leaders in Russia or in the West.

The attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II on 13 May 1981 is also subscribed to the scope of terrorist solutions, which aimed at the elimination of the reactionaries, and has a deep connection with the message of Fatima. Indeed, the second part of the message says that if Russia fails to convert, “the Holy Father will suffer greatly”²⁷, while the third part tells about “a bright light (...) and a Bishop dressed in white (...) he was killed by a group of soldiers who shot at him with fire guns and arrows”²⁸. The suffering caused to Pope John Paul II by the bullet which pierced him and the one that wounded his finger, as well as the very attempt to his life in itself are very close to the figure of *the Holy Father* and of the *Bishop in white* of whom the messages speak. The Pope himself assumed this prophetic identity, declaring after the attempt that there was a *maternal hand which guided the*

²⁶ Cf. D. ZUZEAC, “Istoria terorismului în lume. Cine sunt considerați primii teroriști din istorie și cum a evoluat terorismul de-a lungul timpului” (“The world history of terrorism. Who were the first terrorists in history and how terrorism has evolved throughout history”), in *Adevărul de Suceava*, 8/08/2016.

²⁷ MF, 21.

²⁸ MF, 26-27.

course of the bullet, enabling the *agonising Pope* to survive while *almost dead*²⁹.

Recent studies in the *Stasi* archives reveal that Mehmet Ali Ağça, who was a member in the Turkish terrorist group *Grey Wolves*, had been employed for this criminal operation by the Bulgarian secret services affiliated to the *Stasi* Bureau in the German Democratic Republic and who had close connections with the KGB in the Soviet Union. The *Papst Action* initiated by the *Stasi Büro* in 1982, in order to eliminate any proof that Mehmet Ali Ağça had connections with Bulgaria, confirmed since then by means of various disinformation actions exactly that which they strove to cover³⁰.

The errors of Bolshevik policies could be resumed in one: the construction of a society without God³¹. There exists a real risk to repeat them, if we fail to consider the substance of the message at Fatima: the conversion of hearts to the values of Christian humanism. The word *heart* appears three times in the message. This term designated the entire human being, living not only for the immanent life, but opened as well towards the transcendent, *etsi Deus daretur* (*as if God exists*). Thus, the power by which we could put an end to the spiral of evil does not come from below, but from above; does not come from ourselves, but from Another One. In our relationship with God we can answer evil with goodness. However, the contemporary man, overwhelmed by the weight of his own intellectual discoveries,

²⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, "Meditation Together with the Italian Bishops at the Gemelli Clinic", in *Insegnamenti*, vol. XVII/1, 1994, 1061.

³⁰ G. WEIGEL, *La fine e l'inizio. Giovanni Paolo II: la vittoria della libertà, gli ultimi anni, l'eredità* (*The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II – The Victory of Freedom, the last Years, the Legacy*, Doubleday 2010), note 93, Siena 2012, 152-153. Among the subtle lies fabricated by the Secret Services in the German Democratic Republic, one was published in the European press of those years. Thus, the leader of the Christian Democrat Party in Bavaria, Franz-Joseph Strauss, would have been implicated in the assassination attempt of Pope John Paul II, as he had close connections with the rightist political parties in Turkey.

³¹ Cf. HH KIRILL I, *On the Testimony of Orthodox Faith*, *op. cit.*

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understands himself as the legitimate norm for reasoning and conduct. Left alone in front of good and evil, the contemporary man lives in one single dimension, without inter-personal relations, without any transcendence, *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God does not exist). Now man alone decides what is good and what is evil. This anthropological model – a human being without transcendence – has culminated during Communism and Nazism, when certain people decided in the name of a *good* only seen in the light of their own desire for power that other people deserve to die or to disappear. The exacerbated subjectivism during Communism and Nazism has deep roots in the Illuminist mentality³²; it still survives today in the hybrid forms of political correctness or secularised humanism. While retrospectively looking at the suffering caused by the totalitarian ideologies in the 20th century, I think that, so as not to repeat them in the name of other ideologies, we need the conversion of hearts, the spiritual renewal of mentality, renewal which ought to proceed from one's heart and to reach the hearts of the others.

The Rosary as an instrument of spiritual resistance

The message of Fatima was transmitted to the Church and to the entire world while the First World War was coming to an end. For the participants that had suffered during this conflict, peace undoubtedly became a long-awaited value. The belief that the Rosary is the spiritual instrument by which evil could be defeated (physically, morally, socially, spiritually etc.) and people could live in peace was deeply rooted in the mentality of the Catholic Church³³. Therefore, we

³² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Memorie și identitate (Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections)*, published by Phoenix, 2005), translated from Italian by ROXANA UTALE, Bucharest 2005, 18-19.

³³ In the 13th century, aided by the Prayer of the Rosary, St. Dominic won against the Cathar heresy. While preparations were being made for the naval battle of Lepanto in 1571 and during its development, Pope Pius V required that all the Christians prayed the Rosary. On the very day and at the very hour when the

should not be surprised at the fact that, in times difficult from a social or political point of view, at Lourdes³⁴ and at Fatima the Blessed Virgin appeared with the rosary in her hands and asked the faithful to resort to this prayer as a means of resistance against various evils. Following in the footsteps of Pope Leo XIII³⁵, all popes in the modern and contemporary history of the Church have recommended the Prayer of the Rosary³⁶. But the most devoted to this prayer was Pope John Paul II who, two weeks after his being appointed as Successor of St. Peter, said:

“The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A wonderful prayer! Wonderful in its simplicity and in its depth. (...) In fact, on the background of the

associations of the Holy Rosary were making processions and public prayers, the Christians won against the Turkish armies. It was then the Feast of the Holy Rosary was introduced in the catholic calendar – 7 October – and in the *Litany of Loreto* the invocation *Help of Christians – Auxilium christianorum* was added. During the siege of Vienna by the Turks in 1683, the whole city was praying the Rosary. The sign that their prayer was efficient was that the armies of the Polish King, John Sobiecki, arrived as a reinforcement and saved them. After defeating the Turks, John Sobiecki, a true devotee of the Rosary Prayer, wrote to Rome: “I came, I saw, the Holy Virgin of the Rosary is triumphant.” Cf. I. SUCIU / C. F. SABAU, *Fecioara din Fatima*, 297-299.

³⁴ The apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes in 1858 have been confirmed by the Church.

³⁵ Pope Leo XIII wrote ten Encyclical Letters, the first one being *Supremi apostolatus officio* on 1 September 1883, so as to encourage the children of the Church to resort to the power of the Rosary Prayer against injustice in social life and against evilness in the political life. Leo XIII was convinced that the Rosary is “an efficient spiritual instrument against the evilness of society”. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Beatae Virginis Mariae*, no. 2, translated from Italian by C. Grigore, Iași 2002, 4.

³⁶ Pope Pius XI admitted that he never went to sleep until he first recited the Rosary. Pope Pius XII insistently recommended reciting the Rosary together, in one's family. Pope John XXIII wrote an Apostolic Letter on the Rosary Prayer *Il religioso convegno* (29 September 1961), while Pope Paul VI spoke about the Rosary in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus* (2 February 1974).

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words *Hail Mary*, we see with the eyes of our souls the main episodes from Jesus' life. They consist of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries³⁷ and set us in living communion with Jesus through – one could say – the heart of his Mother. In the same time, our heart can encompass in these decades of the Rosary prayer all the facts that compose the life of an individual, of a family, of a nation, of the Church and of the whole world; personal happenings and those of our fellow men and, most of all, of those who are closer to us and whom we love more dearly. Thus, the simple prayer of the Rosary beats the rhythm of our human life”³⁸.

Being a typically meditative prayer that corresponds to some degree to the *Prayer of the Heart* or to the *Jesus Prayer* in the Eastern Christian, Pope John Paul II – in the same way as his predecessors – recommended the Rosary as a prayer for peace. By its very nature, the Rosary is a prayer oriented towards peace, as it assists the one who prays to assimilate the Christ's mystery, the Prince of Peace and *our peace* (Eph 2:14), to discover the secret of peace and to transform it into a lifetime project. Then, the Rosary is a prayer for peace also due to the fruits of love it produces. If properly prayed, i.e. in a meditative manner, the Rosary favours the encounter with Christ in his mysteries and in his brethren, above all in those who are suffering. The Rosary does not mean avoiding the issues of this world, on the contrary, it teaches us to tackle them in a more responsible and generous manner³⁹. Therefore, this prayer has a powerful influence on our lives, on our hearts, which it sets in harmony – according to the content of the *Hail Mary* – with the Heart of Jesus and with the Heart of Mary. In a personal confession about the fruits of this prayer in his own life, John Paul II said: “After twenty-five years, reflecting on the tribulations I encountered while exercising my Petrine ministry, I wish

³⁷ We pray nowadays also the mysteries of light that have been recently added.

³⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Rosarium Beatae Virginis Mariae*, 5-6.

³⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 56-57.

to emphasis once again, as a heartily invitation addressed to all of you to experiment this in a personal way: yes, indeed, the Rosary prayer *beats the rhythm of our human lives*, in order to harmonise it with the rhythm of divine life”⁴⁰.

Bearing in mind the close connection which Pope John Paul II enjoyed with the Blessed Virgin Mary by means of his favourite prayer, the Rosary, let us attempt to discover the hidden meaning of several coincidences regarding public events in his life and our recent history. Indeed, these significant coincidences make one think.

Thus, on 2 May 1981, Lawrence James Downey, who had been a monk at the Cistercian monastery *Tre Fontane* in Rome, suffering now from a mental disease, managed to hijack a plane from the route Dublin – London, compelling the pilots to head towards Teheran. When the plane landed in France under the pretext of being supplied with fuel, Downey threw out of an airlock typed sheets of paper by which he was requesting that the Pope published in a certain magazine the third secret of Fatima. Including the managing director of the airport, no one could understand what exactly he meant, as no one understood what was this third secret of Fatima⁴¹.

Another event, which raised many questions and caused many controversies occurred on 13 May 1981, the day of the first apparition at Fatima, when in the San Pietro Piazza in Rome Pope John Paul II was the victim of an attempt, Mehmet Ali Ağça’s criminal hand was prevented from assassinating the Holy Father by a nun, who had come in the San Pietro Piazza for the general audience held on Wednesdays; the nun was called *Sister Lucia*, exactly as the visionary Lucia from Fatima. When Pope John Paul II visited Mehmet Ali Ağça in prison, the latter asked him: *Why didn’t you die?* The Pope was not expecting such a question. He kept it in his heart for many years, but then his first answer, and the decisive one was that: “he knew he was saved by

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 39.

⁴¹ Cf. I. SUCIU / C. F. SABAU, *Fecioara din Fatima*, 457.

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the Blessed Virgin⁴². The inexplicable thing is the sinuous course the bullet took within his body, spearing all his vital organs.

While the Pope was still recovering in the hospital, he asked for the envelope containing the third secret of Fatima, but decided to make it public only 19 years later, on 13 May 2000, when he beatified Jacinta and Francisco at Fatima.

After his recovery, on 13 May 1982, John Paul II went to Fatima to thank the Blessed Virgin Mary for saving him from the criminal hands of Mehmet Ali Ağca and, in front of the statue of St. Mary of Fatima, he consecrated the whole world to her Immaculate Heart. Sister Lucia was not content with this consecration, as the Lady *dressed in light* had requested that the Pope consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in union with all the Bishops in the world.

On 25 March 1984, the Pope consecrated again the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in front of the statue of St. Mary from Fatima especially brought for this occasion to the San Pietro Piazza. During this event the Pope offered the bullet that crossed his body without killing him so as to be placed within the crown of St. Mary of Fatima, which *happened* to have a spare place of the same dimension as the bullet⁴³. In the act of consecration all the Catholic Bishops were united with the Holy Father. The Pope did not make a direct reference to Russia, but an indirect one, including it among the countries that *most needed* the care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sister Lucia confirmed this consecration declaring that the wish of the Holy Mother was fulfilled. After this, the first signs that the communist

⁴² S. DZIWIŚ, *O viață cu Karol. Conversație cu Gian Franco Svidercoschi*, (A Life with Karol: My Forty-Year Friendship with the Man Who Became Pope, Hardcover, 2008), translated from Italian by ILIEȘ CÂMPEANU, Bucharest 2008, 133.

⁴³ The crown had been made by using the melted metal of various valuable objects (rings, earrings, bracelets etc.) donated by the Portuguese women as a sign of gratitude towards the Blessed Virgin that their country did not enter the Second World War and that they could enjoy peace.

world was gradually dissolving began to appear. Signs which make us think!

Thus, at the end of 1985, in Geneva, the American President Ronald Reagan met the Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, so as to find together of a way to stop the arms race. 3,500 journalists were present. The negotiation lasted for 15 hours. The two leaders met together *tête-à-tête* five or six times. A historical declaration was signed, which stipulated that “*the nuclear war should never be started, as in such a war there are no winners*”⁴⁴. The *spirit of Geneva* was now being born, the spirit that consecrated the nuclear disarmament. Meanwhile, in Soviet Russia, Mikhail Gorbachev began the *glasnost* policy (openness, transparency) and *perestroika* (restructuring). In the summer of 1986, R. Reagan and M. Gorbachev met again at Reykjavik, where they decided to eliminate an entire category of nuclear rackets. According to Gorbachev, this was an “event of the greatest importance in the recent history of mankind”⁴⁵.

Another crucial event. In 1988, the Soviet Government allowed the organisation at the local level of the celebrating the anniversary of a millennium from the Christian baptism of the Russian people. However, this became the national day. That year, throughout the whole Russia only 6,000 places of worship were opened, three Theological Seminars and two academies⁴⁶, and yet the participation of the Russian people in these ceremonies was impressive both as number and as quality.

Then, on 9 November 1989 the Berlin Wall falls, and about two months later, on 1 December 1989, the first Soviet President – in 70 years of communism – visited the Vatican and met with Pope John Paul II. Thus the visible dissolution of communism began almost like

⁴⁴ M. GORBACHEV, *Amintiri...*, 411.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 418.

⁴⁶ HH KIRILL I, *On the Testimony of Orthodox Faith*. Today in Russia there are 36,000 places of worship, 1,000 monasteries, 56 Theological Seminars and Academies, 2 Orthodox Universities and other educational institutions.

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a game of dominoes. The Pope did not expect it, even if he was aware that that system was socially and economically inefficient⁴⁷.

Eventually, on 8 December 1991, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in the Catholic calendar, the Soviet Union was dissolved as a state, by the withdrawal from the Union of Ukraine and Belarus. Gorbachev became a president without a country. On 25 December 1991, M. Gorbachev retired from the office of President of the Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin became President. The red flag bearing the hammer and sickle was removed from Kremlin. The faithful and the devotees of Fatima acknowledged that: the Immaculate Heart of Mary has triumphed on the walls of Kremlin! Russia was following a new course in history.

Did the Blessed Virgin of Fatima overthrow the communist regime?

On 13 August 1994, a fragment from the Wall of Berlin was brought to Fatima as a testimony that the Holy Mother contributed to the fall of the communist ideology. Obviously, this contribution was not a direct one, but through the people in the Church, some well-known, some not. We could say that, in a certain way, the Christians of the 20th century that prayed the Rosary and accomplished acts of penitence for their own sins by means of confession and by receiving the Eucharist on the first Saturdays of the month have directly participated in the fall of communism. But especially Pope John Paul II, a Pope with a special devotion to the Mother of God, according to his own pontifical motto: *Totus tuus! – Everything is yours, Mary!* Answering Gian Franco Svidercovski's question – “What would have happened if on that 13 May the two bullets fired with a 9 calibre Browning reached their target?” – Cardinal S. Dziwisz replied: “I have wondered too? Hadn't the Blessed Virgin's hand deviated the course of the bullet, what would have happened? Which would have been the

⁴⁷ S. DZIWIŚZ, *O viață cu Karol*, 173.

future of the world? Meanwhile, deprived of the assistance of the Polish Pope, the Revolution of Solidarnosc would have barely survived. And different, as well, would have been the history of the East and Central Europe”⁴⁸.

The fall of communism was considered by Pope John Paul II as one of the greatest revolutions in history. He always read it in the light of faith and saw in it the sign of a divine intervention. He held that the liberation of the nations in the communist block from the Marxist totalitarianism yoke was closely connected with the private revelations at Fatima, with the consecration of the world, especially with the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Still the fall of communism also had its internal causes. This is what John Paul II was writing in the encyclical letter *Centesimus annus* in 1991: “The decisive factor that triggered the changes is, undoubtedly, the violation of the labour rights”. Then, “the inefficiency of the economical system, which has to be considered not only as a technical issue, but even more as a consequence of violating the human rights to initiative, to property and to freedom in the economical sector”. Finally,

“the cultural and national dimension: the human being cannot be understood starting in a unilateral way from the economical sector, likewise he cannot be defined only on the basis of his belonging to a social class or another. A human being is to be comprehended in a more complete manner when he gains his own place in...”

Briefly, the Marxist regime “had promised to uproot from the human heart the need of God, still the results show that this cannot be accomplished without shattering one’s heart”⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 135.

⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, the Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, nos. 23 and 24, 1 May 1991, Bucharest 2008, 458-459.

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After his visit to the Vatican in 1989, M. Gorbachev declared that: “Everything that has occurred in the Eastern Europe during the latest years would not have been possible without the presence of this Pope, of this great political role he understood to assume on the world scene”⁵⁰. In an indirect manner, the President of the Soviet Union acknowledged that the failure of the communist system was generated by the spiritual emptiness left by the atheist ideology in the people’s hearts. This emptiness prompted the people to search for the meaning of life in their own cultural and religious identities. From this perspective, Pope John Paul II was the right man at the right place. His teaching and example, together with that of those who suffered the afflictions of the atheist totalitarian regimes, have proved to all of us that the desire for freedom cannot be suppressed in man’s heart, the prayer is mightier than the guns, and that culture is more efficient than tanks or than the Iron Curtain.

Indeed, this is the conclusion to which I arrive, that nothing can suppress the flame that burns within the hearts of human beings, a flame which means one’s desire to be free and to live in dignity and freedom. Our Lady of Fatima helped the people in Europe during the last century, especially the people in Central and Eastern Europe, to believe in this desire, inviting all of them to adopt and practice the Christian values in both their community and private lives. That which occurred at Fatima then, and that which followed afterwards until today, shows us that – whenever led by God’s light – man’s heart becomes an invincible fortress. And yet, could this message of the Blessed Virgin of Fatima – a message filled with meaningful hope for each of us, as well – reach mankind without the help of certain charismatic persons, such as St. Lucia, St. Jacinta, St. Francisco, or St. John Paul II? Therefore, I wish to conclude with a brief prayer:

All Saints of Fatima, pray for the people who desire to be free!

⁵⁰ Apud S. DZIWIŚZ, *O viață cu Karol*, 176.

Mary, a Genuine Source of Spirituality

János VIK*

Abstract

The Virgin Mary can be seen in the context of Fatima appearances as the pure mirror of the divine mystery. The Blessed Virgin Mary has fully lived the contemplative phase of spiritual life. For a contemplative attitude the most specific is the pure beholding that does not want to accomplish anything. Contemplation as an attitude includes beside this pure trust and love that does not expect anything from the other. Eventually contemplation includes suffering. We can assume that the shepherd children of Fatima have also lived this contemplative attitude that can distinguish between the gifts of God and God Himself, the only one worthy of worship.

Keywords: Fatima, Virgin Mary, Francis and Jacinta Marto, Lucia, Pope Francis, Franz Jalics, contemplation, spiritual life, *Evangelii gaudium*.

„I could not fail to come here to venerate the Virgin Mary” – Pope Francis spoke these words in his homily at the Holy Mass celebrated on 13 May 2017 on the esplanade of the Marian sanctuary in Fatima during which – as we know – he canonized Francis and Jacinta Marto. In the context of the appearances of the Virgin Mary in Fatima, Pope Francis highlighted that Mary „came to remind us that God’s Light dwells within us and protects us”. The Holy Father continues this idea when he says: „the three chosen children – Jacinta, Francis and Lucia – found themselves surrounded by God’s Light as it radiated from the Virgin Mary. She enveloped them in the mantle of

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Light that God had given her”. The Blessed Virgin „introduced them into the immense ocean of God’s light and taught to adore him”.¹

Pope Francis, although I do not think he wanted to explicitly outline a specific theological approach in this homily, nevertheless provides us through his words a profound insight into spiritual or mystical theology.

That is, in the perception of Pope Francis – regarding the appearances of Our Lady in Fatima – a distinction must be made between God’s light and God Himself. The light that radiated from the Virgin Mary during the Fatima appearances was not her own light but the Light of the Divine presence. So we can say that the same divine presence is referred to here that the German theologian and philosopher Rudolf Otto implies in his work „*Das Heilige*” (The Sacred) published in 1917. The presence of the Sacred in its realization as a religious experience is, according to Otto, a divine mystery (*mysterium*) that irresistibly attracts (*fascinans*) and also repels us with terror (*tremendum*). These attributes, however, are not constituents of the Sacred, but belong to the sentiment it awakens in us.²

Therefore, the Virgin Mary can be seen in the context of Fatima appearances as the pure mirror of this divine mystery. Thus Mary did not want to be adored by the three shepherd children; on the contrary, in Fatima too she remained a genuine source of spirituality even through remaining the perfect example of a human life centered on God.

In this sense, it can be said that she, Mary of Nazareth, in the instances where she is explicitly mentioned in the New Testament, always appears as a faithful woman or as the Virgin Mother of Jesus.

¹ Papa FRANCISC, *Fatima: noii sfinți Francisc și Iacinta ne învață să-l adorăm pe Dumnezeu*, in: http://ro.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/05/13/fatima_papa_francisc_predica_sf_liturghie_canonizare/1311913, 10.10.2017.

² Rudolf OTTO, *Sacrul*, trad. Ioan Milea, Editura Humanitas, București 2005.

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Also on his visit to Fatima, Pope Francis highlights that Mary is a „Master of spiritual life, the first one who followed Christ along the narrow way of the cross”.³ The Pope emphasizes very concisely, as usual, this idea in a rosary meditation: „With Christ and Mary we remain in God”. This God, or his divine presence, became constant in the life of the saints Jacinta and Francis Marto following the appearances of the Virgin Mary. That is, they have learned from Mary, the Virgin Mother, to make a difference between the gifts of God and God Himself, who always remains for Christians also a „*Deus semper maior*”, a God that is always greater than his gifts.⁴

It is only through this distinction that the faith can be kept alive and the Christian spirituality independently of existential crises. We do not know, but we cannot exclude, and even more, we rightly assume that the Virgin Mary has gone through such existential crises. Otherwise, for example, we would not devote every September of the liturgical year to Our Lady of Sorrows. But despite this she preserved her primordial relationship with Jesus Christ, and precisely through this essential, vital and providential relationship with her Holy Son, she lived her life centered on God.

If we want to understand as deeply as possible the form of spiritual life that the Virgin Mary has lived, it can help us another essential distinction of spiritual theology, fully known and recognized in the history of Christian spirituality.⁵ This is the distinction between the pre-contemplative and the contemplative phase of spiritual life. In the pre-contemplative phase, spiritual progress is accomplished

³ Papa FRANCISC, *Fatima: la rugăciunea rozariului: Cu Cristos și Maria, rămânem în Dumnezeu*, in: http://ro.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/05/12/fatima_medita%C8%9Bia_papei_francisc_la_rug%C4%83ciunea_rozariului/1311894, 10.10.2017.

⁴ Eva-Maria FABER, *Deus semper maior. Erich Przywaras Theologie der Exerzitien*, in: GuL 66 (1993) 208-227.

⁵ BENKE, Christoph, *Kleine Geschichte der christlichen Spiritualität*, Freiburg 2007.

through our own efforts. Naturally, nothing can be obtained without the grace of God, but in the pre-contemplative phase we are the ones who strive: reflect, evaluate and examine our own conscience. We analyze, make decisions and resolutions.

The behaviour of the spiritual man changes in the contemplative phase. Instead of striving to make progress, we learn to look only at God and trust that anything else will be given to us if all our endeavours focus only on our relationship with God. This is not inactivity, but only care freeness. In the contemplative phase of spiritual life, we become more independent of results.⁶

The Jesuit of Hungarian origin, Franz Jalics – born in 1927 – who founded and for almost three decades has directed a spirituality centre in Germany, writes in this context the following: The pre-contemplative phase is centered on our cognitive ability and the achievement of our goals. And what behaviour can be considered specific to the contemplative phase? Jalics highlights the fact that, for a contemplative attitude the most specific is the pure beholding that does not want to accomplish anything. Contemplation as an attitude includes beside this pure trust and love that does not expect anything from the other. Eventually contemplation includes suffering. In order to remain in contemplation, we must accept and bear suffering. But what is suffered in the state of attention towards God will also be saved.⁷

The Blessed Virgin Mary has fully lived this contemplative phase of spiritual life.⁸ In this respect, Pope Francis formulates in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* to the bishops, clergy,

⁶ Franz JALICS, *Kontemplative Exerzitien. Eine Einführung in die kontemplative Lebenshaltung und in das Jesusgebet*, Würzburg 1996, 12-15.

⁷ JALICS, *Kontemplative Exerzitien*, 181-184.

⁸ Franz JALICS, *Die kontemplative Phase der ignatianischen Exerzitien*, in: Andreas Schönfeld (Hrsg.), *Spiritualität im Wandel. Leben aus Gottes Geist*, Würzburg 2002, 344-360.

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consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the proclamation of the gospel in today's world:

„Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. [...] This interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization.”⁹

We can assume that the shepherd children of Fatima have also lived this contemplative attitude that can distinguish between the gifts of God and God Himself, the only one worthy of worship.

This is where their strength came from – says Pope Francis – to overcome adversity and suffering. Contemplative attitude has remained constant in their lives, as evidenced by their persistent prayer for sinners and the desire to remain constantly alongside „the hidden Jesus’ in the tabernacle.”¹⁰

The 100th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima – what does this unique spiritual event invite us to? Allow me to conclude with an encouragement that was also spoken by Pope Francis on his visit to Fatima:

„With Mary's protection, may we be for our world sentinels of the dawn, contemplating the true face of Jesus the Saviour, resplendent at Easter. Thus may we rediscover the young and beautiful face of the

⁹ Papa FRANCISC, *Evangelii gaudium*, trad. pr. Mihai Pătrașcu (redactor: Claudia Stan), 288, in: <http://www.magisteriu.ro/evangelii-gaudium-2013/>, 10.10.2017.

¹⁰ Papa FRANCISC, *Fatima: noii sfinți Francisc și Iacinta ne învață să-l adorăm pe Dumnezeu*, in: http://ro.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/05/13/fatima_papa_francisc_predica_sf_liturgie_canonizare/1311913, 10.10.2017.

Church, which shines forth when she is missionary, welcoming, free, faithful, poor in means and rich in love.”¹¹

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¹¹ Papa FRANCISC, *Fatima: noii sfinți Francisc și Iacinta ne învață să-l adorăm pe Dumnezeu*,

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Fatima 100. Historical Aspects

Fabian DOBOȘ*

Abstract

This article is about the historical aspects which form the context of the apparitions of Virgin Mary at Fatima in 1917.

In the first part, we will present briefly the political context during which the apparitions had taken place: The First World War.

The main content of the article is formed from the chronological and detailed description of the six apparitions of Virgin Mary at Fatima to the three Portuguese shepherds (Lucia, Jacinta and Francis), enhancing on their private feelings, but also on the faith of the thousands participating at these events.

Up until 100 years ago, Fatima was only an unknown village from central Portugal, but after the apparitions of Saint Mary, the word "Fatima" has occurred on the lips of millions of persons, among them many making the pilgrimage to this holy place of Portugal; holy place, because, Our Lady, the Queen of All Saints, descended among the human to invite everyone to prayer and penitence.

Keywords: Saint Mary, Fatima, Portugal, Lucia, Jacinta, Francis, First World War, Pius XI, John XXIII, John Paul II.

Introduction

Until 100 years ago, Fatima was a hardly known village in central Portugal, a small place, without any importance even for geographers¹. But, along with the apparitions of Our Lady to the three little shepherds (Lucia, Jacinta and Francis) in 1917, the word "Fatima" has occurred on the lips of millions of persons, among

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¹ Cf. Icilio Felici, *Fatima*, Iași 1997, p. 15.

whom many decided to go on pilgrimage to this holy place in Portugal; holy indeed, because Our Lady, the Queen of All Saints, has descended there among humans to urge them to pray and to make penitence².

100 years later, Christians are still wondering whether they have fully understood the message of Our Lady and whether they have put in practice that advice given by the Queen of Heaven.

In the following pages, we shall emphasize the historical aspects which form the context of these apparitions. Firstly, we shall briefly describe the political context of this event and then we shall chronologically present the six apparitions of Saint Mary, Mother of God.

1. The political context

In Portugal, the monarchy was abolished in 1910, when King Manuel II (1908-1910) was forced to resign, as the revolutionists proclaimed the Republic in the same year³.

On 28th June 1914 in Sarajevo the heir of the Austro-Hungarian imperial throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, was

² Cf. Bishop Ioan Suciu, *Fecioara din Fatima*, Baia Mare 2017, p. 41. The interest of the Romanian people for the devotion towards Saint Mary of Fatima has developed mainly in the interwar period. So, in the “Saint Helen” parish in Bucharest, at the initiative of the local parish priest, Alexandru Horvat, SJ, was organized on 13th of February 1945 “the first penitence pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fatima”, event which constituted the beginning of a long and wonderful tradition, which was kept until today: on the 13th day of each month prayers are recited to Our Lady of Fatima (Dănuț Doboș coord., Petru Husariu, Maria Buturugă, Andrei Dumitrescu, *Biserica „Sfânta Elena – București”*. *Un veac de istorie și spiritualitate*, București 2015, p. 5).

³ www.wikipedia.org, accessed on 4.10.2017.

murdered. The author of this crime was a former student named Gavrilo Princip, member of the secret organization “Black Hand”, which had fought for the unity of all the southern Slavs. This event was the pretext used by Austro-Hungary to declare war to Serbia on 28nd July 1914. Immediately, Russia started to mobilize its armies to defend its ally, Serbia; after this, Germany declared war to Russia, in order to sustain its ally, Austro-Hungary⁴. However, the Germans did not want a war on two fronts against Russia and France, Russia’s ally; so, they first attacked France. Afterwards all the World Powers entered the war, as well as other states which wanted to reach their goals⁵.

In 1916 Portugal entered the war as the ally of the Entente Powers, as this country for centuries had had close economic relationships with the British Empire⁶.

2. The history of the apparitions

2.1 The vision of the Angel of Peace

Before the apparitions of Virgin Mary in 1917, the three shepherds (Lucia, Jacinta and Francis – Lucia dos Santos and her cousins, siblings Francis and Jacinta Marto, all three of them living in the small settlement, Aljustrel, a part of Fatima parish) had three visions of the Angel of Peace.

⁴ We present the alliances signed shortly before the break of the First World War: the Central Power (Germany, Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria) on one side, and on the other side, the Entente Powers (France, the British Empire and the Russian Empire).

⁵ Cf. Raymund Netzhammer, *Episcop în România într-o epocă a conflictelor naționale și religioase*, vol. I, București 2005, pp. 629-630.

⁶ Cf. www.treccani.it, accessed on 4.10.2017.

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The first apparition occurred in the spring of 1916, in front of a grotto on the Cabeço hill, near Aljustrel, and it had developed as sister Lucia recalled:

We had been playing for a while and then a strong wind blew the trees and this made us look above, as it was a clear sky. Then we saw in the distance above the trees lying in the east a white light having the form of a transparent young adult, brighter than the crystal crossed by the sunlight. As he approached us, we could figure out its features: a teenager, in his 14 or 15, very beautiful. We were surprised and also fascinated. We could not say anything. Arriving near us he said: “Have no fear. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me”. Kneeling down before us, he bowed to the ground. Led by a supernatural force, we followed him and we repeated his words: “My God, I believe, adore, hope and love you. I beg forgiveness for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you”. After he repeated this for three times, he stood up and said: “This is how you ought to pray. The Heart of Jesus and of Mary are attentive at your voices”. Then, he disappeared⁷.

The three children were amazed and while remaining in the same position the Angel left them and they kept repeating the same words.

The second apparition occurred in the summer of 1916, near the well in Lucia’s family courtyard, where the children were playing. Sister Lucia recalls the Angel’s words:

What are you doing? Pray! Pray a lot! The Sacred Heart of Jesus and of Mary have mercy on you! Offer ceaselessly your prayers and sacrifices to the Holy One. Lucia got courage and asked: How can we sacrifice ourselves? “In everything you can and how much you can (...). Thus you will bring peace over your country. I am the Guardian Angel of

⁷ www.angelinspir.ro, accessed on 4.10.2017.

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your country (...) Above all, receive and bear the sufferance which the Lord will send you⁸.

The third apparition of the Angel occurred at the beginning of 1916's fall, again at the grotto from Cabeço. The three children arrived before the grotto, they started to pray the Rosary and the prayer they had learned from the Angel. Suddenly, they saw, shining above them, an unknown light. They saw the Angel having in his hands a chalice with a **Host**, from which some drops of Blood fell in the chalice. Leaving the chalice and the **Host** floating in the air, the Angel knelt near them, asking them to repeat for three times a penance prayer.

Then, Lucia recalls, he stood up, he took again the chalice in his hands and gave me the **Host**, and, what was in the chalice, he gave it to Jacinta and Francis to drink, telling them: Take and drink the Body and Blood of Christ, awfully insulted by the ungrateful ones. Give compensation for their sins and comfort your God.

Again he bowed to the ground and repeated with us for three times the same prayer and then he disappeared⁹.

2.2 The apparitions of our Lady

The first apparition (13th of May). On Sunday 13th of May 1917 the siblings Jacinta (7 years) and Francis Marto (11 years) together with their cousin Lucia dos Santos (10 years) were herding their sheep near Fatima in a place called "Cova da Iria" (Valley of Peace). After lunch they prayed the Holy Rosary and afterwards they started to play building little stone houses. At one moment, the three shepherds saw a lighting and a bright light appeared. The children saw in the middle of

⁸ Bishop Ioan Suci, *Fatima*, p. 50.

