

## Venerable Paisius Velichkovsky at the Kiev Theological Academy. The meanings of a choice

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### **Abstract:**

The article presents the reasons behind the establishment of the Kiev Theological Academy as well as the specificity of the educational model employed therein, insisting upon a nuanced understanding of the influences of western models regarded as sources of inspiration. The study goes on to examine aspects from the years spent by Venerable Paisius of Neamts as a student there and analyses the motivation he provided for leaving the Academy, as his own testimonies and subsequent activity showed him to be a true prophet of the need to resort to the patristic heritage as the basis for an authentic Orthodox theology. The last part looks into the way the academic theology has assessed the neopatristic renewal program, highlighting the degree of contemporary relevance for other inspirational sources available to the East, in an effort to develop a theology faithful to Tradition and responsive to modern challenges.

### **Keywords:**

Saint Paisius Velichovsky, Kiev Academy, Fr. Georges Florovsky, neopatristic theology, contemporary Orthodox theology

Brought to the fore again on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Kiev Theological Academy (1615-2015), the icon of all the saints (*see picture no. 1*) who have benefited in the course of time from an educational-theological experience in this institution contains important names of Eastern theology and spirituality, including that of the one who has been

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characterized as ‘the man behind the Philokalia’<sup>1</sup>, claimed by both Slavic and Romanian cultures and spiritual spheres: Saint Paisius Velichkovsky of Neamts. Previously, his name and life had been the subject of one of the ten biographies of saints<sup>2</sup> with names related to the Academy of Kiev, and considered to be representative for their contribution to the shaping of some personalities who would later on enrich the Orthodox calendar.

The Kievan episode of Elder Paisius’ life is mentioned in most biographies or articles dedicated to him<sup>3</sup>, and has been commented upon more or less rigorously, according to the intended objective of the authors. This study aims to present in more detail this particular stage of Paisius’ biography, while also examining the significance of his stance on the curriculum of the Academy (secular and theological) in those times, viewed in the light of the subsequent events in the Elder’s life on the one hand, and of the course followed by theological instruction to the present day in the Orthodox sphere, on the other hand.

**The Theological Academy from Kiev. Intention and result**

At the time when Paisius Velichkovski was studying at the Theological Academy in Kiev, this institution had already existed for more than a century. Its foundations had been laid in 1631 (according to some in 1632) by the young archimandrite Peter Mogila, the future metropolitan of Kiev (1633-1646), at that time abbot of the Pechersk Lavra (or Lavra of the Caves), where he initially served, moving later on to Bratsky monastery. The roots go even deeper, back to 1615, when the school of the so-called ‘Orthodox brotherhoods’, which the college actually merged with, was founded at the Monastery of the Theophany in Kiev. The level of the Mogilian Academy was very high in that age: the curriculum was remarkably rich, the rectors and professors were recruited from among scholar monks or young men sent to study, who were extremely skilled. The college possessed a huge library so that it is considered that this Mogilian college of Kiev

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, the man behind The Philokalia. His Life by Schemamonk Metrophanes*, translated by Seraphim Rose, St. Paisius Abbey Press, Forestville, California, 1994, quoted by Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, ‘The Romanian posterity of paisianism and its dilemmas’ in *Autobiografia și Viețile unui stareț urmate de Așezăminte și alte texte*, the second edition, Introductory Study by P. Elia Citterio, edition supervised by Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2002, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Desiati sviatih Kievo-Moghileanskoi Akademii*, Kiiv, 2002, p. 65-70.

<sup>3</sup> A solid bibliography with 86 studies in Russian and Ukrainian and 96 in other languages (Greek, English, Italian, French, Polish, Romanian), can be found at this address: <http://paisius-niamets.orthodoxy.ru/biblio.html> (page accessed at 17.11.2015).

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(*Collegium Kijovense Mohileanum*), which as of 1701 ranks as an Academy, is the oldest high-level educational institution of the Orthodox Slavs<sup>4</sup>.

Peter Mogila had two main convictions that led to the founding of the college, as part of his cultural and missionary activity. Firstly, in the context of the Jesuit propaganda aiming to convert the white Russians (or Belarusians) and the orthodox Ukrainians who were politically integrated in Catholic Poland, particularly after the “union” from Brest (1596), the need for an educational institution equal in prestige with the famous and erudite Jesuit colleges was essential for the solid theological and cultural preparation of the clergy in order to protect the Orthodox faith<sup>5</sup>. This genuine intellectual reform was the expression of Peter Mogila’s belief that only by introducing Latin Western humanism (in his view, the Slavic and even the Greek culture were irrelevant at that moment<sup>6</sup>) would the Orthodox Church be on a par with other Christian denominations<sup>7</sup>. In actual fact, the sources of inspiration for a theological instruction other than the Western ones were simply lacking in the Orthodox East.

Secondly, Peter Mogila’s intentions were very generous, and in no way motivated by personal prestige or profit. He was convinced that a single school in Kiev, be it a real university, would not be enough, that this ‘work’ should not be limited to one institution alone but rather spread by way of subsidiaries, as it would actually happen later on at Vinica, Krzemeniec, Liov, and then at Moscow. Moreover, Peter Mogila did not wait for this to happen naturally, let’s say through positive contamination, but actively militated to this end, by ‘spreading the word’

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<sup>4</sup> Fr. Prof. dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Românei*, vol. II, third edition, Trinitas Publishing House, Iași, 2006, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvester Kossov, the first prefect of the Academy stated: ‘We need Latin so that no one calls us «stupid Russians» [*glupaia rus*’]. Studying Greek was the reasonable thing to do, when done in Greece not in Poland. Here, nobody could do without Latin – in court, at meetings or anywhere else, for that matter. *Graeca ad chorum, latina ad forum*’. Acknowledging this line of reasoning, Georges Florovsky goes even deeper, discerning here not only ‘a linguistic matter’ but ‘a matter of tradition and cultural settlement’. Cf. Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, part one, volume five, translated by Robert L. Nichols, 1979, p. 66. During Paisius’ studies, the use of Latin as a means of conversation was the norm as it is shown in ‘Instrucțiunile Arhiepiscopului Rafail Zaborovschi către profesorii și studenții Academiei de Kiev’: ‘all students and particularly the teachers were required to take responsibility for making it a law for themselves to use Latin in their conversations too’. Cf. the annex to Protohierarch Serghie Cetfericov, *Paisie, Starețul Mănăstirii Neamțului din Moldova. Viața, învățătura și influența lui asupra Bisericii Ortodoxe*, second edition, Nemira Publishing House, 2010, p. 451.

<sup>7</sup> P.P. Panaitescu, *Petru Movilă. Studii*, edition supervised, afterword, notes and comments by Ștefan S. Gorovei and Maria Magdalena Székely, Enciclopedy Publishing House, București, 2006, p. 10-11.

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about the college himself, as he was convinced of its intrinsic necessity<sup>8</sup>. In this context, it is worth mentioning that in Moldavia the college of Iassy too followed the Kiev model (its Latin character being soon replaced by the Greek current). In Wallachia, on the other hand, the marks of Kiev's visionary mission were to be seen in the printing activity supported by Metropolitan Peter Mogila. Thus, 'the western values and the respect for the Latin language entered the Romanian spiritual circuit'<sup>9</sup>. Regarding the assessment of the Academy's importance, there is no unanimous perception, the extreme views swinging between a providential role for some<sup>10</sup>, Peter Mogila's work being likened to a rebirth 'through culture'<sup>11</sup> of the Eastern Church, and a disaster for others (among these Father Georges Florovsky being the most prominent<sup>12</sup>).

