CARPATHIAN SPIRITUALITY

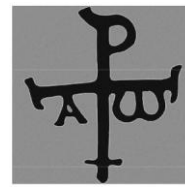
Cover design: Neofit & Calinic
Layout: Carmen Olaru

This volume contains the transcription and processing of the conversation-recordings between I. Misailescu and Neofit the hieromonk.
Rm. Vâlcea - Glimboca / 18. IX. 2021- 18.X. 2021

The CIP description of the National Library of Romania
NEOFIT, the hieromonk
Carpathian spirituality: conversations / I. Misailescu, Neofit. - Sânbotin: Chipul Iconic [the Iconic Image], 2022-3 vol.
ISBN 978-606-95520-1-8
Vol. 1 : About paternity. - 2022. - ISBN 978-606-95520-2-5

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CARPATHIAN
SPIRITUALITY



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About
paternity

I.MISAILESCU • NEOFIT

conversations

CHIPUI
ICONIC
SANBOTIN
2022

To the confessors of the Carpathian hesychasm

(I)

Ion Misailescu: The theme of spiritual paternity and the way it is shaped in relation to some specific Christian visions, has interested you. The volume *Spiritual Movements in Orthodoxy* begins with a significant, paradigmatic text by Fr. Stăniloae: *"Throughout the history of Orthodoxy we observe not only the personal differences - of temperament and interests - between a saint and another saint, but also the differences between the various spiritual movements, without this making one [spiritual movement] less Orthodox than the other, but all rendering - in different forms, that complement each other symphonically - the same background of evangelical spirituality and all leading, in slightly different ways, to the same goal, that perfection of man, through the cleansing of the passions and union with God."*

Why would it be important to know the different spiritual movements in Orthodoxy?

Neofit: Simply put, because they exist. Their actual existence also shows us a non-uniform work of God. In a way, it also has to do with the revelation of Orthodoxy in its concrete manifestations, with its recognition, and, ultimately, with our recognition, each and every one of us. Certainly, we can detect spiritual filiations, kinship and spiritual influences through which we can understand and orient ourselves and others in a better and more appropriate way. Then, having, for example, a more concrete and clearer understanding of the Carpathian Hesychasm tradition, through comparative distinctions, we can re-find ourselves and settle—*why not*? – more fully in a[n] "[at] home", valorizing and potentiating the "spirit of the place".

The volume, published in 2013, is dedicated to Fr. Ghelasie from Frăsinei, ten years after his passing to eternity. It also has a subtitle: *specificities / personalizations* - because, apropos of the specific movements, we must also grasp their specific character, but, at the same time, we must highlight the personal image of some of the spiritual fathers who have marked and shaped them through the extent and scale of their

work. Through their iconic presence, these spiritual fathers have left a mark which could generate and drive a spiritual movement.

In fact, it is but an imprint and a mark of likeness, a birth and re-birth of filiation, in relation to a spiritual paternity. The term (spiritual) "movement" is used by Father Stăniloae. Father Ghelasie insists more upon the term of character or specificity, whether Carpathian, Athonite, Slavic or Sinaitic. There are also newer works and presentations with regard to the Syriac or Georgian specificity.

With regard to what Father Ghelasie mentions - about a more concrete identification of the hesychasm through its paradoxical placement in the context of the other mystic traditions - the need to know the spiritual movements is given by the fact that it opens the possibility and the opportunity to identify yourself (as well) and to get to re-know yourself better. You can define yourself clearer and delve deeper into the mystery of your own spiritual image. And, from this point of view, spiritual movements are to be known.

It is no coincidence that I chose this quote from Father Stăniloae in the preamble. I wanted to point out, using the argument of the authority of the Great Theologian, and rhetorically, persuasively, of course, that these spiritual movements exist. They are not inventions. They are realities to be grasped. Of course, if we do not see them, if we do not receive them, we can be poorer. However, the risk of not taking into account such spiritual movements is not just one of lessening. Sometimes, there is also a risk of confusion, of forcing and straining, of unnatural transformation through the inappropriate engraftment of patterns typical of movements from other areas.

On the other hand, knowing them allows us to better define and develop ourselves, both practically and experientially, personally and communally. By knowing them, we can become aware of the vectors specific to a model or a paradigm that directs us to a spiritual forming or to a certain *iconing* - to use a well-established Ghelasian term, related to the Carpathian specificity, also designated and characterized by Hesychast as "iconic."

Father Stăniloae writes that these [spiritual] movements are complementary - since, together, they round out a panoramic vision of Christian life and spiritual experience - and pursue the same goal, namely the union with God and the perfection of man. To some extent, they differ in their beginnings and in certain steps to be taken. However, "in slightly different ways" or "in slightly different forms", they recount the same evangelical background. Today, the context is an attractive one, because there are many translations, editions and publications. We can say that we have access, to a large extent, to the Christian spirituality as a whole. The possibility of having an overall picture, of synthesizing and making comparisons is greater today than in the past. And, from this perspective, it is an opportunity to observe such [spiritual] movements which - once identified, recognized, positioned - can in turn help us to rediscover ourselves better in our very nature.

I repeat, it is also a challenge of the moment, due to the fact that we have the possibility of grasping this polymorphous chromaticism of Christianity. And here, of course, I am referring not to the many heterodox aspects, but to the polymorphism found within Orthodoxy itself. There are certain differences to be taken into account. If we do not take them into account, we may "fall" into a uniform, flat view of the Orthodoxy. Which I do not consider to be an appropriate, useful vision [approach]. And it is neither real, nor true. It is not an authentic vision. However, if there is varied terrain, if there are peaks in Orthodoxy, why not make the most of them in their data? After all, this varied terrain also expresses God's multi-shaped work, which happens and is reflected also through these specific characters or spiritual movements.