⁹ Icilio Felici, *Fatima*, pp. 30-31.

the light the figure of a young woman approaching them (“the Lady from the Light”)¹⁰. The Lady was dressed in a white robe, like a cope, with golden edges, which covered her head and the entire body. From her praying hands hung Rosary beads with a silver cross. While the children were trying to run, the Lady stopped them saying: *Do not be afraid! I do not want to harm you!* Lucia asked her: *From which country are you?* The Lady answered: *My country is in Heaven.* Then, she asked them to come to the same place at the same hour on the 13th day of each month until October. When she heard that the Lady had come from Heaven, Lucia asked her if she and the other children would go to Heaven. The Lady assured her that all three of them would go to Heaven, but Francis would have to say many prayers before he could go to Heaven. Then Lucia asked “the Lady from the Light” what happened with her two friends, who had died recently at a young age. One of them, said the Lady, was in Heaven, and the other one was in Purgatory. Then the Lady asked them if they would want to offer sacrifices and to receive sufferings in order to convert the sinners. Lucia answered affirmatively on behalf of all. Pleased with their answer, the Lady advised them to pray every day the Holy Rosary for peace; after which she disappeared. All this had lasted for about 10 minutes: although all of them could see everything that happened, Francis couldn't hear anything¹¹.

Even if the shepherds agreed not to tell anyone about these things, Jacinta could not resist keeping the secret and that evening she told her family what had happened that afternoon. Obviously no one believed her¹².

¹⁰ Giuseppe Cionchi, coord., *Le apparizioni di Fatima*, Camerata Picena 2010, p. 56.

¹¹ Bishop Ioan Suciu, *Fecioara din Fatima*, pp. 55-58.

¹² Icilio Felici, *Fatima*, pp. 39-40.

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The second apparition (13th of June). The shepherds followed by a group of 50-60 curious persons¹³ went again to the place of the first apparition. Faithful to her given word, the Virgin Mary appeared, asking Lucia to learn to read and assuring them that the other two children would go to Heaven. Also, the Lady told Lucia that Jesus wanted, with her help, to spread into the world the devotion to the Immaculate Heart. The three visionaries could see the Lady's heart crowned with thorns, understanding this as an invitation to penitence¹⁴.

The third apparition (13th of July). Although the three children had been discouraged by their parents and by the locals as well as by the parson, on 13th of July followed by 5,000 persons they went again to the place of the apparitions¹⁵. Again, the Virgin asked the shepherds to pray the Rosary daily and to offer sacrifices. Lucia asked the Lady to make a miracle for those who did not believe, but the Lady told them to come on each 13th of the following months and in the end, on 13th of October, she would make the miracle so that everyone could believe.

During this apparition, the Lady gave Lucia a series of secrets: the vision of hell and the prophecy of the Second World War, which would begin during the pontificate of Pius XI (1932-1939)¹⁶.

The third secret has a special history and for a better understanding we shall present below a fragment from a study

¹³ Marinus Maria van Es, SVD, *Fatima. Erscheinungen und Botschaft unserer lieben Frau*, Jestetten 1986, p. 11.

¹⁴ Cf. Bishop Ioan Suciu, *Fecioara din Fatima*, pp. 62-67.

¹⁵ Marinus Maria van Es, SVD, *Fatima. Erscheinungen und Botschaft unserer lieben Frau*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Icilio Felici, *Fatima*, pp. 59-60. Only in 1941, at the Church's request and, after she had received the permission from the Heavens, Lucia wrote only two of the three secrets.

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entitled “The third secret of Fatima: certain dates, doubts and insides”, published by Andrea Tornielli, in the Vatican Insider, on 9th of May 2017:

“Since sister Lucia’s health had become weak, the bishop feared that she could die without telling the third secret. So Correia da Silva, first personally, then in writing, commanded her, at the end of 1943’s summer, to write on paper the last part of the prophecy. The visionary had tried for five times, but she could not write. The turning point occurred in January 1944. Lucia felt the Virgin’s presence and told everything that had happened in a letter addressed to the bishop, handing him also the secret.

This letter and the words we are about to quote have been unknown until recent times. The Virgin’s indications were precise: “Do not be afraid, as God wanted to try your submission, faith and humility; be calm and write what I command you, yet you cannot understand these. After you will have written them, put it in an envelope, close it and seal it and write that it can be opened after 1960 by the patriarch cardinal of Lisbon or by the bishop of Leira (...)”. The envelope was sealed with a little bit of wax and given to the bishop of Leira, who announced it to the patriarch of Lisbon, Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira, and to the Holy See, which advised him to keep the envelope. The bishop, even if he could, did not open the envelope. On 7th of September 1946, having an intervention at the Marian Congress from Campinas, Brazil, Cerejeira announced that the envelope would be opened in 1960.

After a year and a half, receiving the text of the prophecy in the envelope sealed by the visionary, Monseigneur Correia da Silva put the envelope in a personal one and sealed it again, writing: *This envelope with its containing will be given to his Eminence, cardinal don Manuel, Patriarch of Lisbon, after my death. Leira. 8th of December 1945. José, Bishop of Leira.*

In 1956, when the bishop was already old, sick and almost blind, and the date indicated for revealing the secret was approaching, he received an order from the Vatican to send to Rome a copy of all sister Lucia’s manuscripts and the original envelope of the third secret. At the half of March 1957, the Auxiliary Bishop of Leira, Joao Pereira Venancio, gave the document to the Apostolic Nuncio in Portugal, the Archbishop

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Fernando Cento. The envelope arrived in Vatican on 16th of April 1957 (...)

The first Pontiff who opened the envelope and read the secret was John XXIII, during the 1959's summer, while he was at Gandolfo Castle; on 17th August (...) The Pope brought the envelope to Vatican. No one spoke about it, neither the Holy Office. The envelope was in a desk drawer in the Pope's bedroom. So, the envelope was kept in a place less visible and accessible (...). After he had asked to be helped in translating the text, John XXIII dictated to Monseigneur Capovilla a few phrases which he wrote on an envelope, which has been a secret until recently: *The Holy Father had received from Monseigneur Philippe this piece of writing. He had reserved the right to read it on Friday along with his confessor. As there were some difficulties in translating the text, he had asked Monseigneur Tavares who translated it. He showed it to his close collaborators; and, in the end, he said that that envelope would be closed again, along with these words: Without any evaluation (...)*

But the text of the secret did not remain known only by a few persons. Planning his visit to Fatima, on 13th of May 1967, in order to mark the 50th anniversary of the apparitions, Paul VI assembled, on 1st of March, a Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, during which, the secret was read and it was discussed if it was opportune to make it public or not. The negative opinions prevailed, so it was decided to continue John XXIII's directive. In 1978, after the short **phenomena** of John Paul I, Karol Wojtyla was elected as pope. According to his confession, never rejected, from 13th of May 2000 at Fatima, presented by the Vatican's spokesman, John Paul II had read the text in 1978, a few days after he had been elected. From other testimonies, presented by the Portuguese theologian Aura Miguel, we know that, after the attack on 13th of May 1981, while taken to be hospitalized at the Gemelli Polyclinic, **Pope Wojtyla** asked to see all the documents regarding Fatima: *One of the first cardinals who had visited John Paul II, was the Argentinean Eduardo Pironio, who affirmed that he had seen the Pope lost in documents about the apparitions from Cova da Iria. The former secretary of the Pontifical Council for Laity stated that the Pope, impressed by the coincidence of the two dates, studied the documents.* According to Monseigneur Bertone's writings,

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that event would have taken place after two months from his attack: *His Eminence Franjo Seper, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gave his Excellency Eduardo Martinez Somalo, substitute of the Secretary of State, on 18th of July 1981, two envelopes: one white, with the original text of sister Lucia in Portuguese; another one, orange, with the Italian translation of the secret. On 11th August, Monseigneur Martinez restored the two envelopes to the Holy Office's archive.* Also, in this case, the differences between the accounts could have a simple explication. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that 17 days after the Pope had left the Gemelli Polyclinic, John Paul II returned there on 20th of June 1981 due to a blood infection that he had got. He would remain in hospital until 14th of August, for 55 days. During this new period of hospitalization, according to the registers of the Holy Office, he received the documents about Fatima. So it cannot be excluded that in fact the versions may concur and that the remembrance of the Pontiff consulting the documents are referring to the second hospitalization, not to the first one. Thus, on 13th of May 2000 when, at the end of the Mass for the beatification of Francis and Jacinta Marto, celebrated by John Paul II, in the presence of sister Lucia, in the square in front of the sanctuary from Fatima, the Cardinal Secretary of State, Angelo Sodano, presented a summary of the secret. Sodano presented the prophecy as referring to the past, to the persecution of Christians that had occurred during the last century and affirmed that in the vision the Pope “drops as dead”. Announcing also that *for allowing the Christians to receive and understand the message of Fatima, the pope gave the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith the mission to publish the third part of the secret, after it had prepared a proper commentary of it (...).*

Even if the vision does not contain prophecies about natural disasters and about losing faith in God, the images are powerful and apocalyptic: it refers to the martyrdom of a big number of Christians – an actual and sad subject nowadays – and to the death of a pope who is murdered”¹⁷.

¹⁷ www.ercis.ro, accessed on 4.10.2017.

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The fourth apparition (19th of August). After the apparition of 13th of July, because of the agitation overtaking the people, the three children were declared epileptics. However, many were interested to know more about these apparitions. So, on 13th of August, at Fatima there gathered up approximately 20,000 persons to witness the apparition of the heavenly Lady¹⁸. The hour was approaching, but the children did not arrive, although they had gone to the place of the apparitions. In fact, the three shepherds had been arrested and confined, by the local mayor Francis da Silva, because Lucia had not wanted to reveal the secret heard at the last apparition. When the crowd decided to go to the mayor for explications, the familiar thunder was heard; after it, it was seen a great light, then a beautiful cloud landed on the place where usually the Virgin had appeared. After 10 minutes, the cloud rose to heavens. After many threats and tortures, the three children were released on 15th of August 1917.

On Sunday, 19th of August, Lucia, Francis and his brother John – Jacinta had remained home¹⁹ – went to heard the sheep at the place named “Valinhos”. The Virgin appeared and was disappointed of those who detained the children. She asked them to pray and not to forget about the meetings from the following two months²⁰.

The fifth apparition (13th of September). Over 20,000 people were there to assist to the fifth apparition of Mother of God²¹. At Lucia’s advice, the crowd kneeled down and prayed the Rosary. Suddenly, the Virgin appeared and assured the children that *in October, the Lord*

¹⁸ Marinus Maria van Es, SVD, *Fatima. Erscheinungen und Botschaft unserer lieben Frau*, p. 16.

¹⁹ When Lucia saw the light announcing the apparition, she sent John to bring Iacinta. John did not see anything, he only heard the thunder.

²⁰ Bishop Ioan Suci, *Fecioara din Fatima*, pp. 62-67.

²¹ Marinus Maria van Es, SVD, *Fatima. Erscheinungen und Botschaft unserer lieben Frau*, p. 16.

*will come, and also the Lady of Sorrows, Mother of Carmel, Saint Joseph with the Infant Jesus to bless the world. God is pleased with your sacrifices*²².

The sixth apparition (13th of October 1917). A day before the last apparition, during which the Lady had promised to do a miracle, Lucia's mother told her to confess as if the miracle would not happen, the crowd could attack and murder her. Lucia assured her mother that the Virgin would keep her promise and so it was impossible for her to be murdered. Many pilgrims slept in the open²³. They were not afraid of the rain which had transformed Cova da Iria into a valley of mud. While the crowd was praying, the Virgin Mary appeared and at Lucia's question: "Who are you and what do you want from me?", the Mother of God answered: "I am the Queen of the Holy Rosary. I want to have here a chapel built in my honour". The Virgin also asked for prayers for the conversion of sinners and the daily prayer of the Rosary. The moment "the Lady from the Light" was disappearing, Lucia shouted: "Look at the sun"²⁴. That moment, the rain ceased, the clouds spread away and the sun looked as a wheel of fire which rotated its self around its own axe, sending rays of light of different colours. After a short break, there followed another dance of the sun, above the thousands, who were watching the spectacle performed by the sun. After another break, there followed a miracle even more coloured and brighter than the first two; while the pilgrims were enjoying that events, the three visionaries were led into Paradise, where they could see the Mother of God, Saint Joseph with the Infant

²² Icilio Felici, *Fatima*, p. 97.

²³ At the last apparition over 60,000 persons were present (Marinus Maria van Es, SVD, *Fatima. Erscheinungen und Botschaft unserer lieben Frau*, p. 19).

²⁴ Cf. Bishop Ioan Suci, *Fecioara din Fatima*, pp. 104-110.

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Jesus in his arms, blessing the world. Then, Lucia saw Saint Mary as the Mother of Sorrows and as the Mother of Carmel²⁵.

Conclusion

Today, when we celebrate 100 years from the apparitions of Saint Mary at Fatima, the humanity is invited again to admire the Mother of God's beauty, but also to pay attention to her **gentle and severe** voice, which calls everyone to prayer and penitence.

The apparitions of Fatima and the three shepherds' sanctity²⁶ represent for every Christian a piece of the glory promised by Jesus in the Gospel: He does not guarantee an easy life on this earth, but eternal life, after we, helped by His grace, win over the forces of darkness, which lose all their power in front of God the Almighty.

²⁵ Icilio Felici, *Fatima*, pp. 109-115.

²⁶ Iacinta and Francis were beatified by Pope John Paul II on 13th of May 2000 and canonized by Pope Francis on 13th of May 2017. Sister Lucia dos Santos has passed away on 13th of February 2005, at the age of 98 years, in the Carmelite Monastery from Coimbra. Today, her cause of beatification is in progress at the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints from Vatican. The bodies of the three visionaries are resting in the Sanctuary of Fatima (www.santiebeati.it, accessed on 10th of October 2017; cf. Fabian Doboş, ed., *Le colonne dell'infinito. I santi ed i beati proclamati da Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. II, Iaşi 2010, p. 85).

MARY IN THE LIGHT OF THE BIBLE

Mary's Features – The Features of the Church

Exegetical Commentary on *Lk 1,26-56*

Tarciziu ȘERBAN

Abstract

In traditional Churches, Mary, the Mother of Jesus enjoys particular appreciation, mainly resting on the Gospel texts. However, more and more studies have come to the conclusion that Mary represents not only the historic character who gave birth to Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, but also she has acquired features that, by means of various appellatives, evoke the chosen People and its vocation in history. In a typological approach, this study attempts at detecting her ecclesiological features as well, as they are suggested in filigree in Luke 1:21-56. Thus, on the one hand, Mary appears as a synthesis of extremely numerous Old Testament texts which speak of God's saving work in favour of the people of Israel and, on the other hand, as a programmatic projection into the new people born as the Body of Resurrected Christ on the Pentecost day – the Church.

Keywords: Mary, Church, Daughter of Zion, Mother of Jesus, Ark of the Covenant, corporate personality, New People of God.

Introduction

It has long been known that the Gospel episodes in which Mary is a key figure cannot be considered as strictly historical narratives. Bible commentaries now stress the Christological character of the episodes in which the mother of Jesus “plays a central role”¹, as well

¹ The Gospel texts where the mother of Jesus is a protagonist can be called “Mariological” as they reveal the personality and the role of Mary in the plan of

as the ecclesiological features that delineate her “face” in most of the Gospel texts, in *The Acts of the Apostles*² and in *The Book of Revelation*³. *Jn* 19:25-27 would be a clear example, as it depicts an unprecedented scene:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary [the wife] of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

From a historical point of view it is unlikely that a condemned man would be assisted in his last moments by his own family⁴. At best, the family would be allowed to take the body and bury it (unless it has been decided that the body should remain on the cross until its corruption⁵). Indeed, the synoptic Evangelists fail to mention the presence of the family at the place of execution. Therefore, the *Mother of Jesus* standing near the cross embodies rather the features of “those who await salvation and expect it”⁶. She is confirmed as *Mother of the disciple whom Jesus loved*, this disciple representing the true believer, who, according to *Jn* 2:5, does *whatever Jesus tells him*. In his turn,

salvation, but they are mainly “Christological” as they focus mainly on the person and on the mission of Christ.

² The only mention of Mary in *The Acts of the Apostles* is in 1:14 and confirms her role in the “childhood of the Church”.

³ I. Faraoanu, “Maria în *Apoc* 12...”.

⁴ C. Perrot, *Jésus*, col “Que sais-je?”, PUF, Paris, 1998, p. 115.

⁵ M.F. Baslez, “La crucifixion, « la plus lamentable des morts »” in *Bible et Histoire*, Folio histoire 121, Gallimard, Paris, 1998, pp. 213-218.

⁶ A. Marchadour, *L’Évangile de Jean*, Commentaires, Centurion, Paris, 1992, p. 235. Cf. and X. Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l’Évangile selon Jean IV*, Parole de Dieu, Seuil, Paris, p. 144.

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the *disciple* is entrusted to the Mother of Jesus as a son⁷. Therefore, according to John the Evangelist, the Church, whose mother is Mary, the first believer, is brought into existence by this founding word. The disciples are not orphans. They are welcomed into the Community of the faithful represented by the *Mother of Jesus*, who, at the wedding of Cana in Galilee, invites them to adopt a disciple's attitude, being herself a disciple who listens and fulfils the Word of the One to whom she gave birth⁸.

This vision illustrated by the above-mentioned episode in John's Gospel is in line with that of the synoptics. Indeed, in the episode where the Family comes to seek Jesus while He is surrounded by a crowd of disciples, He cries out *My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it* (Lk 8:19-21; see also Matt 12:46-50; Mk 3:31-35). In other words, to hear and to do the word of God become the conditions for building a privileged relationship with Jesus, conditions which his biological mother as well as his brothers have to fulfil in order to become part of the Community that He has created, namely the Church⁹.

In this article I intend to highlight the ecclesiological features, which I would even call programmatic, in the Gospel scene that usually describes the "conversion" of the life project of the *maid of Nazareth* to the Project that God has planned for her, to be the Mother

⁷ "It is impossible not to discover in the words *behold your son... behold your mother...* the synopsis of the whole process that we can discern as follows: the Christian is entrusted by Christ to the Church, and the Church is offered to the Christian so that each finds the same Lord in everybody and everybody finds the same Lord in each person. The motherhood of Mary, extending from Jesus to All of His, appears as the principle of the motherhood of the Church." Louis Bouyer, *Le quatrième évangile*, Éd Casterman & Éd de Maredsous, Casterman, Tournai, Paris, 1958, p. 226.

⁸ A. Marchadour, *L'Évangile de Jean*, Commentaires, Centurion, Paris, 1992, p. 56.

⁹ H. Cousin, *L'Évangile de Luc*, Commentaires, Centurion, Paris, 1993, p. 117.

of his Son, a “conversion” expressed in the words: *Let it be done to me according to your word!*

These features are even more obvious when referring to the entire ensemble of the *Annunciation*, which contains the Annunciation of the angel and the Visit to Elizabeth (*Lk* 1:26-56).

Mary’s Features

When speaking of the “ecclesiological features” of Mary, we are referring to those aspects that define the Church instituted by Jesus Christ, more specifically those features that express her identity and her mission, as embodied in the Mother of the Son of God.

First, however, we must mention a few elements which support the argument for the ecclesiological features of Mary in our text. These features are foreshadowed in several texts of *the Old Testament*. They delineate a common profile both of the Mother of Jesus and of the Church.

1. The angel’s greeting addressed to Mary (*Rejoice, O highly favoured one, the Lord is with you!*): we should not fail to notice that this greeting is an echo of at least three texts of *The Old Testament* in which the authors announce to the people of Jerusalem that God is about to intervene in their favour¹⁰:

Zeph 3:14a.15b-17 – Shout for joy, daughter of Zion!... The king of Israel, the *LORD*, is in your midst... Do not fear!... The *LORD* your God in your midst ...

Joel 2:21.23 – Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the *LORD* has done marvellous things! Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the *LORD* your God!

¹⁰ S. Lyonnet, “*Chaire kecharitômenè*”, in *Biblica* 20, 1939, pp. 131-141.

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Zech 9:9 – Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The text of the prophet Zephaniah most likely reflects the oppressive atmosphere of the Assyrian domination, which considerably changed the social and religious life of the society. It was a change brought about because of collaboration with many opportunists in the country. This domination seems to draw to an end, as the Babylonians are freeing themselves from the Assyrian rule. In the emancipation of Babylon, the prophet foresees the dawn of the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for those that have remained faithful in the country, the *Holy remnant*. In this text, which might have also inspired the other two, the prophet sees *the Day of the Lord* already started and invites the *Daughter of Zion* to rejoice with all her heart, to cast away fear because the Lord is in her midst, He, her King and Saviour. And this is exactly what the angel proclaims in *Lk* 1:28-33. The Evangelist sees both annunciations as pointers to the dawn of the day of salvation, evoked in Luke 1:77-79. Therefore the archangel Gabriel can ask Mary to rejoice and not to fear: the Lord is with her; she will carry a son in her womb, a son who will be the king and saviour of Israel.

The prophets Joel and Zechariah formulate the same message, in almost the same terms. It is true that Joel does not use the phrase *Daughter of Zion*. He speaks of the *children of Zion*. In this text Israel is seen as a mother rejoicing over her children's salvation.

As for the assurance the angel gives Mary, *the Lord is with you!*, we can say that it is never used in Sacred Scripture for ordinary life situations. It is only given to people whom God entrusts with a special mission. To name just a few protagonists who received such assurance: Isaac (*Gen* 26:24), Jacob (*Gen* 28:15.20), Moses (*Ex* 3:11-12), Gedeon (*Judg* 6:16) or Jeremiah (*Jer* 1:8). The destiny of Israel lies in all the above-mentioned texts and the religious history of Israel

would depend on the answer given to the One calling her. Therefore, when Gabriel tells Mary *the Lord is with you*, it means that the Lord entrusts her with a mission and implicitly she will enjoy divine support.

Therefore, we can say that the above-quoted texts (and they are not the only ones) speaking of the *Daughter of Zion* underline above all her condition, her humility and her frailty. Moreover, the idea suggested by the title *Daughter of Zion* is closely associated with the idea of the salvation of the Remnant and the Restoration of Israel. Therefore, Luke sees in Mary just such a humble and faithful daughter, to whom God turns in the fullness of time. This is highlighted both by the use of the word *kecharitômenè* (*full of grace*), as well as by what the angel says, verse 30: *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God...* Indeed, we can find this phrase in *Gen* 6:8; 18:3; 30:27; etc. In Luke's eyes, Mary holds all the attributes which the *Daughter of Zion* must possess in the fullness of time. In other words, in this text Mary does not just represent a real person called to fulfil a mission, but rather stands for what has been called a *corporate personality*¹¹. As a matter of fact, the Jews would consider every single person as the embodiment of the character and personality of his or her ancestors. One would continue to live in one's children and descendants. Therefore, in the way that Luke describes Mary, she can be perceived as *the Daughter of Zion in the fullness of time*.

2. The angel's answer to Mary's question about how she could conceive, *How can this be, since I do not know a man?* also echoes other texts. His words *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the*

¹¹ See H. Wheeler Robinson, "Hebrew Psychology", in *The People and the Book* (A.S. Peake), Oxford, 1925, pp. 353-382; "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality", in *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments* (J. Hempel), BZAW, 66, 1936, pp. 49-62.

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power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God..., probably allude to the creative power of the Spirit of God expressed in *Gen 1:2*, but, even more likely, they recall the divine presence which descended upon the Tent of Witness and eventually lead the people to freedom, as described in the last part of *the Book of Exodus* (40:34-38). In *Ex 40:34-35 (LXX)*, after narrating how the Tent has been made, the author states that: a cloud covered the Tent of Witness, and the glory of the Son of God.

3. The scene of Mary's visit to Elizabeth alludes, most likely, to the episode of the transportation of the Ark to Judea, an episode depicted in *2Sam 6:1ff*. In this scene we read that, when the Ark was being brought, the people of Jerusalem cried out for joy and David danced before the Ark. Similarly, Mary's arrival brought great joy to Elizabeth and the child leapt in her womb, details that remind us of the joy of the people and David's dancing. (In the Greek version of Symmachus the verb describing the dance of David is the same as the verb used for the leaping of the child in the womb of Elizabeth). Moreover, in the narrative of the bringing of the Ark, David exclaims: *How will the ark of the LORD come to me?* An exclamation so close to that of Elizabeth: *And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* So, we can notice in the exclamation of Elizabeth the important replacement of *the Ark of the Lord* by *the Mother of the Lord*. Or, to put it in another way, Mary embodies the instrument through which God makes himself present among His people. From Nazareth, where the conception has taken place, Mary brings *the Son of the Almighty* to the house of Elizabeth.

4. The response of Elizabeth to Mary's greeting also reminds us of a text that refers to Israel. It is about blessings upon the people: *Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle and the young*

of your flocks... (Deut 28:3-4). Luke resumes this blessing placing it on the lips of Elizabeth when she addresses Mary. Once again, Mary appears as a corporate personality who takes on herself the whole of Israel which has been blessed. And the blessed fruit promised to Israel was the Messiah, descendent of the house of David. Now, this Fruit is the fruit of Mary's womb, Jesus, the Messiah, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by a man, the Son offered by God himself, not by man.

Furthermore, we ought to mention the exclamation in *Jdth* 13:18, which Elizabeth quotes when she exclaims: *Blessed are you among women...* Judith, victorious over Holofernes, was to be greeted by one of the council of elders: *Blessed are you, daughter, by God Most High above all women upon the earth and blessed is the Lord God...* In the theological interpretation of Luke, the blessing addressed to the Lord Almighty corresponds to the blessing on the *Fruit of Mary's womb* in Elizabeth's exclamation. This means that Mary can rightfully be named *Mother of God*, because her motherhood does not refer just to Jesus, the fruit of her womb, but to God himself¹². This is the profound theological intention of Luke. Mary sings her *Magnificat* as *the Ark of the Covenant*, as *the blessed Israel* and as *the Mother of God*, as it appears in the narrative of the visit to Elizabeth (*Lk* 1:39-45) and as *the Daughter of Zion*, as it appears in the narrative of the Annunciation.

5. Mary's song as an answer to Elizabeth's exclamations of praise is an echo of Hannah's song from *ISam* 2:1-10. We must read this song as Mary's expression of joy and gratitude for the divine grace that made of her the Mother of the Messiah. But when Mary exalts God for the great things He has done to her, she does not speak on her

¹² The term *blessed* is the same when referring to God in the passage of Judith and to the Fruit of Mary's womb in Luke: *eulogheménos* (*Jth* 13:18, LXX and *Lk* 1:42).

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own behalf, but on the behalf of all those she personifies: the humble ones of Israel.

Along with Hannah's song there are numerous other texts that resonate and complete the understanding of faith in the redeeming intervention of God. The following are some examples.

Hab 3:18 : The song of Habakkuk is not the prayer of an isolated person asking God for a personal favour, but a supplication for His intervention in order to save the people and scatter the enemy, in the same manner as He had once destroyed the people of Cushan and Midian. Then, the prophet exclaims: *I will rejoice in the LORD, I will exult in the God of my salvation.*

Deut 26:7b: In the prayer of thanksgiving that every Jew would say when he came to the Temple each year to offer the first fruit of his land, he would recall the harsh slavery that the people of Israel had endured in Egypt. As they could not bear the oppression anymore, the people cried out to the God of their fathers and – the believer adds – *the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression* (See also *Ex 2:23b-24a*).

It is worth noting that the *LXX* often uses the verb *to see* (*epiblépô*) to express God's concern for the human predicament¹³, both individual¹⁴ and national¹⁵; in *Ps 102/101:14-21*, this concern manifests itself through God's building up Zion¹⁶. We can find all these themes in Mary's words *He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant*. The Lord has seen the predicament of His people, their

¹³ Several psalms express the cry of a soul in distress (*Ps 12:4 LXX*), the prayer of a depressed soul (*Ps 24:6 LXX*), the mourning of a servant of God (*Ps 68:17-18 LXX*).

¹⁴ For example, the barrenness of Hannah in *ISam 1:11 LXX*.

¹⁵ For example, *ISam 9:16* : At that time, there was no king in Israel to lead Israel in battle.

¹⁶ Note the title of this psalm: "A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the LORD." (*LXX*).

straitened circumstances, the prayer of the distressed. It is in these circumstances that He sends the Saviour and thus begins the work of restoring Israel.

This collocation itself – *the lowly state of His maidservant* – finds echoes in the texts of *The Old Testament*. Generally, words like *poor, humble, destitute* refer either to Israel as a whole or to the faithful Remnant of the people, that the prophets speak about. The emphasis is laid on the frailty of the people, weak creatures before God. And, as a rule, *the servant of the Lord* is a title of Israel or of the faithful Remnant. By combining both phrases, Mary wishes to state that *the Lord* is sending salvation to His people; He is establishing His covenant forever (*Ps* 111/110:9). When Mary tells what the Lord has done for her, she has in mind what the Lord has done for Israel. In other words, she identifies herself with the Daughter of Zion.

Gen 30:13: In this verse we find the words spoken by Leah, the wife of Jacob – *The women will call me blessed* – words that are somewhat similar to Mary's expression *All generations will call me blessed...* The expression in *Mal* 3:12 is even closer: *All nations shall call you blessed*, referring to the Day of the Lord predicted by the prophet.

Deut 10:21b: *He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen...* This text, addressed to the entire community of Israel, constitutes an implicit reference to Mary's words in 1:49a, *For He who is mighty has done great things for me.*

Moreover, the *Mercy of God* shown to *those that fear him* (*Lk* 1:50a), that Mary speaks of and applies to herself, is a recurring theme in *The Book of Psalms*. Psalm 135 (*LXX*) is a reminder of the Lord's great deeds during the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, repeating as a chorus that these deeds are the work of His mercy: *for His mercy endures forever*. In Psalm 102:8 (*LXX*) as well, after exalting the mercy of the Lord, *But You, O LORD, shall endure forever...*, the psalmist reveals the beneficiaries of this mercy in verses 17-18: *The Lord's mercy is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear*

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him, and his righteousness to the children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. Also, the author of Psalm 88:3 (*LXX*) brings to mind the deeds of the Lord as deeds of His mercy: I will sing of the mercies of the *LORD* forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations. In other words, God has not performed these miracles for the benefit of the important or of the strong of this world, but for the benefit of the meek and humble of heart, features that saint Luke has used to depict Mary.

Finally, the fact that the Evangelist mentions Abraham is not accidental. Like the father of her people (*Gen* 18:3), Mary has found favour with God (*Lk* 1:30) and like him (*Gen* 12:3; 18:18; 22:18), she is a source of blessing for all generations, being, in her turn, blessed by them (*Lk* 1:42.48); like him (*Gen* 15:6), Mary is praised for her faith in the promise of a miraculous birth (*Lk* 1:45). So, here is Mary giving voice to the praise and thanksgiving of Israel in these days of the Messiah (vv. 46-50). Then she notices that the Lord has sent His salvation not to those who are important in the eyes of the world, but to those who epitomize the entire spiritual destiny of Israel starting with the time of Jeremiah, the period of the fall of the monarchy (vv. 51-53). And, to better define what is essential to the concept of her people's destiny, her thinking goes way back to the beginning of her people's history, seeing her virginal conception as the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham (vv. 54-55). Indeed, just as Abraham had received these promises on behalf of the entire race, so, too, Mary received their fulfilment in the fullness of time on behalf of the entire race.

Therefore, in order to define Mary's profile in this text of Luke, we must take into account all the features that are combined in her. She absorbs all the features of a race awaiting salvation, faithful people who accomplish the Word of God. "Mary is the Mother of Jesus and is willing to be so. She accepts to give birth to the Son of God for the people of God and she fully represents this people and commits them to accepting the salvation God has offered to them.

This role makes possible for her to be assimilated into the Daughter of Zion (*Zeph* 3:14; *Lk* 1:28), into the New Jerusalem (*Rev* 21) in her role as a mother¹⁷. Once combined in Mary's person, saint Luke programmatically projects them onto the Church, which comes to life on Pentecost day, when she gathers the twelve apostles and the other disciples around her in a living community which, having received the Holy Spirit and conceived the Son of God, immediately begins to take Him to those who are awaiting Him.

The Features of the Church

In order to understand the **programmatic** projection of Mary's features unto the Church, the following operation could be attempted: replace *Mary's* name with *the Church* in the text of Luke. Once replaced, the pertinence of such a change should be examined. A permanent examination of conscience would be required on the part of the Church.

So, this is what the Gospel text looks like after such a replacement:

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was **the Church** (Mary). ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, **Church** (Mary), for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His

¹⁷ Léon-Dufour, X., *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique*, Cerf, Paris, 1988⁶, col. 721-722.

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father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴ Then **the Church** (Mary) said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible.” ³⁸ Then **the Church** (Mary) said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

³⁹ Now **the Church** (Mary) arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of **the Church** (Mary), that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told to her from the Lord.”

⁴⁶ And **the Church** (Mary) said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. ⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. ⁵⁰ And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, ⁵⁵ as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.”

⁵⁶ And **the Church** (Mary) remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

Put this way, the Gospel text offers many characteristic elements for the nature and mission of the Church; these elements can be found both in *The Acts of the Apostles* and in the Epistles of Paul, an important theological and ecclesiological support of Luke's writings, and also in other texts of the *New Testament*, especially in the *Gospel of John* or in the *Book of Revelation*. Thus:

1. Like Mary, the group of the apostles gathered on the Mount of Olives receives from Jesus himself the following news: *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

This message shows two important aspects: on the one hand, the Holy Spirit is to come upon the group of apostles, the first nucleus of the Church and, on the other hand, the Spirit will give each one of them the power to become a witness. In other words, the same Spirit that came upon Mary and made her conceive and give birth to the Son of God will come upon those who, by their witness, will have to achieve something equivalent to this conception and birth *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. Xavier Léon-Dufour expresses the same meaning when he says:

“Pentecost represents for the Church, to a certain extent, what the conception by the Holy Spirit meant for Jesus (*Lk* 1:35), His anointing by this Spirit at the dawn of His Messianic mission (*Acts* 10:38), and what it is for every Christian the gift of the Spirit through the laying on of hands...”¹⁸.