To Florovsky, Peter Mogila's activity had been a gateway for Western ideas (of Catholic or Protestant nuances) into the Orthodox sphere. The Academy of Kiev could be considered to have broken completely with the traditions of the West Russian Schools, Kievan education being impregnated with scholasticism, not of the Middle Ages, but rather with a 'neo-scholasticism or pseudo-scholasticism of the Council of Trent'<sup>13</sup>. Through this institution of education and other missionary, liturgical and cultural activities of Peter Mogila, 'the first encounter with the West' had occurred. However, this encounter had not been free of consequences for it eventually ended up 'in captivity'. It is true that a school was founded, but theology had been 'severed from its living roots' and 'a malicious schism interposed between life and thought'<sup>14</sup>. The graduates of Kiev School learned 'the baroque theology of the Counter reformation age' and consequently 'they were initiated with great effort in the Eastern Orthodox heritage'<sup>15</sup>. In Florovsky's critical vision,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan Nestor Vornicescu, 'Sfântul Petru Movilă. Monografie hagiografică' in the collective volume *Sinodul de la Iași și Sf. Petru Movilă 1642-2002*, Trinitas Publishing House, Iași, 2002, p. 148. Panaitescu considers that even though the 'school of Kiev made Romanians (...) want to be better instructed and to acquire a theological education, the notion of a Latin Orthodoxy – which was the very essence of the school from Kiev – was never assimilated by them'. Cf. P. P. Panaitescu, *Petru Movilă. Studii*, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> Natalia Iakovenko, 'Învățământul latin și umanismul școlar în Ucraina la sfârșitul secolului al XVI-lea jumătatea secolului al XVII-lea' in *Duhovna Spadchina Kiivskoi Russi*, no. 1, Odessa, 1997, p. 5-16.

<sup>11</sup> P.P. Panaitescu, 'Petru Movilă și românii' in *Movileștii. Istorie și spiritualitate românească*, vol. I „Casa noastră movilească”, Holy Monastery Sucevița, 2006, p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> Georges Florovsky, *op. cit.*, especially p. 64-85.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78-79.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78

the aura of the Flood hovered over the whole movement, as it contained a pseudomorfism of the Russian religious conscience, 'a pseudomorphosis of the Orthodox thinking'<sup>16</sup>. For him, Peter Mogila's legacy 'is an ambiguous one', even though under his rule the Orthodox Church emerged from the disorientation and lack of organization that were the consequences of the union of Brest. 'The Church that emerged from this temptation was no longer the same', he claims, for it had become infused 'with a new and curious spirit, the Latin spirit'. What is worse, Florovsky considers that 'Mogila's internal toxin' is even more dangerous than the Uniate Church, which people could resist, while 'Mogila's crypto romanticism had sneaked in quietly and imperceptibly, facing almost no resistance'<sup>17</sup>.

Despite the fact that Florovsky authored one of the most important histories of the Russian theology, and is generally hailed as a praiseworthy figure for his contribution to the neopatristic Renaissance in contemporary Orthodox theology, this radical attitude has been carefully inspected and even sanctioned by authors such as Frank E. Sysyn<sup>18</sup> or Paul Gavrilyk<sup>19</sup>. Both of them noticed in Florovsky's approach an error of perceptual inadequacy, which is the projection of a future reality i.e. the Russian cultural and political domination in Ukraine, so as to blur the perception of an older period in the history of Ukraine (i.e. between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), when it was under a Polish influence. In doing so, he had made uncritical use of the considerations of one Russian historian alone: Nicholas Karamzin (1766-1826). Florovsky perceived Ukraine only under a Russian cultural and spiritual hegemony. As the title of his book clearly shows ('Ways of the Russian Theology' – '*Puti russkogo blagosloviia*'), he refused to believe in the existence of the 'Ways of *Ukrainian* Theology'. The work was written in 1937, after the national Ukrainian revolution and the Renaissance of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine took place, so that certain opinions on Peter Mogila and his future supposedly harmful influence could be regarded as a sentencing of the Ukrainian orthodoxism as a whole as well as of Ukraine's national movement, which Father Florovsky never really agreed with<sup>20</sup>. Hence, the historical context of this period

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> Frank E. Sysyn, 'Peter Mohyla and the Kiev Academy in Recent Western Works: Divergent Views an Seventeenth-Century Ukrainean Culture', in *Harvard Ukrainean Studies*, volume 8, number 1/2 (june 1984), p. 155-187. The entire volume is dedicated to the commemoration of the 350 years from the foundation of the Movilian Academy in Kiev, taking as a reference date the year 1632.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Gavrilyk, *Kyiv Theological Tradition in Georges Florovsky's Ways of Russian Theology: A Critical Assessment*, International Symposium of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, 8-10 May 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Frank E. Sysyn, *art. cit.*, p. 169.

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should be reevaluated, Florovsky's rigid dichotomy between east and west being anachronistic and historically unjustified.

The advantages of such a contact between east and west have also been emphasized by some. The western scholastic movement, for all its shortcomings, forced a clear and balanced way of reasoning<sup>21</sup> and will tempt later Orthodox theologians to use 'the best of what the Western way of thinking had to offer'. In doing so, they would harbor an attitude that was neither one of intimidation nor one of contempt, thus giving birth to 'the academic spirit'<sup>22</sup>. The theologians from Kiev have even been commended on their open-mindedness<sup>23</sup>. As it turned out, they were not dominated by Thomism to the extent they were accused of doing by their contemporaries or post-evaluators, sometimes out of ignorance, at other times as a reaction towards the innovative ideas that seemed rather dangerous. On the contrary, they strongly condemned the errors of the Catholic theology (*Filioque* for instance).

Peter Mogila was brought up in an atmosphere of great tolerance, a virtue that seems to have run in his family<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, we cannot interpret his sympathy towards Western culture as a sign of his toying with Catholicism<sup>25</sup>. On the contrary, we may be dealing here with a way of defending the faith, albeit an original one: for him, Western culture was nothing but 'a weapon borrowed from Catholicism in order to resist it'<sup>26</sup>. Wrongly accused of crypto-Catholicism, Peter

<sup>21</sup> Although the future development of the Russian theology eclipsed the Kievan roots of the theologic tradition in this space, it was clearly stated that 'Ukrainian and Russian orthodox people have learnt to think for the first time in a theological and academic manner at Kiev'. James Cracraft, 'Theology at the Kiev Academy during its Golden Age', in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, p. 80.

<sup>22</sup> A. Kniazeff, *L'Institut Saint-Serge: De l'Académie d'autrefois au rayonnement d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1974, p. 14. Teophanes Procopovici, rector of Academy (1710-1716), two decades before the Kievan period of paisian education, indicated the proper attitude towards the theology of the West: theology professors may well pay heed to the arguments taken from the Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers that authors of other denominations have put forward; such arguments, however, should be thoroughly examined by themselves before putting them to good use. Quoted at James Cracraft, *art. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> James Cracraft, *art. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> Ștefan S. Gorovei, 'Petru Movilă. Contribuții', in *Movileștii. Istorie și spiritualitate românească*, p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> Georges Florovsky was wondering whether, upon considering Mogila's 'enigmatic and rather odd' character, one could safely discern between seeing him as 'a honest champion of Orthodoxy or a manipulating hierarch of genius', Cf. Georges Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 64. There are several testimonies of the confusion caused by Peter Mogila's vision during those times. Metropolitan Meletius Smotrițki, for instance, who had converted to the Uniate movement, considered Peter Mogila 'easy to win over for the Uniate cause'. Cf. Irenaeus, Metropolitan of Moldavia, 'Petru Movilă și Sinodul de la Iași', in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, 18 (1942), nr. 10-12, p. 486.

<sup>26</sup> P.P. Panaitescu, *Petru Movilă. Studii*, p. 11.

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Mogila regarded the colleges not only as instruction settlements, but as centers for the propagation of the Orthodox faith as well<sup>27</sup>. At least two of his works testify to the Orthodox character of his life and activity: *Lithos sau Piatră din praștia adevărului al Sfintei Biserici ortodoxe ucrainene*<sup>28</sup> and *Orthodox Confession*, considered to be the third one of its kind in Orthodoxy<sup>29</sup>, and which has actually prepared ‘the emergence of the modern Orthodox theological thought’<sup>30</sup>.

