

Discussion

Dmitri Gasak: Thank you very much, Professor David Gzgyan, for your reflections that are not quite simple for perception. However, I think, the discussion can clarify some points. Maybe someone has already got questions or feedback to what Professor David Gzgyan has just said? You are welcome.

Sebastian Moldovan: Thank you very much, Professor. Personally, I very much appreciate this presentation of yours and I confess that it challenged me in the best sense of the word. In particular, I was interested in the analogies you use to understand the topic of the discussion, namely the experience of tradition: what kind of experience mediates the tradition? I could identify three or four analogies. I begin with the last one, ie the current passing through the electrical circuits. Another analogy is that of the garden, in which we have all the gardening accessories, but also all these wires, supports, cords, which have as purpose the growth of the climbing plants. Also, I have found an analogy with writing. You referred to the text, to what the living experience formalises in a text. Of course, we think here of Holy Scripture, and not only, but to all registered treasure of our tradition, the holy canons or the writings of the Holy Fathers. Finally, the first analogy that I think I have identified is the one you borrowed from Kierkegaard, namely of the flight. Why do I refer to the issue of analogies? When we are discussing things which have a apophatical content, something that goes beyond the possibility of a formalization and of a full explanation, we are forced to resort by analogy to similar experiences more accessible to us. Or, the problem you raise is one of the fundamental problems of Christian life, is, as Vladimir Lossky said, the relationship between vertical, between the ineffable absolute and history, with its entire content which we can identify within an empirical support: words, texts, icons, other testimonies, archives of all kinds. I think in general in theology, the analogy is a fundamental problem, because depending on what kind of analogies we use, we capture some or other aspect of the issue in question. This thing was shown by our Savior when He spoke in parables, analogies with common, ordinary ex-

perience. Any analogy, on the one hand reveals some of what the communicator wants to say, on the other hand we must be aware of the inevitable limitations of any analogies of any mode of expression. You have pointed out, in my opinion, very clearly: Tradition is not identical with Revelation. It captures something, fixes something, leaves some prints that can be transmitted, but the discovery event, the event of change, the event of growth, the meeting event itself is never closed, limited to empirical forms that we can transmit each other. Consequently, the event itself remains non-transferable. You said a crucial issue: the one of the criteria. How do we recognize the authenticity of what can not be completely expressed and formalized. Obviously, the letter can never tell us to what extent the Spirit is there, not it alone. We know, of course, pharisaism unhappy experience, the transformation of the living word of God in the Torah, in the Talmud, into something that may contradict God Himself. "Can it be from the Lord, since it violates Saturday?" This situation is classic and we are constantly confronted with it. You have shown very beautiful what St. John says, that we risk to turn the letter into something that kills, into an idol. The Saviour said one thing that can help us: "by their fruits you shall know them". I think we have here an extremely important criterion, namely the fruit of the Spirit. From the abundance of these fruits, to the extent that we partake them from those who have this spiritual experience, we, who do not have this fruit, this direct experience, we recognize a parent, recognize a brother, recognize a bearer of the Spirit through these fruits. And, to close my word, I will use an analogy, remembering the current, the incandescence analogy. When someone came to incandescence can transmit this state of those around him. Who has not reached this incandescence is not transformed by the current passing through his own life, and can not be an authentic witness of tradition. So I think this extraordinary temperature of the spiritual experience is what helps us to grasp if we deal with the presence of the Spirit or some form of imposture. Thank you very much!

D. Gzzyan. As there are no questions, perhaps you will let me expand your remark a bit. In my paper I aimed at aggravating the problem, partly because of my own experience of converting to Christianity was lucky. I was not raised in a Christian family, although if the words of Kierkegaard are taken literally, I have not experienced a 'leap into the abyss' either. Only post factum I realized my life story is quite comparable to such an event. Leaps can presumably be different, and this is another cause for reflection. Of course, when you have to resort to some catchy images in your short paper, this does not mean that they settle all questions. This was not actually my objective. I only wanted the paper to be presented in a supposedly constructive context.

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Here is another problem point that occurs to me again from my own experience. We often resort to the analogy of icon. In this regard, I was lucky again. In particular, it was Alexander Kopirovsky who introduced me into the world of icons and learnt to distinguish between a genuine icon and a false one, between a good and a bad one. But the problem is not in choosing between genuine and ingenuine but rather between two good icons, one of which is an evidence of the spirit working, while the other one is rather characterized by a skilled hand and eye of its author (even such differences exist). This only accentuates the subject of tradition dynamism.

