

ADAM DROZDEK

MONASTIC WORLDVIEW  
OF PAISII VELICHKOVSKII

Petr Velichkovskii was born in 1722, the youngest son of the archpriest of Poltava. He attended a parochial school and in 1735 he enrolled in the Kiev Academy. Attracted from early years to the monastic life and dissatisfied with what the Academy had to offer, he left it in 1739 and started his wanderings in the Ukraine in search of spiritual guidance. In 1741, he became a rhasophore, a novice monk, in the St. Nicholas Monastery (the Medvedovskii Monastery) and assumed the name of Porfirii which was soon changed to Platon. In 1743, he went to Moldavia to continue his spiritual quest. Dissatisfied, in 1746, he moved to Greece, to the monastic community in Mount Athos. For four years he lived in solitude. He became a monk and changed his name again to Paisii. Then gradually, he became surrounded by disciples. In 1758, he was ordained to the priesthood. As part of getting back to spiritual sources, he started to correct Slavonic translations of patristic writings. Because of limitations of space of the Prophet Elijah skete and because of harassment by the Turkish authorities, in 1763, he moved with his disciples to Moldavian monastery of the Holy Spirit in Dragomirna. He continued correcting Slavonic translations by comparing them to the Greek originals. In 1775, he moved to the Secu (Sekul) monastery in Moldavia to be out of reach of the newly established Austrian authorities, and, in 1779, he was ordered to move to the Neamț (Niamets) monastery, also in Moldavia. He established there a school of correctors and translators, acquired many manuscripts and widely distributed copies of corrected and translated patristic writings. He died in 1794.

To the end of his days, Velichkovskii was indefatigably translating Greek patristic writings and correcting existing translations leaving an impressively large body of translations. These translations include the *Philokalia* published in Russian in 1793 very soon after they were published for the first time in Greek in 1782, a large anthology of writings on ascetic monasticism. Velichkovskii also left behind two small treatises of his own, *The scroll* and *Lilies of the field*, a number of letters, many of which are still waiting to be published.

## 1. THE JESUS PRAYER

*The scroll: six chapters on mental prayer* is Velichkovskii's defense of the Orthodox character of mental prayer. However, it soon becomes clear that he did not mean just any prayer made mentally, but very specifically the Jesus prayer (204/49; 207–9/52–54)<sup>1</sup>.

The Jesus prayer is very well entrenched in the Eastern tradition and widely used both by the clergy and laity, and it has been used at least since the times of Neilos the Ascetic and Diadochus of Photice who advocated it in the fifth century. It was elevated to the dogmatic height in the Orthodox tradition since this is what humans have in common with angels<sup>2</sup> (*Lilies* 11)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover,

this Divine prayer is greater than any monastic effort and, according to the Holy Fathers, it is the peak of improvements and the source of virtues, and the subtlest and invisible activity of the mind in the depth of the heart (*Scroll* 200/45).

The prayer is simply the sentence “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me” or simply the name of Jesus constantly repeated. The dogmatic issue is why this particular prayer should be used over all other possible mental prayers and why it should be constantly repeated. The practical issue is how to accomplish such constant repetition.

<sup>1</sup> In references to *The scroll*, the first number is a page from *Житие и писания молдавского старца Паисия Величковского*. Москва: Университетская Типография 1847 [reprint: Козельск 2001] p. 170–210, the second number, to an English translation in: *Little Russian Philokalia*. Vol. 4: *St. Paisius Velichkovsky*. Platina 1994 p. 19–54; however, all quotations are retranslated.

<sup>2</sup> To some extent only: angels from Isaiah's vision repeated “holy, holy, holy” (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8).

<sup>3</sup> In references to the *Lilies of the fields*, a paragraph number is given. The references come from П. Величковский. *Крины сельные, или Цветы прекрасные, собранные вкратце от Божественного Писания. О заповедях Божьих и о святых добродетелях*. Киев 1997, based on earlier edition Одесса 1910. An English translation *Field flowers*. In: *Little Russian Philokalia*. p. 59–126. French translation *Fleures spirituelles*. In: M. AUBRY. *Saint Paissius Vélichkovsky*. Lausanne 1992 p. 99–161 (although “prayer of the heart” is synonymous with “the Jesus prayer,” the translation unnecessarily replaced the latter phrase by the former). A German translation in: P. VELIČKOVSKIJ. *Lilien des Feldes: über die Gebote Gottes und die heiligen Tugenden*. Wien 1977.

