

Father Ghelasie from Frăsinei Monastery

- The contemporary pious Avva worthy
of the *Patericon* tradition –

In the Romanian literature of the Patericon tradition, a series of writings have appeared, next to the *Romanian Patericon* assembled by Father Ioanichie Bălan, which describe the ascetic struggles of some of the spiritual fathers living in the monasteries from our country. Out of them, we distinguish the spiritual image of Father Ghelasie Gheorghe, who lived in the Frăsinei Monastery in the blessed land of the *Oltenia de sub Munte (Oltenia at the foot of the Mountain)*.

Not only through his writing, but especially through his remarkably devout living, the Pious Father Ghelasie from Frăsinei is for all of us today a model of authentic monk – soldier of Christ, with an experience of apprenticeship under the guidance and example of hermits with remarkable asceticism, our contemporaries. In his turn, Father Ghelasie has born/created many disciples to live authentically within the Romanian Monachism, which the pious Avva often referred to as Carpathian.

The worthy of remembrance Metropolitan Bishop Antonie Plămădeală emphasized that the Romanian Orthodox spiritual tradition proves to have been alive and uninterrupted over the centuries. Recent research has revealed a true vocation for spiritual accomplishment in Romanians, a calling for reaching, through local spiritual means, a type of man that is spiritually and bodily incorruptible, free from passions, fair and kind.

In the contemporary period, the abundance of writings about the Orthodox Monachism is an attempt to reveal that Monachism represents the most profound and authentic form of Orthodox living and thinking. Of course, upon close reading, just as the renowned patrologist Stylianos Papadopoulos cautioned us, we can notice that there are not many references to Monachism in the academic theology. In almost every textbook for dogmatics nowadays, in the chapter dedicated to ecclesiology there is no mention about the importance of Monachism within the ecclesial body. This lack is less felt in our Church, since we have the writings of Avva Ghelasie that prove, from a dogmatic point of view, the role of the monks within the Church, as Body of Christ.

For a number of years now, attempts have been made to delimit some typical features of Romanian Orthodoxy. The effort was rewarded through the revelation of these features in the poised image of the Romanian hermit, without the extremes of life, without its excesses which may falsify and dehumanize the human soul. Father Ghelasie's image, as an emblem Hesychast of our Romanian Church, embodies all these features. In his work, Father Ghelasie has offered proof of a living discernment and an exemplary poise.

Father Ghelasie's writings are edited by the director of the Platytera Publishing House, Florin Caragiu, himself a disciple whose obedience work from Father Ghelasie is this very editorial preoccupation. It contains Avva's words of wisdom on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Avva Ghelasie's spiritual image and harsh asceticism which arise within us the longing to follow in his footsteps on the path to the heavenly Kingdom and not to waste this priceless living treasure which the Pious Father left us as inheritance.

We bless with fatherly love the issue of this volume, *The Carpathian Patericon. Pages of Hesychasm*, in the hope that in this way Father Ghelasie's spiritual image will be made vivid in the readers' hearts and they will be able to assimilate better his teachings whose roots are buried deep in the Hesychast tradition of the Orthodox Church.

VARSANUFIE
Archbishop of Râmnic

November 8, 2017,
The Synod of the Saint Archangels Michael and Gabriel
and all the Heavenly Hosts

About Avva Ghelasie

-editor's preface-

The Pious Ghelasie is a luminous figure of the Carpathian Hesychasm, which seems to have sprung straight from the pages of Patericon. There are pages and pages of Carpathian Patericon created in the very place blessed by Saint Calinic from Cernica, at the holy Frăsinei Monastery. With the passing of the time, Father Ghelasie's *spiritualized* stature is being brought into greater relief by the revelation of the saintliness which rested upon his life, his face, in his gestures. The fragments of experience and contemplation evoked by hierarchs, priests, monks and simple Christians who met him reveal all the characteristics that make up an authentic life of *spiritualized* experience and assumed askesis, the image a man who greets us in person from beyond the threshold of this world, out of the godly light which he had been experiencing in the state of ceaseless prayer and prostration.