2. Many times saint Paul has stated his belief that his mission is inscribed within these coordinates: Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ,

¹⁸ Léon-Dufour, X., *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique*, col. 329.

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called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations for the sake of His name... (*Rom 1:1-5; cf. also Rom 15:19-20*¹⁹; *Gal 2:7-8*²⁰ etc.).

What draws our attention in this statement is the fact that Paul feels he has been set apart and entrusted with the apostleship to preach *the Gospel of the Lord* in order to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations. And in *1Cor 1:6-7* the apostle assures the addressees that his preaching is a witness to Jesus Christ, a witness that has been *confirmed in them, so that they come short in no gift...* Moreover, Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ, whom he has been preaching, is the same Jesus of the Annunciation, descendant of the house of David (*Lk 1:32* and *Rom 1:4*), the One announced by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures and proclaimed by the Gospel of God (*Rom 1:2*).

3. As for the nature of the Church, the author of the *Epistle to the Ephesians* defines the work of Jesus Christ in respect to the Church as follows: *Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, having*

¹⁹ *Rom 15:19-20 : ... from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named.*

²⁰ *Gal 2:7-8 : The gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles)...*

no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (*Eph* 5:25-27). Such a statement which alludes to the virginal identity of Mary (*Lk* 1:27.34), which must be kept in all members of the Church, is not without precedent, for in *2Cor* 11:2.7, Saint Paul explains to the Corinthians: *For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ... I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge.* Moreover, the author of the *Epistle to the Ephesians* describes this identity as a calling in *Eph* 1:4-6: Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In such a text, besides the calling to holiness and to righteousness (with reference to the virginal identity of Mary), the author mentions the grace given by God, which has brought about our adoption through Jesus Christ. And it is precisely the same grace that filled Mary, making her worthy to receive the Son of God in her womb (*Lk* 1:28.30).

4. In Mary's journey to the mountainous land of Judea where Elizabeth lived (*Lk* 1:39), the exegetes have identified the theme of the Word which, from now on, would make its way throughout the whole world, and according to *Acts* 1:8 and 28:30-31, would reach Rome²¹. Moreover, Mary's greeting²² to Elizabeth appears in the text as the cause of the child leaping in her womb and her being filled with the Holy Spirit. In his turn, Saint Paul sees the preaching of the Word as a

²¹ Cousin, H., *L'Évangile de Luc*, col Commentaires, Ed Bayard & Centurion, Paris, 1993, p. 30 or Saoût, Y., *Évangile de Jésus Christ selon saint Luc*, CE 137, Ed CERF, Paris, 2006, p. 13.

²² This noun (Gr. *aspasmos*) appears three times in *Lk* 1 - verses 29, 41 and 44. Usually Mary's greeting is considered an "extension" of the angel's greeting. This explains the effects on Elizabeth and on the child in her womb.

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condition for justification and renewal: For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord over all and bestows his riches on all who call upon Him. For “*every one who calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved*”. But how are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!*” But they have not all obeyed the Gospel, for Isaiah says, “*LORD, who has believed what he has heard from us?*” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ (*Rom 10:12-17*).

In this text of Saint Paul we recognize not only the urgency of preaching the Word but also that of sending out on mission to announce this Word. This urgency of sending out on mission to preach the Word comes from Christ Himself, according to the Gospels, and it is addressed to the group of apostles gathered around Him (*Matt 28:16-20; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:47-48; Acts 1:2b-8*) and subsequently assumed by the Church (*Acts 13:1-3 or 15:22*).

5. We find an important Pauline parallel to Mary's song (*Lk 1:46-55*) in *1Cor 1:26-31*: For consider your call, brethren, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were noble of birth. But God has chosen what is foolish in the world to put to shame the wise, God has chosen what is weak in the world to put to shame the strong; God has chosen what is low and despised in the world, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no flesh might boast in His presence. It is by Him that you exist in Christ Jesus, who for us was made wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — so that, as it is written, “*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*”

Like Mary who, at the beginning of her song, recalled her condition at the moment she was chosen to take part in the divine work (*Lk 1:48-53*), the apostle Paul wishes to point out the lowly state

of the Corinthians at the moment God chose them to do His work. By means of these persons lacking wisdom, power and social influence according to the world, God puts to shame the wise and the mighty, that no flesh might boast in His presence... Paul uses the verb *to boast* several times in order to contrast two spiritual attitudes: *to glory* and *to glory in the Lord*, where only the second one corresponds to the gifts of God. And he states that God's gift and most important work consist in your being in Christ Jesus according to the wise plan of God. Indeed, according to this plan, Christ has accomplished the redemption, the deliverance by which God has acquired a people, which also embraces the Corinthians in order to make them share His favours: wisdom, righteousness and holiness. Christ is the source of these favours and He places them at everyone's disposal, so that everyone can enjoy them: He accomplishes the wise plan of God and makes it known; He enables them to participate in his righteousness and holiness. Therefore, God has called the Corinthians to become members of the Church with no regard for the wisdom of the world and has offered them *to be in Christ*, who is their wisdom, their righteousness and their holiness, in order that they may find their pride and trust in the Lord alone (*cf.* also *Phil 3:3; Rom 5:11*).

According to both Mary and Paul, the way to become a full member of the New People of God, of the Body of Christ, of the Church, is to have a faith similar to Abraham's faith. Indeed, the apostle emphasizes the pre-eminence of faith in attaining the divine blessing and justification on two occasions (*Rom 4:1-22* and *Gal 3:6-14*). For example, with the help of two texts taken from the *Book of Genesis* (15:6 and 12:3), Paul highlights in *Gal 3:6-9* a relationship between Abraham's faith and the Christian community. Thus, according to *Gen 15:6*, Abraham receives justification as a reward for his faith, before ever having accomplished a deed worthy of it and even before being circumcised. Moreover, according to *Gen 12:3*, from its very beginning, the history of the patriarch receives a universal meaning: in Abraham all the families of the earth are blessed. Therefore, after bringing both texts together, Paul draws an

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essential conclusion for the Galatians: everybody who shows a faith similar to that of Abraham is a son of Abraham, sharing in his blessing, called to enter into communion with God, to receive the gift of true life and to be transformed by means of God's grace. Consequently, *Scripture had foreseen* that all nations would participate in the blessing of Abraham and that everything was to be fulfilled in Christ, the Son of Mary.

Conclusion

Our study, based on *Lk* 1:26-56, has emphasized the complexity of Mary's profile as described by the Evangelist. On the one hand, her features appear as a synthesis echoing numerous Old Testament texts that speak of God's work of salvation in the midst of Israel, and on the other hand they appear as a programmatic projection into the new people born as the Body of the resurrected Christ on Pentecost day, that is the Church. In this way, the Church reveals what Mary lived secretly. On both sides there is a mystery of virginity, a spousal mystery where the Lord is the Bridegroom; on both sides there is a mystery of motherhood and filiation, where the Holy Spirit operates (*Lk* 1:35; *Rom* 8:15), first in Christ's conception and birth (*Lk* 1:31; *Rev* 12:5), and then concerning the members of His Body (*Jn* 19:26ff; *Rev* 12:17). The mystery of virginity implies total purity, the fruit of the grace of Christ who touches her being at the core, making her *holy and without blemish* (*Eph* 5:27). The mystery of motherhood implies full union to the mystery of Jesus' earthly life, through His Passion and Cross (*Lk* 2:35; *Jn* 19:25f; *Rev* 12:13), and into His glory in the sharing of His resurrection (*Rev* 21). *The one highly favoured* by the Lord (*Lk* 1:28) remains, in the project left to the members of the Church, *to the praise of the glory of His grace bestowed on them in the Beloved* (*Eph* 1:6). It is through her intercession that the Son of God has made Himself brother to all people, establishing an organic relationship with them, while they cannot reach Him without passing through the Church, His body (*Col* 1:18). The Christians' attitude towards Mary is determined by this fundamental fact. Therefore, this

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attitude is closely associated with their attitude towards the Church, their Mother (*Jn* 19:27).

Mary, the symbol of Israel in the Gospel of John

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Abstract

In this paper I shall try to prove the idea that Mary is the symbol of Israel in the fourth gospel through the two texts where Mary plays a role.

Keywords: Mary, gospel of John, wedding at Cana, crucifixion.

There are only two texts in the Gospel of John where Mary has any role. These are the Marriage at Cana (2,1-12) and the scene of Mary standing under her Son's cross (19,25-27). In this paper I sustain the idea that Mary is the symbol of Israel in the fourth gospel.

I. The Wedding at Cana (Jn 2,1–12)

The story of the wedding at Cana in the Gospel of John closes the calling of the disciples and simultaneously opens a new part, which ends with the second sign made by Jesus, the healing of the royal official's son in Capernaum (4,46–54). Jesus promises Nathanael and through him all of his disciples: "...You will see greater things than these." (John 1,50b) One of the first revelations promised by Jesus is represented by the revelations of his glory (John 2,11). At the same time the story of the wedding at Cana opens a chain of seven signs from the gospel, also known as the Book of Signs (John 1-12), which culminates in the raising of Lazarus.¹

The story of the wedding at Cana contains at least two enigmas. The first one being: Jesus' unexpected reaction to his mother's request. The second enigma is Jesus declaring that his hour has not yet come, and with all of these he completes his first sign.

¹ cf. Johannes BEUTLER, *Johannes evangelium*, Herder, Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 119.

Why does Jesus distance himself so sternly from his mother's indirect and at the same time polite request? I'm not referring to him addressing her as "Woman", but to the question of: "What has this to do with me and you?". The Bible from Iași rightfully annotates: This expression is a translation of the Hebrew formula: *What is between me and you?* More precisely: *What is it for you and me?* The translation could have more meanings: „*What's your problem with me?*” (Mark 1,24 and 5,7) or “*What has this to do with me? I don't care!*”² Jesus's words seem to be impolite. By this expression the demons address Jesus. (cf. Mark 1,24; 5,7). The different meanings of this expression in modern languages³ show how hard it is to translate this Semitic phrase. This expression can also be found in Septuagint, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures (Judg 11,12; 2Sam 16,10; 19,22; 1Kgs 17,18; 2Kgs 3,13; 2Chr 35,21). The Greek version translates this phrase as *ad litteram* and not *ad sensum* (מָה־לִּי וְלָךְ = τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί = what to me and you?) The preferred translations are those which combine Jesus's resistance with his intention of resolving Mary's request. We could paraphrase his response as: “What would you like me to do? Let me resolve this in my own way! Leave it to me!”

In the biblical tradition the person who pronounces this phrase is concerned with the interference of the other party's behaviour.⁴ As I

² cf. *Biblia*, Iași 2013, 2583, note 4.

³ The Bible from Iași translates: *ce am a face Eu cu tine?*” (What would I do with you?). Campbell enumerates a few examples of how this idiom could be translated into English: “What to me and to you?”, “What have we to do with one another?”, “Why do you involve me?”, “What has this concern of yours to do with me?”, “What have I to do with you?”, “What have you to do with me?”, “What would you have me do?”, “Let me handle this in my own way”, “Leave this to me.”. Einheitsübersetzung: „Was willst du von mir, Frau?” (What do you want from me, Woman?) Szent István Társulat offers a harmonized translation: „Asszony, a te gondod az én gondom.” (Woman, your concern is my concern)

⁴ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, *Kinship Relations in the Gospel of John*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, nr. 42, 2007 The Catholic Biblical Association of America, Washington DC 20064, 126.

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said before, in the New Testament those who are possessed by the devil address Jesus with this phrase: “what is it to us, you and me, Jesus of Nazareth? etc.” (Matt 8,29; Mark 1,24; 5,7; Luke 4,34; 8,28; John 2,4). We have to acknowledge the fact that this dialogue is not appropriate to have between a mother and her son. The different variants of the manuscripts reflect a wish to better and interpret stylistically the phrase. The oldest texts, like P⁷⁵, do not contain punctuation marks, which mean that it’s the exegete’s decision where to put the question mark, in front of the noun “woman” or at the end of the sentence.⁵

This text is not problematic only to modern readers. The fathers of the church tried to give an explanation based on the Christological and Mariological discussions from their era. St. John Chrysostom felt the need to insist on how Jesus listened to his mother and father and referred to the Gospel of Luke 2,51. He even directs to the example for children. When parents don’t put any obstacles in the way of God’s will, the children have to listen to them. But when they ask for something at the wrong time, or they separate them from spiritual things, they don’t have to listen.⁶

In the homilies of the gospel, St. Augustine considers that the addressing “woman”, used by Jesus to call his mother, can be explained by Jesus Christ’s double birth. He is born in eternity, without a mother, only from a Father. At the time he was born from a woman without a father. Without a mother he is God, without father he is human.⁷ Christ was true God and human too. Being God he didn’t have a mother, being human he had one. So, his mother was the mother of his flesh, mother of mankind, mother of weakness, which he

⁵ cf. Benedikt SCHWANK, *János evangéliuma*, Agapé Szeged 2001, 89.

⁶ cf. St. Thomas AQUINAS, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, St. John*, Veritatis Splendor Publications, MMXII, trans. John Henry Newman, 54.

⁷ cf. Szent ÁGOSTON, *Beszédek Szent János evangéliumáról I. I–XXX. beszéd*, trans. RÉVÉSZNÉ BARTÓK Gertrúd, Ókeresztény Örökségünk, Jel Kiadó, Budapest 2008, 128.

took upon himself for us. He was preparing to accomplish the miracle out of his godly nature, and not out of his weakness. He committed the miracle as God, and not because of human weakness. It's as if Jesus tells through his answer that: the one who does the miracle, my godly nature is not born by you. When the weakness will hang by the crucifix, I will recognize you.⁸

The Bible from Iași summarizes in the note to verse 2,4, the opinion of the exegetes which were already anticipated by St. Augustine. This expression could be understood the best as a divergence of perspective in resolving the difficulty that has appeared: *the remedy of an unpleasant situation is asked, with a human motivation. Jesus commits the miracle as part of his messianic mission and has a much deeper motivation and meaning.*⁹

Campell proposes a sociological lecture of this episode, which I will summarize because it presents correspondingly Mary's human perspective. His approach is based on the social conditions in the Mediterranean basin of the Antiquity. He identifies two essential values in this kind of society. One is the honour of a family and the other is modesty/humility.¹⁰ Marriage is the fusion of two big family's honour. The absence of wine could compromise the honour of the families taking part in the marriage. The wedding's guests come from different settlements: Bethsaida, Nazareth and Cana. The news of an unsuccessful wedding would spread throughout the whole of Galilee and would be considered a dishonour to the two families. The risk of their honour being compromised because of the absence of wine is quite significant. Mary intervenes beside her son in order to save the family's honour. She wants to draw her son into a social competition which is typical for the ancient Mediterranean societies, in order to avoid the humiliation of their family. She hoped that Jesus would

⁸ cf. Szent ÁGOSTON, *Beszédek Szent János evangéliumáról*, 129.

⁹ cf. *Biblia*, Iași 2013, 2583, note 4.

¹⁰ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 127.

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improve the family's status. With his negative response Jesus refuses to take part in a local competition for honour.¹¹

The ancient Mediterranean is also characterized by the image of limited goods.¹² In Jesus' cultural world the perception of goods being limited was wide-spread. It was a fact that the ascension of an individual or a family in honour or status meant the losing of aforementioned things by an individual or family. Therefore the successful individuals were envied by those around them.¹³ Those who are modest do not try to obtain more honour than what the public would be willing to give. A truly modest person would strive to be under the social status that they have the right to be. Moreover the zeal for honour was considered to be an arrogant behaviour in Jesus' world, yet modesty and honesty was considered to be more important than honour.¹⁴ In the Book of Proverbs 15,33 it is written: *Wisdom's instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honour.* In this case Jesus' honesty/honour could be the reason why he initially refused to involve himself with the absence of wine. The fact that Jesus' humility took precedence over honour could be observed throughout his public life, as shown in the fourth gospel: Jesus refuses the honour that came from the people (cfr. 5,41), he does not make signs and miracles in order to gain recognition from the people. In addition Jesus refuses to be made king by the mass after feeding five thousand men and an even bigger number of women and children (cf. John 6,26–29).¹⁵ His actions are typical of a humble person, who does not want to rise above others. Instead of searching for laurel wreaths, the Jesus of this gospel promotes and defends his Father's honours (7,18; 8,49. 54; 15,18).¹⁶ If Jesus's mother tries to obtain from her son

¹¹ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 127.

¹² cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 128.

¹³ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 129.

¹⁴ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 129.

¹⁵ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 129–130.

¹⁶ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 131.

a demonstration through a sign or miracle or a public intervention with the scope of obtaining honours for Jesus, and implicitly for his family, her approach is not compatible with the humble behaviour of Jesus presented in the fourth gospel. Jesus refuses to act in the way his mother proposed to, but at the same time he doesn't decline to act.¹⁷ The miracle of the water changing at the Marriage at Cana is an inconspicuous one, because Jesus' time hasn't come yet. Only after the last sign, the raising of Lazarus seems that his hour has come, from this moment on Jesus talks openly about his identity in the Gospel of John.¹⁸ The mother of Jesus, after she started looking for a guarantor of honour for herself and her family does she quickly realize that the right procedure is to do what her Son says (John 2,5).¹⁹

Campbell's sociological approach offers many interesting details, however it has some weak points. For example, the image of "limited goods" doesn't seem to be compatible with the situation, I can't see how Jesus could provoke the envy of those not at the wedding by the giving of wine. I can't see or understand how increasing the honour of the involved families would damage the honour of those not participating at the wedding.

We have to continue our investigation in order to find matching solutions for the problems at hand. Mary, whose name is not mentioned in the fourth gospel, is perceived in her role as a woman and in the hypostasis of salvation which goes beyond her individuality.²⁰ The exegete has a hard job concerning the narrative of this gospel. On one hand the Marriage at Cana isn't just a dry recital of what has happened, she is full with symbolic details, the evangelist wants to present a happening from this world, but with a profound meaning. That's why an exegete who is fixated only on an allegoric

¹⁷ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 131.

¹⁸ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 133.

¹⁹ cf. Joan Cecilia CAMPBELL, 2007, 134.

²⁰ cf. Johannes BEUTLER, *Johannesevangelium*, Herder, Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 119.

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statement destroys this masterpiece. On the other hand those who look over the symbolic content will only understand the half of this piece.²¹

The second enigma is the fact that Jesus says: his hour has not yet come. However he immediately makes a miracle. Therefore, judged by Jesus' actions his hour has obviously come. Certainly these two enigmas are closely related. We direct our attention at another text from the gospel in order to find the solution. At the beginning of the 7th chapter Jesus is being harassed by his brothers. They want to convince him to go to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, so that people could see the miracles he performs. Jesus responds to his brothers:

6... „My time has not yet come, but your time is always here ...**8** You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.” (John 7,6.8)

The parallel ideas between the two texts are obvious. Here too we find a request for Jesus to appear in front of the public and we see him refusing once again. This isn't the only common point: just like at the wedding, Jesus refuses his family's wish, but still does what they requested of him. He goes to the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7,10), moreover he appears before the public (7,14.26).

What Jesus does in both episodes – strictly and formally refusing the wish of his family could have only this meaning: What he does publicly has nothing to do with the flesh and blood, doesn't come from human interest, from human plans and wishes, it is the will of God and the plan of his Father.

With the transformation of water into wine at the wedding at Cana in John's Gospel the great and eschatological work of God starts, revealed through the glory of his Son revealed by the prophets of Israel. In John 2,1-12, where God's work is told, abundance, glory and

²¹ cf. Benedikt SCHWANK, 2001, 92.

the wonderful taste of Christ's glory is described. The gathering of the believers is already mentioned. That's why the difference between those who believe and those who know nothing about what's happening is so strongly underlined in this story.

The person who is responsible for the feast, the steward, represents those who gathered, those who take part in the event, who taste the exceptional quality of the wine and don't know from where it comes (2,9). The steward belongs to the group of those who may look and see but not perceive, and hear and listen but not understand (Mark 4,12). On the other hand, the evangelist asserts explicitly about Jesus' disciples: *He showed his glory and his disciples believed in him.* (John 2,12).

The disciples believe and recognize Christ's glory. Because they believe they too receive from the abundance of glory "grace upon grace". (John 1,16) Since they believe they don't act according to their own interests and plans, but from the will of the Father. Because they believe they are *nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (John 1,13).²²

²² This verse has an interesting variant. There are commentaries which express both versions, like FARKASFALVY Dénes, *Testé lett szó I*, PruggVerlag Eisenstadt 1986, 51; Irenaeus (in the Latin translation), Tertullian, Origen (in Latin) formulates this singular sentence: *qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis neque ex voluntate viri sed ex Deo natus est.* The Codex Veronensis from the 5th century offers the same text (Verona, Bibl. Capitolare, VI (6). cf. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. Nestle–Aland, Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, Stuttgart ²⁷1993, 714). However the plural form has its own textual witnesses of authority, like the P⁶⁶, which could be dated from 200 and the rest of the capitalized codexes from the 4th and 5th century. The plural variant talks about the fact that God's sons can't obtain this character nor through blood, nor through the will of the flesh and nor through the will of man. The singular version though refers to the incarnated Logos. In this case the biblical affirmation could create problems in an environment influenced by the different gnostic movements. The Logos *was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.* For gnostics it could serve as evidence of their conviction, conformable to the statement that Jesus didn't become man in the proper sense of the word (cf. FARKASFALVY, 1986, 52).

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The third group consists of Jesus' brothers, meaning his relatives. They are not mentioned separately in the story, where they talk about the fact that his mother was at a wedding (John 2,1). But their presence is self-evident, as shown by the ending of the story (John 2,12). Mary couldn't go to the wedding by herself. Later we learn about the fact that Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him (7,5).²³

While observing these lines of the gospel we would surely reach to the questions of: what group did Mary belong to? What is her role? What is her role in this story?

She clearly doesn't belong to the group of those who are involved with the whole happening, those who do not understand what's happening. Mary knows from where the wine comes from. Although it seems that she does not represent those who believe. It is said explicitly only about the disciples that they believed in Jesus' glory (John 2,11). The mother and brothers of Jesus are not involved. However, according to the evangelist we cannot conclude that Mary didn't believe in her Son. On the other hand it doesn't say that: "*This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His mother and His disciples believed in Him.*"

The reason why the evangelist didn't use such words is because Mary's role in the story is something else. It is exemplified throughout Mary that the epiphany's hour is not identical with the hour of men, that God's will is not identical with that of men, and God's plan is not identical with that of men. Only because of this does Jesus refuse categorically his mother's wish. The refusal is not addressed to his mother, he only wants to show that messianic time is not determined by Him (Jesus), but by the Father.²⁴

Due to the Holy Virgin's figure it becomes clear that the true Israel, the one that Jesus gathers around himself is not generated where people gather through ties of flesh and blood, but only where

²³ cf. Gerhard LOHFINK – Ludwig WEIMER, 262–3.

²⁴ Gerhard LOHFINK – Ludwig WEIMER, 263.

people surrender to God's plan. He creates the true Israel, which doesn't care about the ties between families, clans and nations. This narrative is heading to a direction similar to those from Mark 3,20–21.31–35, where Jesus proclaims the new family of God's kingdom, in contrast with any bodily ties and kinship:

“Who are My mother and My brothers?” **34** Then He looked around at those who sat around Him and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! **35** For whoever does the will of God is My brother, and My sister, and My mother.”

Thus Mary in the narrative from John 2,1-12 doesn't represent those who believe, but embodies those who haven't took a step yet from the flesh and blood towards the eschatological Israel. In other words she represents the Israel of the Old Testament in the best sense of the term: she is wholly present; she is able to listen; she insists even after Jesus' refusal; she lets herself being corrected, but orders the servants: “*Whatever He says to you, do it.*” (John 2,5).²⁵

Alcuin²⁶ notes at verse 3: “In this case, Mary bears the features of the synagogue, who provokes Jesus to make a miracle.”²⁷ The addressing of female is not derogatory. Since the bodily ties become

²⁵ There are exegetes who see in Jesus' mother's admonishment “Whatever He says to you, do it!” to the servants a sign of her belief. Therefore, based on this incentive she too is included in the group of Jesus' disciples, who believe seeing the first sign at Cana. cf. Jacek ONISZCZUK, *La Passione del Signore secondo Giovanni, Gv 18–19*, Retorica Biblica EDB, Bologna 2011, 186.

²⁶ Flaccus Albinus Alcuinus or Ealhwine (cca. 735 – 19 mai 804) was an Anglo-Saxon scholar, theologian, a professor at the palace school of Aachen, assistant of Charlemagne in the domains of religion and culture. cf. <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcuin>

²⁷ Unfortunately I only have an abstract of Alcuin's writing from *Catena Aurea*. It would be interesting to analyze the text as a whole for a better understanding. But from what he adds „It was customary for the Jews to ask for miracles.” it seems like Mary adjoins the Jews, those who frequently ask for miracles. cf. St. Thomas AQUINAS, *Catena Aurea: St. John*, 54.

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irrelevant, Mary is the woman who spiritually is the closest to Jesus, she's the first person to see the sign of salvation (4b). The evangelist considers it to be important to present this woman's contribution in the era of the New Testament. Mary prepares the servants for what Jesus will do: "Whatever He says to you, do it." In the words addressed to Jesus, and corrected by him, she represents the Old Testament. Through the words spoken to the servants she gains an appropriate and privileged place according to God's will. She stays the closest to Jesus both in the community of the Old and New Testaments.

We have to say that only she expects her Son to take action. Only she feels the eschatological abundance, which Jesus brings. Hence she represents that Israel which keeps hope even at messianic time, which is willing to be aggregated by God, the true Israel, the one which awaits with tension at the threshold of the new world, created by God.

We assume a correct position with the retelling of the wedding at Cana only if we read it in a typological key, says G. Lohfink. Mary, the disciples, the brothers of Jesus, the servants and the steward represent, beside their historical reality, different categories from the people of Israel: Mary and the servants represent the Israel full of awaiting and hope; the disciples are the exponents of Israel, who already believe, the brothers of Jesus embody the unbelieving Israel, while the steward embodies the Israel that doesn't observe what's happening.²⁸

II. Mary under the cross (John 19,25–27)

The story of the Marriage at Cana isn't the only time Mary appears in the Gospel of John. We find Mary at the foot of the cross at the end of the gospel. Only here it is revealed whom she represents. We quickly realize that the evangelist purposely tied together the wedding at Cana with the scene of the cross (John 19,25-27). These

²⁸ cf. Gerhard LOHFINK – Ludwig WEIMER, 264.

two episodes from the gospel are the only where Mary has a role in. Both texts refer to the Glory of Jesus: through the miracle at Cana the relegation of his glory starts, the elevation of the cross represents the fulfilment of the glorification through the paradox of abasement and humility. In addition Jesus addresses his mother in both texts as “woman”. H. Gese doesn’t consider the appellative “woman” as defacement, on the contrary. In Antiquity this was how they addressed the mother of the king, in this case the Messiah’s.²⁹ These two scenes are the only ones where the evangelist puts the mother of Jesus and his disciples in the same scene.³⁰

25 But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.³¹ **26** When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, here is your son.” **27** Then He

²⁹ cf. Gerhard LOHFINK – Ludwig WEIMER, 425. note nr. 11.

³⁰ cf. Jacek ONISZCZUK, 2011, 186.

³¹ Verse 25 is quite hard to interpret. According to J. Oniszczyk’s interpretation about the number of females present at Jesus’ cross we can talk about several grammatical readings. We have to consider the fact that the uncial manuscripts did not have punctuation marks and the words weren’t separated. Therefore in the modern editions the editors are the ones who do this work. One of the first possibilities from a grammatical point of view could be: only two women are present. In this case we read this way: *But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, namely Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.* Meaning A = C (Jesus’s mother is Mary the wife of Clopas) B = D (the sister of his mother is Mary Magdalene). This grammatical analysis doesn’t work if we consider it’s content. Jesus’ mother cannot be identified as Mary the wife of Clopas. Another interpretation can be summarized as such: (a; b = c; d). In this case we are talking about three women: Mary, the mother of Jesus, the sister of his mother, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. If there were three women, then the first two’s names are not mentioned, only the last two. The reason behind omitting the name of the first two could be because at that time of the gospel’s writing their name was well known by the community, thus there was no reason why to mention it. This last interpretation is plausible and sustained by the majority of commentaries. cf. Jacek ONISZCZUK, 2011, 182–3.

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said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time, this disciple took her to his own home.

At first sight it seems like Jesus would like to take care of his mother in a devout way, fulfilling his final obligations as a son before his imminent death. However this isn't the only way to interpret it. Beutler mentions rightfully that there are few texts in the New Testament that had so many interpretations, just like this one. In its history of interpretation the mariological sense predominates since the patristic era. The mariological aspect is the most widely spread in the Catholic exegete in France and Italy. In the forefront of this interpretation it seems as either Jesus entrusted the beloved disciple, as the representative of the future community to his mother, or that he entrusted his mother to the disciple, who “took her to his own home”.³²

There's another model for interpretation, for example in the Protestant exegesis, but also in the Catholic one from Leuven and in the German region, which puts the beloved disciple at the centre of the scene and not Mary. They base their claim on the fact that the disciple is the one who takes Mary to his own home and not the other way around.³³

The interpretation of the Swiss exegete, Jean Zumstein might take middle ground between the two models.³⁴ He thinks that our pericope is part of a series of symbolic texts, in which the words have a more profound meaning, sustained also by their literary sense. This means that the disciple taking Mary home has a meaning for the community

³² cf. Johannes BEUTLER, *Das Johannes evangelium*, Herder Freiburg im Breisgau, 2013, 502.

³³ cf. Johannes BEUTLER, *Das Johannes evangelium*, Herder Freiburg im Breisgau, 2013, 502.

³⁴ cf. Jean ZUMSTEIN, *Johannes 19,25–27*, in *Kreative Erinnerung. Relecture und Auslegung im Johannes evangelium*, Zürich 2004, 277–290. Reference based on J. Beutler, 2013, 44.

after the resurrection: the beloved disciple is the reference point not only for Jesus' family, but for the family of the believers that has yet to be born. This vision can be confirmed by its context in John 19,25-27. In all of the precedent and following scenes we can verify this symbolic dimension. For example, the inscription underlines Jesus' regal dignity. The division of his clothes is reminiscent of the community's unity. The thirst of Jesus at the moment of his death means his thirst for the salvation of people. The blood and water which drops from his ribs when he is stabbed by the soldier's spear symbolizes the gifts of salvation after resurrection.³⁵ The expression "he bowed his head and gave up his spirit", beside the death of Jesus means in a symbolic way the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁶

Therefore this episode has a much more profound dimension. The following excerpt appears right after the manifestation of Jesus' final wish: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished ... When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, „It is finished!" (John 19,28.30).³⁷

Because of this we sustain that the declarative formula of: "Here is your son" and "Here is your mother." cannot represent simply familial relations. John 2,1-12 and 7,1-10 suggests that the evangelist at the scene of the crucifixion is talking about the new people of God, to whom the human desires and plans don't matter, only the fulfilment of God's work. Her, in this hour, the words of the great priest, Caiaphas become true, which the evangelist interprets like this in John 11,51-52:³⁸

51 He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, **52** and not for the

³⁵ cf. Johannes BEUTLER, 2013, 502–3.

³⁶ cf. Johannes BEUTLER, 2013, 508.

³⁷ cf. Gerhard LOHFINK – Ludwig WEIMER, 2012, 265.

³⁸ cf. Gerhard LOHFINK – Ludwig WEIMER, 2012, 265–6.

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nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Thus Jesus' death gathers the sons of Israel, confirming their unity. The ancient prophecies about the rebuilding of Israel become true throughout his death, and particularly through the Church. This is the message the evangelist would like to send through such an important text in the economy of the gospel. "Sons scattered" are not, how many exegetes think, the pagan believers, but those Jews who came to faith in the diaspora. They are, together with the Jews of the homeland the true Israel, which, is open even to pagans. The converting of pagans does not represent the theme of John 11,49-53. Here they talk about the eschatological reconstruction of Israel.³⁹

If in John 2 Mary represents the Israel of the Old Testament which is waiting, full of hope and belief, then the scene of the crucifixion might mean only that this Israel has reached its mark: at his time of death, Jesus entrusts the Israel represented by Mary to his beloved disciple, in communion with him and in his care, who represents in the gospel together with Peter and the other disciples the new Israel, the eschatological one. In other words: Mary, the Israel that is open to the Messiah is entrusted to an apostle and throughout this to the apostolic Church.

But the Israel represented by Mary is targeted at the Lord's cross. Much more happens here. Jesus doesn't only say: "Here is your son!" but "Here is your mother!" The beloved disciple is entrusted to a mother, the personification of the Israel of the Old Testament, which he should never abandon and which he has to keep in his heart. Under the cross mother and son become the new family of the Messiah. They all need one another, neither can be without the other one.

In conclusion we can say: the gospel's text transforms the historical persona of Mary into an exemplary character: She represents

³⁹ cf. Gerhard LOHFINK – Ludwig WEIMER, 2012, 266.

the symbol of Israel. At the beginning of the gospel she represents the Israel which hopes and listens, which is open to new things. At the scene of the crucifixion the Israel of the Old Testament reaches its destination. Jesus fulfils his mission, he rebuilds the eschatological Israel, God's new family. This new family is represented by the communion of Mary and Jesus' beloved disciple. Jesus was born in order to create this eschatological family, which can become the "sprout of the church and new humanity."⁴⁰ The Church comes to life the moment Jesus entrusts his mother to his disciple.⁴¹

Mary as the representation of God's people after the 2nd century

Ludwig Weimer maintains that in the patristic era the church's concept was much larger compared to what it became in the theology of the Middle Ages. The Fathers of the Church never treated the Church as an absolutely new reality, without any ties to the people of the Old Testament. The fathers of the church saw in the Church the accomplishment of God's ancient plan. Through her God guides the world to salvation. Because of this to the great theologians of the first centuries the Church existed since his plan of salvation. This is the reason why the Church's mystery is revealed by different steps from the Old Testament. Origen (+254) maintains that every masterpiece needs a sketch, and the Old Testament reveals many sketches of future happenings. The fathers of the church interpreted the Old Testament in a typological manner, they have seen in his events prefigurations of Christ and of the Church. St. Augustine in his homily for the feats of

⁴⁰ cf. Pope Benedict the XVIth, speech during his pilgrimage in Turkey, Ephesos 2006. 11. 29.