### Venerable Paisius, student of the Academy from Kiev

The years in which Paisius carries out his studies in Kiev (1735 – 1739) coincide with the peak period of the Academy (identified by the specialists with the entire first half of the eighteenth century<sup>31</sup>). A complete course of study lasted twelve years and was divided into eight classes. The first four were the grammar classes (where languages such as Old Church Slavonic, Polish, Latin and Greek were taught), followed by the poetics class (the art of versification) and the rhetoric class (the theory and practice of the oratorical art). The terminal classes were philosophy (where logic and dialectics were studied, as well as the natural sciences, such as physics, mathematics, astronomy, zoology) and theology. The latter was usually attended only by those willing to become priests. Those who opted for a secular career graduated philosophy alone. The theology class involved the study of dogmatic and moral theology, church history, hermeneutics and the calculation of the Easter date. Throughout the school year, eight lessons lasting sixty minutes each were taught to the students in each class and on a daily basis (except for Sundays and feast days). The classes started at eight in the morning and ended at six in the evening, with a two-hour lunch break at noon. In the philosophy and theology classes there was a tradition of organizing debates that only the best students could engage in. In addition, students in theology had the duty to preach in the churches of the monastery<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> *Idem, L'Influence de l'oeuvre de Pierre Moghila, archevêque de Kiev dans les Principautés Roumaines*, Paris, 1926, p. 8-9, quoted by the author in his study, „Petru Movilă și românii”, p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> Details at Fr. Prof. dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *op. cit.*, p. 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Fr. Ion Vicovan, *Romanian Orthodox Church History*, volume I, Trinitas Publishing House, Iași. 2002, p. 217. Both works are castigated for being impregnated with ‘latinism’ by Georges Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 71, 75-78.

<sup>30</sup> Fr. Prof. IOAN ICĂ ȘN, ‘Mărturisirea de credință a lui Mitrofan Critopulos. Însemnătatea ei istorică, dogmatică și ecumenică’, in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, 18 (1973), no. 3-4, p. 218.

<sup>31</sup> Bureza B.B., *Kievskaiia Duhovnaia Akademia I Seminaria. 20 – letiu vozrozhdenia posfesiatsa*, Kiev, 2009, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> There were optional classes for those who wanted to study algebra, geometry, optics, hydrostatics, civil and military architecture, mechanics, geography, the new European languages,



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Paisius studied in a building that had only recently been erected (1703 – 1704), called Mazepin (*see picture no. 2*), which only had one storey at first, and was divided into six classes and three corridors. A new storey will eventually be added as well as a chapel in the eastern part, dedicated to the feast of the Annunciation, and consecrated by the Metropolitan of Kiev, Raphael Zaborovsky (1731 – 1747)<sup>33</sup>. We have no information as to where Paisius lived during his years of study (he does remember a landlady, as will be seen shortly, in the rather exceptional circumstances of his student life). It is known that some of the students were accommodated in a boarding house built in 1719 on the land belonging to the monastery, the rest of them boarding at different churches, where they attended the holy services, teaching also the children from the schools of the respective parishes. For their services they received not only accommodation free of charge, but also a small remuneration<sup>34</sup>. Rectors of the Academy during Paisius' student years were Ambrose Dubnevici (1731 – 1737)<sup>35</sup> and Sylvester Dumnetsky (1737 – 1740)<sup>36</sup>.

The educational requirements at the Spiritual Academy from Kiev show the earnestness with which the formative process was regarded. Teachers were expected to be themselves 'paragons of faith endowed with great affection, modesty and gentleness, good manners and culture'<sup>37</sup>, to make use of the most efficient means in the teaching process rather than 'priding themselves on their intelligence'. After the instruction hours they were to lead the students to church for a thanksgiving prayer. Fairness in grading was necessary so as not to promote 'the unworthy', for otherwise 'some might lose the pleasure to learn while others will sink more and more into laziness'. The worthy were rewarded, and 'the lazy and

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painting and a number of other disciplines, so that in the eighteenth century there were around thirty subjects from which one could choose from at the Academy. *Ibidem*, p. 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20. On the consecration day (1 November 1740), Petru/Paisie was no longer a student at the Academy.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20-21.

<sup>35</sup> Former student of this school, he will first teach at the lower cycle, then will become a philosophy and theology teacher. Several facilities have been built at the Academy during his stint there. He was the coordinator of the Ukrainian Codex of laws, which was the work of more than 70 persons, all graduates of the Academy. In 1742 he will be enthroned as bishop of Chernigov and Novgorod and will set up colleges for the training of the future priests, modelled after the one in Kiev. For their proper maintenance he introduced a special tax in monasteries. Biographical details at X. I. Hijniak, *Rektory Kievo-Moghilianskoi Akademii 1615-1817 r.r.*; Kiev, Videvnicii dim 'KM Akademia', 2002, p. 132-134.

<sup>36</sup> He was noted as a good administrator of the academy. He campaigned for the return of the old privileges to the Ukrainian church, as well as for the recognition of the academic rights of the teachers previously certified by the czarist diplomas (1691, 1701). *Ibidem*, p.136.

<sup>37</sup> 'The instructions of Archbishop Raphael Zaborovschiy to the teachers and students of the Kiev Academy', Annex to Archpriest Serghie Cetfericov, *op. cit.*, p. 449.



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disobedient' were warned and even expelled from higher education 'so that the Academy would have a good reputation both in terms of the quantity and the quality of its students'<sup>38</sup>.

It was compulsory for one to attend all classes and academic festivities with no exception, those absent without leave being punished. The order of the entry to classes was regulated by a ringing bell: at the first ringing students would enter their class, at the second one they would sit down in their desks, at the third the teachers of 'the first two schools' (the lower cycle) would come in, and after the fourth ringing, finally, the teachers of poetry and rhetoric would make their entrance. The students from the lower classes owed respect to their older mates, and were to avoid getting involved in 'dishonest activities'. Any altercations within the ranks of the students or between the students and those outside the school had to be settled by the superiors (no student was entitled 'to take revenge for an offense by himself, but had to wait for the decision of the appropriate authority')<sup>39</sup>. The use of fire arms was prohibited, as well as choosing a landlord with a bad reputation, 'wandering' at night or attending events where 'gladiator fights or fist-cuffs' took place. For recreation purposes, however, they were allowed to play 'musical instruments appropriate for students'<sup>40</sup>.

Public instructions at the Academy included the spiritual aspect of life inside a boarding house. Accompanied by teachers and supervisors, students 'are required to attend (...) all the prayers and church services and especially the Holy Liturgy', to confess and receive the communion once during every fast, and twice during in the Easter Fast, 'according to the old tradition and with due preparation and repentance'<sup>41</sup>.

The circumstances in which Venerable Paisius arrived at the Academy in Kiev, the events outside of school, and above all his feelings from this period are reported to us by himself in his *Autobiography*<sup>42</sup>. His father died when he was four, then died his only brother. To safeguard an old family tradition that involved

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 450-452.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 450-451.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 453-454.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 449-450.

<sup>42</sup> 'Autobiography of a Staretz', translated by doctor Elena Linta, revised by Deacon Ioan I. Ica jr., based on the original and on the Italian and American translations, in Venerable Paisius Velichkovsky from Neamts, *Autobiography and The lives of an abbot followed by Establishments and other texts*, p. 87-196. Reported to have been found at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Aleksandr Iatimirski, the Slavonic text of the manuscript was published in full only in 1986 by Antonios-Aimilianos N. Tachiaos. Elder Paisius' *Autobiography* was translated into Italian (1988), French (1991), American (1989). It will only be translated into Romanian in 1996, in spite of the fact that it existed in manuscript since the mid-1980s (therefore being the first one in a modern version).

a continuity in the priestly ministry at the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Poltava, young Peter (as he was called in baptism) is suggested by the community as the one to serve in this church following his great-grandfather (Symeon), grandfather (Luke), father (John) and brother (also John). With this end in view, Peter is introduced by his mother and his uncle to Metropolitan Raphael Zaborovsky, who, while giving Peter his blessing to be 'the heir' of the cathedral, commanded to Peter's mother to have him pursue secular studies (the classic high school) at a school in Kiev<sup>43</sup>. This was happening in the year 1735, when Peter had not yet reached age 13. The first three years of school were extremely fruitful, as Peter diligently learned the 'science of grammar'. Throughout this period, he would return home for only two months, in the summer (the courses ended on July 15 and resumed in the fall). During the holiday he carried on reading the Holy Scripture and the patristic books available at that time, left over from his older brother or borrowed from church (in *Autobiography*, mention is made of *The lives of the saints*, the works of Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Saint Dorotheus of Gaza and *The Pearl* of Saint John Chrysostom<sup>44</sup>). The fourth year was more difficult, as his studies no longer appealed to him in a genuine way ('I was following the teaching at school just out of habit and without any benefit'<sup>45</sup>). However, Peter applied himself all the same in what was to be his final year of study.