However the second case is much more difficult. According to icon painters, it is known that Theophanes the Greek was sometimes compelled to fresco churches using a team-based method. It is unlikely he had enough time for spiritual concentration in order to paint the Transfiguration icon everywhere and always exactly the way it was once revealed. Theophanes the Greek did not know how to paint bad icons. But even he must have had both moments of clarity and just skilfully painted frescoes. After all, it is more difficult to see differences between them rather than between a crafted icon and a genuine one.

The living experience of tradition lets us not be afraid to constantly put ourselves in question and to look for our spiritual grounds over and over again. In this sense, a leap into the abyss is not something that happened once. For example, in my life I keep getting back to it. On the other hand, this is an additional temptation. It is easy to utter such words as ecstatic movement of the spirit etc. We must not also forget this holds more subtle temptations. There are certain guarantees in the dynamics of tradition. I have not mentioned them, but they exist. These guarantees are also of spiritual origin.

A. Kopirovsky. The paper by Professor David Gzgzyan stimulates reflections. Of course, one cannot approach the issue of Tradition superficially, as Protestant currents do: they consider anything that is not directly related to Scripture must not be present in church life. Unfortunately, this problem, seemingly so simple and clear, is a stumbling block to many people nowadays. Thus, one has constantly to explain that tradition is not something invented by people but what comes from the depths of the spiritual life.

But the paper provides also a counterexample, which seemed to me, however, somewhat artificial. On the last page it is written: 'Once such fixed forms are admitted as obligatory for all, the very life with God will be threatened.' Further a vivid image is evoked: 'Plant stakes cannot substitute plants, but, inexplicably, we rather often see those who are delighted with contemplating a garden, in which blossoming flowerbeds and fruit-bearing trees have been replaced with stones,

sticks and ropes.’ I could hardly imagine someone touched by seeing such a garden, not a Japanese stone garden but one where sticks and ropes substitute plants. If the ‘dark twin’ of tradition manifests itself openly, it is immediately visible as an image of darkness.

However, more complicated cases exist. Imagine we enter a garden where everything is beautiful – even more beautiful than in reality – and iconized. The very richness of our tradition – spiritual texts, beautiful icons, magnificent churches, sophisticated forms of worship – is a challenge. But, as Fr Alexander Schmemmann wrote about this briefly and figuratively in his “The Journals”, ‘the decorations have taken the entire stage.’ This theatrical scenery is splendid, but it is indeed very difficult to do anything on such a stage. In my view, this facet should have been more covered in the paper. I say this not to reproach Professor Gzgzryan, who had very little time at his disposal to cover this subject extensively. He did the main thing, that is, he set up the problem as such. But I would like to know his attitude to this facet.

David Gzgzryan: Even though I warned I would avoid radicalization, but in one example I obviously failed. I admit I resorted to such an absurdist method to drive the point home. But I totally agree with the way you expand this subject. In fact, it is a bit difficult to live in this brilliantly iconized space. But in this regard I have also a feeling that hardly anybody needs it. In addition to the fact that we can observe an overflow of evidence, albeit brilliant, of the Spirit who has worked in the past, these high things are apparently becoming less appreciated. Maybe I am just clumsily trying to justify this absurdist method. The point is we encounter very often situations when obvious simulacra are present instead of genuine things. Material evidence of the Spirit working must not overshadow His very work. But the loss of sensitiveness to this evidence is namely because one loses sensitiveness to the main thing – to what has produced them. That is why I emphasized this point: the problem is to distinguish between a good icon, which is already usual for a skillful painter, and an icon as an evidence of the Spirit working. In this sense, I think the both correlate with each other.

Dmitri Gasak: If I may, I will also say a few words in relation to the problem of tradition, as it has been pointed out by Professor David Gzgzryan. Christianity has created the most powerful culture in the world’s history. And today only experts can actually understand it. I will continue the example of icon. I think, most modern Orthodox Christians simply cannot discern the quality of different icons of one painter, especially if it is Theophanes the Greek (Alexander Kopirovsky suggests that most professionals cannot either). It is known that St. Seraphim of