⁴¹ cf. Kurt KOCH's preach from 2013 September 22, during the Swiss National Day of Prayer, at Einsiedeln, in: Michael HESEMANN, *Fatima titka, A Mária-jelenések, a pápa és az emberiség jövője*, Magyar Nyugat Könyvkiadó, Vasszilvág 2017, 363. Original title: *Das letzte Geheimnis von Fatima, Marienerscheinungen, der Papst und die Zukunft der Menschheit*, Kopp Verlag, Rottenburg, 2016.

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the Maccabees, he warns his audience with the following words: “No one should believe that before Christian people God’s people didn’t exist ... Christ had people only after his passions, moreover his people are originating from Abraham ...”⁴²

The fathers of the church saw the prefigurations of the Church in Noah’s ark, in the Tabernacle, in the shrine, in Zion, in Solomon’s temple, in the bride from Song of Songs, in the saints of Israel. To them the Old Testament’s time was Jesus’ engagement time with his Church.

The Second Vatican Council refound the close ties between the Church and God’s people from the Old Testament.

... In Mary the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 103b)

Mary, who enters more intimately in the history of salvation unites in a way by itself and reflects the highest facts of belief; (*Lumen Gentium* 65)

Through this vision the council opened the door to the interpretation of not only to Mary as the original icon of the church, but also as the ideal icon of the true Israel from the Old Testament. God’s activity of salvation in Israel is one of the mysteries of the Church.

The fathers of the Church had a bigger concept of the Church, according to which the existence of the Church doesn’t begin at Pentecost. Pentecost is the culmination and fulfilment of a long process, which began much earlier.

The fathers of the church frequently call St. Mary the clean earth from which Christ had sprung out. When they create this vision, they

⁴² Gerhard Lohfink – Ludwig Weimer, 268.

have the cursed earth of Genesis 3,17 in mind. Was Israel since Abraham only a cursed earth? Wasn't this earth, using a modern image, decontaminated by the prophets?

What do these invocations in the lauret litany mean: "queen of patriarchs, queen of prophets?" These cannot mean anything other than the fact that Mary comprises the Old Testament as a whole. She absorbs all the light of the Old Testament and gathers it in her "yes". In her response "Let it be to me according to your word." contains all the "yes-es" of Abraham, Moses, Anna, David and every prophet's.

Mary and the People of God in the Book of Revelation (Rev 12)

Iulian FARAOANU

Abstract

The Marian themes are not so common in the last book of the Bible. However, chapter 12 might be an exception to this. On the other hand, ecclesiological images are often used together with the theology and Christology themes. Some scholars believe that one method for understanding the message of the book could be the analysis of the images of the Church. This paper aims to bring partial light on the term "Church", seen as the people of God in relation to Mary, the mother of the Church in the Revelation. How does the people of God relate to Mary? The answer can be analyzed from three perspectives: the historical perspective, the symbolical perspective and the relation between the community and the individual.

At secondary level, the paper also introduces a point of view on the interpretation of the great sign in Revelation 12. Is there a Mariological reference in the Revelation? It would be preferable to have a balanced approach, a synthesis between the two manners of understanding the image of the Woman: the Church or Mary.

Keywords: Mary, Revelation, people of God, ecclesiology, symbolism, community.

Introduction

The two main approaches in the interpretation of the great sign in *Revelation 12*: the ecclesiological¹ interpretation and the Marian²

¹ Hippolytus of Rome, Tihonius, Jeronimus, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Beda etc.

² A promoter of the Mariological interpretation was Quodvultdeus, bishop of Carthage (+454), a disciple of St. Augustine.

interpretation are widely known. The numerous studies on this theme indicate that an accurate interpretation cannot be exclusive. A solely Marian³ interpretation is difficult if we take into account the opinion of the great number of exegetes who identify the Church in the “woman” of the *Revelation*. Yet, an exegetical interpretation that would completely disregard the Marian interpretation would be erroneous.⁴ On the other hand, there is a group of Biblicists who bring together the two types of interpretation, proposing an ecclesiological and Marian interpretation,⁵ *i.e.*, a synthesis between the collective image and the individual⁶ one, with various specifications.

1. The People of God in the Revelation

Of all the images and metaphors used in reference to the Church in the book of Revelation, I chose that of the people of God, as it seems to be the most common. At the same time, it is in line with the collective and representative function of the tribes and apostles in relation to individuals.

When addressing the people of God, *the first question* relates to the description of such people. It is important to differentiate between the image of the people of God in the first part of the book (*Revelation* 2-3) and in the second part (*Revelation* 4-22). In *Revelation* 2-3, the messages to the seven communities in Asia Minor present the actual life of the Churches, with that acknowledgment of the coexistence of

³ If there is only the Marian interpretation, there are difficulties in identifying the meaning of all elements of the context.

⁴ See I. DE LA POTTERIE, *Maria nel mistero dell'alleanza*, Marietti, Genova, 1988, 258-259.

⁵ In the last decades, there has been a large number of supporters of Marian interpretation in *Revelation* 12; see J. ERNST, “Die himmlische Frau” in 12. Kapitel der Apokalypse, in *Theologie und Glaube* 58 (1969), 39-58.

⁶ In *Revelation*, there is no use of the name Mary; instead the term “gyne” (woman) is used in *Revelation* 12.

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saints and sinners. It is the description of the real and actual Church,⁷ with the challenges encountered in living in accordance to faith in the given social and historical context. In these seven communities who have a special relationship with Christ present among them, ecclesial life must be characterized by fidelity and conversion, while constantly observing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The recommendations to perseverance and fidelity take into account the danger of idolatry and the compromise with the pagan world to which the Christians of Asia Minor were exposed as regards the external relations (with the Empire and the temple) and the internal relations (within the community). At the same time, there is a recommendation to discernment concerning prophetic doctrines and revelations, and consistency in Christian life. There is no mention of Mary, as the focus is on the relationship with Christ.

In *Revelation* 4-22, the author describes the universal Church, uncircumcised to a city. It is the image of the people of God, comprising the entire world and consisting of people from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues of the earth. Besides the special indications, the temporal ones are also changed, as *Revelation* 4-22 mentions “millennium” and “three and a half days”. Finally, *Revelation* 4-20 presents an ideal image of the Church, described using only positive aspects: there is an ideal people described only in optimistic colours, using numerous images: the 144,000 (*Revelation* 7; 14), the Two Witnesses (*Revelation* 11) and the Woman⁸ (*Revelation* 12).

The *second question* regards the frequency of the recurrence of one theme like God’s people along with other major themes in the book. The ecclesiological theme is present, first of all in *Revelation* 2-3, a large part of these chapters being dedicated to the description of

⁷ The term “*ekklesia*” (church) is used in *Revelation* 19 times to indicate the seven communities of Asia Minor.

⁸ The name of woman in *Revelation* 12 is capitalized as it stands for an actual name, referring to an individual or to the Church.

the Asia Minor Churches life. In *Revelation* 4-22, the theme of the people of God is not at the forefront. The ecclesiological theme is related to the doctrine on God, the One who guides history sitting on his throne, and the doctrine on Christ, the One who reveals and fulfils God's plan. The people of God enjoy a privileged relationship with God. God protects this people, this being obvious in the seal put to the members of the twelve tribes of Israel (*Revelation* 7:1-8), in the name written on the forehead of the 144,000 (*Revelation* 14:15), in the immunity of the Two Witnesses (*Revelation* 11), and in the saving of the Woman in the desert (*Revelation* 12). The people of God have a special relationship with Christ. Christ the Lamb is standing (although stabbed) on Mount Zion together with the 144,000 believers (*Revelation* 14:1). It is Him who must be followed up to death by the ones redeemed from all over the earth (*Revelation* 14:4). The Two Witnesses, a symbol of the Church, are given by Christ the mission to prophecy (*Revelation* 11), and the testimony of the ones redeemed by the blood of the Lamb is also in favour of Christ (*Revelation* 12).

Along with the ecclesiology related to theology and Christology, we can also include the Mariological theme to be identified in the history of the people of God.

2. Revelation 12:1-6: Exegetical Analysis

Revelation 12, one of the most studied⁹ chapters in Revelation, contains references to the people of God and, probably, implicit references to Mary. In order to understand the message, it is necessary to take into account the narrative structure¹⁰ of the unitary chapter, the multiple references to the Old Testament (cf. Genesis¹⁰ 3:15; Isaiah

⁹ Cf. P. PRIGENT, *Apocalypse 12. Histoire de l'Exégèse*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1959, 1: a chapter that has a significant influence on the directions of interpretation; touchstone, cf. A. YARBRO COLLINS, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Scholars, Missoula 1976, 231.

¹⁰ Cf. E. CORSINI, "La donna e il dragone nel capitolo 12 dell'Apocalisse", in *Ricerche storico bibliche*, 6 (1984), 256.

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66:7; Psalms 2:2.9),¹¹ as well as the purpose of the book that is an exhortative one. In addition, we need to consider the symbolism present in every page of the book. Finally, in order to ensure an accurate interpretation, it is necessary to analyze the context so as to discern the intention of the author.¹²

Revelation 12:1 introduces a great sign, to be decoded in the context of two other signs, the Dragon in Revelation 12:3 and the plagues against the idolatry of the Beasts in Revelation 15:1.¹³ The sign that is at the centre of the scene in Revelation 12:1 is the Woman (“*gyne*”), a term that appears eight times in Revelation 12. It is interesting to notice how the name of the Woman is not revealed.

The term “*gyne*” brings to mind the symbolism of the woman, the bride (Isaiah 54:1-6; Jeremiah 3:20; Ezekiel 16:14) and the mother (Isaiah 49:21; 50:1; 66:7-11) in the Old Testament. The woman was often the symbol of Israel¹⁴ (cf. Isaiah 52:2; 54:1-6; 60:10; 62:1-5). In the book of Revelation, other parallelisms could be made with Revelation 19:7 and 21:9, in association with the image of the Lamb’s bride,¹⁵ while there is a strong antithesis with the prostitute woman in Revelation 17.

a) The first ecclesiological element is represented by *the twelve stars of the crown of the Woman*. One of the interpretations of the stars is from cosmological perspective, seeing the stars as sources of light. However, the pale light of stars at night is of no significance as compared to the bright light of the sun the woman is clothed with.

¹¹ Cf. P. PRIGENT, *Apocalisse*, 357; G.K. BEALE, *Revelation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1999, 623-624.

¹² Cf. A. VALENTINI, *Maria secondo le Scritture*, EDB, Bologna 2007, 333-340.

¹³ Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, Paoline, Milan 2005, 235.

¹⁴ Cf. B.J. LE FROIS, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap 12). Individual or Collective?*, Orbis Catholicus, Rome 1954, 94-95; R.H. MOUNCE, *Revelation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1997, 232.

¹⁵ Cf. U. VANNI, *L’Apocalisse. Ermeneutica, esegesi e teologia*, EDB, Bologna 1998, 231-232.

Another direction of interpretation is inspired from symbolism of the stars in the Old Testament. According to the divine covenant, the descendants of Abraham would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (cf. Genesis 15:5). A parallelism closer to Revelation 12 is the text in Genesis 37:9-11 which includes a reference to the 12 tribes symbolized by the stars.¹⁶ Considering this parallelism, we are entitled to assume that the 12 stars in Revelation could also refer to the 12 tribes or the 12 patriarchs. A further confirmation is found in Revelation 1:20, a verse in which the stars are attributed to human groups; in fact, the stars are the seven angels of the Churches. This idea is emphasized by number 12 (stars) with reference to the twelve tribes of Israel. The number 12 present in Revelation 12:1 is the number of the people of God, complete and perfect.

The activity of the Dragon in Revelation 12:4 can also be seen in relation to the stars. The action of sweeping a third of the stars would thus express aversion towards creation.¹⁷ However, this activity seems to be directed not towards the stars in the sky, but to the stars in the crown on the head of the Woman as part of the sign seen in the sky. In other words, the aversion of the Dragon is directed towards the Woman and the people represented by the 12 stars.¹⁸ A key to understand the image of the stars can be the acceptance of the inspiration in Daniel 8:10. In Daniel's text, the sweeping of the stars on earth is a symbol of the action of Antiochus IV, the one who wanted to achieve self-deification and persecuted the saints of Israel. Similarly, the Dragon of Revelation is the self-deifying power which persecutes the people of God.

¹⁶ Cf. J.M. COURT, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*; Guthrie, NTT,108.

¹⁷ Cf. U. VANNI, *Apocalisse*, 243.

¹⁸ Cf. G.K. BEALE, *Revelation*, 637; G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 241.

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As regards¹⁹ the other two celestial elements in Revelation 12:1, the sun the woman is clothed with may be the image of God that clothes the Woman-people with his splendour, with his best.²⁰ In the Old Testament, God wraps himself in light as with a garment (cf. Psalms 104:2), and may also wrap his bride in light. Jerusalem is invited to put on the garments of splendour (cf. Isaiah 52:1), or the garments of salvation (Isaiah 61:10). In the author's opinion, the anthropological symbol associated to the cosmological one, "the woman clothed with the sun", indicates God's loving care when protecting his people. Moreover, God's wrapping and clothing the woman with the "sun", gives her his splendour. Thus, the woman appears at transcendence level, particularly loved and cared for by God.²¹

As concerns the moon, it has a role in governing time, with no specific symbolism as in the case of romantic literature. The image of the moon was relating to the calendar used to govern the times, seasons, and holidays (cf. Genesis 1:14-16). Thus, the role of the moon is not that of support for the "woman", being under her control. The position of the moon – under her feet – thus indicates obedience, dominion over time and history.²² Considering the function of the moon in governing time, the symbol expresses a simple actual content: the woman controls the sequence of time, she is above human events, without being conditioned by them, being in a higher dimension. By extension, the people of God, even if remains in history, is above time and historical events,²³ heading to the final fulfilment in the eschatological Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Cf. U. VANNI, «La decodificazione del "grande segno" in Apocalisse 12,1-6», in *Marianum* 40 (1978), 142-143; G.K. BEALE, *Revelation*, 635-636.

²⁰ Cf. R.H. MOUNCE, *Revelation*, 232; U. VANNI, *Apocalisse*, 232.

²¹ U. VANNI, *Apocalisse*, 232.

²² Cf. R.H. MOUNCE, *Revelation*, 232; G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 235-236.

²³ Cf. U. VANNI, *Apocalisse*, 233.

In synthesis, there is a unitary picture that renders the celestial identity of the Woman and her divine protection: the Woman-people of God is clothed with the sun, that is clothed by God, with special care and love. The moon under the feet indicates that she is above the challenges of the time of the covenant, as she reaches that achievement that God actualizes at the end of time, that is, at eschatological level. It is at this level that the woman-people of God is described using a three-folded emphasis: she already has the “crown”, the sign of the eschatological award, and is already at divine transcendence level (the stars) in the eschatological dimension of celestial Jerusalem (the «12 stars»²⁴.

b) The big sign is completed with the image of the *pregnant woman* crying out in pain as she is about to give birth (Revelation 12:2). In the Old Testament, the labour of birth was considered as announcing the Messianic times (cf. Isaiah 13:8, Hosea 13:13) and referred to Israel (Isaiah 26:16-18, Jeremiah 4:31, 13:21, Micah 4:9-10)²⁵. In Isaiah 66:7-9, Zion is the woman who generates in suffering the new people, expecting to be freed by God²⁶ (cf. Isaiah 26:17; Micah 4:10). Isaiah 26:17-18 includes the same aspects evoked in Revelation 12:2: the cry, the labour and the birth. However, in Revelation 12, even if the labour is present, the emphasis is on the birth, on the maternity and the son to come into the world.²⁷

Before presenting the labour and the birth, there is the mention on the pregnancy. If we follow the collective direction, the interpretation

²⁴ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 237.

²⁵ Cf. B.J. LE FROIS, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun*, 95; R.H. MOUNCE, *Revelation*, 232; P. PRIGENT, *Apocalisse*, Borla, Rome 1985, 368; D.E. AUNE, *Revelation 6-16*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville 1998, 682; G.K. BEALE, *Revelation*, 630; I. PAUL, «The Use of Old Testament in Revelation 12», in S. MOYISE (ed.), *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 2000, 264.

²⁶ Cf. P. PRIGENT, *Apocalisse*, 357; I. PAUL, «The Use of Old Testament», 264.

²⁷ Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 238.

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may be the following: in the people of God, there is something to be born. The people are waiting. It has not completed its mission, as it has a task and has to deliver a son, indicating the new reality.

c) Another relevant element is the *protection of the woman in the wilderness* in Revelation 12:6. The reference in the Old Testament is related to the journey of the Israelites into the wilderness (Exodus 19:1-2, Numbers 14:20-35). As once happened to the Israelites, the woman is now saved in the wilderness over a period of 1260 days, during which she is nourished by God. For John, the desert is, on the one hand, a symbol of God's protection²⁸ and, on the other hand, a place of trial where hostile forces appear.²⁹ The desert, however, remains a place of transition, while the purpose of the journey is to reach the Promised Land. The text in Revelation 12 speaks of an exodus of the latter times, where the wilderness is the place to discover God's care for his people and the journey to fulfilment. The image of the wilderness is part of the larger image of Israel's liberation and of the protection provided during the journey and the nourishment of the people with manna.

Revelation 12:6 shows God's protection and nourishment as regards the Messianic community starting from the defeat of the Dragon in the sky until the end of time. All this is accomplished in Christ who has already defeated Satan.

In Revelation 12, John of Patmos presents the exodus of Messianic times in continuity to God's intervention to liberate Israel. The reference is not to Israel, but to the Woman-people protected and nourished by God. This exodus is a sign of victory³⁰ as, despite the historical trials, the people of God will reach the New Jerusalem.

²⁸ Cf. H. GOLLINGER, *Das "grosse Zeichen" von Apokalypse 12*, Echter, Würzburg 1971, 100-101.

²⁹ Cf. R.H. MOUNCE, *Revelation*, 234; P. PRIGENT, *Apocalisse*, 378-379; G.K. BEALE, *Revelation*, 645.

³⁰ Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse e i suoi enigmi*, Paideia, Brescia 2004, 222-223.

3. The Elements for Understanding the Relationship between Mary and the People of God

Premises

There are certain arguments to refute the Mariological interpretation. The first objection is that Christian writers of the first centuries did not interpret Revelation 12 from Mariological perspective (the first such interpretation traces back to the 4th century A.D.). The second objection is based on the fact that the author does not explicitly identify the woman with Mary. On the other hand, it is possible for the mother of Messiah to be identified in Mary without explicit assistance. The synoptic tradition, the gospels on childhood (of Matthew and Luke) include explicit references to Mary and her name.

The theme of the male man born into the world remains a subject of discussion between the interpreters of the Bible, as well. The object of the discussion is the description of the birth which is not adapted to what is happening in Bethlehem; is it not clear whether the birth takes place on earth. There is, however, the idea of a symbolic birth in Acts 13:33, where birth coincides with resurrection (the birth for heaven).

Finally, another objection often referred to is the labour of birth which cannot be associated with Mary and her virginity. The description of the labour of birth cannot be associated to the theological image of Mary. This is the conclusion reached by the majority of the exegetes nowadays. However, the book of Revelation uses a symbolic language (it is in no way a physical birth). It could be an implicit literal meaning with reference to Mary, and an explicit literary meaning in relation to the Church.³¹ Then, there are other meanings suggested: a spiritual allegorical meaning (Mary), a typical spiritual meaning, a generic meaning, a consecutive meaning, etc.

³¹ Cf. G. PERELLA, “Senso mariologico dell’Apocalisse XII, in *Divus Thomas* 43 (1940), 220.

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On the other hand, there is the *ecclesiological interpretation* of the sign in Revelation 12. This interpretation is in line with the significant place of the ecclesiological theme in Revelation. The note in Revelation 12:17, whereby the woman's sons are those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus, is an argument supporting the collective interpretation of the Woman. The Woman is the mother of the people of God who keep the commandments and give testimony.

A second argument supporting the collective figure in the woman is the use of number 12 which indicates in the Revelation the twelve tribes of Israel and the people of God. Many exegetes tend to associate³² the Woman in Revelation 12 with the one in Revelation 21, both of them representing the image of the community of believers, although they highlight different aspects. On the same direction, the prostitute woman in Revelation 17 can be a collective symbol, as well.

A third element to confirm the collective symbolism of the Woman in Revelation 12 is the interpretation of the woman's fleeing into the wilderness, an aspect which is not in harmony with Mary's personal life. Mary's flight into Egypt (Matthew 23:12-20) or the flight of the Church to Pella in A.D. 70 are not symbols of the fleeing into the wilderness described in Revelation 12. This wilderness is not a sign of Mary's glorification, but refers to the times of the Israelites' journey through the desert.

Apart from the aforementioned, there are also other arguments supporting the ecclesial character of the Woman in Revelation 12: the celestial aspect of the Woman which cannot be associated to an individual character; the reference to the rest of the descendants, etc. Therefore, the Messianic Woman in Revelation 12 can be rightfully considered a symbol of the people of God. However, a balanced approach would include the *ecclesiological and the Mariological*

³² Cf. J.M.P. SWEET, *Revelation*, SCM Press, London 1990² (1979¹), 302; J.A. DU RAND, «The Imagery of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21,9 – 22,5)», in *Neotestamentica* 22 (1988), 76.

interpretations, given the close connection between Mary and the Church.

3.1. Historical dimension and synthesis of history in the dimension of unity

First of all, we could better emphasize Mary's role in the history of the people of God taking into account the *historical dimension*. The Bible presents a story with events, characters. Reading the unfolding of history, there is a journey from the call of Abraham, the father of a great people, to Moses, the ruler of Israel, to Mary, called to give birth to Jesus the Saviour. Two significant episodes are inserted in this history:³³ the episode of the exodus and the time of Jesus Christ. The exodus is emblematic for the understanding of the text in Revelation 12, as well as of the symbolism of the woman. Revelation 12 alludes to the wilderness, an image within the broader framework of the liberation of the people of Israel, of the protection provided during the journey and of the nourishment with manna. Revelation 12:14 recalls the theme of the fleeing into the wilderness; however, the Revelation emphasizes two aspects of the exodus: the manna and wings of the eagle. The wings of the eagle indicate protection,³⁴ as in the case of Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:11. On the other hand, the manna (Exodus 16:32, Deuteronomy 8:16) is not only a reward for the winners as can be seen in Revelation 2:17, but also food provided by the presence of God among the people.³⁵

In summary, the exodus experienced once by Israel is now re-experienced by the Messianic woman certain of the protection of God and content of the gift of liberation.

Also on historical dimension, the "Woman-Church" in *Revelation* 12 is not fully understood in its magnitude and dynamism if we do not

³³ Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 252.

³⁴ The liberation in the wilderness also refers to the second exodus (cf. Isaiah 32:15; 35:1; 40:3; 41:18; 43:19-20; 51:3).

³⁵ Cf. G.K. BEALE, *Revelation*, 670.

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consider the “woman” - mother of Jesus and of the disciples during the formation of the Church. Mary has a significant role in the salvation history. She is an individual who gave birth to the Son at a precise historical moment. She also becomes a symbol of Israel and of the new people.

Reading the Revelation, we note that John is interested in the connection between the two covenants and in the relationship between the community of the 12 tribes and the people founded on the 12 apostles. In the view of the author of Revelation, there is a *unitary* dimension. An argument for the unity between Israel and the Church in a unitary salvation history is the very discourse on God’s commandments (the Torah) and the testimony of Jesus (the Gospel) in Revelation 12:17. The observance of the law, an element of Israel identity (cf. Deuteronomy 3:3-18; 1Maccabees 1:60-63), and the testimony or belief in Jesus as Christian element, are brought together here. The association of these elements is the proof that John of Patmos makes no distinction between the people of the old covenant and that of the new covenant, although the latter implicitly includes the message of fulfilment. In addition, there is no presentation of the Judeo-Christian and of the pagan-Christian Church. The woman in Revelation 12 is, in fact, the Church, being originated in the people of Israel,³⁶ but transformed by Christ’s presence.

The idea of the God’s unitary people can also be seen in the image of the crown that holds together the twelve stars, the symbol of either the tribes or the apostles. The number 12 can also be considered a sign of the unity of the community, as it refers either to the tribes or to the apostles, a symbol of the only people of God. The unity between Israel and the Church is also reflected in the symbolism of the Woman in Revelation 12. Indeed, the Woman, the pre-Messianic people, first gives birth to her Son, the Messiah, being then seen as

³⁶ Cf. R.H. MOUNCE, *Revelation*, 231; A. WIKENHAUSER, *Apocalisse*, Rizzoli, Milan 2000, 276.

Messianic people together with the rest of the descendants (Revelation 12:17). Ultimately, it is the same Woman-people invited to fight the Dragon.

The author does not only emphasize the idea of unity³⁷ and continuity, but also that of the uniqueness of the people of God. Thus, there is the concept of a single people of God consisting in the two situations (Jewish and pagan) renewed in the uniqueness created by Christ.

Apart from the historical situation reflected in Revelation 12, we can also refer to the historical synthesis between East and West. In the West, the two dogmas were proclaimed: 1854 - the Immaculate Conception and 1950 - the Assumption of Mary. The common tradition of unity is that of 431, the year when Mary's motherhood (*Theotokos*), the mother of the people of God, was proclaimed.

3.2. Relationship between the community and the individual: communion

In the Old Testament, the woman is presented using the image of the wife, of the bride (Isaiah 54:1-6; Jeremiah 3:20; Ezekiel 16:14) and of the mother (Isaiah 49:21; 50:1; 66:7-11). The woman was often symbol of Israel³⁸ (cf. Isaiah 52:2; 54:1-6; 60:10; 62:1-5) in relation to the God of the covenant.

The Old Testament often prefers the community dimension: God concludes a covenant with a people he chose as inheritance. Even the term "son", for example, is used with reference to Israel, the preferred son.

³⁷ What kind of uniqueness of the people of God? First of all, it is not a unity meaning a suppression or replacement of the Old Testament, nor does it mean a delimitation of the New Testament from a perspective of duality, but rather a unity in complementarity.

³⁸ Cf. B.J. LE FROIS, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap 12)*, 94-95; R.H. MOUNCE, *Revelation*, 232; G.K. BEALE, *Revelation*, 629.

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On the other hand, the New Testament also takes into account the individual aspect: Jesus is the Son of God. Mary is described as an individual, even though she can symbolize an entire people. John speaks of the birth of the Messiah in collective terms in Revelation 12, but it can be presumed to refer, at least implicitly, to the person who gave birth to Christ the Messiah. Mary was known in four traditions of the New Testament, including John's tradition. It is very possible that John of Patmos had knowledge of data about Mary, especially as he was in contact with the churches in the area of Ephesus. Moreover, his interest in the origin of the Messiah can be proof of his knowledge on Mary. The Messiah is the "root of David", the lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 7:5-8).³⁹

Still in this direction, Revelation 12.4 includes parallelism with Genesis 3:15. Eve is a symbol of all humanity (she cooperated with Satan to bring death), while Mary – the woman in Revelation 12 is a symbol of the people (she cooperated with Jesus to bring life). From the beginning, the text in Genesis 3:15 had a collective interpretation in the Jewish world (the descent referring to Israel); in Christianity, the interpretation was individual, with reference to the Messiah.

In this context, an additional support in understanding the image in Revelation 12 is the association with the images in Revelation 19 and 21 on the fiancé and bride, a symbol of the people who is preparing and is then ready to celebrate the wedding with the Christ the Lamb.

As regards the relationship between the community and the individual, a subject of reflection is also the idea of the birth in Revelation 12. The ecclesial community of the New Testament reveals a Messiah that goes beyond the mother-son relationship. The group notes with astonishment that it has the mission to show Christ present among it, and to communicate him to others. Accomplishing this mission is particularly difficult, being comparable to the labour of

³⁹ Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, Paoline, Milan 2005, 252.

birth, yet this does not discourage the Church from historically expressing Christ and offering it (to bring him to light). Thus, the Church, finding its reflection in Mary, discovers its identity and mission in carrying and showing Christ in its historical context.

Summarizing the data, Mary is the representative and the reflection of the people as regards the function of the Church as mother. In addition, this people are also identified in its charismatic leaders, in this case in Mary, the queen⁴⁰ of the Church.⁴¹

3.3. The people of God and Mary: symbolism and symbolic theology

John first alludes to a sign: “and a great sign appeared in heaven.” The woman is, therefore, a great sign,⁴² to be decoded in the context of two other signs: the Dragon in Revelation 12:3 and the plagues against the idolatry of the Beasts in Revelation 15:1.⁴³ It is a great sign which determines profound astonishment and requires decoding. The description of the sign as “in heaven” is not a location of the sign but, in line with the Old Testament, it determines an ideal identification at the level of God. In fact, John mentions from the beginning that his experience is “*en ourano*” (4:2b); it is a sign in heaven and at

⁴⁰ It is not a deity, the queen of heaven, but a human being. In fact, the text in Revelation 12 notes that: she fled, was taken into wilderness, a place God prepared for her, was nourished; all these elements are common to a human being, cf. P. FARKAS, *La “donna” di Apocalisse 12*, Rome 1997, 212.

⁴¹ If the male son is a king, it is assumed that his mother is a queen (the image of the queen-mother is well-known in the Old Testament). The members of the Church identify themselves in the royal function.

⁴² Probably, there are no signs announcing eschatological events (cf. Mark 13:24, Luke 21:25, Matthew 24:29). According to P. PRIGENT, *Apocalisse*, 363, the signs are inspired from the exodus and must lead to the acknowledgment of the true God. According to G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 285, the sign is a significant image or an impulse to discover a message. In John’s theology, the sign reveals divine glory and is meant to lead to faith.

⁴³ Cf. G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 235.

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transcendence level. Therefore, it is a sign which contains a message; it is of great importance and it is located in the celestial dimension.⁴⁴

Apart from the reference to the sign, the Woman is a symbolic model in Revelation 12. John's symbolism is, by its character, complex and multifaceted. It often combines chromatic symbolism with somatic symbolism, numerical symbolism, etc. Revelation 12 also includes an association of symbols, in order to obtain the image of the people of God and the image of Mary, the mother of the Messiah.

The symbol has its richness and includes reference to another reality.⁴⁵ There are levels within the symbolic system: the realistic level, then the level of the Old Testament, followed by the level of the author. For example, the son being born: a) is a boy, a son; b) is the royal son of the Psalms 2; c) is the Messiah imagined by the author. Apart from these levels, we can note the evolution of the symbol, its transformation and insertion into a complex image. Thus, the woman is enriched with the following elements: the sun, the moon under the feet, and the crown of twelve stars. However, the starting point is the realistic level: in the case of Revelation 12, she is a woman with bright garments and a crown on her head (queen). We move from the historical level to the allegorical one, the woman is the image of the people of God.

However, it should be noted that the apocalyptic symbol, in addition to its own content, has an evocative power which helps the ecclesial group to discover what it thinks and desires. As the ecclesial community already knows the role of Mary's Messianic maternity, although the book of Revelation does not provide this information, the reading of the symbol can provide an opportunity to evoke and admire Mary. Thinking about the woman clothed with the sun (meaning a

⁴⁴ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 230.

⁴⁵ It could be stated that the Woman in Revelation 12 is neither Mary nor the Church; the woman is described as a queen who gives birth; the woman is like the mother of Jesus, cf. P. FARKAS, *La "donna" di Apocalisse 12*, Rome 1997, 235.

loving proximity of God), the ecclesial group may feel a call to that ineffable relationship with God that was specific to Mary (“full of grace, the Lord is with you”, Luke 1:28). The description of the labour of birth reminds the ecclesial group of the image in *John* 19:15-17 where Mary, next to the cross, receives the Messianic role as Mother of the Church. The description of her living in the desert can represent for the group a sign of the maturation of Mary’s faith during the public life of Jesus.⁴⁶

To summarize, the apocalyptic symbol, given its richness, may contain a double reference: to the people of God and to Mary, the mother of the Church. The woman with the crown with twelve stars is a symbol of a community in its journey through history, having the guarantee of the divine protection, having in Mary the reflection of perfection and the companion on the way to the celestial Jerusalem.

Conclusion

A balanced position brings forward the ecclesiological interpretation of the image in Revelation 12: the Woman⁴⁷ in Revelation 12 is, first of all, the symbol of the people of God.

However, one cannot rule out a minimal reference to Mary. A strong argument in favour of the reference to Mary is the allusion to the woman mother of the Messiah, living among the Christians of the first century. Probably, John of Patmos was also aware of the traditions on Mary, as is the case of the majority of the authors of the New Testament.

Apart from this finding, it is necessary to draw a conclusion from the perspective of the relationship between Mary and the members of the Church: Mary is the mother of the Church, and the Christians are sons who treat her affectionately. As regards the Bible and the divine

⁴⁶ U. VANNI, *L'Apocalisse*, 251.

⁴⁷ According to G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, 252, we must consider Mary who gave birth to the Messiah. Even if the woman in Revelation 12 is a collective symbol, John probably had in mind also the mother who gave birth to the Messiah.

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revelation, relations are particularly significant. Man is a relational being. Apart from the relationship with God, with the peers, with nature, one could also include the relationship with Mary. The sons represent a community or a family living in communion with the mother of the Church.

From another perspective, if Mary gives birth to the Messiah, Christians have a duty to give Christ to the world. Going through the labour of birth and the sometimes hostile environment, the joy lies in showing to the people Jesus Christ the Saviour, the Way, the Truth, the Hope and the Life; all this within the specific historical dimension.