The main reason offered by Peter for losing his enthusiasm for study was his inclination towards the monastic life, which was getting stronger every day: 'the yearning for the monastic life had grown ever stronger within my soul and it kept nagging me not to stay in school any longer but to hastily leave the world'<sup>46</sup>. The inclination of this child to monasticism had however taken shape at a much earlier age (before ten, in any case), being enhanced by the readings from his parents' home, and spurred even further by the visits to the monastic settlements near Kiev, which touched him deeply. In his third year of study, during the winter, two of his schoolmates chose to become monks in the Kitaev hermitage near Kiev, which belonged jurisdictionally to the Lavra of the Caves. A three-day visit to his friends enabled him to get in touch with the details of the monastic daily schedule through a first-hand experience: the atmosphere of the communal readings in the refectory (from Saint Ephrem the Syrian) after Compline, the service of Matins followed by Liturgy both during night time, his being allowed to join the communal meals

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Cf. P. Elia Citterio, 'An abbot and his autobiography', Introductory study at the above edition, p. 45 and note 73.

<sup>43</sup> 'Autobiography', p. 90-91.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93.

by the benevolence of the abbot of Kitaev, hieroschemamonk Theodosius, the humbleness of his two former schoolmates, now novices, who had been appointed to work in the refectory, standing ready to serve the others, the final discussion with them about the beauty of monastic life, all of these strengthened his resolve to hasten his steps towards monasticism. He goes back to school ('but without any diligence, studying simply out of habit'<sup>47</sup>), but after graduation does not return during the summer holiday to Poltava. Instead, he keeps living in a room rented from an old widow in the southern part of Kiev, thus having the opportunity to worship more often in churches like St. Sophia, St. Michael the Archangel and especially at the Lavra of the Caves (in particular at the Liturgy on Sundays and on great feast days, sometimes even staying over night in one of the caves).

The summer after his third year of study allowed him a new visit to the Kitaev hermitage, along with an attempt to enter monasticism there, which failed due to abbot Theodosius' wisdom. The abbot had previously submitted Peter to a test of unconditional obedience at which Peter failed (a failure that taught him a wonderful lesson). Moreover, he had foreseen the turmoil that such a decision would have thrown Peter's mother into. He did not dampen the enthusiasm of the 16 year old boy though, but urged him to find a more suitable place<sup>48</sup>.

Between September and January in the new academic year, Peter/Paisius did not attend school, a fact noticed by another student of the Academy, who 'denounced' him to Venerable Sylvester Kuleabts (*see picture no. 3*), 'at that time overseer of all schools'. Before him, Peter shyly offered his reasons for giving up 'the secular teaching (the ancient classics)'. The first reason he put forward had to do with his unswerving desire to become a monk as soon as possible because of the fear of the 'unknown hour of death'. The second reason was the use as a basis for study not of 'the words of the God bearing teachers of the Holy Church, who had been taught spiritual understanding by the Holy Spirit', but of the texts of the ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero and Plato. Thus, there was always the danger of falling into 'the depravity of the mind' because of the contact with Greek mythology at such a young and unripe age. Finally, the negative examples of individuals from the monastic ranks who had completed the same studies (and who ended up 'living like lay dignitaries, in great honor and glory and bodily comfort, wearing expensive clothes, riding thoroughbred horses and being carried by luxurious coaches'), instilled into Peter the fear of becoming like them or even worse. Venerable Sylvester (who would become rector of the Academy a year later) argues that the importance for theologians to become acquainted

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 99-105.

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with the classics will only be fully understood in the upper cycle, as the first four years were dedicated to grammar. Theology proper would only be studied after the completion of the first level and after rhetoric (2 years) and philosophy (2 years). For standing unconvinced, Peter was threatened with beating, and for fear of that, he eventually completes his fourth year at the Academy<sup>49</sup>.

In the summer holiday, after a two-year absence, Peter saw his mother again at Poltava, revealing to her his intention to become a monk. Though not exactly taken by surprise at the news, his mother was deeply moved. Peter, equally overcome with emotion, tried to calm her, and acting upon the advice of his confessor pointed out to her all the benefits of the theological instruction for a future priest. 'I'll have to keep going to school until graduation, even if unwillingly, so that I won't be a complete ignoramus, unable to say a word to Christians in my sermons'<sup>50</sup>. In the meantime, however, he makes preparations with a friend and schoolmate, Demetrius, also from Poltava (and who was inspired by the same desire to be a monk), to leave the country after his departure to Kiev so as to avoid any obstacles in bringing his ideas to fruition. Held back for a few days by an illness, he appointed Demetrius to make all the necessary arrangements in Kiev. After finally setting out from Poltava and reaching Kiev, Peter was disappointed to find his friend wavering over his decision and therefore resolved on leaving him behind and following his own way. After arriving in Kiev, he makes a dangerous journey on water to Chernigov, where his confessor during his student years lived (i.e. hieroschemamonk Pachomius), who talks him into choosing Liubetsky Monastery, which was located across the border<sup>51</sup>. His being accepted as a novice there was the starting point for Paisius' long and colorful monastic journey<sup>52</sup> and the end of his student years, as he will never again return to the Academy from Kiev.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 106-109.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>51</sup> Eastern Ukraine, with its center in Kiev, was annexed to Russia in the year 1667, in the wake of a long war between Russia and Poland. Cf. Nicolae Chifar, 'The Holy Synod from Iasi in the political – religious context of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century', in *Historical studies*, 'Lucian Blaga' University Publishing House, Sibiu, 2005, p. 62.

<sup>52</sup> A synthesis of monk Paisius' pilgrimages comprises 2 years at Liubetsky, Medvedovsky, the Lavra of the Caves and some Ukrainian hermitages (1740-1742); 17 years on Mount Athos at different cells, an attempt to stay at Simonopetra and then at the hermitage of St. Prophet Elijah belonging to the Pantocrator Monastery (1746-1763); 35 years in the Romanian Principalities as follows: 4 years at the hermitages Dălhăuți, Trăisteni, Cârnu and Poiana Mărului all of them located in the counties of Buzău and Vrancea, and for a brief period at Vorona and Neamts in Moldavia (1742-1746) and, after the athonite *intermezzo*, 12 years at Dragomirna Monastery (1763-1775), 4 years at Secu (1775-1779) and, finally, for the last 15 years of his monastic life (which spanned over 50 years) at Neamts (1779-1794). Cf. Deacon Prof. Ioan Ivan, 'Introducere' at *Viața cuviosului*

Considering his own testimonies, Paisius' choice to leave school might seem easy to categorize as expressing a reaction against the teaching method's lacking in 'spirituality' as well as a necessary condition for following his calling to monasticism without delay. At this point, if one is to see accurately the overall picture, some nuances and clarifications are in order, concerning the general mood of the times, the human patterns existing at the Academy and the more profound significances of certain attitudes susceptible to labelling.

As Paisius writes his *Autobiography*, many years after his sojourn in Kiev as a teenager, he has the mind of a mature man, well versed in ascetic endeavours (especially on Mount Athos and in the Romanian Principalities). He had known little of the philokalic patristic literature as a student. Over the years, however, he had grown acutely aware of how decisively important this literature was, for monks in particular, but also for theologians at large (it is true that he was rather reluctant to recommend the Philokalia to lay persons). His aversion to the character of the Academy, arid and impregnated with scholastic Catholicism, is expressed in his later years through the eyes and words of someone who had an in-depth knowledge not only of Kievan monasticism, but also of the shortcomings of other Ukrainian monastic communities, which he had experienced first-hand. He obviously saw the lack of contact with the literature of the neptic Fathers (which existed even on Mount Athos) as a demerit and such a sad reality hardened his old convictions, first expressed back in 1739 before his former study supervisor. That is not to say that young Peter used the arguments against the Kievan educational methods only to justify his leaving school in favour of monasticism. As a student, the maturity of his mind and of his vision concerning spiritual life<sup>53</sup>, education and monasticism, had been undoubtedly beyond his years. Therefore, he had simply felt empirically just how inadequate and alien to the spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy those instruction methods were. The fact remains however that the main motivation behind Elder Paisius' decision to leave school was his longing for the monastic life. As a secondary motivation, the difficulty of adapting to a system alien to his soul is not to be dismissed either<sup>54</sup>.

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*Paisie de la Neamț*, edition supervised by Deacon Prof. Ioan Ivan, based on manuscript no. 154 in the Library of the Neamts Monastery, p. XIII.