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Sarov used to pray with an icon that was a fragment of a Western iconographic composition of the Annunciation. This icon was written neither in an outstanding manner nor by a great icon-painter, not being in itself of great spiritual value. But St. Seraphim's experience (by the way, it has come down to us only partially in terms of written sources) has entered the tradition not only of the Russian Orthodox Church but also of some other churches, not just the Orthodox ones. It turns out that icon is not the point. When we enter a church or the altar in it and see that all is cluttered up with icons, it often betrays bad taste and a lacking sense of proportion and proper place for icon in church architecture and liturgical space. On the other hand, St. Seraphim's experience of prayer, and not only his, shows that it is not the icon but something else that determines the quality of prayer and the spiritual condition of the human person and Christian gathering. Probably, for Theophanes the Greek such distinction was important, he was well aware of what quality any of his icons is. For him, it was so because he personally experienced this revelation associated with inspiration. He must have discerned where his work reflects a genuine spiritual experience, and where it is just a masterly work of an icon painter. To understand St. Theophanes, one has to do something by oneself, one needs to enter the experience of such revelation. But it turns out, as Professor Gzgzyan says, that this experience is not transferable: Tradition can be transmitted to somebody else, while Revelation cannot. But if tradition can, after all, be transmitted, then how? In my early Christian life I was surprised that absolutely different people in church call themselves spiritual children of a distinguished person. Seeing them, I would have never said they might be spiritual children of one and the same person. Say, many in the Russian Church call themselves spiritual children of Fr John (Krestyankin). But it is quite unlikely that Fr John would have been a bearer of such different spiritual traditions!

So, is it possible to take a step closer to solving the mystery of transmitting tradition? After all, it is so important that Tradition should really initiate every Christian not just into symbols of Christianity but into the immediate experience of faith of the Apostles and all Saints. This faith must become not just man's personal property but it has to unite him with his fellow believers into church.

David Gzgzyan: I will specify this personal experience of revelation is not directly transferred, as it was exactly stated in my paper. Tradition in its very essence is nothing else than the experience of transfer, of interaction, of achieving the unity of many in their different personal experiences resembling the primary experience of revelation. And yet this is the experience of consensus. So the very paradox is that tradition can be transmitted. The question is how. One can get off with an affirmation: if it is the Tradition of the Holy Spirit, then it is transferred

through the spirit. But such statements look like excuses nowadays. I will emphasize again a phrase from my paper: Tradition is an area of effort. I think we quite often fix on some one-offs, singular upheavals. People can quite sincerely recall what they have first experienced once and speak about it in such a way that it gives completely unambiguous evidence of something genuine. But there is a confusing question: what then? Does such an one-off cover the rest of one's life? No.

As for unlike children of one spiritual father, people often say about themselves they are someone's spiritual children but, inexplicably, their spiritual father is rarely asked whether he really has so many of them. I suspect the answer would surprise both spiritual children themselves and those who are asked (such examples are known). But I would pose the question even more bluntly: how can we find out whether we are children of our Heavenly Father or not? He has as many children as no spiritual father would bear. Here another problem arises: well, we can call so ourselves. But does He acknowledge us as His children? Being named God's children is not only an award, it also requires faithfulness. Some Orthodox are pretenders. This phrase allows a situation where I consider myself Orthodox, and others agree, whereas in heaven I would be for some reason deemed non-Orthodox. Are there any institutions confirming my 'personal' Orthodoxy? I do not know. There are institutions that secure canonical forms of Orthodoxy. But, as we know, they are easy to reproduce. What is much more important is the criterion of selecting these forms. It is usually mentioned in the preambles to the acts of the Ecumenical councils: this is the action of the Holy Spirit. The question is whether all is in accordance with Him.

Gathering together these one-offs, various facts of personal biography or collective histories, requires unceasing effort, when we share these events with each other, when we recognize each other within them as children of the one Heavenly Father and Christ's disciples. Therewith, we always have to admit the possibility that, due to our infirmity, we are already satisfied with this unity but He may come and let us know there actually is no unity between us. This assumption, however, is also informal. We do not whip up ourselves artificially all the time. Church life, life in the spirit is probably so that you cannot stop. Moreover, you have to seek all the time a reproducible consensus. If we live, we move, problematizing ourselves this movement all the time. Otherwise I do not really understand what life is. Life is not mere reproduction, unless we speak of biological life (although there are opinions that it is not as simple as we sometimes imagine). What then to speak of human life?...