Finally, as Mary fulfils an exodus, Christians, too, are called to an exodus. To this end, it is necessary to interpret the signs (we need to recover the symbolism!) in order to stay on the right path and to focus on the New Jerusalem, the dream of any member of the people of God.

MARY IN THE LITURGY AND THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

The Rorate-Mass (in Transylvania) Background, history, celebration and theological message

David DIÓSI

Keywords: Advent liturgy in Transylvania, Rorate mass, theological message.

In Advent¹, the *Rorate* masses are very popular between Catholics. These masses are actually votive masses, celebrated early in the morning, in honor of the Virgin Mary. The roots of these

¹ More details about the Advent liturgy: W. CROCE, „Die Adventmessen des römischen Missale in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung”, in: ZKTh 74 (1952), 277–317; W. CROCE, *Die Adventsliturgie im Licht ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, in: ZKTh 76 (1954), 257–296, 440–472; J.A. JUNGSMANN, „Advent und Voradvent. Überreste des gallischen Advents in der römischen Liturgie”, in: *Gewordene Liturgie. Studien und Durchblicke* von Josef Andreas Jungmann, Innsbruck – Leipzig 1941, 232–294; W.J. SCHLIERF, *Adventus Domini. Geschichte und Theologie des Advents in Liturgie und Brauchtum der westlichen Kirche*, Bonn 1988; F. CABROL, Art. *Avent*, in: DACL 1 (1907), 3223–3230; R.P. PIERRET, *Le temps de l’Avent*, in: QLP 17 (1932), 263–284; A. ADAM, *Das Kirchenjahr mit feiern. Seine Geschichte und seine Bedeutung nach der Liturgieerneuerung*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 1979, 109–116; TH. MAAS-EWERD, „*Schon leuchtet deine Krippe auf*”. Die Feier der Geburt Jesu Christi und der weihnachtliche Festkreis in Liturgie und Brauchtum. Festgabe zum 6. Februar 2000 mit Bibliographie. Hrsg. von F. Trenner und B. Wendel, St. Ottilien 2000, 33–40; M. KUNZLER, *Sein ist die Zeit. Eine Einführung in Liturgie und Frömmigkeit des Kirchenjahres*, Paderborn 2012, 151–168; DIÓSI D.: *Advent kialakulástörténete és liturgiája*, in: Diósi D. (ed.), *Adventus Domini – Úrjövét. Az advent története, szokásai és lelkisége*, Budapest – Kolozsvár 2013, 11–60.

celebrations are in the mass of Wednesday (*feria ad angelum*) in Winter Ember Week². This fact isn't surprising at all, as people loved these masses very much, and they were celebrated with feast every time. We can observe a tendency in many places, especially in the baroque times, where the priests used to dramatize the gospels, in plays similar to the Christmas ones.³ In some regions the *Rorate* introitus was preceded by a dialogue similar to the *Lumen Christi – Deo gratias* dialogue from the Pascal vigil, a triple exclamation, intonated higher every time⁴ *Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son! And the people's answer was: And they will call him Immanuel!*⁵ Another widespread exclamation: *Look, the*

² More details about the Ember Week: A. CHAVASSE, *Die Quatembertage*, in: A.-G. Martimort (Hrsg.), *Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft II: Die übrigen Sakramente und die Sakramentalien. Die Heiligung der Zeit*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 1965, 277–284; L. EISENHOFER, *Handbuch der katholischen Liturgik I: Allgemeine Liturgik*, Freiburg 1932, 482–485; MIHÁLYFI Á., *A nyilvános istentisztelet. Egyetemi előadások a lelkipásztorkodástan köréből*, Budapest ²1918, 88k; RADÓ P., Art. *Kántorböjt*, in: Kühár F. – Radó P. (ed.), *Liturgikus Lexikon*, Komárom 1933, 187–189; DIÓS I., Art. *Kántorböjt*, in: *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* 6 (2001), 135–136; A. HEINZ, Art. *Quatember, Quatembertage*, in: *LThK* 8 (³1999), 764–765 (Bib.).

³ In a *Rorate* mass celebrated in a monastery in Mülln, in 1748, the gospel was performed using „light effects” and the pigeon „deployed to the Holy Spirit”. It's description is as follows: „Gleich bey Anfang gehen die Sterne und der Mond recht schön in denen Wolken auf. Vor dem Evangelio zerlaillet sich eine Wolken, durch welche sich ein Engel hervorschwinget bis ad cornum epistolae [= the right part of the Altar] in der Höch, ad cornum evangelii [= the left part] aber kniet unser liebe Frau auf einem Bettschamel. Sobald das Evangelium anfanget, stehet sie auf, und da der Diaconus singet: Ave gratia plena, so siehet man diese 3 Word neben des Engels seyn maull illuminiierter, und wan er singet: Spiritus (sanctus) superveniet in te, fliecht ein Tauben ad Mariam zu dem Gesicht und sie bekomet gleich einen Schein” (quoted: F. MARKMILLER, *Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich. Advent und Weinachten [Bairische Volksfrömmigkeit. Brauch und Musik I]*, Regensburg 1981, 20).

⁴ G. FUCHS, *Einführung*, in: G. Fuchs (Hrsg.), *Rorate. Impulse und Modelle für Messen, Wort-Gottes-Feiern und Frühschichten im Advent* Regensburg 2004, 11–17, 14–15.

⁵ See. Is 7,14; Mt 1,23.

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*Lord will come and all the holy ones with Him! (Ecce Dóminus véniet, et omnes sancti eius cum eo!) and the answer: And an immense light will shine that day! (Et erit in die illa lux magna!)*⁶

„In the heart of the person whose life is connected with the Church – writes *Saint Teresa Benedicta* (Edith Stein by her civil name; † 1942) –, the bells that call to the rorate masses and the songs related to Advent wake a saint desire; and the one who met the inexhaustible source of the Liturgy, are visited daily by the great prophet of becoming human: «Drop down ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness! The Lord is near! Come, let us adore Him! Come, come Lord, do not delay! Rejoice Jerusalem; fill yourself with joy for your Saviour comes!»,⁷. In this mass, even the *Dominus vobiscum* liturgical salute reminds us about the *Dominus tecum* addressed by the archangel Gabriel to Mary, revealing us, at the same time, the profound meaning of this salutation: God shall be with you, the same way He was with Mary. Mary's type of approach in advent glorifies her personality, role, and respect in a new light: Mary is the model of Christ's dwelling in us, thus the Christian is man involved in the dignity of God's Mother, „he has to form the Son of God in himself and to bring him into the world together with the Virgin Mary at Christmas.”⁸

The name of the Rorate mass comes from the initial word of it's introitus: „Drop down [= Rorate] ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness” (Is 45,8). In the Middle Ages, they were celebrated before the principal mass of the day, and not instead of it. Its liturgical colour was white, it was held with Gloria and its list of songs was constant. Nowadays, the Rorate Masses are, in fact, permitted on Advent weekdays only to December 16, using purple as liturgical colour, and liturgical texts for Advent, in some regions even every ordinary community masses – sometimes even those held in the evening – are referred to as Rorate. The Rorate Mass is sometimes

⁶ See. Zach 14,5.7.

⁷ E. STEIN, *A karácsony titka*, in: *Vigilia* 41 (1976), 816–821, 816.

⁸ PARSCH, *Üdvösség éve*, 61–62.

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referred to – because of its Gospel, which describes the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel – as *the mass of angels*,⁹ and, in older times it was referred to as golden mass. The *golden mass* (*missa aurea*, *gulden mess*) denomination, is justified by *Márton Padányi Bíró* († 1762) Veszprém's „last mustached, spinster, horse rider bishop”¹⁰ in the following way:

„Now in these sacred days, outside the custom of other times, even before sunrise, at dawn we listen to a mass speaking about the angelic greeting of the Virgin Mary of the Nazarene, and about the embodiment of the Son of God, this mass, *us Hungarians we call it golden mass* for its great respect and dignity.”¹¹

The golden masses were highly appreciated. They had a great impact on people. People loved it so much and appreciated so much its impact that the golden mass became independent. In some regions, it was ripped out of Advent's context. By keeping its formulas, it could be celebrated at other times also. In Hildesheim, from the 13th century in October, more precisely on Saturday after the celebration of St. Michael's Day, foundational *missa aurea*-s were held with great pomp.¹² Grand provost *Johannes Busch* († 1479/80) said that this

⁹ The angel mass denomination has different meanings depending on territory: It may be used for the Rorate mass in question, but may mean the Christmas Midnight Mass because of the singing of the angels in the gospel, and even occasionally it's used for the funeral mass of children or, earlier in time it was used for the Thursday massess which were celebrated with exposed Eucharist and/or with Eucharistic blessing (see. R. BERGER, *Lelkipásztori Liturgikus Lexikon*, Budapest 2008, 28).

¹⁰ VICZIÁN J., Art. *Bíró Márton*, in: *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* 1 (2004), 842k, 842.

¹¹ Quoted: BÁLINT S., *Karácsony, húsvét, pünkösöd. A nagyünnepek hazai és közép-európai hagyományvilágából*, Budapest 31989, 13 (italics mine).

¹² See A. FRANZ, *Die Messe im Deutschen Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Liturgie und des religiösen Volkslebens*, Freiburg 1902 (ND 2003), 282–286.

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mass lasted for 3-4 hours. The prelates received rich gifts and money for their assistance. People did not forget about the rest of the clergy either.¹³ It is important to note that this is not why the *missa aurea* name was given, but – as indicated by the sources¹⁴ – due to its value and impact, and its magnificent celebration (the assumption that its name is due to the fact that in the early books *Rorate caeli*'s initials had been printed in gold is unlikely¹⁵).

The Rorate masses were celebrated depending on time and place at various times of the Advent.¹⁶ *Ordo Romanus XV* (No. 8) requires that a week before Christmas (*ante Nativitatem Domini per spatium hebdomadae*) people start to commemorate the conception of Mary,¹⁷ specifically in those seven days when the O-antiphons¹⁸ are sung.

¹³ „In Hildesheim [...] aurea missa ab omnibus canonicis totius civitatis et a cunctis praelatis et religiosis cuiuscunque ordinis, etiam mendicantibus, per tres aut quator horas decantari solet de b. Maria virgine in organis. Unde cunctis praesentibus dantur notabiles praesentiae praelatis, sicut mihi pullus caritatis, speciosis rebus conditus, pullus assatus, dimidia stopa vini, cuneus sive albus panis magnus, quod omnibus nobis ad mensam sufficeret, et quatuor solidi dantur. Singulis vero fratribus dantur duo solidi Luticenses pro praesentia” (quoted: FRANZ, 286¹).

¹⁴ FRANZ, 286.

¹⁵ Ph. HARTMANN, *Repertorium Rituum*. Übersichtliche Zusammenstellung der wichtigsten Ritualvorschriften für die priesterlichen Funktionen, Paderborn ¹²1913, 306.

¹⁶ See some complicated rules about the Rorate masses from before the liturgical reform in: HARTMANN, 306; 310–311.

¹⁷ „Deinde und Dominica ante natale Domini incipiunt canere de conceptione sanctae Mariae“ (OR XV [M. ANDRIEU, *Les Ordines Romani du haut moyen-âge* {SSL 24} III, Louvain 1951, 95]).

¹⁸ More detailed about O-Antiphons: DIÓSI D. (szerk.), *Ero cras*. Az Ó-Antifónák története és magyarázata, Budapest – Kolozsvár 2013; TH. SCHNITZLER, *Die O-Antiphonen*, in: HID 29 (1975), 145–154; E. BALLHORN, *Die O-Antiphonen*. Israelgebete der Kirche, in: JLH 37 (1998), 9–34; A. WEBER, *Die sieben O-Antiphonen der Adventsliturgie*, in: PastB 19 (1906/ 1907), 109–119; J. WEIHER, *Die O-Antiphonen*, in: LiZs 2 (1930), 137–148; V.E. FIALA, *Eine Sonderform der O-Antiphonen*, in: ALW 12 (1970), 261–267; A. HOLLAARDT, Art. *O-antifonen*, in:

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Later, the Italian dioceses extended this custom for nine consecutive days before Christmas (*celebratio novendialis Missarum aurearum*). In Germany, Austria, Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, Rorate masses were celebrated for centuries in every day of Advent (*per integrum Adventus tempus cotidie*). The problem was that the masses were held with Gloria and Credo. Since this local custom was in conflict with Roman standards, it was necessary for the bishops to request permission from Rome for their customary celebration. Thus local customs could only be met on the basis of special privileges given by the Holy See. Therefore the Roman Rite Congregation allowed the celebration of the Rorate masses by taking into account local customs with special privileges, in 1892 to Pannonhalma and to the diocese of Veszprém¹⁹, and in 1958, to the archdiocese of Esztergom, referring to their ancient traditions (*ex antiquissima consuetudine*).²⁰

LitWo 2 (1968), 1914–1917; A. STOCK, *Poetische Dogmatik*. Christologie I: Namen, Paderborn – München – Wien – Zürich 1995, 130–142; A. THIERMEYER, *Die vorweihnachtlichen O-Antiphonen*, in: K. Gamber, Ein kleines Kind – Der ewige Gott. Bild und Botschaft von Christi Geburt (SPLi 2. Beiheft), Regensburg 1980, 77–90; TH.J. KNOBLACH, *The „O“ Antiphons*, in: EL 106 (1992), 177–204; PASCHER (lásd. lábjegy.), 366–368.

¹⁹ In the Diocese of Veszprém, Rorate Masses had the following privilege: 1. During the Advent throughout the day (until Dec. 23), a solemn Rorate votive may be sung daily (except the first Sunday of Advent, the feast of Immaculate Conception and Christmas vigil): with a Collecta pray, Gloria and Credo; 2. in parish churches where there is only one mass, on Sundays, and on feasts when the mass has to be held for the people, the corresponding liturgy must be held; 3. In the eighth of Immaculate Conception, the Mass of the Feast and not the Rorate Mass needs to be celebrated (MIHÁLYFI, 496). „In many places, they also celebrate Rorate in the eighth of the Immaculate Conception, but according to the rubrics, in the eighth, only the Mass of the Immaculate Conception can be held, as a devotee of the Holy Virgin. However, there are also people who claim that customary law has also deleted this rubric in this case” – writes UNGHVÁRY Antal (*A római egyház liturgiája*, Budapest 1934, 33).

²⁰ RADÓ P., *Enchiridion liturgicum*. Complectens theologiae sacramentalis et dogmata et leges II, Romae – Friburgi – Barcinone ²1966, 1109–1110.

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In the diocese of Transylvania, these masses also possessed a special apostolic privilege, as proved by the Roman decree²¹ sent to bishop *Majláth Gustáv Károly* († 1940) in 1905, decree that he distributed as a circular around the diocese in the same year.²² The morning masses from Advent, therefore, enjoyed great popularity in Transylvania, and according to the Decree of the Rite Congregation, they were celebrated with special solemnity with organ accompaniment, incense, a Collect prayer also with Gloria and Credo.

²¹ Gyulafehérvári Érseki Levéltár Nr. 8/1905:

„Rmus Dnus Gustavus Carolus Majláth, Episcopus Transilvanien., exponens ab antiquis temporibus pergratum fidelibus vigere consuetudinem in Ecclesiis ipsiusmet Dioeceseos, prout in permultis Austriae atque Hungariae, integro tempore sacri Adventus, celebrandi summo mane Missam votivam B. M. V. de tempore, cuius Introitus »Rorate«: Sanctissimum Dominum Nostrum Pium Papam X. supplex rogavit, ut eiusmodi usus, de Apostolica Benignitate, continuari valeat, nimirum:

I. Ut a Dominica prima Sacri Adventus usque ad diem 23. Decembris inclusive, in Ecclesiis, ubi enuntiata Missa »Rorate Coeli« cum cantu celebratur, eadem prouti votiva solemnitas cum Gloria, unica Oratione et Symbolo; ubi vero lecta celebratur, absque Gloria (praeterquam in Sabbatis) et Symbolo, cum commemorationibus occurrentibus celebretur.

II. In Ecclesiis Parochialibus, vel Conventualibus, ubi unica tantum Missa celebratur, quando obligatio recurrit eam applicandi pro populo, non Missa votiva »Rorate«, sed Officio currenti respondens celebranda erit;

III. Diebus infra Octavam Immaculatae B. M. V. Conceptionis pro memorata Missa »Rorate«, celebratur propria de ipso festo, cuius Introitus »Gaudens gaudebo«;

IV. Ac demum excluditur ea Missa votiva a duplici primae classis occurrente.

Sacra porro Rituum Congregatio, utendo facultatibus sibi specialiter ab eodem Sanctissimo Domino Nostro tributis, iamdiu inductam consuetudinem iuxta preces benigne continuari concessit; servatis ceterum Rubricis. Contrariis non obstantibus quibuscunque. Die I. Aprilis 1905.

A. Card. Tripepi, Pro-Praef.

† D. Panici Archiep. Laodicen. Secret.”

²² *Litterae circulares ad venerabilem clerum almae Dioecesis Transsylvaniensis dimissae anno Domini MCMV, Albae-Carolinae – Gyulafehérvár, Typis: Georgii Papp 1906, 38.*

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„In a mystical light – writes a not well known author, *Bétaffy*, in 1913 in the *Transylvanian Altar Society Magazine (Erdélyi Oltáregyesületi Lap)* – alongside a pale candlelight, the church is filled with people and sighs. They look at the altar with hopeful, wet and staring eyes, from where the eternal «Emmanuel» consolation comes. The smoke of the incense fills the air, Gloria is playing, taking, taking the tears and the sighs up to Heaven. Then, the prophet responds: «*Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us'*». After that, the angel says: «Hail, full of grace» and the ringer, the bell, the organ gives a reverberation in the name of the earth, and spread the word, the gospel, the joy of the wisdom in the whole wide world. The heavens drizzle. From the inexhaustible source of divine goodness and mercy, the dew of consolation, hope and self-confidence is swirling. The gentle, adventurous melodies engaging in the heart fill the church, giving people the sense of wonderful compassion: – «The Lord is near, come and worship Him». It is a wonderful charm that even, after centuries the great waiting of the nations, have always been fresh, with elemental force! Every year, the bell, the organ, the ringer sound differently: when the first Rorate arrives. This is the secret of the forever young God-man. Only He knows how he is able to renew the same feelings in a new form, new milieu. And a happy soul is the one who, as a flower before the dew, can open the door for this divine power from far away.”²³

In the following, let us say a few thoughts about the time of the Rorate Masses. These are celebrated at dawn, or more precisely before dawn, traditionally at six o'clock in the morning. The erudite *Lonovics József*²⁴ († 1867) Bishop of Csanád and Archbishop of Eger, in his

²³ BÉTAFFY, *Rorate*, in: *Erdélyi Oltáregyesületi Lap* 11 (1913), 101–102.

²⁴ The descendant of Lonovics in the present bishop seat of Timisoara – Márton Bishop – describes Lonovics as follows: „Ein wahrer Segen dieser hervorragende Mensch, hochbegabt mit vielerlei Talenten und Fähigkeiten, ein pastoral äußerst aktiver Priester, ein Fachmann der Verwaltung und auf dem politischen Parkett versiert, eine landesweit bekannte, geschätzte und geachtete Persönlichkeit“ (M. ROOS, *Erbe und Auftrag*. Momente aus der Vergangenheit der Diözese Csanád und

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famous work *Archaeologia*, writes the following about the Rorate masses:

„It is easy to guess why this morning mass is so dear for the believers. In the silence of the night, the ringing of the bells calls them to the Lord's house, rejoicing that, while others rest in their dreams, they can serve the Lord without any warfare, and they also can start and devote their daily tasks with participating at a mass. It is the celebration of that heavenly dawn, which proclaims the coming of the Divine Grace Day. [...] This liturgy is celebrated every day, at dawn, except on Sundays and on the day of the Conception of the Virgin Mary, until the vigil of Christmas, in the honor of the Holy Mother of God. This mass is celebrated in the morning hours, to the memory of the darkness in which the human nature was immersed before Jesus the light of the world was born”²⁵.

József Archbishop explains in his writing both causes of the early timing of the liturgy.

The first – valid even nowadays – is done with practical consideration. Nowadays, the Christians in our parish can only crowd greatly to the Lord's house, if the visit of the Rorate masses does not cover their everyday life-related duties. From this point of view, the dawn is the most appropriate and the most feasible, because everybody – before they can go to work – may attend the mass at dawn. Thus the individual zeal – besides my own self-control – has nothing in its path, and assuming the sacrifice of early awakening,

ihrer Nachfolgebistümer I: Die alte Diözese Csanád. Zwischen Grundlegung und Aufteilung, Teil 2: Vom Barock bis zur Revolution 1718–1850, Teilband b: 1800–1850, Szegeđ-Csanád – Groß-Betschkerek – Temeswar, 2012, 123).

²⁵ LONOVICS J., *Népszerű egyházi archaeologia* vagyis a katolikus ünnepek, szentségek, ünnepélyek s szertartások értelmezése, és a különféle rendes s rendkívüli szószéki jelentések, részint szent beszédekben, részint hirdetményalaku oktatásokban I: Az egyházi évkör, kiadta Hopf János, tisz. kanonok, hittudor s a Pesti Kir. Egyetem Hittudományi Karának kebelezett tagja, Pest ³1865, 5.

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every believer can hurry to church to greet the Morning Star²⁶ before dawn

„In the places where tradition is respected, people almost do not even notice the effort they make: early awakening, the sacrifices of walking through snow and on ice.. [...] At Jamul Mare, children are awakened in the Advent by the sound of the bell. They gather in settled places and wake up the sleeping believers with bells and songs, going from house to house, so that they could arrive on time to the morning liturgy. On the last day, they receive gifts at every place they visit, gifts they share in fraternity afterwards. In the German village of Nagymányok, a while ago, the ministrants and boys who cared for the air alimentation of the organ slept in school, so they wouldn't fall asleep in the morning”²⁷.

We couldn't count with an evening – after work – timing of the Rorate masses, because the *Missale Romanum* (1570), edited by Pope Pius V (1566–1572), provided for the private Masses (*missa privata*) – a term by which the daily Masses were named (*missae quotidianae*) – to be celebrated after Laudes from dawn until noon (*ab aurora usque ad meridiem*).²⁸

To this practical cause, which is added a symbolic one, the darkness before sunrise represents mankind in sin. In this darkness the word of God was spoken, through the archangel Gabriel, who eradicated the darkness of sin and announced the dawn of salvation.

²⁶ The Morning Star (= Venus) is a symbol of the Virgin Mary, and the last visible glow in the sky before sunrise: Mary gives birth to the „Day of Truth” (Mal 3,20), Christ. The star – that is, in the common language, all the visible sky with the exception of the Sun and the Moon – is a symbol of Mary. It is also the Moon, which may be a symbol of the Church, for Mary and the Church, like the Moon, are given the sunlight from the sun, that is, Christ.

²⁷ BÁLINT, 13–14.

²⁸ „Missa privata saltem post Matutinum et Laudes quacumque hora ab Aurora usque ad Meridiem dici potest (*Rubricae generales Missalis XV,1*). Részletesebben a szentmise időpontjáról lásd MIHÁLYFI, 387–392; HARTMANN, 250–251.

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Therefore, the celebration of the liturgy of Rorate before sunrise is closely related to the view that the archangel Gabriel would have given Mary the news of incarnation in the evening, which is in the dark. We need to know that medieval theologians were concerned with the scene of the revelation mainly by three questions: what Mary do when the angel visited her,²⁹ what day did that happen,³⁰ and at

²⁹ See. K. SCHREINER, *Maria*. Jungfrau, Mutter, Herrscherin, München 1994, 116–117. According to the Apocryphal *Gospel of James* (chapter 9), when Mary went out for water with a pot, she heard a voice of a heavenly messenger: „Hail, full of grace among women!” She didn't realise where the sound came from. Returning home, she put down the pot and continued her work, which consisted of putting the upholstery for the temple from the purple and scarlet yarns (she was selected by the High Priest by a lottery among eight virgins). Then suddenly, she saw the angel himself, who said to her, „Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace in the Lord of the Almighty, and you will conceive from His Word” (see. J.B. BAUER, *Az újszövetségi apokrifek* [Studia Theologica Budapestinensia 3. Subsidia 1], Budapest 1991, 36–37; *Evanghelii apocrife*, Traducere, studiu introductiv, note și prezentări de Cristian Bădiliță, Iași ²1999, 39–40). The „royal door” (*baszilikai pülai*) in the middle of the iconostasis, bishop and priest can go throught during masses (the lateral, south and north doors are the „deacon's doors”) is the regular venue of the angelic greeting, where Mary is always shown with a spindle. *Otfrid* († 870), the Benedictine Abbey of Weissenburg (Elsaß), in his *Liber Evangeliorum*, written between 863 and 871, says that Mary was singing psalms when the angel visited. *Heinrich*, theologian and speaker who was born in St. Gallen and learne and worked in Prague (*around 1350), in the work of *Mary's Life*, written from 1410 to 1420, says she read from the book of Isaiah (Is 7,14) when the angel visited (*Heinrich von St. Gallen. Das Prager Marienleben*. Edition und Untersuchung. Bearb. von Hardo Hilg [MTUDL 75], München 1977, 148; S. LÜKEN, *Die Verkündigung an Maria im 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhundert*. Historische und kunsthistorische Untersuchungen, Göttingen 2000, 326⁵³).

³⁰ This day is already being put on March 25 by St. Augustine († 430), precisely on the day when, at that time, the Savior was crucified. Thus, in the Middle Ages, March 25 marks the most important date of Christian worship, which dates to all important events of salvation: the creation of the world, the creation of Adam, the murder of Abel, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham's sacrifice. „Die Vorliebe für den 25. März entsprang nicht kalendarischer Kurzweil oder dem Verlangen nach schöner Symmetrie. Dem offenkundigen Bemühen, die

what hour did the angel visit her?³¹ From our point of view, only the last question is relevant. Since the scripture itself does not reveal anything about the date of angelic greeting, different opinions emerged. The theologian-authors of the Middle Ages thus – depending on their reasoning – had chosen the morning,³² the midday³³ or the evening timing for the angel visit. However, it seems that the evening timing was the most widespread and most accepted idea.³⁴ We are convinced about this from a Franciscan act written in Pisa (1263), which enrules the brothers to make the people greet Mary when the bells ring for completorium. To give a reason for the date, the document refers to „the opinion of some famous teachers”, according to which „the angel greeted Mary at this hour”³⁵. A lot of time before the mentioned act, *Beda Venerabilis* († 735) Benedictine brother and Doctor of the Church, who was named in 836 *venerabilis et modernis temporibus doctor admirabilis* („respectable and admirable scholar of modern times”) by the synod from Aachen,³⁶ was also representing the idea of an evening timing because in his opinion the evening is the fullness of the day, this means that the day will only be complete with

großen Heilstaten Gottes an ein und demselben Tag stattfinden zu lassen, lag die Absicht zugrunde, die innere Verkettung der christlichen Heilsgeheimnisse kenntlich und erfahrbar zu machen“ (SCHREINER, 35).

³¹ SCHREINER, 37–39.

³² E.g. *Saint Albert the Great* († 1280) and *Antonius of Florence* († 1459) (SCHREINER, 38).

³³ Their argument is that at noon the sun is the strongest and at that time it gives the strongest light. So it seemed appropriate that the „Day of Truth” (Mal 3:20) should be born at that time (SCHREINER, 38).

³⁴ A. HEINZ, *Die marianische Schlußantiphonen im Stundengebet*, in: M. Klöckener – H. Rennings, *Lebendiges Stundengebet. Vertiefung und Hilfe*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 1989, 342–367, 345–346.

³⁵ „Et statutum fuit [...] quod fratres in sermonibus populum inducerent, ut in Completorio, pulsante campana, beatam Mariam aliquibus vicibus salutarerent, quia aliquorum solemnum doctorum est opinio, quod illa hora ipsa fuit per Angelum salutata” (Analecta Franciscana 3 [1897], 329 [italics mine]).

³⁶ DIÓS I., Art. *Beda Venerabilis*, in: *MagyKatLex* 1 (2004), 686.

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the evening that is associated with it, and only this is in concordance with „the fullness of time” from Gal 4,4. Also the evening time is best suited to the Prophet Isaiah's following statement: „*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light*” (9,1)³⁷. Bernard of Clairvaux († 1153) convent founder Doctor of the Church, named also *Doctor Marianus*, in one of his homilies from Advent sermons, also stands with this conviction: „It was night in the world [...] No angel appeared anymore, and the prophets did not speak anymore. [...] When there was silence over all things and the way of the night, your omnipotent voice, O Lord, came to us from your royal throne”³⁸. The sixth century *Conditor alme siderum*³⁹ Advent Hymn⁴⁰ says in its third

³⁷ SCHREINER, 38k.

³⁸ „Tempus est jam ipsum quoque considerare tempus, quo Salvator advenit. Venit enim (quod et vos credimus non latere) non in initio nec in medio temporis, sed in fine. Nec incongrue factum est, sed vere sapienter disposuit Sapientia, ut cum magis esset necessarium, tunc primo ferret auxilium, pronos ad ingratitude Adae filios non ignorans. Vere enim *advesperascebat et inclinata erat jam dies*, recesserat paulo minus sol justitiae: ita ut exiguus nimis splendor ejus aut calor esset in terris. Nam et lux divinae notitiae parva admodum erat, et abundante iniquitate fervor refriguerat charitatis. Jam non apparebat angelus, non loquebatur propheta; cessabant velut desperatione victim, prae nimia utique duritia hominum et obstinatione: at ego, ait Filius, «tunc dixi: Ecce venio» (Psal. XXXIX,8). Sic, sic dum medium silentium tenerent omnia, et *nox in suo cursu iter perageret* (Sap. XVIII,14), omnipotens sermo tuus, Domine, a regalibus sedibus venit. Quod et Apostolus innuens aiebat: «Quando venit plenitudo temporis, misit Deus Filium suum» (Galat. IV,4). Nimirum plenitudo et abundantia temporalium oblivionem et inopiam fecerat aeternorum. Opportune ergo tunc advenit aeternitas, quando magis temporalitas praevalebat. Nam ut caetera sileam, ipsa quoque pax temporalis illo in tempore tanta fuit, ut ad hominis unius edictum describeretur universus orbis (Luc II,1)” (Sermones de tempore: In adventu Domini [Sermo I,9; PL 183, 39; italics mine]).

³⁹ See the interpretation of the hymn A. SCHULTE, *Die Hymnen des Breviers nebst den Sequenzen des Missale*. Übersetzt und kurz erklärt, Paderborn 1916, 134–137.

⁴⁰ In the Breviarium, the Advent Sundays, in the Liturgia Horarum (1971), is the hymn of everyday Vespers only in the first part of Advent (until Dec. 16). In our

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verse that the Bridegroom came into the world in the „night of the world”⁴¹. All of these sources of evidence convince us that the evening timing of the angelic greeting had great popularity in the medieval public conception. That's why they praised the Virgin Mary at night, after praying the completorium. The Church also wanted, by this pious tradition, to greet Mary when she was greeted by God himself (by Archangel Gabriel). „So at the end of the day, people remember the beginning of salvation. When the natural sun sets, the praise of the woman from whom the Christ-day is awakened is started”⁴². This pious tradition built by theologians and based on a strong symbolic thinking, led to the fact of the Rorate mass being celebrated even before the sunrise – so in the cold winter night – thus attempting to „replicate” the dramaturgy of the Annunciation. In the darkness before the daybreak we wait impatiently, accompanied by Mary, the Morning Star who announces the coming of „the Sun of justice” (Mal 3,20), and who is already abounded by the grace of God, giving us the light of hope, to be visited by „the sunrise shall come from on high”, „to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk 1,78) and

folkloric song collection (*Éneklő Egyház / Dicsérvjétek az Urat*), we can find a paraphrase with a melody from a Transylvanian folkloric collection, and verse transcript of the hymn, which inspired from the *Cantionale Catholicum* (Johannes Kájoni) and the Protestant Graduals. (DOBSZAY L., *A magyar népének I*, Veszprém 1995, 87–88).

⁴¹ The text of the third verse in Latin:

Vergente mundi vespere
uti sponsus de thalamo
egressus honestissima
Virginis matris clausula.

⁴² „Der abendliche Ansatz des Mariengrußes im täglichen Stundengebet wurde also wohl mit Bedacht gewählt. Zu der Tageszeit, zu der – einer frommen Überlieferung zufolge – Gott selbst Maria begrüßt und das Wunder der Menschwerdung seines Sohnes in ihrem Schoß gewirkt hatte, möchte auch die Kirche die Mutter des Erlösers grüßen. So steht am Ende des Tages das Gedächtnis an den Anfang des Heils. Beim Untergang der natürlichen Sonne erklingt das Lob der Frau, aus der die Christus-Sonne aufgegangen ist“ (HEINZ, 347).