<sup>53</sup> The spiritual earnestness of the future Starets, even before enrolling at the Academy, has often been noted. Paisius understood 'the essence of a christian life' as being 'the virtue of love', manifested for instance in not judging our fellow men. Cf. Metropolitan Seraphim Joantă, *Isihasmul, tradiție și cultură românească*, translated by Iuliana Iordanescu, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 132.

<sup>54</sup> A presentation of the hybrid character of the Kievan instruction is offered by Nina Kauchtschischwili, 'Tradizione religiosa e sollecitazione illuministe nella cultura russa del settecento'

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It has been said that Venerable Paisius ‘left the Latin school for a Greek monastery’<sup>55</sup>, but that’s not to suggest that his attitude towards knowledge in general was a contemptuous one. His burning desire to start the monastic life would have had him leave a Greek school as well. For practical reasons, he felt studies to be necessary for monks too. As specialist knowledge of Greek was needed for translating the patristic texts, he sent two of his apprentices, a Romanian one (Gerontius) and a Slav one (Dorotheus) to attend the spiritual Academy from Bucharest which was equally influenced by Western schools (these being in fact the only viable educational paradigms of that age). Moreover, he constantly supported them, both financially and spiritually, encouraging them and praying – as he writes to them – ‘for good progress in learning what you are being taught, for the benefit of the monastic community’<sup>56</sup>. As it turned out, Paisius would have been better off not leaving the Academy in such a haste, as he himself realized later on in his translation activity, though he owns to it in a rather indirect manner, without explicitly showing regret at his decision as a young man: ‘A book translator needs to be thoroughly informed not only about grammar and orthography (...), but about all things, including the valuable knowledge of poetics, rethoric, philosophy and theology, a brief dip into them won’t do. As for myself, although having spent four years in my youth at the schools in Kiev, I was only taught Latin grammar, as those who wished to be monks weren’t allowed to touch the highest knowledge’<sup>57</sup>. Paisius’ humbleness is worth mentioning here, as to him moving on with his studies to a higher level would have conflicted with monastic repentance and humility. Moreover, Archimandrite Sylvester Kuleabts (future bishop of Sankt Petersburg) had turned out to be right when pointing out to Peter that he wasn’t able to grasp the benefit of secular instruction for he hadn’t reached yet the high-level classes. ‘Over time – he tells Peter – you’ll get there and by knowing that instruction, you’ll be able to understand its great benefit and you will praise God for healing you of your ignorance’<sup>58</sup>. When in Kiev, Peter was forced to learn grammar on the texts of pagan authors in which ‘the famed gods and goddesses of

in the collective volume *Paisij, Lo starec*, Bose, 20-23 settembre, 1995, Edizioni Qiqajon, Comunità di Bose, p. 27-43.

<sup>55</sup> Georges Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>56</sup> Venerable Paisius Velichkovsky, ‘Răspuns pentru nemâncarea de carne către părinții Dorotei și Gherontie, ucenicii săi, care se află în București, trimiși de sfinția sa la școală pentru învățătura limbii elinești’ in *Cuvinte despre ascultare publicate de ucenicii cuviosului Paisie Starețul la Mănăstirea Neamțu în anul 1817*, revised by Virgil Căndea, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 225-229.

<sup>57</sup> Saint Paisie de la Neamț, *Cuvinte și scrisori duhovnicești* vol 1, selected and translated into Romanian by Valentina Pelin, Tipografia Centrală Publishing House, 1998, p. 49.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Autobiography’, p. 109.



the ancient Greeks' and 'the tales of Pythia'<sup>59</sup> were mentioned; instead, his disciples, who made up a genuine school of translators<sup>60</sup> (both Romanians and Slavs) were practising and deepening their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar of the foreign languages on texts of the Fathers, thus gaining (in a way that would have satisfied Peter as a student) 'a twofold benefit as it closely intertwined spiritual understanding and secular instruction'<sup>61</sup>.

As mentioned before, Peter/Paisius wasn't the only one from the Kievan College inspired by a desire for monasticism. Demetrius, who hailed from the same town as Peter (i.e. Poltava), also had a mind set on becoming a monk. Although he had promised Peter that he would join him once he took care of a few loose ends that needed tying up, Demetrius will never join the monastic ranks. Instead, he will go on to become a priest in his hometown, while remaining forever filled with nostalgia for the monastic life he could have had. Hence, it becomes clear why Paisius sends him a letter concerning monastic obedience as well as the three paths of the monastic life<sup>62</sup>, rather than one on matters relevant to a parish priest. Peter/Paisius, together with other young schoolmates, would attend spiritual meetings on a regular basis before the evening services on the eve of Sundays and great feast days, held in a quiet place at Bratsky Monastery (i.e. Monastery of the Brotherhood) from Kiev, where the Academy was located. Their goal was a radically ascetic monasticism, with no compromises, under the obedience of the same mentor. Rather than being simply youthful enthusiasm, their striving for the highest monastic standards, 'spontaneously evangelical and patristic'<sup>63</sup>, was a way of dissociating themselves from the spiritual decadence of more than a few monks in those times. Such a striving shows Peter and his peers to have a discernment

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 107.

<sup>60</sup> About the translation activity from the paisian communities in N. A. Ursu, 'Școala de traducători români din obștea Starețului Paisie de la Mănăstirile Dragomirna, Secu și Neamț', in *Românii în reînnoirea isihastă*, studies dedicated to Venerable Paisius from Neamts at the bicentenary of his death, 15 November 1994, published with the blessing of I.P.S. Daniel, Metropolitan Bishop of Moldavia and Bukowina, supervised by Virgil Căndea, Trinitas Publishing House, Iassy, 1997, p. 39-82. To be noted, in this context, the good knowledge of Greek and Latin of the Romanian monks, who have revised the patristic Slavic translations, both grammatically and lexically, in accordance with the Greek originals, still in manuscripts two or three decades before their printing. In this respect, see Dr. Valentina Pelin, 'Contribuția cărturarilor români la raducerile Școlii paisiene', in *Românii în reînnoirea isihastă*, p. 83-120.

<sup>61</sup> 'Autobiography', p. 107.

<sup>62</sup> Saint Paisie de la Neamț, *Cuvinte și scrisori duhovnicești*, vol. II, p. 106-123. Paisius sincerely appreciated Demetrius and this can be seen from the general tone of the letter (full of many biographical confessions), and from the addressing formula: 'to the follower of Abraham's deeds and the zealous observer of God's commandment, to my beloved friend, Demetrius the priest'.

<sup>63</sup> 'Autobiography', note 22, p. 98.

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beyond their years, fuelled by their constant spiritual readings and, more importantly, by the contact with the inspiring Kievan monasticism<sup>64</sup> (leaving aside the negative examples which would only serve to make them more resolute in their exacting endeavours). In our opinion, we wouldn't be overstating our case if we saw divine providence at work here. Knowing Peter's honesty and devotion to be unswerving, God prepared him for his future mission as reformer of monasticism, an utterly impossible task when dealing with someone who lacks spiritual resoluteness and who diverges from the traditional, ascetic and mystical norms of an authentic monastic way of life.

It would be wrong to see Venerable Paisius' abhorrence to the Catholic West as having its origins during the time of his studies at the Academy from Kiev. Upon considering subsequent events in his monastic life, such as the closing down of the Monastery of St. Nicholas in Medvedovsky only months after his being tonsured as a rassophore in 1741 (as the monks living there refused to convert to 'Uniation'<sup>65</sup>), the abandonment of Dragomirna Monastery in the aftermath of Bukowina's invasion by Catholic Austria in 1775, and the relentless propaganda among the Orthodox living in the Catholic countries whose effects he had witnessed with his own eyes during the time spent in the Moldavian monastic communities, all of these seem more likely to have contributed to his uncompromising attitude towards Roman-Catholicism and the Uniate Church, an attitude that actuated him to zealously enforce the ruling made by the Synod of the Patriarchs in 1775 regarding the re(baptizing) of those willing to convert to the Orthodox faith<sup>66</sup>.

Interestingly enough, a comparison has been drawn between Paisius and one of his Ukrainian schoolmates, Gregory Skovoroda (1722-1794) (*see picture no. 4*). Both of them left the Academy from Kiev with a more or less similar motivation, in an attempt to detach themselves from the arid nature of the instruction they were receiving and to dedicate themselves to a superior way of life<sup>67</sup>. Paisius,

<sup>64</sup> At Kitaev Hermitage, Peter notices with joy 'the grizzled hair and the faces of the pious monks who lived their, that were pale, yellow and thin because of fasting', also 'the peace and quiet in which they lived together, their devoutness and silence, their kindness and pious attitude'. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 99-100.