The term "movement" can have both an aerial and an aquatic, oceanic meaning. It can also have an artistic, cultural, but also a spiritual meaning wherein, the people - who have certain affinities and kinship, even a certain spiritual paternity and filiation, subtended by a certain specific or spiritual character - are involved, in the form of a [spiritual] movement. These movements are connected - as Father Stăniloae

mentions - also with differences of temperament and preoccupation, as from man to man the different gifts and talents, do differ. The same is true with regard to each person's education and the native information upon which this common evangelical background [foundation] is built, grows, and fruits.

I do believe that the present times also require us to look at these differences, in more detail. For me, they are but a personal preoccupation as they offer me, I think, the possibility of a finer, clearer sieving of the spiritual reality, when I focus not only on the spiritual personality, but also manage to see the typology or model, the specific formative structure that it proposes. Undoubtedly, the fact that Father Stăniloae drew attention to these specific details - which, I reiterate, should not give rise to contradictions - is to be taken into account. Not everyone has such a preoccupation. You can remain loyal to a particular formative model without knowing that there is another equally valid one. You may not realize that by what you do and how you do it – with regard to your commitment as Christian spiritual experience - you are in fact subject to a specific formative model, which you consider to be a generic Christian model.

It is also no coincidence that Father Stăniloae has outlined the identifying features of certain spiritual movements within Orthodoxy, and has captured the characteristics of the Romanian hesychasm. It is not without reason that Father Ghelasie has highlighted the Carpathian or the iconic specificity, as he called it. So, these are characteristics that have been observed [noted] by two great, contemporary spiritual persons. I do not know whether in other areas of Orthodoxy, there are such preoccupations for nuances of this kind. I found it remarkable that Father Stăniloae, who is a great theologian of the universal Orthodoxy and in particular of the Romanian Orthodox Church, has identified these features and has spoken about them. In the same way, Father Ghelasie, a spiritual person, penetrating mystic, hesychast mystagogue, has identified details with regard to the specific and has also presented them comparatively, both as vision and as experiential practice.

It remains for those who have an affinity to such approaches to deepen them, to lay them bare. Otherwise, of course, everyone can orient themselves as they see fit. However, I believe that it is necessary to recognize these movements, precisely because they make it possible to grasp the characteristics of certain formative models and, ultimately, a more profound settling in the tradition's living presence, by overcoming some rigid, unilateral tendencies which have a standardizing and generalizing effect. The equilibrium and harmony of the personal and interpersonal living are easier to achieve if you do find the points of support that are most similar to your way of being, the reference points that are most in tune with your nature. Thus, spirituality, in its practical and experiential sense, does not appear as a generic or alien implant, but in relation to a way of being, within a "spirit of the place", to use this expression.

I.M.: Does the "what you do, makes you" expressed by Father Teofil Părăian apply all the more to this area, let's say, of spiritual movements? In other words, in Orthodoxy, each one of us grows - as a "child of God" - by being formed in the manner of the spiritual movement to which his/her spiritual father belongs?

N.: Yes, it is a "making [creation] that makes you", but here we emphasize the one paradigmatically oriented by a spiritual movement, as a settling in a wider spiritual kinship and heritage, but also by the accents of some personal models, as a direct paternity. They are also milestones of this making, didactic in a way, from the perspective of presentation and communication, as proper tradition. These can be analyzed as such. It is inevitable that the making will bear stylistic, personalized marks.

The question is whether each of us is aware of or if we associate a spiritual father with the paradigmatic reference points that he has assimilated and which he transfers as legacy, thus becoming formative reference points for his followers. Therefore, it matters if these reference points are read also from the perspective of a spiritual specific of a spiritual movement, to use the term you have evoked through Father Stăniloae's text. Thus, there is no doubt that what you

do makes you. This is why it is also important how you do what you do, and the way in which you do it, so that subsequently what you do will make you. There is also a vision with regard to this making that makes you.

For Avva Gelasie, the hesychasm is sustained or vectorized by an hesychast vision. It is not a mere hesychast practice, a mere skill, but a practice subsumed in a hesychast vision, a perspective, let's say, on Christian life in its entirety. And from this point of view, of course that at some point, whether we like it or not, we are influenced or shaped by the "making that makes us" and by a vision. Whether we are aware or perhaps not aware of this influence of the vision is another matter. It may just be one point in our spiritual journey. Or maybe we are in a space of interference, where we are not clear enough about what and how. Or we have assimilated reference points from one [spiritual] movement and from another, which coexist more or less, or maybe we are the ones who create a new synthesis, give birth to another movement. Well, who can do this. I do not consider myself capable of such a creation.

However, the present discussion tries to, somehow, bring into focus these specific [spiritual] movements. In fact, it wants to draw attention to the fact that they do exist. And, if we are convinced that they do exist, then let us try a double reading: as specific and as personalization, like the subtitle of the aforementioned volume. There are spiritual movements that denote a striking specificity or a paradigmatic model characteristic, but there also are persons or personalities who assume this specific model in a certain way and transfer it upon the others, according to their capacity and gifts. Of course, not everyone has the capacity to actualize, to grow a legacy. For these are not neo-forms, precisely because they are not simple projections, but actualizations and multiplications of the talents relating to a heritage. In fact, Father Ghelasie avoids using the term hesychast neo-forms or neo- hesychasm.

It is interesting to read the personalist reading of the hesychast with regard to St. Basil the Great, St. Pachomius the Great or St. Theodore the Studite, who created, through the "monastic rules", a kind of extension of a content of their own.

