

The influence of the religious faith on creating a communion of feeling spirituality in 17th-18th century Moldavia

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Abstract: *The faith and religious practice embodied in our ancestral church have contributed to the creation of a genuine communion of feeling within the entire “Romanian spirituality”. The spiritual renewal of the monastic life, initiated by Father Pachomius and Father Paisius Velichkovsky, consisted of a spiritual movement which involved exchanging ideas, giving up the deviations from the true spiritual life and the shift to the genuine piety. The Orthodox liturgical chanting has represented a means of promoting a spiritual renewal, as, through song, the soul strengthens itself in faith and in the love for God.*

Key-words: *Romanian spirituality, Orthodox music, 17th-18th century, Moldavia, religious faith.*

Moldavia – a corner of heaven, a rich land, with a generous and hospitable people (though often visited by undesired guests, who craved after its riches); still, the Moldavians’ sense of belonging to the Romanian spirit, just like the Romanians from the other provinces, has managed to survive through decades.

“Moldova’s spiritual history is irrevocably marked by an ancient, original musical art, incorporated into an infinite emotional scale.

Byzantine music is an integral part of Moldova’s past of art and culture. It has been the cornerstone for the creation and development Romania’s sacred music. Being a part of the Romanians’ cultural past, it has developed and spread in their specific traditional spirit.”²

The Moldavian places of worship, as representatives of the spiritual life on the territories between the Carpathian Mountains and the Dniester River, date back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries, at the same time with the emergence of Christianity. Until

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² Guţanu Stela, “*The Monastery of New Neamţ-the sacred river that flew in the ocean of romanian history*”, published in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai-Musica*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 1/2011, pg.34

the foundation of the self-governing state, each feudal formation had its own church and its chosen servants.

During the 11th-12th centuries, there can be noticed an amassment of all the church organizations into a single spiritual center – the Metropolis in Halici.

After the foundation of the Moldavian medieval state, the church became a state institution supported by the high officials and protected by the ruler. The period of the 14th and 15th centuries stands out, first of all, through a significant increase in the number of monasteries which possessed great landed properties. Secondly, one can notice a boom in all the fields of church culture and art: church architecture and paintings, ceremonial objects, literary activity (the translation of manuscripts into Slavonic – the language of the **rulers' chancellery and of the church services, the duplication of manuscripts, etc.**). During this period, the guiding lights of the entire Orthodox spirituality were the Gospel, the patristic literature and the ceremonials of the great teachers of monastic life: Saint Pachomius, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Cassian, Saint Theodore the Studite, etc.

The 15th-16th centuries stand out through a progress in the construction of churches. Mainly, there appeared a certain originality in the Moldavian architectural style, which peaked during the rule of Stephen the Great, when the number of places of worship increased considerably, between 1487-1497.

In the following century, a lot of builders of churches and monasteries began to dedicate these holy places of worship to the patriarchs from Greece or Turkey.

In the early 17th century, Metropolitan Varlaam of Moldavia noticed the necessity to make a systematization of the church chanting. For this purpose and with the support of Vasile Lupu, Voivode of Moldavia, he set up a school where, in addition to the general subjects, children studied music, as well. With all the efforts of Metropolitan Varlaam to introduce the Romanian language in the church services, we can regretfully notice that it was the Slavonic language (with some variants in Greek) that prevailed in the liturgical service and in the church chants.

In the life of the Moldavian Christian-Orthodox church, the 17th-18th centuries represented the Phanariote period, when a lot of foreigners came to this principality and drained the monasteries' possessions to their own advantage. For Moldavia, the Phanariote period "excelled" in political, economic, social and religious oppression, with significant territorial losses, which had severe consequences to the subsequent history of Romanians everywhere.

Although the proportion of the Greek language and Byzantine music increased in this period, we can notice an increasingly frequent use of the Romanian language. One proof in this regard is a document cited by Prof. Mihai Gr. Poslușnicu in his work, "*The History of Music in Romanians*": "On the right of the lectern there

were Moldavian cantors and on the left – Greek cantors, who were chanting, in turn, in both languages".³

In 1780, Constantine, the Protopsalt of the Metropolis, opened, at his own expense, a school of music, which was highly valued in those times.