Velichkovskii defended mental prayer in general and Jesus prayer in particular by reference to the Bible and to writings of the Greek fathers, who, in turn, also based their arguments on Biblical references. Some references are noncontroversial, particularly the ones which speak about the prayer in the heart, in the mind, or in the spirit, for example, “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15), or Christians should be singing in their hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16) (*Scroll* 174/22). In a way, this can be considered the prayer-life common sense: the words of prayer should be spoken with understanding; therefore, the mind should be involved also while praying aloud. A prayer without the mind’s participation is not a prayer, but a mindless recitation. However, a silent prayer, the prayer of the mind is a prayer. Velichkovskii very well realized it when he wrote that God does not want many prayers, and the believer should be concerned not about their quantity, but about attention paid to them (*Lilies* 31).

However, when arguing in favor of the Biblical roots of mental prayer, Velichkovskii not infrequently overreached himself. For example, he wrote that “the Divine mental prayer has its unshakeable foundation” in Christ’s words on entering a closet, closing the door, and praying to the God who is in secret (Mt. 6:6), which Chrysostom interpreted as referring to “silent, secret prayer from the depth of the heart”<sup>4</sup>. This verse, however, refers to not making a show of a prayer, not to the kind of prayer and is hardly an unshakeable foundation in respect to the latter. Interestingly, in the very next two verses Christ spoke against vain repetition (μη βαττολογήσητε) in prayer and those who think that they will be heard in much speaking (πολυλογία, Mt. 6:7–8). Velichkovskii never addressed the problem of how to reconcile this statement with the constant repetition of the Jesus prayer.

Velichkovskii also referred to statements of the fathers in support of validity of the Jesus prayer. Basil interpreted the verse “His praise will be always on my mouth” (Ps. 34[33]:1) as speaking about “mental mouth [...] i.e., mental prayer” since when asleep, the bodily mouth is silent (*Scroll* 188/35). Does this mean that, while asleep, mental prayer is conducted even if afterwards there is no remembrance of this fact? Basil also used this argument: whether a person eats, drinks, or does anything, he does it for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), which indicates that “in such [a person] also the heart keeps vigil”, which, in Velichkovskii’s opinion shows that “there is mental mouth and mental work and praise that takes place mentally in the inner man” (189/35). However, this is simply a *non sequitur*. At best it can be concluded from this verse that man also sleeps for the glory of God, not what takes place during sleep.

Simeon the New Theologian referred to the verse speaking about the heart as the source of evil thoughts (Mt. 15:19) and to the metaphor concerning the

<sup>4</sup> Also metropolitan Ilarion was convinced that “Jesus Christ Himself teaches here the silent Prayer”. Іларіон. *Старець Паїсій Величковський*. Winnipeg 1975 p. 80.

necessity of keeping clean the inside of the cup (Mt. 23:26), which Simeon saw as pointing to the need of guarding one's heart, but Velichkovskii saw in this testimony a reference to "the guarding of the heart, that is, to the mental call upon Jesus" (*Scroll* 190/36). The heart can and should be guarded by the grace of God upon which believers can call, but the verses actually do not specify how this guarding can be accomplished and what kind an effective prayer should be. Simeon also said that when Ecclesiastes wrote that "if the Spirit of the Lord comes upon you, leave not your place" (10:4), "place, he said, points to the heart: the Lord similarly says, «Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts»" (190/36). It is quite puzzling where Simeon saw a connection between the heart being a source of evil thoughts and not leaving one's place. Moreover, even if it is granted that place means the heart in Ecclesiastes' statement, it is not clear how the idea of mental prayer can be found in the phrase, "leave not your heart".

Velichkovskii listed Biblical verses quoted by Hesychus' in support of the idea of mental prayer: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God" (Mt. 5:8); "Blessed is he that takes and dashes your little ones against the stones" (Ps. 137[136]:9); "Be prepared, oh Israel, to call the name of the Lord" (Ps. 101[100]:8), and many others (*Scroll* 191/37), but from none of them can it be inferred that mental prayer is meant; for instance, if purity of the heart means that "there is not even one thought of the world" in it (191/37), how does it point to mental prayer? How does dashing Babylon's children against the rock indicate mental prayer? How does Israel's calling upon the name of the Lord point to it? Velichkovskii just quoted these verses with no comment as though the fact that Hesychus quoted them was a sufficient explanation that these verses speak about mental prayer.

John Climacus quoted some verses that, in his view, speak "about this sacred prayer and about true silence of the mind", including "I speak rather five words with my mind" (1 Cor. 14:19); however, as the context indicates, Paul meant speaking aloud understandable words rather than speaking aloud in unknown tongues; another verse is: "my heart is ready, oh God" (Ps. 57[56]:8), but can readiness be equated with prayer? Velichkovskii did not provide any comment on these verses, either. However, two verses used by John Climacus could be used in favor of mental prayer, although hardly in favor of silence of the mind; "I sleep, but my heart keeps vigil" (SoS 5:2), although it does not necessarily mean praying, and "I cried with my whole heart" (Ps. 119[118]:145), which, in his view means "with the whole body and soul" (*Scroll* 192/38).