Id est, they somehow transposed and personalized, through these "rules", a way of seeing [perceiving] the monastic image. In such a kind of practice, there is the image of transposition, of the manifestation of a personalized act. And I do believe that, from this point of view, even nowadays – as the theology and anthropology keep talking about the person, both in the divine and in the human sense - there is a need for a personal and personalistic assumption, as integral personality, of the spiritual life. Particularly today, when there is a tendency, in society, towards uniformization, fading and even annihilation of the personal character of man, mysticism must promote it.

Christian spirituality, in particular, should come and support this personalism, discovering the identity of the person's image and the potential to be image in the likeness of God. Here in the movement from image to likeness, the identification of the personalistic support is a fundamental one. In fact, at Father Stăniloae, both the personalism and the inter-personal are strongly present, as openness and mystical communion between man and God, as an encounter between people who reveal themselves as mysteries. In the same way, also at Father Ghelasie, this personalist foundation of presence and living, of the Christian life in fact, is emphasized - even as hesychast mystic. Which also reveals a consistent image of our commitment as persons. That is why - whether we realize or not that we are also tributary to a specificity - we must note that some of the great spiritual fathers have highlighted certain characteristics. Which is a plus for us, I think. And this specific personalist perspective can help us, not only theoretically but also practically. We can be clearer and more plenary, from this point of view.

I.M.: Father Dan Popovici observes, and I quote: "For example, the Syriac monasticism excels very much in a certain ascetic rigor. It is not by chance that those so-called extremely radical ascetic phenomena, such as, for example, the asceticism of the pillar-dwellers, have appeared there".

Father Vlasie from Frăsinei said that for the Russians, the "madness for Christ" is a very widespread form of Orthodox living. At the same time, Father Vlasie also evokes from the *Sinaitic Patericon*, a [spiritual] person who, I quote: "prayed in a

very strange manner. He had two vessels and some pebbles. And - for every good thought - he would put a pebble in a bowl, and - for every bad thought - he would put a pebble in the other bowl. And this was his mystic(ism)". After a few more examples, Father Vlasie concluded: "So, why should we marvel so much at the Carpathian specific, the Carpathian mystic(ism), the iconic practice, that it is I don't know how, when Orthodoxy is full of all kinds of [spiritual] experiences and forms."

Another example - which seems to me to be worth mentioning - is St. Paul's observation - in *the First Epistle to the Corinthians* - about the ancient Jews and Greeks: "The Jews ask for signs, but the Hellenists seek wisdom".

Do these characteristics - specific to the spiritual movement to which we belong - guide and shape us even without our even realizing it?

N.: These are the characteristics that impact [influence] us. The question is whether we do read [observe] these specific differences, whether we are aware of them, whether we assume them and even develop them as meeting boundaries. From what you have mentioned, both Father Dan and Father Vlasie, give pertinent examples of such forms of living with accents of "specificity", of a certain orientation, which we certainly do not find in our country. In the tradition of the Romanian or Carpathian space, we don't find pillar-dwellers, of the Syriac type, or madmen for Christ, under the form assumed in the Russian or Slavic type. Which does not mean that these types are not valid. We are talking about real saints, mentioned in the Synaxarion, who had lived like this.

It is an extraordinary fact that there are such forms of living because it shows us the divine ampleness that allows this space of personal assumption of an act of living and giving. One wanted to sit on a pillar and from there he explored his spiritual experience, and God received his self-offering [sacrifice] and sacrifice under that particular form and worked in that way also through him. Another one becomes an extreme paradox through this madness for Christ, that can permanently vex the others with a certain attitudinal harshness and provocative actions, defying not only the rule

but also the normality. And thus, God allows him, too, the space to manifest and assume a spiritual life, under this form. Which, in turn, so to speak, can certify that there is freedom in assuming one's personal way of life and one's own mode of self-offering [sacrifice] and sacrifice. There is a personal authenticity and a personal style in which we can and must grow our encounter with God.

These examples may be one more argument that in the ecclesiological environment, (with)in the Orthodox Christian space, there is no standardization of the ways of self-offering, of the forms of response [answer], of commitment to this path - as Father Stăniloae wrote in the quote you mentioned - of cleansing from sins and uniting with God. In fact, that is the goal. But look, one chooses one path, another chooses another [path]. There is no single, standard recipe. They differ, as Father Stăniloae says, not only in their preoccupations, temperament or personal character, but even in the way they walk and set out on the Path. They differ in a certain specific way of following this path, [path] to which we are all called, namely, cleansing our passions and perfect union with Christ.

With regard to the question, obviously we are pre-oriented and formed also by a certain vision, which the spiritual father, the priest or the shepherd of souls somehow assumes - whether he wants to or not. [He] assimilates a certain spiritual forming [shaping] which is reflected in a particular way of shaping others spiritually, in his turn. He transfers this formative mode to the others. The individualized guidance, the particularized, situational, contextual advice, are personalized and subscribe to a vision of the spiritual life, as assimilated by the believer, as assumed by the spiritual father, confessor.

For example, at Frăsinei, you could talk to, you could get [spiritual] counseling from Father Lavrentie, who was a great spiritual father, or from Father Ghelasie. There were other fathers in the early '90s when I arrived there. There was Father Paisie, Father Ioanichie or Father Inochentie. But you could see these differences of approach, even within the mystery of confession. And, of course, you could also explain, in a personalist sense, the way each of them answered your

questions or guided and shaped you, upon certain vectors or certain formative frameworks. Their personality was inevitably also in the wake of or in the bed of a formative specificity. This matters too, at least for me it does.