We can notice that the Romanian language had flourished, up to this point, as it became the primary language used in the liturgical services and in the church chants.

Despite the crisis of the traditional system of values, caused by the ascent of allogeneous, mainly Greek, elements, brought along by the Phanariote regime, the 18th century stands out through the emergence of church writings which aimed at reviving the Romanian culture.

"*The Homiliary of Varlaam*" has been the reference point for the sensitivity of the Romanian Orthodox culture, which has largely contributed to the nation-building process, toward the end of the 18th century. This process did not progress linearly, it had its ups and downs, caused by the crisis in conscience, in which harmonizing the ideas of *motherland* and *orthodoxy* was impossible, in the spirit of monasticism, which considered these concepts incompatible. Their incompatibility can be explained through the fact that "it is neither glory, diligence, richness, parents or ancestors, nor the motherland, that are of use to man; it is only one's deeds that count".⁴

The high priest Filaret Scriban stated that "where there is no motherland, there is no happiness"⁵. The 18th-century religious writings showed that the process of illumination of the people led to a better self-knowledge and to the development of the national spirit.

The study of the religious translations from that period come to reinforce the assertion to revise the Orthodox values, which create a complete harmony between the two ideas: *motherland* and *orthodoxy*.

In the preface to the Russian translation of the works "*The Lives of the Saints*" (Neamț Monastery, 1811) and "*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*" by St. John Climacus (Neamț Monastery, 1814), the translator states that the period discussed in these books represented the *golden era* of the Moldavians and of all Romanians, a time of wonders. The ideas evoked by the translator confirm the development of the Romanian national conscience.

The 18th century is marked by the activity of the *igumen of Pokrov Skete, our venerable father Pachomius* and of *our venerable father Paisius Velichkovsky* – two

³ Mihail Gr. Poslušnicul, *The History of Music in Romanians*, "Cartea românească" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1928.

⁴ C. Erbiceanu, *A Few Notes on Archimandrite Sophrony*, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, XXIII, 1899-1900, page 538-539;

⁴ C. Noica, *The Question of Spiritual Balance*, in *Action and Reaction*, 1929, 1, page 58-59

great reformers of the monastic life and contributors to the increase of the theological cultural treasure, through the translations of patristic literature.

Starting as a monk at the Neamț Monastery, *Father Pachomius* later became igumen of Pokrov Skete and then bishop of Roman. In 1724, he wrote his will, which mentioned, among other things, the "Pokrov Skete". Pachomius demanded that, at Pokrov, "the monks would lead their monastic life working, fasting and praying; they should not have any possessions, but everything will belong to the community; they are to obey the igumen completely, without whose consent they are never allowed to leave the skete; they shall refrain from eating meat all their lives; the books must not be given away, so that they could be of use to the skete dwellers and help in their cultural and spiritual progress; (...) the cantors and religious Brothers who will be able to read and write can be ordained as monks, but only after being put to the test for three years, as the *Nomocanon* (code of ecclesiastic laws) provides; no foreign priest shall be allowed to serve, unless the monks have made sure that he has been **ordained canonically**". At the end of his will, Pachomius asked the monks and igumens of the Neamț Monastery to protect the independence of this skete and to not interfere in its internal affairs".⁶

Some of the important activities of Pachomius's apprentices were the translation of the *Holy Fathers'* works and the copying of *The Lives of the Saints*. The spiritual renewal of the monastic life, which Father Pachomius had initiated, spread in many monasteries across Moldavia and Transylvania. In the mid-18th century, the monastic life in Moldavia was flourishing, attracting many Russian anchorites that were seeking peaceful shelter, suitable for the ascetic life.

Upon return from the Moldavian lands, our venerable father *Paisius Velichkovsky* confessed that he had found there the true monasticism and asceticism, practiced according to the "Nomocanons" from Mount Athos and also, that he had discovered its mysteries and understood, by profound feeling, the beneficial effect of "*the Jesus Prayer*" or "*the Prayer of the Heart*". This prayer was introduced in the monastic life by Paisius himself, thus generating the revival of the hesychastic spirituality.