Fr. Nicolae Chifăr: I want first to thank professor Gzgyan for this very dense paper. In the spirit of the discussions so far, I would also like to point out a

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problem linked to Tradition and traditions. Sure we all agree that there is a written tradition, that we can call static, because it's already documented. We are talking at the same time about a dynamic tradition, which shows that the Church is alive and that the Holy Spirit works in it. Related to this dynamic tradition, we recognize in the Church or in the Christian world in the broad sense of the word, different movements, charismatic movements, called by some. Some of them are part of the tradition of the Church. Others, which we categorically condemn, are out of this spirit. And then the question arises: Who is the authority that differentiates movement from movement? And I think we all agree, and I ask the opinion of course also to the professor, that the Church is that authority, especially through its liturgical life. And why do I say this? Because there is a danger, which we grasp even in our Church, going to the tomb of valuable spiritual fathers of the Church, to worship, to bring veneration, but we walk past the church, where the Divine Liturgy is celebrated. Or, for example, at the Monastery Sambata, Father Teofil Părăian forbade communion to those who did not attend three consecutive Sundays at the service. Or going to his grave, passing by the church, is not in the spirit of what he wanted, what he preached. So the question is related to the authority in the Church and how we manifest it to distinguish traditions from traditions. Thank you!

D. Gzzyan. I would probably answer so: there is a historical plan of solving such situations. In my view, it is ambiguous: sometimes decisions were good and sometimes too hasty. Sometimes a confluence of circumstances helped. As we know, Hesychasm was nothing else but a charismatic movement, very bold, innovative, extremely risky at first glance and, like any charismatic movement, not free from extremes. I still do not know what exactly turned out to be the decisive factor for the flawless victory of Palamism when even radical forms of Hesychast practices were neither condemned nor at least critically evaluated. Although later these risks were reservedly pointed at.

In my opinion, when we trust God's action, the non-church nature of a phenomenon gradually becomes more pronounced and betrays itself. When I say so, I do not mean at all that everything will go on automatically. In fact, I am a principled opponent of this word 'automatically' in relation to church life. I think one needs the courage to wait. I always tell my students: consider, over the first two or so centuries of Christianity the church had almost no institutional forms of reaching universal consensus. But somehow this consensus triumphed from time to time. Think, for instance, of Theodotus the Tanner: it is well known that this was a classic type of heretic because he positioned himself against anything – against Scripture, which he suggested to correct according to one's own rational understanding, against ecclesiastical authorities, against local churches. All his

behaviour demonstrated there was no authority he would acknowledge, except himself. But the church withstood the presence of this totally subversive person. As a result, the church won through minimal means with maximum effect: Theodotus was taken out and away from church life. Quite another matter is when in history we see examples of, dare I say it, quite hasty institutional decisions with corresponding consequences, not the same as in the case of Theodotus the Tanner. It will just suffice to mention Paul of Samosata! I keep thinking that the Council of Antioch (267–268) lasted about nine months with interruptions. Nine months under circumstances where the church was semi-clandestine with no formal authority to rely on. But do we know how devastating the presence in the church of such a classic type heretic as Paul of Samosata was? How many people did he lug away into a schism? Do we have such evidence? Virtually, we don't. Why? The church won spiritually. The evidence of this victory was a very patient, consistent, thoughtful attitude towards that phenomenon.

In this sense, trusting the Spirit, in my view, can do what none of institutions can ever do, at least not with the same success. But this requires the main condition to be met – the inner trust. When it lacks, then one has to resort to more available means, for example, to involve armed guards for solving a doctrinal dispute, as it was during the Second Council of Ephesus in 449. The final of this Council was expected because its participants did not trust the Spirit at all.

Fr Vasile Bîrzu: Thank you very much for the entire debate and the interventions of all. I thought to intervene in the discussion, hearing about Palamism and also about the criteria that would be valid to confirm a tradition. Here is an aspect that has not been addressed. We are talking only about the tradition that is forged by the Holy Spirit, but here we must take into account the human spirit also and but here we must take into account the human spirit and the nuances embraced by the human spirit contextually manifested, in history, nationally, linguistically and so on. Or in the the early centuries of Christianity we can distinguish in the spirituality and the exegesis of the Church and in the way in which tradition is specified, three main strands: the Semitic tradition – manifested in exegesis and spirituality in a poetic spirit, of the analogies, the Latin tradition – manifested through the legal spirit, and the Greek tradition – manifested through the philosophical, metaphysical spirit, much deeper. I would say that every phenomenon of tradition, finally, articulates itself within the Church's life, if there is also from the Church this effort to blend the three aspects, because the three aspects are practically found in the human spirit. It is about reason – the Greek strand, justice – the Latin strand, artistic sensitivity – the Semitic strand. If the Church had remained only with the Semitic stream, we would have remained