Father Ghelasie really was concerned with these specific characteristics which he emphasized [highlighted] in a personalist sense. They are not just distinctions *for the sake of being [distinctions]*, but, indeed, I do think that they give you the reference points of a more favorable, more natural environment of finding yourself, but also of growth, of development in the same way, that is, more organically. At least that is how I perceived it. There are aspects that make it easier to re-find and restore oneself. Of course, by following a deeper path, that of cleansing of passions, and by pursuing a goal, that of deification [Theosis], which, after all, is not so at hand, for us.

I.M.: Father Ghelasie says that there are two main aspects that determine the formation of a particular spiritual movement. The first one is the heritage - preserved by each people - from the primordial memory of Heaven. The second one is the natural setting of each people (i.e. its geography).

Here are some characteristic touches - of several spiritual movements within the Orthodoxy - sketched by Father Ghelasie:

- the *Egyptian specific(ity)* is characterized by drastic asceticism [askesis] and the ideal of ascent to God;
- the *Athonite specific(ity)* is characterized by contemplation, the search for the divine principles, continuation of Greek philosophy;
- the *Slavic specific(ity)* is marked by a dramatism of the battle with the evil spirits, a descent of the light into darkness;
- the *Carpathian specific(ity)* is distinguished by the search for harmony between soul and body, by the discovery of the soul as existence-essence, as memory of permanence; in addition, there is a significant contribution of the natural environment, which arises from the relationship between man and the cosmos,

marked by the understanding of the human image as priest who serves-liturgizes in(side) the creation, which makes man's encounter with the cosmos not a metaphysical-contemplative one, but one of communion-transfiguration.

What more could be said on this theme?

N.: Of course, these characteristics are perhaps too general or too succinctly sketched. But they can be identified as vectors, if one wishes to pay attention to them, as an orientation. This memory of Heaven, preserved in a certain historicity, is also worth considering. After the fall, each people is left with a certain memory of its own, with a memory of the spiritual, as much of it as is left, mixed up in the conditions of the fall. Christianity brings forth a full rebirth of man. Only that the Christian rebirth, in the Eastern sense, is not but a mere overlapping of grace, it is not a supra-added grace. It is not a juxtaposition, but it also involves a restoration and a transfiguration, but of a given, which somehow exists in a pre-orientation, so to speak, as a graft-carrier of a certain kind. In this sense, some seek a direct spiritual or have a metaphysical approach through which they attempt a kind of transcendence into a beyond, by going beyond the mundane and the material. They seek the soul at the expense of the body, heaven at the expense of earth.

Inside the Carpathian character, Avva Gelasie speaks of an "iconic" specific(ity) that denotes a kind of integrative relationship between heaven and earth, a kind of cohabitation of spirit and matter, soul and body. A specific(ity) that does not imply a contradictory relationship with the environment, not even in relation to the evil. It is not a position of tense, polarized contrast. The iconic would be linked to this integrative coexistence, to this non-confrontational participation. And, from this point of view, the iconic is a form or preform of harmonization, of integration. It is a predisposition of not "thinking" in terms of contrary duality or contradiction between spirit and matter, between man and nature. This relationship also results from a background - from what is left of this primordial memory – because, obviously, Christianity grafts itself onto something. It comes

upon a given. It does not come from nothing.

Christianity fulfills and transfigures, but still transfigures a *something*, a *given*. There are also certain characteristics, certain specific data, just as there are at the individual level. Father Stăniloae pointed out, during the interwar period, that there are distinctions also between the apostles as type of personality, as type of answer, as are those between St. Peter and St. Paul. There are data, characteristics, of personal and community differentiation, even though they do serve the same Spirit, the same God, and confess the same Truth. We must beware of a uniform approach which annuls reality in its diversity.

The word of the apostle, that in Christ there is no longer Jew, there is no longer Hellenist, there is no longer male or female, is not to be interpreted as annulling the Jewish character or the Hellenist character, but as transfiguring and fulfilling these characters. For then, if you follow the idea that there is no longer male and female in Christ, what are you doing? What are you getting at? However, we objectively see, in the Synaxarion, that there are saints who are male and saints who are female.

Therefore, there is a cleansing, a restoration and a transfiguration of the real, existential given, not a canceling of it. Christianity is not a transcendence into a... universal, undetermined spirit... It is not like oil floating on water. It is a spirituality that penetrates something, that manifests itself. Then there is also the transfiguration, there is also the deification [Theosis]. Man is penetrated by God, he is not just annexed, glued, juxtaposed. But, even as modality, as I was saying, God allowed both the one who climbed up a pillar and also the one who went preaching to the end of the earth, to give glory to Him. There are various forms of living and confessing one's faith. There are gifts given and different [spiritual] works, and it is good to see this differentiation as well, but in a unity of a joint-work.

As opposed to the tendency to ascend towards Heaven, in(side) the Carpathian specific(ity), we rather have the sense of a descent, of a manifestation of the Heaven. It is not so much an ascensional perspective as a perspective of descent,

of the manifestation of Heaven on earth. Nor is there a dual-contrast relationship [kinship] between Heaven and earth, one of contrast. There is a relationship between earth and Heaven, which the iconic perspective reveals. Paradigmatically, the creation has an iconic image. It is imprinted, it is created by the Word-Person. Man in particular has this word-person image. The whole creation has this filiative [i.e. from the word *filiation*] - iconic relationship with God, through the creative act, especially man, being explicitly created in the image and likeness of God. From this perspective, there is no estrangement between Heaven and Earth, between Creator and creation, but a kinship, a likeness. Thus, the great mystery of Christianity is the mystery of the embodiment [incarnation] and of the deification [Theosis], (and) of our resurrection with the body itself, revealed Christically-filiatively.