Our venerable father Paisius Velichkovsky led the renaissance in Romanian monasticism, in the spirit of the Mount Athos tradition, in the late eighteenth century. All his life and activity were targeted towards a pure and genuine monastic life. He is the creator of "*Staretsdom*" – a new form of leadership in the Orthodox monasticism, according to which the title of *Starets* (an elder of an Orthodox monastery who functions as venerated adviser and teacher) was superior to the Greek title of *igumen* and was received by the first of the monastery's fathers, who was the head of the monastery and responsible for the monastic community. In

⁶ Drd. Constantin Voicescu, *Pokrov Skete and Its Importance to the Church Life and Culture in 18th-century Moldavia*, seminary work, in the "Romanian Orthodox Church" Magazine, an XV, 1972, no. 7-8, page 828-829.

the organization of the monastic life, he guided himself by the rules that he knew, yet he adjusted them to the Romanian living conditions and customs. In the guide for monastic life written by venerable Paisius Velichkovsky, it is provided as follows:

- All possessions must be shared: (...) the one who enters the community must be informed, from the start, that all members, beginning with the igumen, must obey this rule of having no personal possession, whatsoever;
- Obedience is the essential pillar of monastic life; that entails the abandonment of one's own desires and the effort to carry out God's commandments and to serve one's Brothers as one would serve God Himself;
- The obligations of the igumen are: to study the Scripture and the Holy Fathers, so that they would not dare to pass their own teachings onto the Brothers; to not forget that it is the word of God which is the teacher and guide, on the way to salvation; to find out, for all, the parable of humility and love; to not act without the counsel of the elder Brothers, more experienced in the ways of the ecclesial life; to summon the community in order to make a joint decision, when it comes to important matters; to help preserve peace, unity and the bond of love among brethren;
- The religious services should follow the Athonite tradition; all members, with no exception, apart from the ill or those sent away on duties, are duty-bound to attend the liturgical services, from beginning to end;
- Meals are taken in common, equal to all;
- The duties are carried out with the blessing of the igumen, in silence and in prayer;
- The organization of the community life also entailed a series of other characteristics: women were not allowed to enter the monastery; the village church was serviced by a regular priest; special care had to be provided to the ill.⁷

Paisius chose to obey God's commandments with all his heart and soul, advising his apprentices to study the patristic literature. He wanted to creatively renew the patristic customs of the monasticism of his time and, for this, he set up *the Romanian school of translators* at the monasteries Dragomirna, Secu and Neamț. Some of the most notable apprentices of this school were Archimandrite Macarius, Hieromonk Hilarion, Hieromonk Isaac, Hierodeacon Stefan, Hieromonk Climent, Hieromonk Gherontie, Hierodeacon Gregory and Hieromonk Josef.

Many translations were carried out under the supervision of Father Paisius:

⁷ Akathist to the Venerable Father Paisius (Velichkovsky), New-Neamț Monastery, 2001, pp. 29-30.

- The translation of the Books of the Holy Fathers from Greek into Romanian and Slavonic;
- The translation of the words of wisdom from the Holy Fathers: Saint Anthony the Great, St. Isaiah the Hermit, Peter Damascene (book II), St. Theodore the Studite, Marcus - the Anchorite, Nichita Stitatul (three hundred chapters), Callistus - the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and Ignatia Xantopol (the fasting one);
- There were corrected the old translations of the pious writers Isihic, Saint Diadochus, Macarius the Great, Saint Philotheos of Sinai, Ava Thalassius, Saint Gregory of Sinai, Symeon the New Theologian and many others.

When translating from Greek into Slavonic, Fr. Paisius studied the translations of the Romanian scholars: "Once, while we were in the Holy monastery of Dragomirna, I started thinking and tormenting about how I could make either the correction of the Slavonic patristic books, or begin their translation from Greek, once again. And I started this as follows: I took as guidance the translations of the patristic books into Moldavian, which had been made - from the Greek books that had been copied for me at the Holy Mountain – into their Moldo-Vlach mother language, by our beloved Brothers, Hieromonks Macarius and Hilarion, psalm readers skilled at translating books and also, great scholars. Some of them had been translated by Brother Macarius at the Holy Mount of Athos and the rest – at Dragomirna. With these translations, which were undoubtedly accurate, I started correcting the old translations of Slavonic books from Greek that were in my possession. I even translated some of them again, diligently, while consulting the Greek books that had been copied for me at Mount Athos.