<sup>65</sup> 'Autobiography', p. 146.

<sup>66</sup> Problems sketched (with the promise of a later thoroughgoing study) in the introductory study to the translation of the correspondence between Paisie and the Greek hieromonk Dorotheos Vulismas, as an effort to complete the paisian corpus of letters made by archdeacon prof. dr. IOAN I. ICĂ jr, 'Despre Mirungere și Botez în Moldova anului 1785. Starețul Paisie Velickovski în dialog epistolar cu eruditul ieromonah Dorotheos Vulismas', in *Revista Teologică*, no. 4 (2011), p. 58-75.

<sup>67</sup> A.-E.N. Tachiaos, 'Paisij Velickovskij and Grigorij Savvic Skovoroda: Two Unconventional Reactions to Kievan Theology', în G. Broggi-Bercoff, M. Capaldo, J. Jerkov Capaldo (edd.), *Filologia e letteratura nei paesi slavi. Studi in onore di Sante Graciotti*, Roma 1990, p. 613-621,

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however, chose to go back to the Fathers and to Tradition, whereas Skovoroda opted for a pre-Christian philosophical and religious quest, blazing a trail in Russian religious philosophy<sup>68</sup>. Whereas Paisius had left the Academy to run away from the world, Skovoroda has been labelled a *homo ludens*: not running away from the world, but getting caught up in its whirl. It has been contended that they were proponents of two different styles. On the one hand, Skovoroda (the first original Russian and Ukrainian philosopher) typifies the baroque style. Paisius, on the other hand, is an exponent of the so-called byzantine style, meaning that through his life, work and Weltanschauung he sees order and harmony as reigning supreme in the world. Conversely, the baroque style sees all of existence as ruled by chaos<sup>69</sup>. Although they espoused conflicting views regarding life and the world, both thinkers have been hugely influential in Russian, Ukrainian (and even Romanian, in the case of Paisius) cultures. Directly or through his disciples (in Russia, those from Optina in particular), Paisius has influenced a great number of philosophers and writers (such as Gogol, Žukovsky, Kireevsky, Dostoyevsky, Leontiev and Soloviev), who have developed a synthesis between the secular culture and the Orthodox spirituality. Gregory Skovoroda has influenced important figures such as Lev Tolstoi or Vl. Vernadsky, also making a positive contribution to the development of Ukrainian poetry<sup>70</sup>.

Another comparison, this time with a contemporary saint, i.e. Tikhon of Zadonsk, would have Paisius living ‘in the past, according to tradition and within Tradition’<sup>71</sup>. In a sense, as opposed to the atmosphere of his age, Paisius seems to belong to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. His presence and activity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, have been truly providential. He did not return to the tradition of the Fathers as a sign of a soppy historicism or as someone overly enamoured of the past, but as

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quoted in ‘Autobiografia’, note 32, p. 109. Skovoroda stayed at Kiev between 1738 and 1750, with a pause between 1742-1744, where he first discovered the great Western modern philosophers, such as Descartes, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Wolf, Diderot, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau. In 1760, he will refuse the proposal of ordainment into a priest, and will strongly argue with the ecclesiastic authorities of the time, denouncing, as Peter/ Paisie did some time, ‘the clerical Pharisaism’ and ‘the monastic masquerade’. Although he refused to join a ‘school theology’ (even if he taught for a while moral theology), his philosophy remains dominated by an intense religiousness. See, for example, Kaluzny Antoine Eugène, *La philosophie du cœur de Grégoire Skovoroda*, Fides, 1983, 130 p., selected excerpts being available at [http://lettresukraineriennes.blogspot.ro/2011/08/blog-post\\_7553.html](http://lettresukraineriennes.blogspot.ro/2011/08/blog-post_7553.html) (webpage last visited on November 17, 2015).

<sup>68</sup> A presentation-synthesis at Tomáš Špidlík, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creștin. IV. Omul și destinul său în filozofia religioasă rusă*, translated by Maria Cornelia Ică jr, introductory study and afterword: deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2002.

<sup>69</sup> Andrei N. Okara, ‘Paisie Velikicovski și Grigorie Skovoroda’ in *Paisij, Lo starec*, p. 122.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125-126.

<sup>71</sup> Georges Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

a man fully aware that the salvation of monasticism and of Christianity at large, arise therefrom.

### **Contemporary Orthodox Theology. Challenges and Attitude**

Once he started his monastic life, Paisius was no longer directly or programmatically interested in theology, that is to say, academic theology. Nonetheless, his vast translation activity represented much more than the regeneration of monasticism in a Patristic spirit – it was an announcement *avant la lettre* of the requirements expressly needed for a living Orthodox theology. For this reason, the recovery of Patristic sources by Paisius represented not only a proposal for a new path in monastic life (in fact, the return to the old, authentic ways), but also the discovery of new horizons in theology, earning him the name ‘the prophet and clairvoyant of things to come’<sup>72</sup>.

Felt as a necessity by Peter/Paisius at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the turning to the sources of Tradition would represent for Easterners a continuous yearning, which was, regrettably, difficult to quench in the adverse historical conditions through which the Orthodox peoples went (rule of the Turks and communism); it was proclaimed however as a programme for the 20<sup>th</sup> century Orthodox theology and after at the International Congress of Orthodox Faculties (Athens, 1936)<sup>73</sup>, especially through the voice of father George Florovsky. In the same year, Vladimir Lossky also announced his theological ‘neo-patristic’ methodology, understood as a return not so much to the word, but to the ‘spirit’ of the Fathers, as a prompt answer to the ‘religious philosophy’ for which the Tradition of the Holy Fathers did not represent ‘a living organism, the inner self-confession of the truth’, but a ‘dead, inert, obsolete, imperfect material, a simple basis for subsequent developments and speculations’<sup>74</sup>. In Romania, Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae endorsed the same programme, creating through his major works (which covered three main directions – dogma, mysticism, liturgy) a ‘neo-patristic synthesis’, overcoming scholasticism in two ways: ‘abstract intellectualism’ is replaced by the ‘hesychast mystical experience criteria’, and ‘modern individualism’

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 161.

<sup>73</sup> The third thesis of the congress works, discussed on November 30, 1936, focused on establishing the ‘external influences’ (Roman-Catholic, Protestant and philosophical) on Orthodox Theology after the fall of Constantinople, works by Archbishop Chrysostomos of Athens, Prof. Constantin Dyovouniotis from the University of Athens and prof. George Florovsky. The entire summary of the works can be found in *Candela*, theological and ecclesiastic magazine, Chernivtsi, year XLVII, no. 1-2 (1936), p. 205-314.

<sup>74</sup> Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, ‘Sensul exemplar al unei vieți și opere: lupta pentru teologie’, introductory study to Vladimir Lossky, *Vederea lui Dumnezeu*, in Romanian by Maria Cornelia Oros, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1995, p. XIII-LII.

is opposed by the ‘communitarian personalism as a model of the Trinitarian Communion’, a communion which is only ‘implicit in the dogmas’ and is ‘practically achieved in the double experience of God’s descent and the personal-mystical and communitarian-liturgical ascent of the believer and Church to the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity’<sup>75</sup>. In the Serbian sphere, the promoter of this Patristic rebirth was Saint Justin Popović, whose work *Dogmatics* is profoundly anchored in the Greek and Byzantine Fathers, the dogmas not being ‘doctrinarily and abstractly treated as a speculative system’, as it happened during the secular ‘Western captivity’ of Orthodox theology, as the period after the 15<sup>th</sup> century was named, but as an ‘authentic Patristic and spiritual understanding, as pillars and expressions of the spiritual and ascetic experience of the Church’<sup>76</sup>.