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to exclaim happily at his arrival: *Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.*

The Rorate-masses, celebrated in the snowy, foggy winter dawn have always created a special atmosphere in the church, and they have had an uplifting effect on the soul of the people. The late chaplain of Cluj-Napoca, Héjja Albert († 1968), who was born in Székelypetőfalva, wrote the following about the Rorate masses from Transylvania, in 1930:

„From the early childhood, for the church-going Catholic person, the most beloved memories are related to the Rorate masses. These morning masses are undeniably uplifting, nice and beautiful. [...] The people love them, every year looking forward to these masses. Souls move when they begin on the dawn of the first Monday of Advent. Children are already asking on the night before, «Oh, my mother, will you wake me up at dawn»? Those who are sometimes so hard to get out of bed are up already at the first call of awakening. When the misty cloudy dawn arrives, the bells call for mass, and quiet, silent walking groups hurry to the church. [...] The Rorate masses are also loved by the people because they can engage with the wings of the songs in the mass, in its liturgy, and the mood that is brought by the celebration of these masses. The clouded, foggy wintertime and dawning somehow create a circumstance that completely fits the liturgy, closely in the form of the old, Hungarian translation of the introit. [...] There is nothing that can make people leave this tradition; for four weeks, only increasing enthusiasm will be poured into it. As the snow rises from a few inches to half a meter, as the cold of December and the night absorb more and more the dawn, so that they go home from the Rorate in the moonlight, as the Christmas star is waving from closer, and people start to feel the mystery of Christmas. The zeal and the warmth of the heart of those who go to these masses, and their lips cry the song of the millennial

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Messiah's desire: *Dew down, heavenly highs!* (Harmatozzatok égi magasok)⁴³

Trefán Leonárd († 1945) Franciscan brother, a few years later, in 1934, writes the following at his ministry in Mikháza (today in Maros County), about the celebrated Advent masses:

„The bell in the morning wakes people up for the morning mass. This bell cries loudly, and prays with devotion. It arouses hope, wakes up trusts, and chases away the problems faced in sleepy drowsiness. The dawn of December is not like any other. It's hard as lead, and with its misty uncertainty it's weighing on the human heart. The dawn of December is the dawn of longing, of mysterious suspicions and great fortunes. And yet it's a bright, beautiful dawn. In our small village, fluttering flames, shimmering candlesticks came from all sides to our church. Men and women dressed in winter clothes and children filled the Lord's house. The bell began to sing, the mass began, and the sound of the loud voice of the organ rang in the church's misty air: *Dew down, Great Sky, the True and the Good...* (Harmatozd le nagy Ég az Igazat és Jót...) This is the glittering beauty of the Advent dawn and the Advent of a soul full of. We await salvation from the captivity of our sins, in the darkness of our lives we hope for light. The message of the bells is the following: Be enlightened people! Do not bring shame on man, for God became man for us⁴⁴.

It would be a deserving for us to stick today (even in the cities, in particular) for the Rorate masses to be celebrated in early dawn and exclusively with candlelight (from which the Rorate-masses were named *Lichtleskerch* at the Franks⁴⁵), so the modern man, who lives in

⁴³ HÉJJA A., *Roráté-misék a nép lelkében*, in: *Az Oltár. Az Erdélyi Oltáregyesületek hivatalos lapja* 3 (1930), 74–75.

⁴⁴ TREFÁN L., *Adventi harangok*, in: *Katolikus Világ* 31 (1934), 353–354.

⁴⁵ H. RAUCHENECKER, *Lebendiges Brauchtum*. *Kirchliche Bräuche in der Gemeinde*, München 1985, 166.

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the world of electric light and light pollution, can especially find in the richness of the symbol of the darkness-light antithesis, and he can understand and experience the effect of the symbol of light on his soul (of natural and carefully guarded light) finding out the fact that above the „phobia” of his existential darkness only Christ, the Light of the World, can be victorious. The full cutting out of the artificial light shows us the value of the true, flickering, living light. Darkness is – like our chilling, frozen cold – a symbol of the World, and candlelight since ancient times is a symbol of the Light. We are trying to convey and live a sense of empathy to revive this contrast. In the darkness we cannot find ourselves, we can't find home, we are helpless and desolate, and therefore we are trying to cling to our fellow human beings with fearsome fears of our existence, but we forget that they are exposed to the danger of darkness as ourselves, too.⁴⁶ Then we understand the existential affliction of Prophet Isaiah's words: *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light* (Is 9,1).

Translated from the Hungarian by Grigore Beáta

Lipsește rezumatul!

⁴⁶ A. GRÜN – M. REEPEN, *Heilendes Kirchenjahr*. Das Kirchenjahr als Psychodrama (Münsterschwarzacher Kleinschriften 29), Münsterschwarzach 1985, 27–28.

The Mother of God in Dumitru Stăniloae's Theology

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Abstract

This study explores the great Orthodox Theologian Dumitru Stăniloae's writings on the Holy Virgin Mary. Although he did not elaborate a special Mariology dissertation, Father Stăniloae wrote about the Virgin Mary from the biblical and exegetic viewpoints as well as from the patristic, apologetical and doctrinal perspectives. I have chosen to present the connection the author sees at one side between the Mother of God and The Holy Trinity and, on the other side, the Virgin Mary's historicity and holiness. The study ends with a reflection on father Stăniloae's ecumenical perspective.

Keywords: Mother of God, Holy Trinity, Dumitru Stăniloae, Holy Bible, Holy Fathers, Orthodox theology, historicity, Mariology, ecumenism.

For the present conference I have chosen to expound Dumitru Stăniloae's views on the Mother of God, or, as he liked to say, on the „theotokologie”¹. Dumitru Stăniloae worked for more than six decades as professor, first at the Theological Academy of Sibiu (1929-1946), then at the Orthodox Theological Institute of Bucharest (1947-

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¹ For the present conference I used the study of Adrian Dinu, „Maica Domnului – ‘cea prin care răsare bucuria’”, *Teologie și viață*, 103-114.

1989), while elaborating his writings on the development of Orthodox theology in Romania².

I would like to point out that, in Mariology, Stăniloae's viewpoint was in line with the coordinates established by the theologians before him, from a contemporary perspective, emphasizing the connection between Theotokos and the Trinity, and with the Holy Spirit. In Orthodox Romania, many theologians had written about the Mother of God, especially after World War II, including Ioan G. Coman³, Ștefan Alexe⁴, Constantin Voicu⁵, D. Fecioru⁶, Olimp Căciulă⁷, Nicolae

² For a complete picture on the life and work of Dumitru Stăniloae, see Ștefan Lupu, *Sinodalitatea: expresie a unității și a catolicității Bisericii, în gândirea pr. Dumitru Stăniloae*, Sapientia, Iași 2009.

³ Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie, Manual pentru uzul studenților Institutelor Teologice*, Bucharest 1956; Idem, „Și Cuvântul Trup S-a făcut”. *Hristologie și mariologie patristică*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara 1993; Idem, „Sfânta Tradiție în lumina Sfinților Părinți”, *Ortodoxia* 8 (1956), nr. 2, pp. 163-190; Idem, „Momente și aspecte ale hristologiei precalcedoniene și calcedoniene”, *Ortodoxia* 8 (1965), nr. 1, pp. 44-82.

⁴ Ștefan Alexe, „Viața creștină după Bărbații apostolici”, *Studii Teologice* 7 (1955), nr. 3-4, pp. 223-235; Idem, „Fericitul Augustin în românește”, *Mitropolia Olteniei* 9 (1957), nr. 11-12, pp. 766-778; Idem, „Contribuția Sfântului Ioan Damaschin la sistematizarea învățaturii ortodoxe”, *Ortodoxia* 36 (1984), nr. 1, pp. 120-134.

⁵ Constantin Voicu, „Hristologia Părinților Apostolici”, *Ortodoxia* 13 (1961), nr. 3, pp. 405-418; Idem, „Maica Domnului în teologia Sfântului Ioan Damaschin”, *Mitropolia Olteniei* 14 (1962), nr. 3-4, pp. 165-184; Idem, „Problematika teologiei Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa”, *Mitropolia Ardealului* 9 (1964), nr. 3-5, pp. 230-251; Idem, „Sfinți Părinți mai de seamă ai Bisericii”, în *Credință ortodoxă și viață creștină*, Sibiu 1992, pp. 58-96.

⁶ D. Fecioru, „Un nou gen de predică în omiletica patristică: Predica la Buna Vestire a Sfântului Gherman I al Constantinopolului”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 54 (1946), nr. 1-3, pp. 60-92 și nr. 4-6, pp. 180-193 și nr. 7-9, pp. 386-397; Idem, „Teologia icoanelor la Sfântul Ioan Damaschin”, *Ortodoxia* 34 (1982), nr. 1, pp. 28-40; Idem, *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, traducere, note și indici, Bucharest 1979; Idem, *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, traducere, introducere, note și indice, Bucharest 1980 (in collaboration).

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Buzescu⁸ and others. These had written especially about the worship of the Mother of God in Church both from the dogmatic and historical point of view, and the moral, spiritual and ecumenical perspectives⁹.

Dumitru Stăniloae had written many times on the Mother of God, but not very much¹⁰, so to say, he didn't write books or complex

⁷ Olimp Căciulă, „Anatematismele Sfântului Chiril al Alexandriei”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 55 (1937), nr. 3-4, pp. 129-155; Idem, „A cunoscut Iosif Flaviu pe Apostolul Pavel?”, *Glasul Bisericii* 20 (1961), nr. 1-2, pp. 77-111.

⁸ *Buzescu Nicolae*, „Theotokos și Hristologia în canoanele, stihirile, dogmaticile și troparele Octoihului mare”, *Ortodoxia* 29 (1977), nr. 1, pp. 20-46; Idem, „«Panaghia Theotokos» în imnologia Mineielor”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 3, pp. 534-558; Idem, „Dreapta învățătură a Bisericii despre Preasfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu”, *Mitropolia Olteniei* 34 (1982), nr. 1-3, pp. 80-88.

⁹ Among those who had studied the worship of Mother of God in the Orthodox Church, can be listed another known theologians: D.I. Belu, *Maica Domnului în lumina innelor liturgice*, Caransebeș 1945, 88 p.; Petru Rezuș, „Mariologia ortodoxă”, *Ortodoxia* II (1950), nr. 4, pp. 515-558; Liviu Stan, „O nouă rătăcire a papalității”, *Ortodoxia* II (1950), nr. 4, pp. 610-619; Isidor Todoran, „Considerații mariologice”, *Mitropolia Ardealului* 3 (1958), nr. 3-4, pp. 218-237; Milan Șesan, „Despre cinstirea Maicii Domnului”, *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* 34 (1958), nr. 7-8, pp. 602-606; Ioan Bunea, „Cultul Maicii Domnului”, *Mitropolia Ardealului* 26 (1971), nr. 9-10, pp. 675-679; Antonie Plămădeală, „Maica Domnului în teologia și viața ortodoxă”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 96 (1978), nr. 9-10, pp. 1113-1123; Ene Braniște, „Cinstirea Maicii Domnului în cultul ortodox și formele ei de exprimare”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 3, pp. 521-533; Idem, „Despre cinstirea sfinților în Biserica Ortodoxă”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 1, pp. 44-67; C. Galeriu, „Maica Domnului «Povățuitoria»”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 3, pp. 454-468; Ilie Moldovan, „Învățătura Sfintei Scripturi despre Prea Curata Fecioara Maria și implicațiile ei religioase morale”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 3, pp. 469-491; Mircea Chialda, „Preacinstirea Maicii Domnului”, *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* 59 (1983), nr. 7-9, pp. 439-448; Idem, „Preacurata Fecioară Maria, Maica Domnului”, *Studii Teologice* 33 (1981), nr. 5-6, pp. 325-342; Viorel Sava, *În Biserica slavei Tale*, Golia, Iași 2004.

¹⁰ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae had approached this subject in the following studies: *Teologia dogmatică și simbolică*, Manual pentru Institutetele Teologice, I-II, București 1958 (and then continued in *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, 2nd edition, vol. 2, EIBMBOR, Bucharest 1997, pp. 53-60, cap. „Fecioara Maria, Născătoare de Dumnezeu”); *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, Craiova 1987, and in many other

studies on this subject (with the possible exception of the study of 1950 on the significance of the Mother of God to the Orthodox and Catholic faithful). He had written both from the biblical point of view, and from the exegetic, dogmatic, patristic and apologetic perspectives. It is worth noting the amiable approach in his books and studies, full of sensibility toward the Mother of God. His writings proved that

“the person of the Mother of God was not only a daily presence, but, much more, a spiritual presence, a tutelary and precatory presence. This can be seen, for example, in his work *Dogmatica*, about the Mother of God. Those few pages from the second volume, in the chapter called “The Blessed Mary, Mother of God”, are full of feeling and spiritual experience, showing not only theological depth, a thorough knowledge of the history of dogmatic, but they show, in particular, how he felt when he spoke about her. A historical and dogmatic study on the person, the words and the works of the Mother of God, lead this Romanian theologian to discover remarkable spiritual elevations. The Virgin Mary has always been the loving Mother, tutelary and auxiliary”¹¹.

My paper deals with some aspects of Dumitru Stăniloae’s theology of the Virgin Mary, more exactly those essential aspects that distinguish themselves from other approaches. First, I will present the connection between the Mother of God and the Son of God, her „historicity”, her holiness and the ecumenical perspective on her function.

articles, such as: „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși și catolici”, *Ortodoxia* II (1950), nr. 4, pp. 559-609; „Maica Domnului ca mijlocitoare”, *Ortodoxia* 4 (1952), nr. 1, pp. 79-129; „Maica Domnului în prologul Evangheliei de la Luca”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 3, pp. 443-453; „Sfințenia în Ortodoxie”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 1, pp. 33-43.

¹¹ Adrian Dinu, „Maica Domnului – ‘cea prin care răsare bucuria’”, *Teologie și viață*, 105.

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Before this, I would like to present, for a better understanding of Stăniloae's Mariology, two aspects. The first is the fact that theologian Stăniloae connected the theory on the Virgin Mary with the prayers to the Virgin Mary. It is known that Stăniloae's daily program of prayers included meditation on the actions and words of the Mother of God. Just like other important theologians, Stăniloae first prayed and then wrote or spoke about the Virgin Mary. Secondly, Stăniloae never separated the teachings about the Virgin Mary from those on Jesus Christ, as can be seen in the Orthodox iconography: The Virgin Mary always has Baby Jesus in her arms, pointing to him, and she receives the blessing alongside all Christians.

1. The Holy Trinity and the Connection with the Virgin Mary

Father Stăniloae developed and updated the theology on the Virgin Mary through an extremely delicate perspective on God and his Creation. He started from the Persons of the Trinity and their actions in the world and he arrived at the Church, at the unity of the Church teachings about Jesus Christ our Saviour and his Mother. In his theological research, Stăniloae started by emphasizing the Persons of the Trinity and the works of God, getting to Creation, the world and human beings, developing, in this way, a complex teaching grounded in the relevance of the Fathers of the Church. The essential element of his theology is the Holy Trinity and his work in the world. He grounded his theology in the Scripture and in the teachings of the Fathers. The whole world, he said, „was created, sustained and helped by the Word of God as unity and hierarchical communion in an eternal renewing movement, through unity continuously integral with the divine and infinite communion”¹².

Therefore, the connection between the Word of God and his Mother has to be seen in the rationality of the Creation and in the plan

¹² Dumitru Stăniloae, „Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor”, *Mitropolia Olteniei* 43 (1991), nr. 1, p. 9.

of the Creation of the world. If God „had put in things the reasons, of which human beings, through them, know the source– the Almighty God”¹³, then man realizes his relation with the Creator and the hierarchic steps of the world. „All need reciprocal love”¹⁴. Man appears like an intermediary between the material world and a world of spiritual beings or between the visible world and the angels. This aspect appears clearer, says Stăniloae, when the Son of God became human. The Virgin Mary had shown once more the almighty and the presence of God in Creation. Mary gave a body to the Son and so he assumed the humanity that he arose above the angels „and so who is close to him can be united with God”¹⁵. Through Incarnation, God „united himself with the Virgin Mary”¹⁶ and those inferior elements transform themselves too, fulfilled by God. Several times Stăniloae spoke about Incarnation, about the unity of the Creation of God and about the uniqueness of the act accomplished through the Mother of God, about the liberation from the ancestral sin, which nobody can accomplish without the unity with Christ. In all his writings on the Virgin Mary, he makes many references to the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church (Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, the Cappadocian Fathers, John of Damascus, Nicholas Kabasilas and others).

For example, when he interprets the biblical text on the Virgin Mary, Stăniloae emphasizes the connection with the Persons of the Holy Trinity and with the ways in which the Trinity worked in the world:

„the second Adam comes to existence through the accepted liberty to become human. He is the product of his liberty. He didn't come in this world without his will. But Kabasilas observed the fact that, if at the

¹³ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor”, p. 11.

¹⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor”, p. 12.

¹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor”, p. 13.

¹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor”, p. 13.

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beginning, at the creation of Adam, the Father had asked the opinion of the other Persons of the Trinity, in the case of Jesus, he waited for the *fiat* of the Virgin Mary. The one that would be born didn't come to the world through a natural process, initiated by an act full of passion, which restricted freedom, but through a fully free act. There are two freedoms: God's freedom and that of the creature that arises from the sin in which he was chained. Kabasilas says: «the most astonishing fact is that God didn't ask Adam if he wanted to come in this world, and neither did he ask for his permission to create Eve from his rib, nevertheless God took his rib. But in the process of creation of the new Adam, he apprised the Virgin Mary before and then he waited for her faith and her assent»,¹⁷.

Father Stăniloae stresses the faith, the work and the collaboration of the Mother of God at the Incarnation of the Son of God:

„It was not a common agreement that has given the Son of God the capacity to become man, to unify the human nature with its divine nature, but a faith that has not been the same, manifested by a feminine bearer of human nature – because in the body of the woman forms another man – in him. Faith in someone, as trust in him, means a spiritual union with him. The total faith of the Holy Virgin in the proclamation given by the angel meant a spiritual union with him as it has not been and can no longer be, since no one has ever been put and will not be put in such a situation”¹⁸.

Somewhere else, Father Stăniloae says:

„in the Orthodox mentality, because sin is not only guilt and penance, but also a dilution of human nature, so to say, liberation of sin means, besides the gratification of God by Jesus Christ through obedience and

¹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului în prologul Evangheliei de la Luca”, *Ortodoxia* 32 (1980), nr. 3, p. 443.

¹⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului în prologul Evangheliei de la Luca”, p. 443.

death, a reinforcement of this nature, through his elevation in the intimate union with divinity... Liberation of the ancestral sin cannot be granted by anybody, but only through the union with Christ. This is how the Virgin Mary came by it"¹⁹.

In his work *Dogmatic Theology*, Father Stăniloae brings, in a few pages, a strong testimony on the Virgin Mary. Trying to explain, starting from the Fathers of the Church, the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary, he showed not only the importance of the Incarnation, the unity of the person that was born from her or the „contribution” of the Mother of God, but also highlights the way in which the teaching of the Virgin Mary influenced the cult and doctrine of the Church. The principles followed are those of modern history, so to say, those who know the sources, their critical research and systematic exposure of ideas.

„the Church has always considered the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, because in this way we confess that the person born from her is not a different person from the divine one, but the Son of God born in human nature... Not to recognize the fact that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God means to negate that the Son of God made himself her Son, consequently the Son of Man”.

If we take into consideration the last sentence, which we can relate to that of Gregory of Nazianzus, which says: „anyone who does not believe that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God, is separated from God”, we can see how deeply Stăniloae’s theology is infused with spirituality. Then, explaining the whole process of Christ’s human nature formation, he adds:

¹⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși și catolici”, *Ortodoxia* II (1950), nr. 4, p. 563.

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„The Fathers of the Church observe that if, at the beginning, he could take only another human subject from Adam, why could he not now take only from a woman, himself, not a human subject, but only a human nature for itself as a subject? But if, at that moment, he took a human subject from Adam - because man needed to have a partner of dialogue from the beginning - now God-Word is going through the whole process of forming his nature, his formation as man, as a new human partner of dialogue, to go from the very beginning of man's way, except for the human initiative of birth, which could only form another human subject from the immanent human order. For Christ, as a man, comes to existence, like Adam, through an act of divine creation, so unspoiled by the act of voluptuousness. But, on the other hand, Christ remains also with Adam's successors who came to life through natural birth”²⁰.

2. The „historicity” of the Mother of God

Speaking of the Virgin Mary, Father Stăniloae could not leave aside the truth that she was a human being, with a free life and with a purity of the body and soul like no one else had and would never have. In a study of 1950, he asserts the true identity of the Mother of God, the way her work has been understood throughout history, and the evolution of the studies on her teachings. Without engaging in a polemic without arguments, but, on the contrary, relying on the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, that is to say, through the living Tradition of the Church, this great Romanian theologian clarifies the “dogmas” in connection with it: the birth of the Virgin (confuting the “Immaculate Conception”), the activity and teachings of the Mother of God (updating her “sermon” and not taking attitude to “*coredemptrix*” dogma), the ascension of the body to the heavens (against the “assumption” dogma of the Catholics). In all these, Father Stăniloae follows the Church Tradition: the Virgin Mary lived on the

²⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, 2nd edition, II, EIBMBOR, Bucharest 1997, p. 55.

Earth, she always remained at the side of our Saviour Jesus Christ, obeyed him and subjected herself to his will, then remained with the apostles, and, at the end of her life, fell asleep, giving her infallible soul in the hands of the beloved Son.

“Orthodox Mariology tendencies – notes Father Stăniloae – keep within the directions of the Gospels and those of the primary Christianity. Who has not noticed that the New Testament covers almost the entire life of the Virgin Mary? The cause can only be that the Mother of God has defeated the pure beginning of the holy writers to give any news of her, especially after the rise of her Son to heaven... It is equally significant that in the first few centuries we do not have information about the life, activity, death, and assumption of the Virgin; only in the apocryphal writings not accepted by the Church. It was not until the Synod of Ephesus, when it was solemnly proclaimed the *theotokia* of the Mother of God, that her figure was greatly developed. This was, it seems an inheritance from the time of the Apostles, who knew that this was the will of the Mother of God”²¹.

In his studies Father Stăniloae also explained the terminology related to the Virgin Mary, the names given to the Mother of God. Their existence is the consequence of a historical evolution of the doctrine concerning her, but also of the growing piety towards her. The names given to her: “The Mother of God”, “The Most Holy”. “The Blessed Virgin”, and “The Preached” are names consecrated in the Church, and were often used by the Fathers of the Church and spiritual writers, and also by the believers, as a sign of their consideration and honor to her.

„Those who want to empty the expressions: *Imperatrix*, our Lady, the one who sits on the right of the Son, of all content, descending her to the saint, in general, they should explain why such titles are granted by

²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși...”, p. 560.

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the Church exclusively to the Mother of God, and not to saints and angels? The Church, constituting her cult, did not make a poetic play, but expressed with amazing gratitude and with holy seriousness the truth in all its shades... We, believers, cannot refuse such expressions or cancel their meaning, referring to them as poetry, neither can we cut them off with our 'theological accuracy' produced by our thoughts. On the contrary, by theological accuracy we must formulate all the nuances of the text that can to one transiently reading, not to choose what we like from it or to insert in it what we like"²².

These names show by themselves the interpretations of the teaching on the Mother of God from the Councils and the holy Fathers. The only doctrinal definition on the Virgin Mary was that of the Council of Ephesus (431), where it was shown that she is "the Mother of God" (*Theotokos*). Entirely Christological, and not „mariological”, the Council decision of 431 found its justification in the theological literature of the first centuries, and, at the same time, generated testimonies for the veneration of the Virgin Mary in most works of the Holy Fathers of the Church. God himself incarnated, becoming our Saviour and, at the same time, the perfect Man. „Until the Synod of Ephesus”, says Father Stăniloae, “it was simply asserted that Mary is the Mother of the Word made flesh, and she was a Virgin and was worshipped in a small cult”. After the Council of Ephesus, the Church had only defined these elements and remained in the Orthodox Church until today”.²³

3. The Holiness of the Mother of God

Father Stăniloae also approached the doctrine on the Virgin Mary through her worship and celebrations. By a diachronic and synchronous method, he has shown how this teaching has developed

²² Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului ca mijlocitoare”, p. 110.

²³ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși...”, p. 561.

over time, through the successive particular and collective contributions, that were the “interferences” between the various aspects of this teaching. In order to better understand how she lived and how the Virgin Mary was in heaven, but also to avoid the confusions that some Christians make (for example, the „moments” of her sanctification, her “degree” of holiness, her place in the Church), Father Stăniloae first explained how God's grace and the mark of the ancestral sin could coexist in her person:

“The Virgin Mary was adorned with the richest grace in the most supreme degree, more than Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist. But yet not with the grace that cancels the mark of the ancestral sin. She had the ultimate degree of holiness to which no man had ever risen nor will ever be raised. It was the highest peak in which mankind ascended to God. But this was a personal cleansing, not the purity of nature, which constituted the common background, transmissible substance of humanity, to be cleansed only by Jesus Christ, when the salvation of all those who accept him begins”²⁴.

Father Stăniloae continues:

„We were wont to observe only what the Virgin gave to the Lord by making up his body from her body and by forming her soul and human mind from her soul and mind – an element I have seen that Nicholas Kabasilas also emphasizes. We were wont to think of the union of Jesus Christ growing in the womb of the Mother and the Mother who communicated her blood and her life through the cordon that made the two of them a dual unit. But we were less accustomed to see what gave the light and purity of the hypostasis of the Word, body and soul and understanding of the Virgin while he was in this union with her, in her womb. Has the Holy Spirit descended into it, without giving it,

²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși...”, p. 567.

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alongside with the power to give birth the Divine Word above nature, also the holiness?"²⁵.

And elsewhere, Father Stăniloae says that the Fathers and spiritual writers of the Church, referring to the holiness of the Virgin Mary before the Annunciation,

“are talking about a new sanctification, cleansing her right now. As for Gabriel the Archangel, the fact that the Virgin Mary is ‘with gracious gift’ (graceful) as Catholics translate the expression *κεχαρτομενι* (Lc 1, 28), there is no obstacle to tell her that she is now receiving a new grace (“Rejoice, you are gracious to God”), so the praise of the venerable Virgin Mary does not stop the spiritual writers of the Church from the East to speak about a new cleansing at the moment of the conception of the Word. For them, the spiritual order of grace has a gradation of nuances, a flexibility that Catholic theologians simplify and thicken in definitions that are too rigid”²⁶.

4. A view of the ecumenical perspective of Father Stăniloae's theology

I was recalling in the previous pages the view of the Romanian theologian, which is deeply anchored in the theology of the Holy Fathers. The proclamation, on the one hand, of some dogmas of the Catholic Church and, on the other hand, the attitude of some reformed Christians regarding the person of the Virgin Mary, made Father Stăniloae to take action. His example was also constantly Orthodox and full of consistency. Here is what he said:

“The common elements of the Orthodox and the Catholic Mariology are: the Virgin Mary's eternal virginity (*aeiparthenia*), her quality of

²⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului în prologul...”, p. 448.

²⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși...”, p. 569.

Mother of God (*theotokia*), and her honor above all saints and angels (*hyperdulia*). These are the three elements proclaimed by the Apostles and the Scriptures in the description of the Annunciation. But Catholicism did not stop at these common elements, but added some new ones that made their Mariology different from the Orthodox one. These are: the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary..., her quality of ‘redeeming all humans (*corredemptrix*)’... and the recent form of dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary to heaven, which, not formulated in a dogmatic way and with peculiar nuances, can be found in the Orthodox Church too”²⁷.

Father Stăniloae criticized the Catholic theology, but he did not suggest a negative and objector theology, but brought in the first place what pious saints developed in their writings. He considered that a correct, sincere and profound dialogue with other confessions should not be led away from the dogmas of the Apostolic Church, but on the basis of the thoroughness of the teachings and their permanent piety. Concerning the actual theme, Father Stăniloae considered that if the Church has always recognized that the Virgin Mary is worthy of worship, by giving her, for example, the title of “Mother of God”, then this title must be the background for an ecumenical dialogue. “Orthodoxy and Catholicism see the Mother of God as being the first and highest perfect creature, the ripeness, the heart and the essence of the Church”²⁸. All Christians must praise the Virgin Mary because she is the subject of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, of all uncreated divine energies, as Christ himself. “But the more she is glorified, the deeper she is in Christ, the less she is distinguished by any kind of parallelism, by some sort of autonomy of Christ in her ministry. She is

²⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși...”, p. 560.

²⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși...”, p. 606.

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the highest creation, but in Christ, remaining in the law of the creature, who is glorified in Christ”²⁹. The conclusion is the following:

„To slight the Mother of the Most Holy, holy himself, not honoring the one she honors as His Mother, the one from whom all honor is coming, the one he surrounds with the greatest glory and with her super grace, means to offend not only the Son of God who became her Son, but also the most fundamental human feelings”³⁰.

Today it can be said that Father Stăniloae brought a special contribution to the strengthening of the ecumenical dialogue on the doctrine of the Virgin Mary. This contribution materialized, in particular, in the elucidation of several aspects: the existence of ancestral sin in her, the unity and not its superposition with the Church, her work and her worship of Christ, not her competition with him. The prerogatives of the Mother of God are not autonomous, they do not come in an individual way, but they are gifts of Christ, which do not limit him and especially do not eclipse him. Consequently, for example, Orthodox iconography always shows the Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus in her arms, that is to say with Christ, showing him to humanity; if sometimes (in the Annunciation, Crucifixion of Christ, Assumption), she is portrayed alone, in the state of glory, this means that she is in communion with him, with the beloved Son. „To exclude the Mother of God from the relationship between me and Christ, means to exclude the Church itself, since she is most directly united with Christ, so the most central member of the Church is the Mother of God”³¹.

Before concluding, it must be said that Father Stăniloae always lived with the consciousness that Orthodoxy is “a particular way of

²⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși...”, p. 609.

³⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului în prologul...”, p. 453.

³¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Maica Domnului ca mijlocitoare”, p. 121.

living Christianity”³², which is identical in its faith and cult with the content of faith and cult of the Apostolic Church:

“Orthodoxy has not created doctrines to narrow the evangelical message to the limited moral and social horizon of past times. It opens itself to the audacity of the generous dreams of contemporary people, without encouraging the chaos proposed by some of them. It does not narrow the progress through authority and does not encourage individualistic disorder, but promotes progress in the infinite perfection of communion”³³.

Some conclusions

In this study I have tried to deal with some aspects Stăniloae’s views of the Virgin Mary. Before World War II, Romanian Orthodox theology did not produce thorough studies on the Mother of God. The proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Mother of God with the body and the soul in heaven by the Catholic Church, as well as the beginning of the ecumenical dialogue with the Romanian Catholic Church, led the Orthodox theologians to approach the mariological theme.

The fulfilment of Christian unity can be achieved – according to Father Stăniloae – by returning to the Orthodox faith and Orthodox way of living. The Church of Jesus Christ is a living Church that has not ceased to exist. For the Romanian theologian, the call to return to the same Church, a holy, catholic, and apostolic one, meant the need for a unitary theology in which the tradition of the holy Fathers is naturally accommodated and in which the Virgin Mary should have a place and a major role.

Father Stăniloae held a united view of Christology. He saw the connection between Jesus Christ and His Most Holy Mother as a real,

³² Dumitru Stăniloae, „Câteva trăsături caracteristice ale Ortodoxiei”, *Mitropolia Olteniei*, nr. 7-8, 1970, p. 730.

³³ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Câteva trăsături caracteristice ale Ortodoxiei”, p. 742.

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close, spiritual and sanctifying one. The person and identity of the Virgin Mary did not overlap with the being or identity of the Church. It is interesting that he also explains the controversies concerning the Virgin Mary (for example, the major one in the 5th century, but also the later ones, that is, those from the third patristic period, related to the honoring of the icons, the relics), which are part of the general issue of honoring the person of the Saviour Jesus Christ, also in the spiritual sense, because they somehow lead to the clarification of the “mystery” of the Holy Virgin.

The approach of the Christological teaching of Father Stăniloae is, of course, an Orthodox one, and kept within the Synod formulations and the explanations of the Fathers of the Church. The qualities of the Holy Mother (the Mother of God, the Eternal-Virgin, the Most Holy), her role (“praying”, not a “mediator” in the sense of a “substitute” of Christ), her actions (Dormition, Assumption), were not for Father Stăniloae the reason for long hermeneutical studies. His theology had a diachronic evolution, with a view to a thorough understanding of the subject, besides the fact that the Mother of God had always been for him an unsurpassed example of faith and devoutness.

The contribution of Father René Laurentin to the Mariology of the Second Vatican Council

Lucian DÎNCĂ*

Abstract

On October 13, 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary met for the last time the three little children from Fatima, Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia, after having met them for six months, consecutively, each time on the 13th day of the month. A few days later, on October 19, in France, at Tours, was born René Laurentin, who would become one of the most important Mariologists of the 20th century and expert theologian in Mariology at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Within this paper, sustained as a conference at the symposium organized by the Faculty of Roman-Catholic Theology in Bucharest, in cooperation with the Roman-Catholic Faculties in Cluj and in Iași, between 13th-14th of October, 2017, on the occasion of the centenary of the apparitions at Fatima, I shall briefly describe Father René's theological formation and then I shall present two major contributions of this renowned Mariologist to the conciliar and post-conciliar Mariology.

Keywords: Council, Mariology, theology, dogmatic, apparitions, Virgin, Mary, Jesus, Christ, Church, bishops, conciliar, documents, decisions.

1. Father René Laurentin

Born on October 19, 1917, René Laurentin dies on September 10, 2017, a month before he would reach the venerable age of 100 years. During his career as a professor, he taught at prestigious Universities in France and all over the world. He was a member of the Pontifical Theological Academy – *Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis*, and expert theologian in Mariology at the Second Vatican Council.

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His interest in the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary brought him worldwide prestige in this field. He was closely interested in the apparitions at Lourdes, at Fatima and at Medjigorje to which he dedicated several reference studies, presenting each time the historical, political and religious context in which such apparitions took place.

In 1934, he enters the Carmes Seminary in Paris and studies Theology at the Catholic Institute. He has the privilege of having as Bachelor's thesis supervisor the great French theologian Jacques Maritain. He receives a master's degree in philosophy after studying at Sorbonne University. In 1939, France entered the Second World War and René is drafted into the army. In 1940, he is taken prisoner and spends five years in captivity in Germany, where he teaches Hebrew language and begins the research that will make him one of the most notable Mariologists of the Catholic Christianity of the 20th century. Returned to France, he defends two PhD thesis: the first one in 1946, in Literature; and the second one in 1947, in Theology, on the topic of the *The Priesthood of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Le sacerdoce de la Vierge Marie*¹. In 1953, he publishes the first dissertation in Mariology², which will recommend him as Marian theologian at the Second Vatican Council. In 1960, Pope John XXIII summons him to Vatican in order to appoint him as member of the preparatory theological commission, and then to perform as expert theologian during the conciliar debates.