Through this experience of the godly seeing, the Saints receive the revelation of man's heart, so that the Holy Trinity's love itself works within them towards the alleviation of the suffering of the world, towards the awakening of our consciousness to a joy beyond all the oppression of an irrevocably death approaching life. Following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Saviour, Father Ghelasie has borne the cross of this world with unimaginable patience, kindness and love, melting life's contrasts into the colours of a soulful icon caressed by the rays of grace.

Avva Ghelasie seemed to step out of a world to come, like a parent coming to greet his prodigal sons. For him, the mystery of man's unification with God is the defining calling and essential challenge of created life. He dedicated himself with all his being to the revelation of this mystery and in equal measure to inscribing it deep into people's consciousness. In his writings, he enhanced an iconic perspective upon the mystery of God's embodiment to the attainment of a clear vision of the world immersed in the icon of the divine love. It is as if he had wanted to save the entire world from within its inscrutable depth.

For Father Ghelasie, *spiritualized* life in its entirety is the fruition of God's gift inscribed upon the human being through the signet of the divine image, a fruition brought to fulfillment through the sacraments-mysteries of the Church, culminating with the divine Eucharist. The Hesychasm occurs here in its true dimension and comprehension as an expression of the liturgical transformation of man's life in the perspective of the eschatological reality made possible by Christ's Resurrection.

Only through an iconic perspective and in the liturgical orientation of the Church are we able to see all the way through to the last consequences how, from Christ, *each well-built and well-accomplished body, through all the joints and ligaments that give him strength, takes part in the fulfillment of his growth, to the measure of the work weighed for each out of his limbs, and builds himself onto love* (Efes. 4. 16).

Father Ghelasie came close to the people who sought him from a sense of genuine longing for their salvation by listening to their cares, sensing their personal and intimate need for change and for fulfillment, and also by finding surprising solutions to pull them out of crisis, sensitizing them towards the mystery of the life which lies ahead.

Nature itself acquires, in Father Ghelasie's iconic view, the colourful reflections taken by the expectation of the *revelation of the sons of God* (Rom. 8, 19), impressing us with its longing sigh for the deliverance *from the bondage of decay* (Rom. 8, 21), in the hope of the participation to *the freedom and glory of the sons of god* (idem).

The Father's care and attention comprised everything, pursuing God's oikonomia, with true self-commitment. Avva was completely alien to adversity and resentment, condescension or, on the contrary, to frustration, to aggression or to barricaded defensive attacks, to infatuation,

ignorance or indifference which so often block any communication. With him every knot was untangled through a candid and penetrating look guided by a deep understanding of human weaknesses, but also by the discernment which managed to pull souls out of hell, simply because his words sowed a *corner of heaven* in every heart.

Having known such a person, one cannot even be sad after his death, because, in the words of Archimandrite Neoniil the abbot of the Frăsinei Monastery, after his departure to eternity, Father Ghelasie *lives!*

The texts put forward are mainly taken from four volumes issued at the Platytera Publishing House: ***, *Father Ghelasie from Frăsinei, the Iconar¹ of God's Love*, Platytera Publishing House, Bucharest 2004; ***, *Ghelasie the Hesychast, Lover of God*, Platytera Publishing House, Bucharest 2004; Florin Caragiu, *The Pious Ghelasie the Hesychast*, Platytera Publishing House, Bucharest 2004; ***, *Avva Ghelasie, God's Orator*, Platytera Publishing House, Bucharest 2005. We have considered it proper, in the Patericon spirit and tradition, in most of the cases, not to indicate in the text the name of the authors of the respective fragments, which can otherwise be found in the above mentioned volumes by anyone interested.

We gratefully thank all those people who offered their good testimony and we pray that God may remember them in His kingdom, so that their account might bear manifold fruition with Father Ghelasie's prayers.

From the wealth of testimonies we have gathered, we have made a selection which, of course, may be enriched upon a future edition.

Florin Caragiu

¹ *Iconar* means, in the present text, not someone who paints icons but someone who ascribes an essential role to the icon in worshipping and in prayer, a typical feature of the Carpathian Hesychasm as we shall see below. (TN)