The programmatic invitation of Father George Florovsky was summarised within the horizon of three significant possible interpretations: ‘modern theological interpretations of the dogmas, required by the inherent historical character forming the theological endeavour, should be made in a maximum relation of *congeniality* with the Patristic spirit, wherein these fully express the *universality* of the Church, by means of actively reintegrating at the level of theological consciousness the category structures specific to *Patristic Hellenism*’<sup>77</sup>. Unfortunately, the requirements imposed by a responsible appropriation of this theological Florovskian programme, except for a few positive examples such as those mentioned above, led to the ‘neo-patristic’ movement’s not blossoming at its true value within the ‘mass’ Orthodox theology. Many times, the programme was reduced to a simple slogan, the sources of the Tradition being ‘invoked or quoted as an adornment or for an authoritarian purpose in a pre-made speech’<sup>78</sup>, without a faith-

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<sup>75</sup> Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei, I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, Deisis/Stavropoleos Publishing House, 2008, p. 43. The author insists on the need to receive this inheritance and teach in theology schools this theologising system as one of the urgent priorities of the current moment of the Church (cf. *Ibidem*, p. 44). See also Adrian Marinescu, ‘Criteriile și fundamentele patristice ale Teologiei, elemente structurale ale Teologiei ortodoxe dintotdeauna și premise ale rezolvării problematicii teologice de astăzi. Studiu de caz: Gândirea (perspectiva teologică), metoda, contribuția teologico-liturgică și receptarea Părinților la Păr. D. Stăniloae (I)’, in *Studii Teologice*, 9 (2013), no. 2, p. 263-239.

<sup>76</sup> Fr. Prof. Ioan Ică and Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, ‘Părintele Iustin Popovici: lupta cu Protagoras sau criteriologia filozofiei ortodoxe a Adevărului’, at Saint Justin Popovic, *Omul și Dumnezeu-ul-om. Abisurile și culmile filozofiei*, introduction and translation: Fr. Prof. Ioan Ică and deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Sophia-Carteia Ortodoxă Publishing House, București, 2010, p. 9. Saint Iustin is also the author of the colossal presentation project in Serbian of the *Lives of the Saints*, seen as a living ‘experimental dogmatic’, the ‘pedagogy’ and ‘encyclopaedia’ par excellence of ‘Orthodoxy’ (cf. *Ibidem*, p. 13).

<sup>77</sup> Ioan I. Ică jr, ‘Patristica și teologia modernă. Semnificația și actualitatea unui program teologic (G. Florovsky)’, in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, 27 (1982), no. 10-12, p. 709.

<sup>78</sup> Father Prof. Ioan Ică and Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, ‘Înnoirea în teologia ortodoxă contemporană: sens, probleme, dimensiuni’, at Karl Christian Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței ecleziale. Înnoirea*

ful and simultaneously creative assimilation, meaning that there is a belief that the Fathers are sending us something here and now and that communication with and about God cannot be exhausted through sterile repetitions. If Paisius left us the *Philokalia*, he did so for us to know it and take inspiration from it for academic theology and our private lives, in order to overcome within the favourable current conditions the dichotomy between ‘piety and school’ of which the Kiev education had been accused. What could be excused and explained in that context becomes a stringent and challenging responsibility today.

A symptomatic example of how some theologians deficiently relate to the Fathers’ tradition, owing, on the one hand, to the rational-pietist marks of intellectual and spiritual influences of Western theology and, on the other, to the lack of an ascetic spirit in their lives, in which the Fathers’ thinking would be naturally engraved, was the dispute from the second half of the former century, in Greece, between academic theology and Philokalic Athonite monasticism. As opposed to the theology of Thessaloniki, represented by Panayotis Trembelas, insufficiently resorting to the ‘spirit and method of Patristic theologising’, Athos, through the monk Theocletus Dyonisiates, represented the faithful continuation ‘both in the word, and especially in its spirit and method’ of the venerable, spiritual, Philokalic and Patristic Tradition of the ‘Eastern church in the integrity of its spiritual and intellectual experiences’. The *Exposition* of the Hagioritic community, a final point of the dispute, was put alongside the ‘Hagioritic Tome’ which defended Gregory Palamas in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and represents the radiography of Orthodox theology ‘finding itself in a reassimilation process not only of its Patristic sources, where Philokalic spirituality resides in its living core of spirit and flaming fire, but also, primarily, of the Patristic spirit, kept alive in the doctrine of this spiritual Tradition’<sup>79</sup>. Another example of not having understood the Fathers is represented by the manner in which a theologian such as Christos Yannaras wrongly quotes and accuses Nicodemus the Hagiorite of ‘alienating’ the Orthodox ethos, which was promptly sanctioned by the same Hagiorite community<sup>80</sup>. Venerable Paisius

*teologiei ortodoxe contemporane*, introduction and translation by Fr. prof. dr. Ioan Ică, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., „Postfață. Între Athos și Atena: note pe marginea unei dispute” for Teoclit Dinosiatiul, *Dialoguri la Athos – între cer și pământ. I. Monahismul Sfântului Munte. II. Teologia rugăciunii minții*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, translation Fr. prof. Ioan Ică sr, presentation and concluding remarks Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2015, p. 443-478. The balanced position of the Neo-Patristic reorientation of the Romanian Orthodox Theology was highlighted here, by mentioning the ‘venerable Orthodox dogmatics professor’ Father Dumitru Stăniloae in the ‘Exposition’. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 462-463 (in the Athonite community’s text, the reference can be found at § 5, p. 470).

<sup>80</sup> Yannaras’ position and the Athonite reaction, in one of the annexes to the work of P. ELIA CITERIO, *Nicodim Aghitoritul. Personalitatea – opera – învățătura ascetică și mistică*, with the



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from Neamts represents, in this case as well, the positive example of having entered into the Fathers' 'spirit'. For him, resorting to the Patristic tradition was not founded on the wish to gain theological information<sup>81</sup> or a need to argue, by using the authority-filled opinions of the Fathers, his own theories, but it was rather the referential and motivational-inspirational impulse of a spiritual life that he wished to be as authentic as possible. It is very clear that a correct and living assimilation of the Fathers requires spiritual congeniality, visible in similar aspects from the life of the holy offerer and the human receiver. One of Venerable Paisius's biographers, schemamonk Methrophanes, described him as follows: 'if somebody were to place him alongside one of our God-bearing Fathers of old, then he would not err, as he did not lack any of their gifts'<sup>82</sup>.

However, to quote a positive example from the Greek space, the name and work of the distinguished theologian Panayotis Nellas are worthwhile remembering, actively involved in the life of the Church under its various aspects (including, or primarily in its liturgical sphere). He was an advocate of a correct understanding and relation towards the Fathers' inheritance in defining a current neo-patristic theology, 'neither conservatory, nor liberal', with him evolving 'gracefully and safely beyond any extreme, between the deathly plague of the rationalist university academic view and the sentimental and voluntarist diversion of pietism or ethicism'<sup>83</sup>.

It can be dangerous, however, not only to remove the Fathers from their historical and ecclesiastical context and their use for already formulated dogmas, but also occasionally proclaim the 'neo-patristic' theology with a tendency for exclusiveness. This can lead, as a consequence, to ignoring biblical theology (even

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translation of his Life and Prologues to the spiritual writings, translation by Maria Cornelia and Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2001, p. 462-476. A contemporary of Venerable Paisie, and, at a given moment, wishing to become one of his disciples, Venerable Nicodemus was moved by the same urge to return to the Fathers' Tradition, whom he brought back to the present moment through his prolific activity.

<sup>81</sup> According to Nichifor Crainic, the essence of Paisianism is 'purely mystical', being able to summarise it 'in two words: *study* and *contemplation*. Study here not in the sense of simply satisfying theological curiosity, be it however legitimate as possible, but of a profound preparation of the intellect for contemplation'. See Nichifor Crainic, *Cursurile de mistică. I. Teologia mistică II. Mistică germană*, introduction and edition by Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2010, p. 308.

<sup>82</sup> 'Viața Cuviosului stareț Paisie scrisă de Mitrofan schimonahul', translated by Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, in *Autobiografia și Viețile unui stareț urmate de Așezăminte și alte texte*, p. 282.