¹ The thesis, entitled "*Le sacerdoce de la Vierge Marie*", was published in Paris (Publisher: Lethielleux) in 1952.

² "*Court traité sur la Vierge Marie*", was published in six successive editions, between 1953 and 2009. The Apostolic Nuncio of Paris at that time, Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, declares about this treaty that it is an important book in the field of Mariology and foresees a long path for it. The treaty is a testament of the Marian theologian.

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His Marian works will also draw criticism, particularly for the way he addresses the apparitions at Medjugorje³ (from 1981 until today) and at Amsterdam⁴ (from 1945 to 1959). Regarding these two places of the apparitions, two main charges are brought against the great Mariologist: the lack of discernment when being convinced that he is in the presence of the Virgin Mary's manifestations and the minimization of, or even the silence on some facts that would invalidate the reality of these manifestations⁵. In some papers, Fr.

³ Since 1981, six children from Bosnia and Herzegovina claim to see the Virgin Mary on a hill near the small village Medjugorje. Because until today those children, who have become adults, claim to regularly see the Mother of God, turning Medjugorje into a real Marian sanctuary, the apparitions from the ex-Yugoslavia are the longest-lasting in the history of the Marian apparitions. The last three Popes, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis, haven't pronounced the authenticity of these apparitions.

⁴ Ida Peerdeman (1905-1996) claims that, between 1945 and 1959, the Blessed Virgin Mary had appeared to her 56 times, revealing with the name "The Lady of All Nations". In one of the apparitions, the Virgin Mary would have dictated to her this prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, send now Your Spirit over the earth. Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts of all nations, that they may be preserved from degeneration, disaster and war. May the Lady of All Nations, who once was Mary, be our Advocate. Amen". Due to the ambiguity of the prayer's content, the Church didn't pronounce itself favorable towards the apparitions at Amsterdam, emphasizing two major points: the desire to establish a new Marian dogma and the idea of the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary nowadays in order to collaborate with Jesus Christ for the salvation of all the nations; see Mirabelle Mark and Russel Richard, "Our Lady of All Nations: The Fifth Dogma", *Catholic Exchange*, October 21, 2013, <http://catholicexchange.com/our-lady-of-nations-the-fifth-dogma>.

⁵ See Joachim Boufflet, *Faussaires de Dieu: Enquête. Phénomènes surnaturels: Où est le vrai?*, Presses de la Renaissance, Paris, 2007, pp. 92-102.

René expresses his favorable position towards some apparitions that the Church, after an attentive analysis, unreservedly condemns⁶.

Among the main Mariological works, the following ones may be mentioned: *Le titre de Co-rédemptrice: étude historique* (1951), *Marie, l'Eglise et le Sacerdoce* (1953; in two volumes: vol. I, *Etude historique* and vol. II *Etude théologique*), *Notre Dame et la Messe* (1954), *Marie, Mère du Seigneur* (1988), *Retour à Dieu avec Marie: de la sécularisation à la consécration* (1991), *Lire la Bible avec Marie* (1993), *Marie, clé du mystère chrétien* (1994), *Présence de Marie: histoire, spiritualité, fondements doctrinaux* (2011), *La Vierge Marie des derniers temps* (2014), *Le Rosaire: les vingt mystères revisités* (2016) etc. But Father Laurentin published very important works even in the field of exegesis and theology: *Structure et théologie de Luc*, 2 volumes (1957), *Jésus et le Temple* (1966), *Dieu existe, en voici les preuves* (1993), *Traité sur la Trinité: Principe, modèle et terme de tout amour* (2001), *Nouveau Diatessaron: les quatre Evangiles en un seul* (2002); in the field of hagiography and mysticism: ten volumes dedicated to Bernadette Soubirous, two volumes about Thérèse of the Child Jesus, four volumes about Catherine Labouré, twelve volumes about Sister Yvonne-Aimée de Malestroit, two volumes about Grignon de Montfort, two volumes about Vassula Ryden, also writing *La vie de Marie d'après les révélations des mystiques: que faut-il en penser?* (2011), about Saint Peter and Saint John the Baptist etc.; in the field of the ecclesiology, in particular about the Second Vatican Council: *L'enjeu du Concile: bilan des quatre sessions et bilan général* (1963-1966; five volumes), *Réorientation de l'Eglise après le*

⁶ See in particular the case of Vassula Ryden, a Greek visionary settled in Egypt, who claims that since 1985 she receives messages from God through some messengers: the Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael, Ste. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, The Holy Spirit (the third person of The Holy Trinity), different angels etc.; see René Laurentin, *When God Gives a Sign: a Response to Objections Made Against Vassula's Testimony on true Life in God*, Trinitas, 1993.

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synode (1972), *Vingt ans après le Concile: un synode extraordinaire* (1984), *L'Église qui vient: au-delà des crises* (1989).

However, the most remarkable works, which reflect an important part of the research performed by the French theologian, are those related to the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, in this respect, publishing a manual of the apparitions, *Dictionnaire des apparitions de la Vierge Marie* (2017) and *Multiplication des apparitions de la Vierge aujourd'hui. Est-ce elle?* (1981, 1st edition; 1996, 2nd edition). The apparitions the most studied by Father Laurentin are those at Lourdes, to which he devotes, between 1957 and 1966, no less than 13 volumes (7 volumes devoted to the study and to the publishing of the authentic documents, and 6 volumes devoted to the authentic history of the apparitions), and those at Medjugorje, to which he devotes 18 volumes (17 volumes devoted, between 1984-1998, to the authentic documents, *Dernières nouvelles de Medjugorje* and one volume in which he intends to answer the question: *La Vierge Marie apparaît-elle à Medjugorje?* – 1984; 2nd edition in 1990).

On September 10, 2017, having been informed about the death of the French Mariologist, one of his numerous disciples, the rector of the Sanctuary of Lourdes, Fr. André Cabes, would say: „Father René Laurentin was an expert at the Second Vatican Council and contributed to the elaboration of the pages written about *Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church*. [...] Behold, you have left in order to finally contemplate Mary, whose steps you followed in so many places in this world”.

2. The 1st contribution:

The conciliar document about the Virgin Mary

The conciliar fathers arrived at Vatican in 1962 with the idea of proclaiming a new Marian dogma⁷: Holy Virgin Mary Co-

⁷ The Catholic Church recognizes four Marian dogmas: two of them are common to the Orthodox Church and were proclaimed in the first millennium of

Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate⁸. It should be noted that already at the beginning of the 20th century a group of Theologians, under the influence of Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Brussels-Malines, was requesting to Pope Benedict XV, in 1921, the proclamation of the Marian dogma: Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces – *Co-Redemptrix et Mediatrix omnium gratiarum*. The argument brought by these theologians for the new dogma was the presence of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the Savior's Cross, suffering together with her Son for the redemption of mankind⁹.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) was also an ardent supporter of the new Marian dogma. Ida Peerdeman, the Dutch visionary from Amsterdam, sustained that the Virgin Mary, herself, requested her, in one of her apparitions, the proclamation of “the final and the greatest

Christianity, in the period of the undivided Church – 1) *Theotokos, Mother of God*, a dogma proclaimed at the 3rd Ecumenical Council, held in Ephesus in 431, as a reaction against the Nestorian error that sustained the existence of two persons, divine and human, living together in Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary being only *Anthropotokos*, i.e. the mother of the human person and not of the divine one; 2) the perpetual virginity of Mary, *ante-in-post partum*, proclaimed after a council held in Lateran, in 649; and two dogmas proclaimed much later by the Catholic Church – 3) the Immaculate Conception, proclaimed by Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, in 1854, stating that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived free from the original sin; and 4) the Assumption of Mary, proclaimed by Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, in 1950, stating that the Blessed Virgin Mary followed her Son, in His Resurrection and His Ascension into heaven, as a premise of the faithful who sleep in Christ; see Bernard Sesboüé, *Histoire des dogmes*, six volumes, Cerf, Paris, 1994-1996.

⁸ See Mark Miravalle, *Marie Corédemptrice, Médiatrice, Avocate*, foreword by Cardinal Luigi Ciappi, Pontifical theologian, 1993, Queenships Publishing, Santa Barbara, California (published in France by Téqui); and Hendro Munstermann, *Marie corédemptrice?*, Paris, Cerf, 2006.

⁹ See W. Beinert, *Die Mariologischen Dogmen und Ihre Entfaltung*, 1996, pp. 35-360.

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Marian dogma”, the dogma by which Mary was to be praised by the faithful people as Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate.

Thus, before the Second Vatican Council many western bishops and theologians were deeply concerned with “forcing” the proclamation of a new Marian dogma, as a coronation of the already four existing dogmas, out of which the last two were the subject of intense debates between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox and Protestant Churches. One may assert that there were five characteristics of the pre-conciliar Mariology: 1) the attachment of many to Mary’s role as Co-Redemptrix; 2) the autonomy of the Mariology within Theology, separated from the others fields; 3) the absence of an explicit biblical basis, when biblical texts speak about the Virgin Mary; 4) the *christotypic* nature, i.e. Mary is on Christ’s side, not on the side of the Church; 5) the maximalist character, i.e. giving to the Virgin Mary as much honor as possible in order to combat the minimalists of protestant influence. These five characteristics are scarcely found in the Mariology of the Second Vatican Council, even if they sometimes persist in the writings of some post-conciliar theologians.

The preparatory commission of the Vatican council had to choose between taking into account the Mariology of the pre-conciliar theologians and their pursuit for the proclamation of a new Marian dogma, and laying the foundation of a more biblical and ecclesiological Mariology, proposing a theological reflection that positions Mary within the Church and not above it. Father Laurentin was one of the artisans of such a choice, difficult to assume for the posterity of the Marian theology of the Catholic Church. Continuing a Mariology based on the five criteria listed above would have deepened even more the relations between the Catholic Church and the Churches resulted from Luther’s reform; therefore, the Second Vatican Council introduced the Catholic Church on an irreversible

ecumenical path by publishing the document *Unitatis Redintegratio*¹⁰. On the other hand, it would have been very difficult to achieve a biblical argumentation in order to support the new Marian dogma, if one should start from two fundamental assertions, one from Saint John: “If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one.” (1 John 2:1), and one from Saint Paul: “For there is one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5).

In these conditions, the preparatory commission proposed several criteria as starting points for the Marian reflection: Mary as a figure, *typos*, of the Church; Mary as representative of mankind; Mary, the one who was redeemed in the most sublime way; Mary, the Mother of the Saviour. These criteria were having the advantage of putting the Virgin Mary not only in relationship with Jesus Christ, but also with the Church. Thus, the fundamental principles of the patristic Mariology are revealed¹¹: Irenaeus of Lyons and Ambrose of Milan developed the theme of the Virgin Mary as image of the Church; Augustine of Hippo speaks about the Virgin Mary as „part of the Church”: Virgin Mary is blessed because she listened the Word of God and kept Him into Her Heart (cf. Luke 2:19). Christ is the Truth, Christ became flesh. Christ, the Truth, is in the heart of Mary, Christ, the flesh, is within Mary; what is in the heart is more precious than what is within the womb. The Virgin Mary is Holy, Blessed, but the Church is more precious than the Virgin Mary. Why? Because Mary is a part of the Church, a saint part, a wonderful part, an extraordinary part, but still a part of the entire body. If she is a part of the entire

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II published an important encyclical, *Ut unum sunt*, in 1995, in which he reaffirms the Catholic Church’s desire to find the most appropriate forms for acquiring the unity in faith of all the Christians.

¹¹ René Laurentin will publish in 1984 an anthology of patristic texts within his work, *Marie, Mère du Seigneur: les beaux textes des deux millénaires*, Desclée, Paris.

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body, then for sure the body is more precious than just one part. The Lord is the Head, and Christ, as a whole, is Head and Body. What does it mean? We have a divine Head; we have God as Head. Thus, beloved brothers, pay attention: you too are parts of Christ, you too are the Body of Christ [...] You, to whom I am speaking, are parts of Christ; who gave birth to you? I already hear the voice of your heart: Mother Church. This Holy Mother, honored, like Mary, gives birth to many faithful people and remains however virgin”¹².

Therefore, no one from the preparatory commission took the responsibility to lead the Mariology to the proclamation of a new dogma at the Second Vatican Council. The intention of the theologians was to base the conciliar Mariology on biblical texts. Thus, it has been concluded that Mariology mustn't be separated neither from the rest of the theology nor from the Church, but rather it must be positioned within both the rest of the theology and the Church. In other words, the conciliar Mariology will pass from a “Christotypical Mariology” to an “Ecclesiotypical Mariology”. This decision leads the conciliar fathers to abandon the idea of proclaiming a new Marian dogma and the redaction of an independent Marian document. Father René Laurentin describes 10 steps¹³ through which the Marian text, that will be the subject of the 8th chapter of the dogmatic constitution concerning the Church, *Lumen gentium*, passed:

1) **The pre-preparatory phase:** between May 17 and November 14, 1960. The Bishops, the superiors of the religious orders, the Faculties of Theology and the theologians are, on a large scale, consulted. Pope John XXIII wanted to find out the topics that could be discussed at the Second Vatican Council. It was compiled an inventory of around 600 subjects, that the conciliar fathers had to speak about. Approximately 2500 Bishops said that, among the topics

¹² *Sermon Denis* n° 25, in Saint Augustine, *Le visage de l'Eglise*, Cerf, Paris, 1958, p. 189.

¹³ The work in which he presents these 10 phases is *La Vierge au Concile*, published in 1965, by House Lethielleux.

to be treated, it should also be the Virgin Mary; among them, nearly 400 supported the idea of proclaiming a new Marian dogma, while 100 were completely opposed to the idea, moreover requesting not to treat at all the topic of the Virgin Mary. However, most of those consulted believed that there were enough important issues to be discussed and to be clarified in a council, rather than proclaiming a new dogma.

2) **The preparatory phase:** between November 14, 1960 and October 10, 1962. The experts write a quite extensive Marian text entitled “The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of mankind”. The text would have been introduced into the dogmatic constitution about the Church, but a misunderstanding emerged regarding the place where it should be inserted: at the beginning, in the middle, at the end? On the November 10, 1962, the commission decides *nihil obstat*.

3) **The first conciliar session:** between October 11 and the December 8, 1962. The conciliar fathers had foreseen that this session would end on December 8, on the occasion of the celebration of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A week earlier, the fathers had finished the document about the Liturgy. Some of them supported the idea that the time that remained until December 8 should be dedicated to the vote regarding the Marian text prepared by the theological commission, that Father Laurentin was part of. Neither Cardinal Ottaviani’s insistence, nor the expert theologians’ desire to have the vote on the Marian text cast were sufficient and more favorable conditions were expected.

4) **The first inter-session:** between December 8, 1962 and September 29, 1963. The conciliar fathers receive the text about the Church, the document about the Virgin Mary being included in the appendix, but it had another title, even though the content was

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identical, *Schema Constitutionis Dogmaticae de Beata Maria Vergine, Mater Dei et Mater hominum*¹⁴.

5) **The second Session:** between September 29 and December 4, 1963. The conciliar fathers discuss about the place of Mariology within the conciliar documents: Should a separate document be devoted to the Virgin Mary or should the text already written be integrated into the dogmatic constitution about the Church? On one hand, Cardinal Santos, Bishop of Manila, supported the idea of establishing a specific Marian document, and on the other hand, Cardinal König, Bishop of Vienna, sustained the insertion of the Marian text into the document about the Church. On October 29, 1963, the decisive vote takes place: 1114 fathers vote for integrating the Marian text within the constitution about the Church, while 1074 fathers vote against; 5 votes were declared invalid. At the end of the session, it was taken the decision to form a commission consisting of four bishops with the task of producing a Marian text that could be inserted into the constitution about the Church, *Lumen gentium*, and might reach a broad consensus among the conciliar fathers.

6) **The second Inter-session:** December 4, 1963 and September 16, 1964. The commission proposes two versions of the same text: the first one is written by the Belgian theologian Georges Philips, and the second, bringing some modifications to the first one, is written by the Spanish theologian Pietro Balic. Both versions had the same title: *De Beata Vergine Deipara in mistero Christi et Ecclesiae*.

7) **The third session:** between September 16 and 17, 1964. The fathers bring into discussion, in particular, two Marian Names: “Mary the Mother of the Church” and “Mary the Mediatrix”. Pope Paul VI supported the first name, while the second became more and more rejected among the conciliar fathers, mainly for ecumenical reasons.

¹⁴ In another version, instead of the expression “*Mater Dei et Mater hominum*”, there appears the expression “*Mater Ecclesiae*”.

The text undergoes some modifications before being laid on the conciliar fathers' working table and before they could decide on it.

8) **The vote on the amendments:** October 29, 1964. 37 amendments are brought to the text proposed for its integration into *Lumen Gentium*. Among these the most important are the following: 1) the title *Mater Ecclesiae* is definitively abandoned, the Virgin Mary being the *Theotokos* (the Mother of God) and the Mother of the Saviour; she is part of the Church, and not above it; the *Ecclesiotypical* Marian model¹⁵ is adopted; 2) suffering together with her Son on the Cross, Mary cooperates in a very special way in the work of the Saviour through obedience, faith, hope and ardent love, in order to restore the supernatural life to the human, but she is not proclaimed Mediatrix or Co-Redeemer¹⁶; in her life, the Virgin Mary was a model of maternal love, that should animate all those who, in the Apostolic mission of the Church, cooperate at the regeneration of humanity¹⁷; the Marian litany at the end of the document was eliminated, its place being taken by a chapter speaking about Mary as a sign of certain hope and comfort for the peregrine people of God towards the Kingdom of Heaven¹⁸. 1559 fathers voted for this text, taking into account the amendments, while 521 voters wanted to introduce certain changes; 10 votes were against the text.

9) **The vote on the final modifications:** November 19, 1964. After introducing the amendments, the fathers voted for the text almost unanimously: 2096 bishops voted for, while only 23 voted against. Father Laurentin writes: „1% of those who opposed seemed to belong to the two extremes: those who considered that the text is minimalist and those who said that the text was excessive and unsatisfactory from the ecumenical point of view”.

¹⁵ See *Lumen gentium*, 53.

¹⁶ See *Lumen gentium*, 61.

¹⁷ See *Lumen gentium*, 65

¹⁸ See *Lumen gentium*, 68-69.

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10) **The Promulgation of the text:** November 21, 1964. Pope Paul VI promulgates the text entitled: *The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother or God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church*. Thus, the document is integrated into the dogmatic constitution about the Church, *Lumen gentium*, chapter 8, and becomes the official expression of the Catholic Church regarding the Virgin Mary.

One more fact should be remembered: the speech delivered by Pope Paul VI after the vote on the Marian document, on November 21, 1964. When no one expected any other addition, in the final speech, the Pope uses the expression *Mater Ecclesiae* twice, an honorary title given to the Virgin Mary, but avoided by the theologians and the experts at the Second Vatican Council: „Therefore, for the glory of the Virgin Mary and for Our own consolation, We proclaim the Most Blessed Mary *Mother of the Church*, that is to say of all the people of God, of the faithful as well as of the Pastors, who call her the most loving Mother. And we wish that the Mother of God should be still more honored and invoked by the entire Christian people by this most sweet title [...] We trust then, that with the Promulgation of the Constitution on the Church, sealed by the Proclamation of Mary as Mother of the Church, that is to say of all the faithful and all the Pastors, the Christian people may, with greater ardor, turn to the Holy Virgin and render to her the honor and devotion due to her”¹⁹. Some bishops applauded the Pope’s speech,

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II developed this Marian title in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*, published on March 25, on the occasion of the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, in the year 1987. Pope Benedict XVI, more christocentric than his predecessor, explained why the Roman Catholic Mariology is related to Ecclesiology, the teaching about the Church. On first sight, he argues, it may seem accidental that the Council moved Mariology into Ecclesiology. This relationship helps one to understand what the Church really is. The theologian Karl Rahner showed that Mariology was originally Ecclesiology. The Church is like Mary; see Joseph Cardinal

while the majority felt betrayed. The arguments of the majority against using the title *Mater Ecclesiae* are: it's an unknown title to the tradition of the Church of the first millennium; the title is used carefully during the medieval period; it's an additional obstacle on the path of ecumenism, particularly with the protestant traditions.

All these discussions and conciliar Mariological debates, in which René Laurentin took part, were aimed to specify the dogmatic position of the Virgin Mary in the Catholic Church: 1) the need to proclaim a new Marian dogma wasn't felt; 2) the patristic Marian tradition was rediscovered; 3) Mary is in the Church, the first on the path of the faith, the first among the disciples of Her Son; 4) Mary is the first, after Christ, who participated in the resurrection of her Son, pledge for all those who will resurrect in Christ; 5) the post-conciliar Mariology becomes more biblical.

The final text of the Mariological document, included into the dogmatic constitution about the Church, *Lumen gentium*, chapter 8, contains five parts²⁰:

1) *Introduction*: numbers 52-54. It speaks about the Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church, as occupying "a place in

Ratzinger, "Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio", Festgabe zum 75. Geburtstag, Schülerkrei Augsburg, 2002, pp. 261-324.

²⁰ In the Christian symbolical language, number 8 is the symbol of the Resurrection: by His Resurrection, Jesus Christ introduces humanity into the 8th day, the everlasting day, in the communion of The Holy Trinity: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. Introducing the Marian text into the 8th chapter about the Church, the intention of the conciliar fathers is evident: after Christ, the Virgin Mary is the first to take part in the Resurrection of her Son, premise of all who will resurrect in Christ at the end of time. Number 5 is the symbol of the virginity. The 5 chapters of the document about Mary make appeal to the *ecclesiotypical* model: Church, just like Mary, gives birth to numerous Christians into the water of the Baptism, keeping intact the virginity of the faith; see René Guénon, "La science des lettres", in, *Symboles fondamentaux de la science sacrée*, Gallimard, 1962, pp. 68-74.

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the Church”, and expresses the intention of the council not to advance a new or complete teaching regarding the Mother of God.

2) *The Role of the Blessed Mother in the Economy of Salvation*: numbers 55-59. It speaks about the Old Testament prophecies related to the Virgin Mary and about her role, in the New Testament, in Jesus’ childhood and public life, as well as after His Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, Virgin Mary being present with the Apostles in the Cenacle of Jerusalem on the day of the Pentecost.

3) *On the Blessed Virgin and the Church*: numbers 60-65. The main idea developed in these numbers is that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and men and that any salvic influence of Mary rests on Christ’s mediation. The Blessed Virgin’s Mary role in the redeeming work of men is to be obedient to Christ. Mary is the type of the Church: The Church is both virgin and mother. Mary’s virtues are exemplars for the Church. Here is the most original Marian contribution of The Second Vatican Council: Mary, in her role as Virgin and Mother, is the image of the Church in her faith, charity and perfect union with Jesus Christ; all the faithful are called to follow Mary’s example in their apostolic vocation to fulfill the mission of the Church of Christ in this world.

4) *The Cult of the Blessed Virgin in the Church*: numbers 66-67. It underlines the Christocentric character of the Marian cult. The Council also proposes some pastoral norms that concern both the maximalists and the minimalists. The cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin Mary must be fostered, but all gross exaggerations have to be avoided, especially when they prevent the dialogue with the other Christian confessions.

5) *Mary the sign of created hope and solace to the wandering people of God*: numbers 68-69. The text ends with Mary’s eschatological significance. The Christians are invited to pour forth supplications to the Mother of God until all families of people “may be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into one people of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity”.

3. The second contribution:

The criteria accepted by the Church for recognizing the apparitions of the Virgin Mary

In his publication, *Dictionnaire des apparitions*, Father René Laurentin presents the criteria accepted and used by the Church in order to officially pronounce the veracity of a new apparition:

i) **The messages:** are they consistent with or contrary to the revelation, the faith of the Church, the Christian morality? Saint Paul already sets this criterion implicitly when he says: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach [to you] a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one that you received, let that one be accursed!” (Gal 1:8-9)

ii) **The visionary’s sincerity:** is he or she credible, coherent, or rather confused, ambiguous, or even manipulator? Is his or her life balanced or shows pathological disorders? It may happen, however, that the apparitions of the Virgin Mary produce great conversions radically change the behavior of the visionaries.

iii) **The favorable signs.** According to the Gospel, there are some signs for the recognition of supernatural phenomena: physical and/or spiritual healing, heavenly signs, perfume source etc. The conversion is often a pretty convincing sign, especially if the visionary person lived before in sin and unbelief.

iv) **The spiritual fruits.** In the Gospel, Jesus draw attention, saying “In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits” (Mat 7:17-20).

However, the Church is always highly cautious when it comes to decide on a new apparition²¹. The case of the apparitions at

²¹ The numerous volumes dedicated by René Laurentin to the apparitions at

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Amsterdam was solved: the Church rejected these apparitions because many elements weren't in agreement with the above criteria. However, the case of the apparitions at Medjugorje, on which the Church hasn't yet officially expressed its point of view²², still remains open.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, Father René Laurentin remains a reference for the post-conciliar Mariology. His numerous theological, dogmatic, marian works, without taking into account the hundreds of articles published in specialized scientific journals throughout the Francophone, Anglophone and Italophone world, represent an obvious proof of his contribution to revival of Mariology on biblical and patristic grounds.

For Pope John the XXIII, the French theologian represented an important asset for the conciliar reflection on Mariology, that's why he appointed Father René as member of the preparatory commission, and later of the commission of expert theologians at the Second Vatican Council. The implementation of the conciliar decisions was an important concern of the Marian theologian.

Also, the study of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary throughout the catholic world has been of interest for him at the highest level, Fr.

Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje are aimed to underline this cautiousness of the Church regarding the Marian apparitions.

²² In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI set a commission of expert theologians under the guidance of Cardinal Camillo Ruini, for the study of "the Medjugorje phenomenon". Pope Francis, interviewed by the journalists during his jubilee pilgrimage of Fatima, on May 13, 2017, declared: "The first apparitions, which were to children, the report more or less says that these need to continue being studied, but as for presumed current apparitions, the report has its doubts. I personally am more suspicious, I prefer the Madonna as Mother, our Mother, and not a woman who's the head of an office, who every day sends a message at a certain hour. This is not the Mother of Jesus. And these presumed apparitions don't have a lot of value".

Lucian DÎNCĂ

Laurentin remaining unparalleled in this field until today. That is why I can only conclude these reflections by calling once again the testimony of one of his disciples, quoted at the beginning of this communication, Father André Cabes, the rector of the Sanctuary of Lourdes:

„What we remember about and admire in Father Laurentin is the solidness of the theologian, the seriousness of the historian, the skill of the journalist, capable to convey what he discovered after working with so much devotion. I would further like to emphasize the piety of the faithful, witness to the joy of the world to come, promised by Mary to St. Bernadette [...] Dear Father Laurentin, we pray at the cave of Lourdes for your communion with the light of our God's love, as the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus, revealed it to us. Pray that we may be here, on earth, instruments in service of the gift that God has set in us”.

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Marco Vannini, *L'AntiCRISTO. Storia e mito*. Milano: Mondadori, 2015. 208 pp.

Marco Vannini, a philosopher, was born in Saint Piero, Sieve (Florence, Italy) in 1948. He is one of the most eminent experts in Mystics and Christian Spiritual Tradition. He translated in Italian the entire German and Latin works of Meister Eckhart. Also, he studied other great mystics like Margaret Porette, Tauler, Angelus Silesius. He is the author of a large number of books; to name just a few: *Prego Dio che mi liberi di Dio* (2010), *Oltre il cristianesimo. Da Eckhart a Le Saux* (2013), *Lessico mistico* (2013), *Storia della mistica occidentale* (2015), *Contro Lutero e il falso evangelo* (2017).

L'anticristo. Storia e mito contains an introduction, 12 chapters and a conclusion. Vannini approaches the concept of *antichrist* from a philosophical and mystic point of view. The method used for understanding this concept is analytic and historic. Thus, Vannini considers different fields: religious, biblical, historical-Christian, conducting his investigation in several geographic and cultural zones.

The concept of *antichrist* preexists both Christianity and Judaism. It appears as “anti-God” or the “opponent of God” in the cosmogony of the ancient Eastern civilizations, and it is evoked as the primordial dragon, the eternal adversary of God, the power of the darkness, the opponent of light. The idea of the adversary of God is found universally in the entire mythical-religious literature. In the Bible it is called *Satan* (in the Book of Job), or *Beast*, the *Big Dragon*, the *Old Serpent*, the *Devil* (in the Book of the Apocalypse). Evil appears from the beginning of the creation till its end, but at the end the Good will triumph over the Evil.

Marco Vannini develops a historical analysis of the concept of *antichrist*, starting from the Bible up to our days, going through the

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Patristic period, the Reform, the Millenarianism, the mystics, the Russian writers, the Modernity the Islam (*Dajjal*), Nietzsche and others.

We get a clear idea who the antichrist is (or the antichrists are) from the writings of St John the Evangelist (the author of one Gospel and of three Letters in the New Testament). In the Second Letter, St John mentions: “There are many deceivers at large in the world, refuses to acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in human nature. They are the Deceiver; they are the Antichrist” (2John 1,7). In his first letter, John introduces the eschatological context of expectation, the context of the final times, and, in doing so, he speaks against those who believe in the imminent coming of Christ (*Parousia*): “Children, this is the final hour; you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and now many Antichrists have already come; from this we know that it is the final hour” (1John 2,18). John does not refer to antichrist in a time to come, an eschatological time, but in these present times. In his narration of Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman, he affirms that “the hour is coming – indeed is already here – when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4,23). Against any tie with the future, which is a tie with the world, John the Evangelist considers that it is *now* the time, the accomplished time. The apocalyptic *Parousia* refers to a time which is not accomplished yet, and consequently fails to recognize in Jesus the *Logos* sent by the Father, the Christ. Those who deny that the *Logos* is God and that He became man have the spirit of the antichrist.

St John makes a clear distinction between Christ and the Evil one, between the sons of God and the sons of the Devil, because the latter practice injustice. Christ came to destroy the Devil’s works. The Devil manifests itself as the *world*: “Do not love the world or what is in the world” (1John 2,15). The idea is even clearer in the Prologue, where John takes an explicitly opposite stand to the Jewish Bible: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1,1). The *Logos*, who was from the beginning, is Christ, who is God, and therefore not a creation at the beginning of time in the Biblical way, because the world is in the

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Logos: “Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him” (John 1,3). A doctrine which affirms that the world is outside of God, not in God, takes us inevitably to the ontological dualism: *God-world*. In this dualism we find many *aporias*, especially in our daily life, for example, when we try to explain the sense of suffering, of death, of evil around us. It introduces the idea of a God as Patron, Master even of Nothing, while man is somehow a slave, who has to obey his Master, even if it is just for some alienating promises, which are to be accomplished in a future which does not belong to him or which he cannot reach.

The concept of *antichrist*, which Vannini supports with arguments throughout this book, it is not that of Satan, the apocalyptic Beast or the Devil, who will be defeated in the eschatology, and who will take with him some prey, as his victims, fruit of his misleading capacity. Antichrist is the one who denies the *Logos*, His divinity, and therefore denies that Christ is the Light and the Truth. “The Antichrist is not the Adversary from the final battle between Good and Evil; the Antichrist has nothing to do with the apocalyptic phantasies of the final times, ... These phantasies are the fruit of misunderstanding, of a resentment, which poisoned for centuries, and continues to poison even today, those who, by ingenuity or malice, gives him (Evil) attention” (p. 185).

The antichrist in fact is the one who denies Christ and His divinity. Denying Christ’s divinity, there is no distinction between grace and nature. Nature will appear as something good, which does not need God’s grace and conversion. This is the true and perfect seduction of Antichrist. In order to understand better who Antichrist (or Antichrists) is, we have to know better who Christ is and what the Christian faith means. Only in this way we can reestablish the historical and spiritual truth, which can bring the light to those who look for it with a sincere heart.

Rev. Eugen BLAJ

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Tim Crane, *The Meaning of Belief. Religion from an Atheist's Points of View*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017, 207 p.

Tim Crane is a philosopher engaged in the study of the philosophy of mind and recently (August 2017) he joined as a professor at the Department of Philosophy at CEU. From the title of the book, that I am reviewing here, it is also evident that Tim Crane is interested in the topics that are pervading our “open societies” and very often debated in the academic institutions not only in popular media as we were used to expect, especially when the discussion focuses on religion.

From the outset I will say that the book is well written, thoughts are clearly expressed using accessible language and it is sincere and unexpectedly friendly toward believers. The book contains also much reliable data and reasonable judgments on how to evaluate religion from a philosopher point of view. Given the last years of the debate between theism and atheism this book is a lucid and warm introduction into the opposite views. In this review we will focus on a few aspects discussed in the book not exhausting the detailed and profound meditation offered by the ex-catholic believer.

The book is structured on five chapters with subtitles not mentioned in the summary founded at the beginning of the book and for this reason I will give an account of the subchapters here. The reader will find that the first chapter *Religion and the Atheist's Point of View* contains a discussion on *Atheism; Humanism*. The second chapter *The Religious Impulse* refers on *The Unseen Order; The Transcendent and Cosmological; Science and Religion*. The third chapter *Identification* discusses on *Religious Principles and Religious Practices; Ritual and Belonging; The Sacred*. The fourth chapter *Religion and Violence* with a discussion on *Atrocity; the Role of Religion in Human Conflict; Irrationality*. Chapter five entitled *The Meaning of Tolerance* contains a discussion on *Relativism and Respect; The Limits of Tolerance*. In developing his thoughts the

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author draws insights from Frederick Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, Karren Armstrong, Pascal Boyer, Thomas Nagel, Ronald Dworkin, Philip Larkin, Brian Leiter, Allan De Botton, Roger Scruton, Simon Blackburn etc.