As such, the mystic(al) living unfolds in the sense of the transfiguration of the earth through the embodiment [manifestation] of Heaven. This is one aspect, that of the Heaven descending to earth. Another aspect, with regard to this primordial memory, as it is identified in this space, is related to man's relationship with nature. We are talking about a liturgical, relational aspect with the cosmos. A relationship that transfigures the cosmos. But somehow associated with the primordial memory, preserved after the fall. It is also a reflection of it, through its anthropological image, in the way in which man is understood, through the image of his existential-essential soul, in the way in which his relationship with nature is understood. The iconic character also includes the relationship with the environment. And there is no doubt that it is one thing to live in a sandy, torrid environment, with temperature contrasts from day to night, as in the area of Egypt or Sinai, and quite another to live in a natural environment, full of life, close to Heaven, as Father Ghelasie says. In a cradle of nature, you recharge yourself, you recover, you rest because there you are aware of God's presence through nature, received and assumed by man, as a gift from Him.

Father Ghelasie asserts that these desert-like spaces also reflect a kind of withdrawal of the Word (and of the Spirit, the Life-Maker). Hence the connotation of the wasteland as desolation proper, for nature also signifies a plasticization of the divine reasoning and a living logosic [i.e. from the word logos λόγος] presence of this kind. The fact that you have a rich natural environment, even diverse in forms of relief, allows another kind of relationship. And, thinking in the sense that we have a direct, unmediated encounter, but also a mediated one with God, then nature also has a sense of being included - as Father Stăniloae mentions - in man's dialog with God, even in a liturgical form of self-sacrifice – oblation - giving: "Thine of Thine, we offer all things to Thee, and for all things". From this point of view, the natural environment as a means of self-sacrifice is a plus. Moreover, over time, nature

also acquires a human imprint, it becomes personalized or iconized. In other words, in the Romanian space there is also a humanization of the cosmos. It is an imprinting given by man's personal presence and by the inter-personal communion. However, man is a wreath and crown of creation, and in a kind of extension in a cosmic liturgy - apropos of St. Maxim the Confessor - the cosmos takes on a certain transfigurative garment.

But, in a reciprocal sense, even the cosmos sustains, supports, man differently, when present in a living and varied form. Then, the relationship between man and cosmos is a relationship which gives a certain image also to the settling in a spiritual or sacred life. I cannot behave in contrast to the environment. We are thus speaking of a hermitage of the forest, as the hesychast would call it, where you also have the ambience of the garden, near a low foothill and at heaven's doorsill, of the stones and springs, plants, flowers and fruit, of the animals and birds. An ambience [surroundings] that is not "all the same" as a hermitage in a hot, sandy and stony area. This cosmic ambience somehow reflects another doxological type. The relationship with God mediated through the cosmos is obviously a plus. This natural cradle of the forest, this kinship with nature, or the awareness of this kinship, does not remain without impact in the spiritual life. You can thus understand that the hermitage of the mountain and water, or the hermitage of the forest in which you have a spring, shade, breeze, a strawberry, a raspberry, a blackberry, is not the same as the hermitage from a stony, sandy area – an area from which the Word seems to have drawn away, leaving - out of the forms of creation – but sand... dust and dirt.

We see aspects characteristic of the Carpathian model. Those related to the humanity of the existential-essential soul, to an iconization and not a mentalization of the world, as a settling of the man, as attitude. But also those related to nature, which are not to be neglected in terms of what it means to have an impact on the spiritual life as a whole. Father Ghelasie also outlined this aspect of the humanization of the cosmos. Father Stăniloae wrote in an extraordinary way about man's relationship with the cosmos and the imprinting

of man's image in the cosmos. And Father Teofil [Theophilus] once recalled the saying of the elders, that in the wheat lies Christ's cheek.

This participation of the man is more complex, participation where you not only have a "one on one" relationship with God, and, of course, in subsidiary, the unseen war with evil spirits, but you also have this encounter through nature, which is also a gift from God, to man. And it is this gift that we must return to God, the first, the first Giver, in a liturgizing way: "Thine are Thine from Thine". You must (also) care for nature, as a brother. Do not exploit it strictly utilitarianly. You must also have a liturgical or sanctifying involvement. Not only must you not destroy it, not only must you protect it, but you must also participate in a liturgical sense, assuming the work of sanctifying the cosmos.

From this point of view, the Slavic dramatism of the battle with evil spirits and the tension between light and darkness, up to a contrast of grimness, is not well suited for the Carpathian space, that is perceived as "heaven's doorsill". And, from this perspective, it is relevant what the hesychast says about the Carpathian specificity as iconic, proposing a type of integrative relationship through the image of the existential-essential soul, which "takes you out" of the area of contrast, of the tension between light and darkness, of this "side by side" war with the evil spirits... This does not mean that there is no fighting from the evil spirits, but this bellicose tension is not the actual spiritual work.

In the iconic specific there is another image of reporting and another attitude towards evil. There is also the integrative relationship between the soul and the body, that must be taken into consideration, must be assumed, from the beginning. Thus, not just pursued as an ultimate goal. What is important, as a settling, as an attitude to cover. So, from the very beginning you are looking for this integrative settling and not for a tenacious positioning in this bellicose contrast. This settling in(to) the specific iconic can take you out of a certain tension of the conflictual relationship, because it urges you to find formulas for living in non-contrary ways. If you consider that you are part of a contradiction, a conflict, you can

certainly walk on the fault line of an inner war by entering into this form of battle.