<sup>83</sup> Diacon Ioan I. Ică jr, '«Îndumnezeirea» omului, P. Nellas și conflictul antropologiilor', la Panayotis Nellas, *Omul – animal îndumnezeit. Perspective pentru o antropologie ortodoxă*, ediția a III-a, introduction and translation by: deacon Ioan Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2002, p. 30. One of the youngest members of the famous 'Zoe' Brotherhood and at the same time graduate of the Faculty of Theology, Nellas was actively involved in the restoration of the authentic spirit of Greek Orthodoxy, as a dissociation from the attempts made by academic theology to 'protestantise' Orthodox Christianity.

though the Fathers based their works on the Scripture), which would remain only a supplier of material for the use of systematic theology, with serious consequences, similar to Protestant errors (excessively resorting to a historical 'Jesus', as opposed to the more metaphysical 'Christ' of the dogma)<sup>84</sup>. In this context, the appropriation of the biblical roots of theology represents a need that is as stringent as the one signalled approximately a century ago in Athens. As opposed to copying the Western exegetical methods, the only ones one would have access to during Paisius' times, at the higher theological education courses in Kiev, the spiritual exegesis of the Scripture, in the sense of the Fathers, was brought to the centre of attention by some representatives of Orthodox theology schools<sup>85</sup>, but who – given the reception of the programmatic Patristic rebirth – tend to unfortunately remain solitary voices to be lost within the facile, timid or self-sufficient immobilism of the new generation of theologians.

In the continuation of the recovery effort of the biblical and patristic roots of theology in an integrating and balanced manner, it is important to remember that Orthodox theology possesses two inexhaustible sources of inspiration and renewal, of which Western denominations are deprived- hymnography and iconography. Despite it having been left at the level of a mere liturgical accessory, not understood by believers due to the discrepancy between the modern language and church language (old Slavonic and Greek), hymnography needs to be reinstated at its value, as doxological theology, forged under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit guiding the saint hymnographers, and based on an acute sense of veneration towards the Scripture and the Fathers in a theological poliphony complemented by prosodic beauty. If a heretical Arius used poetic texts to spread his teaching, contemporary Orthodox theology is called upon not to leave hymnographic texts only to the psaltes, but to bring them back to the spiritual-academic studies. Worthy of remembering now are three great inspirational categories: the Triod hymnography, a work of the Studite school in particular, the hymnography of the great feasts, many of the compositions being inspired from excerpts from the Cappadocian Fathers and the Sunday Trinity Canons, belonging to Metropolitan Methrophanes of Smyrna.

<sup>84</sup> A lucid analysis, with the poposal of a re-evaluation of the biblical studies in the sense of a 'scriptural dynamic of Orthodoxy', at deacon Ioan Ică jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei, I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 77-80.

<sup>85</sup> Following professor Sava Agouridis, author of a paper (*Ermineutica textelor Sfinte*, Atena, 1979<sup>1</sup>, 2000<sup>2</sup>) written in a different register than the old hermeneutical models, inspired from the Western ones, Father Constantin Coman marks the start in Romanian theology regarding a spiritual interpretation of the revealed Word. See Fr. Conf. Dr. Constantin Coman *Erminia Duhului. Texte fundamentale pentru o ermeneutică duhovnicească*, Bizantin Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002.

On the other hand, it has been argued, and rightfully so, that the theology of the icon could be one of the most readily available means to correctly assimilate the Patristic spirit, the main and valid ‘procedure to recover the Fathers’ doctrine’ residing in the ‘iconic viewing and its interpretation in the icon’s light’. A theological education choosing the ‘aniconic methodology of the Protestant or Roman-Catholic education’ loses a ‘bridge capable of uniting the hiatus between the Fathers’ charismatic theology and the scientific university education’. More than an almost magical ‘experience’ of the icon, ‘the study of the icon, of the crises in its history, both providential and eventful, the in-depth studies on the history of iconoclasm, of Christological theology, liturgical iconology and theological knowledge of the canon doctrine and of the applied aspect of the Orthodox guide books can iconically redirect the subjects, can flood and homogeneously ‘iconicise’ the entire body of theological education’<sup>86</sup>. It would be beneficial for academic theology to assimilate the exegesis model, in a profoundly theological tune, starting from the Scripture, the Fathers’ Tradition and the liturgical one, from Venerable Saint Andrey Rublyov’s famous Icon of the Trinity, the profound work of Father Schema-Archimandrite Gabriel Bunge<sup>87</sup>, or the frescoes of the monasteries in Oltenia, in the ‘scholia’ of Archimandrite Bartholomew Valerius Anania<sup>88</sup>. This latter endeavour was seen as a recovery of an ‘unwritten chapter (but painted!) of Romanian theology, which in the blossoming centuries of the Romanian Middle Ages it was not so much a theology of writing, but one of art – a theology painted with the brush of holiness and carved with the chisel of exegesis in the souls and bodies of the saints, or depicted in bright colours on the icons and frescoes of those miracles of beauty which are the old Romanian churches’<sup>89</sup>.

Biblical and Patristic, iconic and doxological, authentic Orthodox theology is still in search of committed promoters, moved by the faithfulness towards Tradition and connected to the present realities which they are called to offer truly saving solutions to. Rigour in life options, a lack of compromise visible so early at a Peter/Paisius, his yearning for knowing the Fathers as inexhaustible sources of answers, the strongly ascetic and liturgically anchored character of his life turns

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<sup>86</sup> The apology of the importance of the icon in theological teaching at Sorin Dumitrescu, *Noi și icoana (I). 3I+I de iconologii pentru învățarea icoanei*, Anastasia Publishing House, 2010, p. 21-33.

<sup>87</sup> Gabriel Bunge, *Icoana Sfintei Treimi a cuviosului Andrei Rubliov sau ‘Celălalt Paraclit’*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, foreword and translation by deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2006.

<sup>88</sup> Valeriu Anania, *Cerurile Oltului. Scolile Arhimandritului Bartolomeu la imaginile fotografice ale lui Dumitru F. Dumitru*, The Publishing House of Diocese of Râmnic and Argeș, 1990.

<sup>89</sup> Ioan I. Ică jr, ‘O teologie românească a icoanei’, in *Tabor*, culture and spirituality magazine, 5 (2001), no. 1, p. 53.

*Venerable Paisius Velichkovsky at the Kiev Theological Academy*

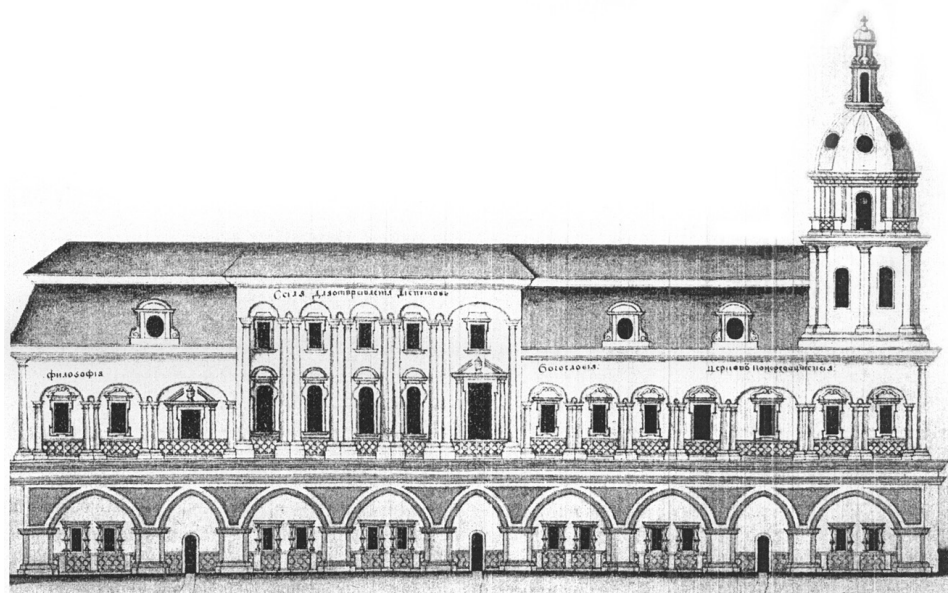
Venerable Paisius from Neamts, amid the current crisis of role models, into an authentic and permanently valid reference, which any theologian as well as any monk or Christian is bound to reach out to. The former student from Kiev has inspiring and cooperative powers that can trigger, at any historical moment, a much needed Patristic revival, beneficial to the way we live and think.



*Fig. 1. Icon of the saints who studied at Kiev Academy*



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*Fig. 2. The Mazepin Building at the Kiev Academy*



*Fig. 3. Sylvester Kuleabts, rector of the Kiev Academy (1740-1745)*



*Fig. 4. Gregory Skovoroda (1722-1794)*



*Fig. 5. Seal of the Spiritual Academy from Kiev*