The whole book is written from an atheistic point of view. The author defines his own atheism: “My own atheism is a consequence of my denial of the transcendent. I believe the world around us that we experience, together with the invisible world described by science, is all there is. Nothing transcends it. It follows from this that I also must believe God does not exist” (pp. 18-19). However, given the irenic spirit and specific understanding of religion and its contribution to the human history and existence, the book it is also a massive reaction to the writings of the New Atheists (and not only) such as Richard Dawkins, A.C. Grayling, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, summarized in the following conceptions about religion: “Their writings are dominated by two views: (1) that religion is largely constituted by certain cosmological beliefs, none of which are true; and (2) that the proper atheistic attitude to religion should be to use scientific evidence and philosophical arguments to remove these beliefs and, with them, the phenomenon of religion itself” (from the *Preface*, p. x). While he gives his own definition of atheism, Tim Crane explains that the two atheistic combative views mentioned above are wrong and are “literalist” and “fundamentalist” readings of religion. Firstly, argues Tim Crane, religion is more than cosmological. It is an impulse related to the sense of the transcendent. Secondly, religion is an attitude toward people and Tim Crane calls it “identification” which means “belonging to a historical tradition” with the moral element included. In the search for defining religion he finds it difficult to give a comprehensive definition. Actually he quotes Karren Armstrong which writes that “there is no single word in ancient Greek or Latin, nor in the Hebrew Bible, that we can translate as religion”. In my view this observation is exaggerated because in the *Epistle of James*, in the New Testament, we find in chapter 1 verse 27

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the word *θησκειά* which can be translated by the word “religion”. However, the author writes eventually that religion can be defined as the following: “Religion [...] is a systematic and practical attempt by human beings to find meaning in the world and their place in it, in terms of their relationship to something transcendent. This description has four essential elements: first, religion is systematic; second, it is practical; third, it is an attempt to find meaning; and fourth, it appeals to the transcendent” (p. 6). Eventually the author recognizes that with the pessimistic atheistic view of life (“pessimistic atheist” as he describes himself, p. 46) we find meaning *in* life but not the meaning *of* life (p. 41). And this meaning in life is that which we create. The author writes: “These things, and the attempts I have just mentioned, are attempts to find meaning in life; religion, as I see it, attempts to find the meaning of life as a whole”[...]” (p. 8). He also recognizes that a nihilistic view of the world is compatible with atheism and as such he is not forced to draw value from human (pp. 32-33) — while he discusses on humanism. Thus, against the simplistic characterization of the New Atheists religion is more than the belief in the supernatural and for sure it is not “magic”.

Another contribution to the discussion is that of epistemic status of the religious belief. Ordinary belief, religious belief and what philosophers call belief are all to be understood in the same way. This analysis goes beyond the simplistic view of common critics of religion and the New Atheists. The author writes that “Philosophers use the word ‘belief’ to refer to any commitment to the truth of some proposition or claim. So in this sense of the word, any opinion whatsoever—however weighty or trivial—counts as a belief (p. 14). The author writes that “On the standard philosophical conception, then, belief involves these elements: accessibility to consciousness, a connection to action, and the aim toward truth (p. 16). Also “Belief is a psychological state, a state of mind; but it is not a conscious state of mind, since no one is ever conscious of all the things that they believe at one given moment. It’s rather that when a conscious human being believes something, they are capable of bringing what they believe to

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consciousness, reflecting on it, and considering it in the light of other things they believe. (pp. 14-15). Our beliefs govern our actions and what is to be believed has a content of that belief. “Believing something is taking it to be true, and this is what matters to the believer” (p. 16). Tim Crane also writes: “Beliefs in the ordinary sense are supposed to be about something important or valuable, something meaningful that governs your whole life or being—politics, ethics, identity, or religion—hence the title of this book. However, the standard philosophical account of belief is perfectly compatible with this fact. Beliefs in the everyday sense are beliefs whose contents concern important matters about your whole life; but what makes a belief a belief is the same in every case. In particular, the features that philosophers identify as essential to belief — accessibility to consciousness, the connection to action, and the aim at truth—all apply equally to religious belief. The religious can bring their belief to consciousness, their beliefs guide their actions in complex ways, and it is incoherent to suppose that someone has a religious belief and yet has no view on whether the content of that belief is true. So philosophers are not talking about something different when they talk about belief” (p. 17).

Tim Crane has also significant things to say about what he calls “identification”. This means that religions are social institutions (p.11) with their practice and community (p. 12) all of them carry with them their social significance (p. 88). Although a human phenomenon, identification with a group is an essential element of the religious belief (p. 89). The link between religious impulse and identification is made by the idea of sacred (pp. 105-106, p. 116) and sacred objects and this is connected to the idea of what philosophers call “intentionality”, the “fact that they point beyond the mere material reality to the desired transcendent reality beyond” (p.112).

When he comes to “irrationality” Tim Crane writes that “Is it necessary that someone who believes that there is an unseen order believe it for bad reasons? If the religious belief itself is irrational by its very nature, then it would seem that it could not be held for good

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reasons. But is this true? It doesn't seem so. Someone could believe that there is an unseen order because they have carefully considered all the arguments for the opposite and have found them wanting; or because they have found some phenomena that they have very good reasons to believe are not accounted for except through the idea of an unseen order (p. 151). Of course, everything that the author writes in favour of religion he denies by other reasoning in response to what he finds in favour of religion to be true, but he works heavily to produce also a reliable religious point of view of the matters discussed. Nevertheless, he indicates that there is no necessary connection or "straightforward correlation" between irrationality and wickedness, as some New Atheists claimed that they have found in connection to religion. The author writes: "The obvious facts are that reasonable, rational, educated, and knowledgeable people can be wicked and vicious; ignorant, irrational people can be good and kind" (p. 157). The supposition from the New Atheists that ignorance is to be found in religion is gratuitously believed because the same situation if to be found in the nonbeliever camp. Actually, as Tim Crane observes there are many religious educated people: "Contrary to what some atheists think, religion does not always decline when people become more educated. The United States has the most sophisticated and well-endowed system of higher education in the world, yet religion (largely Christianity) thrives there as it does in some of the poorest parts of the world. And you still find believers among the highly educated products of American universities — even among their scientists and philosophers — as you do among those who have learned little science. The optimistic view that religion will wither away in the face of science and reason does not have the facts on its side" (pp. 191-192).

On the problem of violence the author argues that: "The idea that religion is the principal cause of the world's violence and suffering is a common theme in New Atheist writing. But it seems to me that this claim is a large exaggeration and does not survive either a careful scrutiny of the facts or a proper understanding of what makes a

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conflict religious” (p. 124). Tim Crane distinguishes two aspects of the problem: “First of all, we need to distinguish two broad (if somewhat vague) ideas. The first is the idea that like all human institutions, religious institutions and groups have throughout history been responsible for atrocities and have caused great suffering. The second is that religious institutions have been in some way uniquely responsible for the worst horrors and evils of the human race. The first idea is obviously true and the second obviously false” (pp. 124-125) and he gives an account of atheistic regimes who committed atrocities. The details of this discussion found in the book is of a very great importance and can be easily followed and the religious will find a balanced view on violence and religion answering to the question “of what it means for violence to be religious” (p. 143). Eventually, the author arrives at the discussion of “relativism” and “tolerance”. After a brief discussion on relativism he concludes that it is a non-starter (p. 172) and self-refuting in the quest for truth, knowledge and understanding. On tolerance he writes: “I have been arguing that tolerance does not require respect for the views one is tolerating. But it does go hand in hand with respect for people as autonomous individuals in this broadly Kantian sense” (pp. 179-180) and “Tolerance, then, is not about respecting the sensitivities of those with offensive opinions. I agree with those who say that we should not respect the sensibilities of those who think that someone should be killed for writing a novel or drawing a cartoon, no matter how much they may be offended by these things. We should not respect these views because they are not worthy of respect. But you can tolerate people without respecting their opinions” (p. 181) and he finds in tolerance of religion a better prospect than the “way of conversion” (p. 191) promoted by the New Atheists. Eventually, Tim Crane is of the opinion that since religion will not disappear, as the New Atheists wrongly expect, “The least we can hope for is peaceful coexistence, while the most we can hope for is a kind of dialogue between those who hold very different views of reality. A genuine dialogue of this kind will be very difficult to achieve, but the first step must be for

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each side to gain an adequate understanding of the views of the other” (p. 193).

I warmly recommend this book to theists and atheists. Theists can use Tim Crane insights and atheists will benefit from a more reasonable and sensible approach to religion to be better informed. For atheists it can become a model for reasoning with theism and for believers it can be a tool in discussing religion and atheism with non-believers from an atheistic point of view. In my own experience, I have found many atheists to be uninformed and this book is a model on how an atheist should think, meditate and write on religion. On the believers side there is nothing to shaken the epistemic status of religious and theistic belief, on the contrary an atheist who writes criticizing the major trend of the New Atheists should be welcomed and widely read. A major contribution of the book is that of the discussion on belief. Tim Crane argued convincingly that religious belief is of the same epistemic status to that of common belief and philosophical belief. This is a very important recognized common ground from which theists can begin to show to the atheists the ramification of rational and experiential status of belief (especially Christian theistic belief) by which we can make reasonable sense not only of the meaning *in* life but of the meaning *of* the human life as a whole.

Liviu DAMIAN

William Thomas WALSH, *Maica Domnului de la Fatima. Relatarea aparițiilor de la Fatima pe baza mărturiilor oculare* (“Our Lady of Fatima. An Account of the Fatima Apparitions Based on Eye Witness Testimonies”). Romanian translation by Ștefan Banea. Bucharest, Editura ARCB, 2017, 272 pp.

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It is the year of 1917. First World War is raging; international powers, and day to day life as well, are shaken to the core. Political ambitions run out of control, people fight blindly – literally –, exacerbating the conflict to a level which prompted Pope Benedict XV to lament it as the „suicide of Europe”.(cum punem ghilimelele: după system românesc „,, sau englez “ „ –dat fiind că textul e în engleză, aş zice că sist. Englez) On this murky background, an obscure village in war-free Portugal becomes the scene of events that seem to go against history. From May 13 to October 13, the Virgin Mary appears to three young children tending their flocks in an olive garden. She conveys to the children a precise message: „Man was made for Heaven. Yet, a great part of mankind is now heading right to Hell. With your prayers and sacrifices, you can change that.” The message is electrifying; from now on the three children will live just for that: to turn souls away from Hell. Growing crowds begin to gather at the apparition site; Portuguese authorities, strongly anticlerical, seek to silence the children and conduct a derogatory public campaign; Church authorities, on the other hand, overcome their initial disbelief and end up confirming the truth of the apparitions. Healings and conversions take place, people start to follow the little shepherds’ example of prayer and penance, and – supported by the fulfilment of significant prophecies – devotion to Our Lady of Fatima gradually becomes part of the collective consciousness, quickly spreading throughout the world. Nevertheless, as is often the case with such events, severe distortions and apocalyptic threats risk distorting the original message.

The American writer, William Thomas Walsh, is intrigued by the mixed echoes that reach him from across the Atlantic Ocean, some thirty years later. A professor, reputed historian and devout Catholic, Walsh decides to go to Fatima in order to study the events and form a personal opinion. With Cardinal Francis Spellman’s endorsement and the support of Lisbon’s Patriarch, Manuel Cerejeira, Walsh spends an extended time in Portugal, contacting eye witnesses and other key figures connected to the 1917 apparitions. He lives for a while in Cova da Iria (the visionaries’ native village), and has long talks with the

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three shepherds' families, as well as with people who had witnessed the miracle of the sun on October 13, 1917. He also takes part in the procession of July 12-13, 1946, a reminder of the July 13, 1917 apparitions, when the most significant revelations had been made. On that occasion, Our Lady had shown the little shepherds a vision of Hell, had announced the end of the war – but had predicted that a new war would break out soon if mankind didn't convert –, and had warned against the spreading of "Russia's errors". The children kept absolute secrecy: only in 1941, upon direct request of her Bishop of Leiria, Lucia wrote down the first two parts of the message conveyed to her on July 13, 1917. The last part, generally known as the "Third Secret of Fatima", was written by Lucia in 1943; she gave it to the same Bishop in a sealed envelope, to be sent to Pope Pius XII. The secret was made public in 2000, at the request of John Paul II.

During his stay in Portugal, Walsh gets permission to see Sister Lucia dos Santos, the only visionary still living. Now a nun, Lucia leads a cloistered life, receiving almost no visitors; yet, to the American writer she will grant an interview that lasted almost three hours. Upon his return to the U.S, William Thomas Walsh summed up his findings in a book, *Our Lady of Fatima*, which was first printed on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the apparitions, in 1947. In this book, Walsh exposes the complicated relationships between the political establishment, the Church leaders and popular piety – three social forces not always in harmony. Staying close to the facts, the author also has a fresh eye for local color, managing to convey a firm sense of the then rural atmosphere, which has since all but disappeared.

Yet – and this is one of the reasons for this review –, the very same atmosphere still lives in Catholic villages of Moldavia (northeastern Romania). This is not a paradox, but a principle in cultural diachrony: peripheral or isolated areas – like Portugal and Romania – are more conservative and, therefore, similar. In fact, a great part of the literature about Fatima in Romania is linked to the region of Moldavia and its Catholic publications, which wrote

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extensively about the apparitions up to 1948, when all religious press was declared illegal by the newly installed communist regime. After the fall of communism in 1989, religious freedom having been restored, various books about Fatima came into print; among these, the *Memoirs of Sister Lucia* (*Memoriile Sorei Lucia*, vol. I and II, translated by Iacob Gherghelucă, Editura Radical, 2001 and 2002), *Fatima și micii vizionari* (“Fatima and the Little Visionaries”) by Isidor Martincă (Editura Universității București 2010), as well as *Fecioara din Fatima* (“Our Lady of Fatima”), written by the Greek-Catholic Bishop Ioan Suciu in 1943 and republished in 2017 by the Lauretane Sisters in Oradea.

In this context, the Romanian translation of Professor Walsh’s, *Our Lady of Fatima*, is both a welcome event and a necessary restitution. In the USA, the book was reprinted several times and translated into various languages, but in the last decades copyright issues prevented its further dissemination. Thanks to the efforts of its translator, Stefan Banea, and the kind support of Chris Walsh and the other six grandchildren of William Thomas Walsh, the book is now available to Romanian readers in a centennial anniversary edition of the Fatima apparitions.

The book contains an introduction explaining the genesis of the work, nineteen chapters detailing the history of the apparitions, and a moving epilogue covering further developments up to 1935 (the beginning of the Cause for Beatification of Jacinta and Francisco Marto, the other two Fatima visionaries). The book closes with the author’s interview with Sister Lucia and a number of follow-up observations she had sent Walsh shortly before the book went to press. The Romanian translation closely respects the original text and preserves both the historic content and Walsh’s story-telling prowess.

What new things about Fatima could we find in this book, translated seventy years after its initial publication? Obviously, in those seventy years, a vast array of Fatima literature developed, films, websites – some better informed, others highly imaginative or downright manipulative... To the reader interested in the historical

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truth, Walsh's book comes as an essential contribution: eye witness evidence is presented by a serious historian who avoids exaggeration, either pious or apocalyptic. Faithful to the facts, the book provides a fleshed-out reconstruction of these apparitions and their background: a time marked by the rise to power of an anticlerical government in a deeply Christian country. Now published in Romania – a formerly communist country –, the translation of *Our Lady of Fatima* also allows Romanian readers to connect with events that have shaped their history and still touch their lives a century later.

Reviewed by Liana GEHL

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *De nu veți deveni precum acest copil*, trad. Maria Magdalena Anghelescu, Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuș, 2016, 90 p.

In 2016, the Galaxia Gutenberg Publishing House inaugurated a new collection of books dedicated to the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, the first book in the series being: *Unless you become like a little child*.

In this seven-chapter work, Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Roman Catholic theologian, tries to elucidate what the Saviour refers to when he indicates the example of being like a child, as something necessary for entering the kingdom of God (Mark 10, 15). The reason why the author engages in such an approach is an obvious one, namely, that salvation involves for a man a „way back into himself” to find „the beginning of the beginning” (p. 11). Hans Urs von Balthasar leads us towards this „backward path” towards childhood, calling for several landmarks.

First, the author helps us to see that Jesus Himself is a Child of the heavenly Father and, at the same time, He is „the Archetypal Child.” Whoever receives the children with love, receives Jesus Christ himself. Then, being a child means also to continue to be amazed at

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each other's freedom and to resist the „Adults” temptation of holding absolute control in an ultra-technological world. Being a child means having an attitude of gratitude, of thankfulness, which is „the quintessence of Jesus' attitude towards the Father” (p. 58). Moreover, being a child means recognizing the „solid fraternity” that exists in the Church, i.e. in the „space for the Christian filiation” where the sacraments ordained by Christ can be received. Also, being a child, in the theologian's view means having time, that is, not delaying the meeting with God and expecting a „free moment”. Every moment which is lived is one in the presence of God.

Last but not least, Hans Urs von Balthasar brings to light the fact that, at the feet of the cross, the Virgin Mary was instituted by her Son as a Mother-Church and even as an archetypal Church. (p.80). Consequently, each step in following Christ must take place in the Marian Church.

As is to be expected, Hans Urs von Balthasar writes with a lot of theological depth, in a cursive style, but understanding the text presupposes from the reader a familiarity with the language and theological concepts of the writer. Despite the small size of the book, it is easy to see the maturity of the Swiss theologian's thinking.

In my opinion, the book is of great help because it has the merit of engaging the concept of “child” with several cardinal theological themes: the relationship of Christ with the Father, Soteriology and Ecclesiology, with an emphasis on its sacramental dimension. In particular, it is important to remember the ecclesiological framing of the Christian concept of filiation, of spiritual regeneration. Similar ideas have been suggested by John Paul II in *The Letter to the Children* (Family Year 1994).

Constantin GHIOANĂ

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Jean Daujat, *Apostolul secolului XX. Monseniorul Ghika (The Apostle of the 20th century. Monsignor. Ghika)*, translated by Mariana Petrisor, ARCB Printing House, Bucharest, 2017, 189 p.

Jean Daujat dedicated his book on Monsignor Ghika to his wife, Sonia Hansen. They both had been the spiritual children of the Monsignor, as he was the one who engaged them and who preached on the occasion of their wedding. Sonia Hansen sketched a portrait in pencil of Monsignor Ghika in 1930, a portrait that can be seen on the front cover on the present edition.

As the author confesses in his *Foreword*, the book has “clearly determined limits”, being a “study of the type of sanctity of Monsignor Ghika, of his spiritual teaching, of his apostolic activity, of his mission in the life of the Church in the 20th century” (p. 12). However the book does not limit itself only to the spiritual profile of Blessed Vladimir Ghika, it also presents the reader with data from his life, data which Jean Daujat had at his disposal directly from the source, from his spiritual director, especially from the period he had spent in France.

In his book Jean Daujat describes Vladimir Ghika in the following way: “He was beautiful, very special, and his gestures and attitudes were always full of elegance and harmony, in the most natural manner and without any trace of artificiality. His face, was lightened by an expression that reached the depth of his interlocutors’ soul, a kind expression, tender and affectionate” (p. 18).

Jean Daujat also tells about the special gifts of Monsignor Ghika, about his rich and fine sensitivity which characterised him, about his qualities as an observer, and also about his very rich imagination; he proved to be very kind, devoted to all, and endowed with an extraordinary capacity for suffering; he was joyful and spiritual (p. 19). Moreover, the author reminds us the artistic and poetic qualities of Vladimir Ghika especially mirrored in *Les Intermèdes de Talloires*.

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Mentioning his shortcomings, Jean Daujat specifies that he lacked an aptitude for the juridic and administrative domain or for finances. Still, as it is written in a note, Vladimir Ghika administered himself the the lands at Bozieni, and in a successful way, while as regarding the financial aspect of the Sanatorium in Bucharest or the Monastery at Auberive he also proved skillful (p. 27, note 22).

We learn from this book important data about the founding of the Centre for Religious Studies with which Monsignor Ghika had connections in many ways. The Centre for Religious Studies founded by Jean Daujat in 1925 is still active. Many of its first students were also spiritual sons of Msg. Ghika (p. 11), while Jean Daujat claims that Vladimir Ghika had a decisive influence on the spiritual orientation of the Centre for Religious Studies” (p.11). Moreover, we also learn about the Establishment of St. John’s Brothers and Sisters (pp. 151-152), which owes its existence to Vladimir Ghika. This should have two branches: the House of St. John and the Family of St. John. Jean Daujat sees in the spirit of St. John that characterised Vladimir Ghika “an essential mission for that which God wants to be born and to develop within the Church in the 20th century in accordance with the needs of this century” (p. 154). By this establishment Vladimir Ghika was a precursory and an initiator of the ecclesiastical movements.

Jean Daujat’s book is extremely precious mainly with reference to the spiritual teaching of Blessed Vladimir Ghika. Jean Daujat, as a spiritual son of the Monsignor, benefited from his spiritual co-ordination, studied his writings from which he extensively quotes and offers his readers a synthesis of the key elements of the Monsignor’s spiritual teaching: the reality of God; the presence of God; unceasing prayer; that which God prefers; the liturgy of the neighbour. Vladimir Ghika nourished the conviction that God is “a real being, the most real among all beings as it is the Being existent by Itself” (p. 47). As we know from yet another book, from as early as the age of five Vladimir Ghika had a strong sense of the presence of God (Elisabeth de Miribel, *Memoria tăcerilor*, ARCB Printing House, Bucharest, 2004,

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p. 16). Jean Daujat claims that Vladimir Ghika used to “recognise the presence of God in all events” (p. 65). Jean Daujat states that Vladimir Ghika “was radiating prayer”, that “he himself was nothing but prayer” (p. 73). Besides that which God commands of advises it is important “to do whatever God prefers” (p. 99). Monsignor Ghika understood the serving of one’s neighbour “as a true liturgy, a one which he used to call *the Liturgy of the Neighbour*” (p. 100).

The text of the book is endowed with a series of clarifying notes that pertain to the editor’s edition; some of these refer to the last part of Vladimir Ghika’s life, after he settled in Romania, i.e. since 1939, a period of time less known to Jean Daujat due to the distance between them two, and also because of the war that broke immediately afterwards and of the communist persecution the victim of which Vladimir Ghika became.

The Romanian edition contains a portrait of Jean Daujat signed Luc Verly and a selective biography containing various titles of Vladimir Ghika’s writings or of writings about him. Among these, Jean Daujat’s book is the first consistent writing dedicated to Vladimir Ghika, and published two years after his death as a martyr. Pierre Gherman also wrote a short book published in the collection “*Convertis du XX^{ème} siècle*” in 1954. After Jean Daujat’s book others will follow as the one that appeared in 1961 written by Michel de Galzain, who did not personally know the Monsignor Ghika, but benefited from the documentation collected by an acquaintance who was close to Vladimir Ghika. In 1962 appears a book written by Suzanne Marie Durand, a collaborator of Monsignor Ghika from the Auberive period.

By his spiritual teaching, by his whole life dedicated to his neighbour, Vladimir Ghika was “an apostle in the service of spreading the Kingdom of Jesus Christ” (p. 133).

Iulia COJOCARIU

Book Reviews

Toby Wilkinson, (translated with an introduction by), *Writings from Ancient Egypt*, London, Penguin, 2017, 384 p.

Readers looking for fast, easy, and reliable access to relevant primary sources on ancient Egypt will be rewarded in their expectations. As for those who might be hoping for more, *i. e.*, to finally have a truly authoritative edition, they will need to keep waiting. Dr Toby Wilkinson, fellow of the famous Clare College, Cambridge, delivers in this anthology the erudition, exactness, and exquisite touch that we have been used to expect from him. The selection is vast and varied, the translations smooth and up-to-date, the critical apparatus concise and precise. I dare however say that this excellent little book will *not* be remembered as a major event in Egyptology. Over the last half a century, since Pritchard's famous 1969 third edition (which is badly out of date), no less than nine general anthologies of Egyptian texts have appeared in English, each having its specific merits: Lichtheim, Parkinson (two distinct anthologies), Foster (two distinct anthologies), Simpson, Hallo, Allen, and now Wilkinson. Comparative analysis hardly suggests that Wilkinson's be the most interesting of them. The classical advice in Egyptology remains thus timely: that reader passionate enough to search for the true meaning of Egyptian thought, and yet not passionate enough to learn Egyptian, this language so lovely in its intricacies, is kindly referred to a plurality of translations, now including Wilkinson's own.

A major event in Egyptology was, two decades ago, Professor Dreyer's monograph (*Umm el-Qaab I. Das prädynastische Königsgrab U-j und seine frühen Schriftzeugnisse*, Mainz 1998) suggesting that writing might actually have first appeared in Egypt, *ca* 3250 BC, rather than Sumer, as we have all learnt back in school. Another major event in Egyptology is unfolding, *i. e.*, in a series of studies by Professor Allen rethinking Egyptian grammar. Wilkinson discusses in his introduction both the origin of writing and Egyptian

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grammar, but never mentions in this connection Dreyer or Allen. Substantive issues also herald issues of structure, and style. Even brief excerpts of probably the most interesting Egyptian narratives (*The Tale of Sinuhe*), wisdom texts (*The Teaching for King Merikare*), and hymns (*Papyrus Leiden I. 350*) are missing from Wilkinson's anthology. And Dr Lichtheim is praised as a "giant of Egyptology" in the Acknowledgments while her monumental anthology, probably Wilkinson's main rival, is patronized as "semi-academic" in the introduction.

Despite shortcomings, Wilkinson's anthology is without doubt original: his translations are very much his own – sometimes too much perhaps. It is topical: it belongs to the trend spearheaded by, *e. g.*, Professor Parkinson, who studies Egyptian literature *qua* literature – although this is a modern rather than ancient concept, and not at all an Egyptian or a Sumerian one (in Sumerology also this trend being dominant). It is important: while in theology, for instance, or even in philosophy the essential has already been said at the beginning, in Egyptology (and Sumerology) the latest treatment of a subject can hardly be ignored since both these subdisciplines of history have been making great strides in line with our recent, better understanding of the ancient languages – and yet, even here, the latest treatment of a subject is not necessarily the best. Even a cursory inspection of Parkinson's anthology dating from two decades ago (*The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*, Oxford 1997), with which Wilkinson's own has much in common despite the obvious differences, suggests on nearly every page the superiority of the old over the new. However, it would be unfair to criticize Wilkinson for lacking those qualities that make Lichtheim or Parkinson unique, or for not taking the extensive approach of the one or the intensive approach of the other. Progress in science is probably due to a number of excellent contributions rather than to only one or two exceptional achievements. And in the rarefied atmosphere of Egyptian anthologies, any high-quality contribution, such as Wilkinson's, will always be welcome.

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However, I cannot help but regret the comparative lack of high-quality translations from Egyptian into Romanian, the native tongue of many among our readers. Professor Cihó lambasted in one of his studies the pioneering anthology edited by Constantin Daniel, *Poezia Egiptului faraonic* (București 1974); it would be interesting to learn his circumstantiated opinion concerning *Gândirea Egiptului antic în texte* (București 1975, reissued in 2008 as *Gândirea egipteană antică*), translated and edited by Daniel – and *Faraonul Kheops și vrăjitorii. Povestirile Egiptului antic* (București 1977), translated and edited by Daniel with Ion Acsan, the translator, with Ion Larian Postolache, of *Poezia Egiptului faraonic*. Until now, Cihó, our leading Egyptologist, has published a series of translations, but not (yet) any anthology comparable to Wilkinson's, despite publicly announcing seven years ago his respective intention. Romanian, this language of intelligent people, as Father Professor Dancă likes to call it, deserves that much.

Our readers must be first and foremost interested in the religious dimension of such an anthology. In this, they should be hardly disappointed. Professor Assmann aptly distinguishes “explicit theology”, discourse about divinity, structured by the rules of argumentation, from “implicit theology”, a prerequisite of every religion (“in the same way that grammar is a necessary prerequisite of every language irrespective of whether an ‘explicit’ grammar of that language exists” – *Of God and Gods. Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, Madison 2008, 13). *Lato sensu*, as implicit theology, almost all extant Egyptian texts are related to religion, which is hardly surprising in so far as religion is the core dimension, constitutive of all the other dimensions of life in ancient Egypt. *Stricto sensu* however, as explicit theology, relevant Egyptian texts are much fewer. Among them, our readers might be especially interested in those contributing a circumstantiated contrast with biblical monotheism. Rather than the majority of Egyptian polytheistic texts (where comparison turns much more complex, not to say complicated), I mean the minority Egyptian “monotheistic” trend. Three *corpora* can be usefully distinguished here: wisdom literature, the hymns to Amun, and the hymns to the

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Aten. In Wilkinson's English anthology, the hymns to Amun are missing (in contrast with some other English anthologies). In Daniel's Romanian anthologies, the hymns to the Aten are missing too – while wisdom literature is purged of its most relevant excerpts. This series of unfortunate editorial choices were obviously meant to propitiate communist censorship.

Despite this harsh editorial process, the excerpts that made it into Daniel's anthology of wisdom literature, or "ancient Egyptian thought in texts" (its title) are dense and diverse enough to offer its readers a rewarding experience that I will try to convey here by means of seven fleeting glimpses. May they invite indeed to reread Daniel's Romanian translation – and to read Wilkinson's English translation, vaster and more varied. I quote from the 2008 Romanian edition, which should be easier to find. "Nu-ți trebuie decât o clipă spre a-ți înfrâna dorința inimii" (*Sfaturile lui Ka-Gemni*, 66). "Tu trebuie să umilești pe cel care spune cuvinte rele/ Prin faptul că nu te împotrivești lui, nici faptelor sale" (*Învățătura lui Ptah-hotep*, 81). "Fă-te iubit de toată lumea de pe pământ" (*Învățătură pentru regele Meri-Ka-re*, 144). "Trupul omului este mai larg ca o șură și e plin de felurite răspunsuri; alege-ți pe cele bune și pronunță-le pe ele, în vreme ce pe cele rele ține-le încuiate în tine" (*Înțelepciunea lui Ani*, 177). "Mai bună este sărăcia acoperit de puterea zeului/ Decât bogăția într-un hambar" (*Învățăturile lui Amen-em-ope*, 198). "Cel ce folosește viața sa pentru mântuirea tatălui său e un om care posedă mântuirea sa proprie" (*Învățăturile papyrusului Insinger*, 216). "Nu există putere reală în afară de puterea zeului./ Și nu există un servitor real decât acela ce-l slujește (pe zeu)" (*ibid.*, 228).

Daniel's translations are largely imperfect. But can there ever be such a thing as a perfect translation? Certainly, such is Wilkinson's neither, despite its comparative advantage. Still, English readers are privileged enough to have access to a variety of high-quality anthologies. Romanian readers in contrast find themselves constrained to choose from among fewer, and not-so-high-quality, anthologies. They have three choices: they can learn Egyptian (an individual

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choice, the most direct but difficult), they can learn English (or German, or French; an individual choice, the easiest but facile), or they can actively support the institutional establishment of Egyptology in our country (a collective choice, by definition the most difficult, but also the most solid). The future is not ours to know. Different people will certainly make different choices. However, time and again, the worst choice seems to choose not.

Cristian POPESCU

Chronicle

Year 2017

On 26th January 2017 PhD Liviu Beriș (President of the Jewes' Association in Romania – Victims of the Holocaust) delivered the conference “Was there any hope at Auschwitz?”

On 23rd February 2017 Fr. Tarciziu Șerban, Reader PhD, held the conference “Apocaliptics, a literature of hope”.

On 28th March 2017 there took place *The Day of Open Gates*, when all those interested had the opportunity to visit the building of the faculty and to discuss on various themes in connection to the specialisations in our faculty.

On 30th March 2017 Prof. Alberto Castaldini held the conference “Hope with Etty Hillesum. The meaning of life in a world confiscated by political dictatorship”.

On 27th April 2017 Prof. Dan Cautis delivered the conference “Can we hope that one day science could discover the elixir of immortality?”

On 12th and 13th May 2017 there was the annual conference of the Romanian Section of the International Society Thomas Aquinas (SITA). The theme of the conference was “About Goodness”. There were delivered 18 presentations, the participants coming from various universities from all over the country and from abroad. We mention several titles: Wilhelm Dancă (the University of Bucharest), *The Being as Goodness, the Value and the Principle of Finality*; Gabriela Blebea Nicolae (the University of Bucharest), *Why Should Justice be an Expression of Goodness?*; Ana Petrache (the University of Bucharest), *Reading Saint Thomas Today: the Spirit or the Letter of Thomism?*; Lorena Stuparu (the Romanian Academy), *Can Goodness be a Virtue of the Modern Politician?*; Andrei Bereschi (the „Babeș-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca), *The Robust, the Fragile and the Anti-fragile in the Political Relationship Good-Evil*; Roxana Zanea

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(Université Libre de Bruxelles), *The Artist Jean Fouquet and the Princely Mecenate*.

On 18th May 2017 on the occasion of the centenary of the apparitions at Fatima there took place the conference entitled "The Messages of Fatima. Messages of Hope?" held by Fr. Prof. PhD Wilhelm Dancă.

On 13th and 14th October 2017 there was the annual conference of the Roman-Catholic Theology Faculties in Romania. The theme of the conference was "*Fatima 100. One Hundred Years from the Apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima*". On this occasion participants from various Faculties of Roman-Catholic Theology in our country held presentations, from among which we mention: Fabian Doboş (the "Al. I. Cuza" University in Iassi), *Fatima 100. Historical Aspects*; Janos Vik (the "Babes-Bolyai" University in Cluj), *Mary. An Authentic Source of Spirituality*; Wilhelm Dancă (the University in Bucharest), *The Message of Fatima and the Ideologies of Evil*; Hristofor-Tarciziu Şerban (the University in Bucharest), *Mary and the Church. Exegetical Commentary on Luke 1:26-38*; David Diosi (the "Babes-Bolyai" University in Cluj), *Mary and the Rorate Liturgy (in Transylvania). The Pilgrimage of Man from Darkness towards Light*.

On 23rd November 2017 Clotilde Armand held the conference "Christians participate in the political life. Why?".

On 14th December 2017 Antonio di Matteo, the Vice-President of "Movimento Cristiano dei Lavoratori", Italy, delivered the conference "Politics – the Highest Form of Charity. The Role of Lay Christians in the Social and Political Life of Europe".