This way of being as iconization seems to me to be appropriate for us, as people living in this humane space of the "heaven's doorsill". At the same time, the iconic character is more silent in relation to the aim pursued, which is both cleansing of passions and union with God as Theosis. This also has to do with our native and inherited data, but also, as Father Stăniloae said, with the differences sometimes only of the beginning and of the small specific path. But the beginning, in these Ghelasian terms, from the very beginning has to do with a non-contrariness between spirit and matter, between man and cosmos, even between man and the forces of evil.

Father Ghelasie says that we must realize, as people who confess to be Christians, that in Christ we are also offered a power to neutralize evil, in the sense of overcoming it, not annihilating it. Because evil is not to be thought of, identified, after all, as an absolute pole of the divine good. The evil is a fall into the bosom of creation, which, although it might perhaps claim to be another absolute, is not. It belongs to the creation. Nor to the creation in its essence, because it does not belong to the nature of creation.

Thus, on the one hand, we must not absolutize it, because in doing so we are somehow playing into its hands, we are giving it satisfaction. And on the other hand, it is good to know that the evil in us, as much and as it is, must be neutralized as memory, by leaving our subjugated [i.e. subjugated, enslaved by the passions] partaking with it. We must overcome it through iconization, entering into the Christic likeness. Settled in this form of iconization I am no longer at war either with myself or with the evil from outside, even if the evil still stirs, inflames, is at war, on the outside. There is no doubt that there is a delimitation and a valor that is specific to preserving the nature "in its nature", which implies both presence and attitude in the sense of actualizing the potencies of the nature. Thus, there is also an attitude. But it is an attitude which does not aim at tension, at conflict, but at overcoming it, aims at the growth in the image of Christ's

peace.

I.M.: Having sketched the general framework of the conversation, I would refer to a synaxis from which the spiritual paternity emerges, broadcasted on the doxologia.ro channel, on YouTube, held by the Reverend Father Peter of the Essex Monastery, England.

N.: Yes, I think I have heard some...

I.M.: The theme of the synaxis: *The charismatic ministry of spiritual fatherhood in St. Sophrony the Athonite.*

N.: In a way, the title also says that it is about a charismatic ministry of spiritual paternity, according to the Pios Sophrony the Athonite. It is also a localization, speaking of specifics and personalizations. The title shows us that it is a charismatic ministry of paternity, namely that of Father Sophrony the Athonite. The translator used the term *fatherhood* instead of *paternity*. Which sounds a bit dissonant, scratchy, to my ear. *Paternity* sounds fuller, denser than *fatherhood*. I don't know if the use of that term was deliberate or a spur of the moment inspiration. *Paternity* sounds more appropriate to me.

I.M.: Here is what I have extracted from this synaxis: the royal Priesthood is man's passage from the in God's image state to the in the likeness of God state. In addition to the priesthood received by ordination. Elder Sophrony – in addition to the priesthood received through ordination – was also a bearer of the royal priesthood. When man becomes bearer of the royal priesthood, he can also be given the spiritual [grace-bestowed] paternity and become a sign for the people of his generation. Many a time, Elder Sophrony would speak of the mystery of the knowledge, of the path of redemption which was given to him through our Lord Jesus Christ appearing enveloped in the uncreated light. And since then, he was able to show this path of redemption also to his spiritual sons, in a personal way.

N.: Now, regarding the royal priesthood (the universal or general priesthood), and the spiritual priesthood or the ecclesiastical priesthood, I understand that Reverend Father Peter links the royal priesthood to the likeness, to the passing from image to likeness. But, from what I can see, it is a

likeness seen in maximal, that is, final terms, already of acquiring the grace of the Holy Spirit in the sense of perfection. The likeness would be understood in the sense of achieved goal, of perfection, and associated with the royal priesthood. However, for Father Stăniloae, the royal priesthood is open to all the Christians. There is the fundamental Christic hierarchy, there is the spiritual [grace-bestowed] or sacerdotal priesthood, but there also is the universal or common priesthood, that royal priesthood which belongs to everyone. In the first centuries, the term *hierarch* was not very much used, precisely so as not to associate the Christian priesthood with the pagan priesthood or with the Old Testament priesthood. In this respect, it was an advertency, a reservation. But what is relevant here, from what I have noticed at Father Stăniloae about the universal, general or royal [regal] priesthood, which is open to us all, is that its basis is the Christic priesthood whose core is the fact that Christ has offered Himself as a sacrifice. In other words, the royal [kingly] priesthood belongs to all Christians and is linked to the self-sacrifice of each and one of us as sacrifice, in his/her own measure. The priest, as a kind of seen member of the unseen Christic priesthood, carries or brings together the prayers and self-sacrifice of the believers [the faithful] in order to unite them with the Christic image, with the Christic priesthood. Thus, a connection is achieved, between the Christic priesthood, the sacerdotal priesthood and the royal priesthood. Father Stăniloae perceives the royal priesthood in that we offer ourselves as a sacrifice... Of course, we must understand that by this offering ourselves as sacrifice, in order to reach the Father, this sacrifice must unite with the sacrifice of His Son. In this regard, the Great Theologian evokes St. Cyril of Alexandria, who affirmed that the Father does not recognize us as his sons unless He sees the sacrifice of His Son in(side) of [within] us. And then our sacrifice must be united, intertwined, with the Christic sacrifice. Thus, our "self-offering" and the "Christic self-offering" must be united, they must be in communion, in order to have access to the Heavenly Father.