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an obscure Jewish sect, singing hymns, as we find at Ephrem the Syrian, and which, without the depth of the doctrinal philosophical theorizing coming from the Greek space, would not have had the chance to endure millennia. Similarly, without the clear anchoring through the value judgments with social, practical, ecclesial implications given by the Latin, legal spirit, the Church would not have been able to be resilient and prolific in missionary or doctrinal difficult conditions. From this perspective I would say that, taking into account the variety of the human spirit, the confirmation criterion of the tradition lies within this interweaving. Now, let me refer to Palamism, which you have mentioned. Prior to Palamism were the Bogomilism, the Paulicianism, the Messalianism, before. All these moves have provoked spiritual disputes. Behind them stood a lack and an incision of the dogmatic language. In itself, simple ascetical struggles had value during Messalianism and also during Bogomilism, But what they did not know was this intellectual effort, and what made the Palamism and, let us generalize, the tradition to gain a stable and lasting form throughout the centuries was taking and transformation a philosophical tradition... I would say that we should understand the Church also in the perspective outlined in *The Didache/ The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, as the Church before the Christian Church, and here we enter into a realm of assuming a much broader tradition. Because we're in a Russian church, I can give the example of Souzenelle Annika's writings in France, a Russian writer with deep connections in the Jewish community, from which she had assumed many elements of the Kabbalah. I find for many of those exegetical interpretations a confirmation within the Orthodox tradition, of course much more profound. I would say that in this perspective and in the perspective the postmodernity proposes us, We should look more broadly within the tradition, not only to reduce ourselves to these three main strands of the Church, and take much more from the philosophy also... Only then can we meet the challenges of post-modernity, which almost takes us out of the Christian classical paradigm and at the same time, we can formulate responses. But the condition is the seriousness and depth of the deepening. It takes very profound people, very interdisciplinary, to draw synthesis in these areas of spirituality. Thank you very much for the generous issue!

D. Gzzyan. I have got two associations. I think Palamism has won because it was fundamentally not aggressive and attacked nobody. Generally speaking, this is what always distinguishes a genuine charismatic movement. When people make effort of renewing the spirit, they are not in the mood for aggression. They try not to lose themselves because they run the risks. Second, the renewal of the spirit is incompatible with aggressiveness. All spiritual movements you have

mentioned were considerably protest-oriented. It makes no difference where this protest-orientedness comes from. Anyway, this was a form of protest not free from aggressiveness, albeit it aimed at counteracting some institutional excesses.

Another point to mention is that Tradition and various historical, ethno-cultural peculiarities do not interact automatically, though there is a very high spiritual tension between them. Simple inclusivity would not help here: to take into account the power of the Latin juridism (in a good sense), of the Hellenic philosophizing and of the Judeo-Christian mythopoetism, one's spirit has to be not only open but also very disciplined. In this regard, my favourite historical episode is the meeting between Pope Anicetus and Polycarp of Smyrna who tried to solve the problem, no more no less, of celebrating Easter correctly. For us, it is still a stumbling block, but they managed to find a rather simple solution. The hierarchs met and looked at each other, that is, at how their communities lived, and somehow understood that the both sides were, dare I say it, normal Orthodox Christians. They have left us no techniques. Perhaps these do not even exist (except for all that what I was trying to say). But the historical fact is established: they bore witness that it makes no difference how and on what day to celebrate Easter. What is important is to stay in spiritual unity. I wonder why today's Christians do not widely mention this example as the most fundamental evidence of who we really are and what tradition we inherit. I do not understand why this episode is so little known. I got on to it ten years after I started delving into church history, though it should be cited everywhere as a textbook example.

Fr Georgy Kochetkov. Thank you for your paper. In my opinion, our discussion is going very well and interesting. But I would like to address another question to Professor David Gzgzyan. When I hear there are icons inspired by the Spirit, whereas there are also icons not inspired by the Spirit but rather just a good handicraft, I associate these things with the notions of 'style' and 'imitation.' In any church one can find handicrafts. These make up a majority, although, of course, there are also spirit-bearing works of art. People in churches usually do not discern these things well. But nowadays, speaking of reviving the church, we also have to speak sometimes of genuine revival and sometimes of stylization of the very life, not only of icons. Is it adequate, in your opinion, to apply such an image and such terminology to this matter discussed above? It seems to me more accessible and comprehensible. Although I do not know what Professor Alexander Kopirovsky, or other experts in church culture and art who are present here, would say. What is the difference between a real icon and a stylization? As we say, this icon painter stylizes more, that one – less. In other words, we even measure it somehow. How does it go on?