And, hence, I translated again the books of these saints: Saint Anthony the Great, St. Jona Scărarul, St. Isichie (priest of Jerusalem), St. Philotheos, St. Nilus of Sinai ("*For prayer*"), St. Isaiah, the Hermit ("*Heads Bowed In Prayer*") and St. Talasie. Out of the previous Slavonic translations, I corrected the following works: of Saint Diadochus, St. Macarius of Egypt (*Book II*), St. Isaac the Syrian, St. Gregory of Sinai, St. Symeon the New Theologian ("*Method of prayer*"), Saint John Cassian the Roman ("*On the Eight Thoughts*"), etc..."⁸

Apart from translations, venerable Paisius contributed to the enrichment of the ecclesiastic literature treasure by writing his own works. He left over 300 written manuscripts to posterity. These include the six chapters about "*The Prayer of the Mind*", as well as a combative reply to the fake teachings on "*The Prayer of the Mind*", which were circulating at that time. His most important work is considered "*Philokalia*", printed in 1793.

The publication of "*the Philokalia*" was "...a significant event, not only to the history of the Russian Orthodox monasticism, but also to the history of the Russian

⁸ Virgil Căndea, *The Romanians in the Hesychastic Renewal*, Trinitas, Iași, 1997, pp. 87-88;

spiritual culture. “*Philokalia*” represented a starting point and an impulse, a return to the sources: it was a breakthrough, the discovery of new horizons”.⁹

Toward the end of his life, venerable Paisius wrote an “*Autobiography*”, in which he provides very few personal data, focusing more on the history of the monastic brotherhood that he had founded, out of monks of different nationalities. His autobiography was never completed. Our venerable father Paisius died on November 15, 1794, at the age of seventy-two.

St. Paisius the Great was a talented cantor, with a good education in harmony, composition and conducting. He is one of the first musicians to have made music transcriptions from psaltic to linear notation, harmonizing the traditional chants on 3-4 voices. Through music, Fr. Paisius contributed to a lessening of the Greek influence, to the introduction of the Romanian language in churches and to an attenuation of the Slavonic liturgical recital, in favor of the domestic Romanian music. He was the founder of the first choral ensemble in church: "According to our research, we have not found any other choir of vocal church music that may have used the linear notation, according to the European system, aside from the one founded at Neamț Monastery by Archimandrite Paisius, Starets of the holy monasteries of Neamț and Secul.

Becoming the starets of the first Romanian *cenobium* (Neamț - Secul), Archimandrite Paisius intended to give the monastic life a new cultural direction, which he did. Hence, after the reforms implemented by starets Paisius in the organization of Romanian monasteries, the Neamț Monastery became the most important Romanian *Lavra*, which was a source of inspiration to all the Romanian monasteries across Moldavia and Wallachia...¹⁰

The spiritual renewal of the monastic life initiated by Fr. Pachomius and Fr. Paisius Velichkovsky consisted of a spiritual movement which involved exchanging ideas, giving up the deviations from the true spiritual life and the shift to genuine piety.

The Orthodox liturgical chanting has represented a means of promoting a spiritual renewal, as, through song, the soul strengthens itself in faith and in the love for God. Therefore, the 18th century represented not only the culminating point of the Romanian monastic movement, but also of the music of Byzantine tradition. The development of the latter has been visible through the activity of the musical schools

⁹ I. Hidarii, Russian title: *Literaturno perevodcheskaya deiatel'nost' Starța Paisiia (Velichkovskogo)*, in: “Moskovskoi Patriarhii” Journal, no. 12, 1956, page 59-60.

¹⁰ Teodor T. Burada, *Works, vol. I*, part I, Edited by Viorel Cosma, The Musical Publishing House of the Composers' Union, Bucharest, 1974, Chapter “*The Choir of Vocal Music from Neamț Monastery*”, page 273-276.

¹⁰ Teodor T. Burada, *Works, vol. I*, part I, Edited by Viorel Cosma, The Musical Publishing House of the Composers' Union, Bucharest, 1974, Chapter “*The Choir of Vocal Music from Neamț Monastery*”, page 273-276.

opened near monasteries and through the activities of the new generation, which adopted the Chrisantic reform.

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