Father Stăniloae specified that the self-offering of man, in

the sense of the universal priesthood, also implies an intention, an initiative of the one who undertakes this work. You must offer [sacrifice] yourself. You have an act(ion) of self-offering, i.e. an initiative of your own. You are not offered, but you *offer yourself*. The Savior gave Himself and offered Himself as a sacrifice. It is also an act of participation in this self-offering, that is relevant. In fact, this act(ion)-initiative gives the measure of the (self-) sacrifice. But the self-sacrifice must be united with the Christic sacrifice. And herein lies the work of the sacerdotal priesthood, to create this bond-union in a mystical body. However, in addition to this sacerdotal role - of the spiritual [grace-bestowed] priesthood, of self-offering and acting in this sacrificial way - there is also a pastoral and teaching [guiding] work of the priest which is reflected in the spiritual shaping [modelling]. Father Stăniloae speaks of what it means to configure the faithful in the Christic image, which, in Ghelasian words, is precisely that Christic iconization or iconing.

Thus, the part of the royal, universal or common priesthood could also be perceived in the sense of an extension of the spiritual work. According to Paul Evdokimov - quoted by Father Stăniloae - the universal priesthood can be carried out *extra muros*, as a kind of "liturgy after liturgy", as an extension of the liturgical self-offering, as liturgizing beyond the walls of the church. A kind of liturgy in communitarian and cosmic extension. In this sense, the royal priesthood also has a teaching [guiding] and pastoral role according to the priestly model, which is also a teaching [guiding] model. It also has a teaching component, therefore, not just one of offering as sacrifice in the liturgical sense. The development is complete. Thus, the royal priesthood (universal or common) is also the commitment of the believer to confess his/her faith, to the prolongation of the liturgy as "liturgy after liturgy". It is but involvement in confessing the faith, in preaching the faith (with)in the family, in the community, and even in society. It is also an active and fruitful extension of this kind.

Thus, the royal priesthood is no longer linked only to an exceptionality. It is no longer associated with Theosis as purpose [goal], with a likeness which would be equated - by the Reverend Father Peter - with perfection, if I have understood correctly. The universal priesthood is also active in our daily actions. It is also path to perfection, to Theosis [deification]. Paul Evdokimov spoke of a continual epiclesis, in the sense of God's blessing descending (up)on our day, action, work or labor. A blessing poured out on the fruit of our work, but also on the fruit of the earth. It is a work of sanctification with a very wide scope in terms of our present act and actions. Father Stăniloae believed that Christianity had broken down the boundary between the sacred and the profane, opening the way to sanctification for all. From this point of view, the universal priesthood is about access to and commitment to a personal sanctification that can also be accomplished through common act(ion)s. Therefore, the universal priesthood is not only an end-point of the fulfillment, but it is also a journey [path] towards fulfillment.

In other words, each one of us, according to our own measure, can make the Christic light visible, here and now. Everywhere, all around us, in the family and in society, wherever we are, it must become transparent. But we do this by assuming the image of the universal priesthood, which is not dissociated from the grace-bestowed - sacramental priesthood and the Christic hierarchy. The universal priesthood is active in and through Christ, the High Priest. It is but a liturgical extension as sanctifying presence and work, also (with)in the living environment. To such an understanding of the universal priesthood, each one is called to participate in personal and communal sanctification, taking the i*nitiative* of self-offering as a sacrifice, according to the iconic Christic model, *from* and *through* the Christic power. The universal priesthood is interwoven, unamalgamatedly intertwined, with the sacramental priesthood and with the Christic priesthood, because, after all, the universal priesthood does not have access to sanctification by itself and through itself.

However, it should be emphasized that through the universal priesthood we can get sight of an assumed image - of intentionality and, of course, initiative and action - which reveals the person, reveals its mystery. Father Stăniloae pointed out that we cannot speak of self-sacrifice without this initiative to assume. Otherwise you are like a sacrificed, not like a sacrifice (i.e. the person who performs the sacrifice). You have to be a self-sacrificer. Sacrifice means to assume. This is the Christic model. The power of His sacrifice supports, sustains, the self-sacrifice. But self-sacrifice needs our *initiative*. However, in this image of assuming the personal-sacrifice we must see a synergy, an intertwining with the Christic sacrifice which becomes transparent and active in us and, through us, in the others. It is another way of seeing the royal priesthood in one of its components. It is not just a view from the highest level, or from the final target.

On the other hand, Father Stăniloae pointed out that we must also be kings over the passions. We must reign over our passions, not be subject to them. It is a kind of overcoming the passions, in the sense of this kingly image. But, at the same time, it is also a way of recovering our royal dignity, our

dignity as sons of the kingdom, because we are in the likeness of the Son of God. It is a way of *entering* into the Kingdom, but also of making our place in the world and of extending, even in our current reality, the kingly image of *to be*. It is a form of extension, in the world, of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The universal priesthood is not only a form of exceptionalism or ideality touched by the peaks, but it is also what we each of us assumes as self-offering and -sacrifice today, here and now. Every priest must have, in addition to the sacerdotal priesthood, an active universal priesthood and grow through it. Obviously, there are measures and measures, differences and differences, in(side) the work of the universal priesthood. In fact, each has its own talents, its own capacity for dedication, for sacrifice. What is important is that a personal initiative must be revived, without which the universal priesthood does not exist, and that this must also be reflected in the paths of our current life, in the course of our life, not only when we reach perfection, the measure of completeness.