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And the second thing I would say. In my opinion, it would be very important to point out the idea of personal aspect and sobornost regarding Tradition. Your paper is entitled 'Tradition in Orthodox Theology and Practice,' but your paper created an impression that Orthodoxy is more correlated with personal aspect, sometimes even with individual one, whereas the aspect of sobornost is not completely covered here. Although, I think, the mystery of Tradition is to a considerable extent related to sobornost. The personal aspect is also involved but here it is necessary, in my view, to somehow continue reasoning in this direction. What do you think?

David Gzgyan. I will start from the second question, which is more difficult. First, I certainly agree that this is the balance and interaction between the two principium – those of personal aspect and sobornost. But it is implied by the very position and sense of Tradition. It is simply impossible to be purely personal. Moreover, in my paper I hazarded to call Tradition final authority, which observes the authenticity of theanthropic experience, theanthropic being. It is simply inconceivable within an isolated individual. I do not even want to evoke the word 'person' in this context. If my paper creates such an impression, it is presumably for reasons of space. But, fundamentally, the spirit of Tradition is actually the revelation of ecclesiality as such. It is Orthodoxy that has intuitively grasped this.

As for stylization, I would also start with the end. What confuses me the most is the stylization of revival and renewal rather than the stylization by an author of another one or of himself, unless this is what you meant when speaking of icons written either inspiredly or 'professionally.' When 'professionally,' what is it the icon-painter does – stylization? In this case he stylizes himself as one who has once experienced inspiration. However I would not take the risk of going into details. This is not really my field to feel at ease. The risks of stylization are widespread but, worst of all, they touch upon the essence of church life – charismaticness, wisdom, sobornost, theology. Let's say, where has the theological inspiration of the early 20th century got to? But stylization is more than enough.

Fr Vasile Grăjdian. I thank you for presentation. Yesterday I had, for the first time, experienced Tetryakov gallery. Florovsky spoke about the pseudomorphosis of Orthodox theology. In the cases of icons and music a problem arises between cult and culture, especially in our secularized era. What happens when you remove the icon from a liturgical setting, not necessarily the church, and bring it to the museum, or the chant in the concert hall? Within the exhibition and the concert all these liturgical signs and symbols which should provoke us the effort and openness to the Revelation of the Spirit, tempt us, lead us to something else,

to another spirit. The Spirit and the spirits. I mean that in a museum, in a concert the people no longer worship; they admire, applaud, comment, then are written chronicles etc. Has it ever been any discussion about the effectiveness of placing famous icons, like those of Rublev, Theophanes the Greek, in an exhibition? In Tretyakov I did a very ambiguous experience: chapel, church, icons exhibition, exhibition of paintings, a shift from cult to culture.

David Gzzyan. Partly, the question was indeed rhetorical. Let me share a complementary consideration. Recently I rewatched a video plot about Fr Sergius Bulgakov, namely about his experience of conversion into faith for the second time, a fundamental one to him, which was influenced to much extent by his encounter with the Sistine Madonna. I purposely referred to the Sistine Madonna, not to touch upon the subtle matter of icon anymore. It is known he was so deeply stunned that he came several times, prayed long, discovered for himself a whole new world and so on. A few years later, already in exile, he experienced profound disappointment, not in faith but in the Sistine Madonna. The Orthodox mentality would make it final: our spirit-bearing icon won over their sensuous painting! But it is known that the story did not end there. Fr Sergius returned to that painting and finally attained the genuine peace with it, with himself and with the inspiration of Raphael, although he no longer viewed this painting as an icon. Although he did not pray with it, he restored his gratitude to it.

This means the answer to the question ‘how?’ is given over a lifetime. I have been many times at the Tretyakov Gallery and continue to visit it. There are a lot of things there I have already become accustomed to (although it is not good to get accustomed to masterpieces of iconography). Thus, one has to make effort to renew this experience of revelation. This ‘technique’ is unknown to me. I just know sometimes it happens and sometimes it does not. And when it happens, it is hard to be confused with anything else. Ultimately, our life comprises both habituation, unfortunately, and renewal. Probably, this is weakness but it is so. To tell the truth, all my life I am a bit afraid of habituation and renewal. In my paper I provide the impression of a much stronger personality than I actually am. But, in my view, the main condition is the inner world and the openness to the new experience, including the experience of disappointment in oneself (not so as Fr Sergius was disappointed in the Sistine Madonna, as he later admitted).

Dmitri Gasak. Thank you very much, Professor Gzzyan and all who have spoken, for such a calm and peaceful and, I should say, meditative dialogue that evokes a lot of different thoughts and associations.