After all, we live with our own weaknesses and passions for a long time, even for a lifetime, until we are fully cleansed of passions. However, we must also let a little light shine within us - as much light as there is - according to our measure. And this light must be seen in such a way that we do not glorify ourselves, but our Heavenly Father, as the Gospel teaches us. From this perspective, the universal priesthood is linked to the sacramental priesthood and to the Christic priesthood, and it also plays the part of ferment, of consecration of the current life [living]. And, no doubt, this work [doing] also has various steps. But we have to walk those steps. We know that we have a long way to go. We must do it, we must accomplish it. We do not teleport ourselves to the ultimate perfection, skipping over a journey of personal growth. It is a journey that ultimately means experience, involvement, and personal transformation.

Therefore, speaking of the royal priesthood, the *initiative* is necessary, namely the personal act(ion), the one Father Stăniloae emphasizes. It is a fundamental act(ion). It is the gesture that expresses us personally [in a personal image]. In this sense, we must resuscitate in each one of us, in all of us, the simple believers, this way of being through *initiative* as *personal act*. We must have the *initiative* of [self-] offering, even that of self-sacrifice.... As long as we have it and as much

as it is today, the measure of our dedication and sacrifice... we must express it.

I.M.: Reverend Father Peter said - referring to the universal or royal priesthood, quoting St. Gregory Palamas - that the Mother of God "has reached the highest measure of the royal priesthood".

N.: I don't know exactly that quote from St. Gregory Palamas. I do know that the Mother of God is the icon of hesychasm. Father Ghelasie presented the Mother of God as an image of the Church. For the hesychast from Frăsinei, the image of the priesthood in itself is the image of God. The image of the priesthood gives birth to the Church, and the image of the priesthood is reborn by the Church. The Mother of God re-births the Son as the image of the priesthood. And then the encounter, the icon of the encounter of God with His creation takes place through the image of the priesthood which gives birth to the Church and of the Church which is reborn as the image of the priesthood. This is the eternizing completeness of the encounter.

In the altar, the Virgin and Child is painted as the image of this mystery of the union of the Church with the Priesthood. The actual Church can only exist through this mystery of the priesthood. But the mystery of the priesthood and of the altar in itself is but a mystery of God. Even in the earthly altar we have this icon of the encounter of the Altar of the priesthood with the Church-[with] the believers, in the image of the Mother of God who is the icon-the absolute image of this Eucharistic encounter and communion. According to the Ghelasian vision, the Image of the Son is the image of the priesthood, and the proper image of the Mother of God is the image of Church in itself. However, the creation retains its image of Church only insofar as it has the communion with the altar and the image of the priesthood.

Thus, there is a mutual birth and rebirth, but the images of priesthood and church are distinct, unamalgamated, unmistakable. The image of creation in itself - as St. Maximus says of the human soul, that it is image of Church - is an image of [the] Church. The image of God is an image of the priesthood, but it descends and liturgizes in(side) the Church.

The union between priesthood-altar and church is in fact the absolute [complete] image of the communion, which is a Eucharistic encounter. This encounter takes place, it becomes eternal, and is represented in the icon of the Blessed Virgin with the Child in her arms. It is the icon that shows both the deified creation and God incarnated - in human form, in an unamalgamated union between creation and Creator. There is a union in this image of creation-birth of the Mother of God, but also of the rebirth-incarnation of the Son, that opens the way to the priesthood and the altar, revealing [unveiling] the image of the church.

I find it interesting that the hesychast from Frăsinei links the image of the Mother of God to the Image of the actual Church, which, however, cannot be without the Image of the Priesthood - the Son, which is the iconic arch-image - model of the Church. The Mother of God is also the archetypal image and model of the perfection of the communion between creation and Creator, which cannot be realized without God's embodiment – God taking human form and without the deification of creation, as union in the same Mystical Body. In this liturgizing communion the images of the Priesthood and of the Altar, respectively the image of Church, remain distinct. This silent embrace between God and Creation in the Mother of God is the icon of communion within the Eucharistic image.

The Image of the Mother of God, which is the actual image of the creation, is fundamentally the Image of the Church in itself. But the creation cannot have actualized-discovered the image of the Church without the manifestation-birth of the Image of God, which is the Image of the Priesthood-Altar in itself. In fact, the ordination as priest is performed only on the basis of the Christic hierarchy/priesthood. The ordination is necessary because, after all, the sacerdotal priesthood does not express a personal human image, but a divine image. That is why the sacramental priesthood, which makes us partakers of the divine, is active only on the basis of ordination.

The hesychast model of the Mother of God is the Image of Church wherein the Priesthood of the Son liturgizes. This is the model that we must assume, as well. The liturgical space,

the walled church, is the place in which these arch-images and images, which are real, concrete and not abstract, are actualized, unfolding in full. Through liturgical participation, we can rediscover our true iconic image discovered [revealed] from the point of view of the origin, or arch-image. Through these arch-images, assimilated liturgically, we can experience that extension of the liturgy after liturgy, in the sense of continuity and permanence of life as liturgy and Christic testimony.

By being present in the liturgical space, we restore our image as a church. We also find ourselves in the likeness of the Image of the Mother of God, giving birth to Christ inside of us. Christ - the Priesthood, liturgizing also inside of us, restores us and, at the same time, reveals to us our image of deified Church. In this way, we too can become iconic models in the likeness of the Image of the Mother of God who is the God-Bearer [Theotokos]. Through the embodiment-birth inside of us, of the Priesthood's Son, a Eucharistic communion-encounter, as an eternal liturgy, is made permanent through deification [Theosis]. Thus, we are called... to an eternal liturgy, a liturgy that is eternal.

Hence - speaking of the practical work and the appropriation of the spiritual life as profession, as craft - the fundamental, arch-image, need for participation and liturgical presence is shown.