Velichkovskii also listed without a comment verses used by Philotheus as "the unshakeable foundation of his words": "In the morning I put to death all the wicked of the land" (Ps. 101[100]:8); "without me, you can do nothing" (J. 15:5); what do these verses have to do with mental prayer, or with any prayer? Some interpretation is needed to call as witnesses even these verses quoted by Philotheus: "with

all watchfulness keep your heart” (Prov. 4:23), “we wrestle [...] against spiritual wickedness” (Eph. 6:12), or “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22) (*Scroll* 192-3/38).

For Diadochus the foundational verse concerning mental prayer is the verse, “no one can say, Jesus [is] Lord, but by/in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3), which speaks about the source of inspiration concerning the confession of faith in Jesus, but nothing about mental prayer. Another foundation supposedly lies in the verse on finding a priceless pearl and purchasing it for any price (Mt. 13:45-46) to have unspeakable joy (*Scroll* 193/38). Hardly anything concerning prayer can be derived from this verse.

Gregory Sinaite used in confirmation of his exposition of “the Divine prayer sacredly performed by the mind in the heart” these verses: remember God always (Deut. 8:18); “in the morning sow your seed and in the evening do not let your hand cease” (Eccl. 11:6); and “the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force” (Mt. 11:12) – how exactly do these verses speak about mental prayer? However, by simply assuming that “the mouth and tongue, and spirit, and voice are one [and the same]” (*Scroll* 194/39), it is easy to see mental prayer in any Biblical verse which speaks about prayer with the mouth, tongue, and voice.

Dimitrii Rostovskii spoke about “praying at all times *with* the spirit” (Eph. 6:18), although the verse speaks about praying *in* (ἐν) the Spirit. He also referred to the statement that “the Kingdom of God is in you” (Lk. 17:21) (*Scroll* 196/41), which hardly points to mental prayer. Interestingly, he also used the verse about the spirit praying in tongues when the mind is fruitless; thus, “I will pray with the spirit and with the mind” (1 Cor. 14:14-15). The context is about speaking in tongues, unknown, unlearned tongues, that is, incomprehensible to the mind, but flowing from the spirit through an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A believer, according to Paul, should pray in unknown tongues and also in a native tongue. If the statement is taken at its face value, mental prayer is the prayer of the mind in understandable fashion. What should we think about the prayer of the spirit? Would there be also a spiritual prayer next to the mental prayer? Velichkovskii nowhere addressed the issue<sup>5</sup>.

In sum, mental prayer is a great tradition and should be treated as such. Velichkovskii’s attempts to justify the reality of mental prayer in general and Jesus prayer in particular by biblical references are very unconvincing in their use of thin interpretations and imposition of unnatural understanding onto biblical

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<sup>5</sup> Rostovskii simplified the issue by assuming that Paul understood by the spirit “human breath and voice,” and by the tongue the part of the body, not a language, and allegedly castigated the Corinthians for praying aloud only, without the participation of the mind, whereby Paul wanted to say, “I pray with the tongue and with the voice stemming from my breath and I should also pray with the mind”. Д. Ростовский. *Внутренний человек, в клетке сердца своего уединен, поучающаяся и молящаяся втайне*. Ч 3.

statement, and sometimes amount to outright spinning and *ad hoc* contrivances. Using such contrived interpretations undermines the sacredness and usefulness of such a prayer rather than reinforcing them. Mental prayer – prayer in the mind or in the spirit, not aloud, but with one’s own understanding – does have a firm foundation in the Bible and that much cannot be contested, and there is no need to use unnatural interpretations to strengthen the case. On the other hand, nowhere in the Bible can a case for the Jesus prayer be found. This is purely a patristic tradition and, at best, it can be stated that the Jesus prayer is not incompatible with the Bible – as many different aspects of other ecclesiastical rules and rites<sup>6</sup>.

The Jesus prayer is elevated to the highest spiritual achievement by the statement

those who want to be joined through love with sweetest Jesus, having spat at all beauty of this world, all pleasures and even at bodily rest, will want nothing else in this life except only incessantly exercise in paradisiacal execution of this prayer (*Scroll* 205/49).

As Simeon the New Theologian stated,

true and undeceiving attention and prayer is this: to guard the heart by the mind during prayer and to remain constantly inside of it and to send from its depth prayers to the Lord (206/50).

To maintain constancy of such a prayer, the fathers provided descriptions of mechanics of prayer. Simeon advised this:

Silent, sit down in the cell in some particular corner, pay attention to do what I tell you: close the door, take off your mind of all vain things, press your chin against your chest moving your sensory eye with the mind. Control drawing in of breath through the nose so as not to breath too boldly and mentally try to find inside your chest the place of the heart where reside all the powers of the soul: at first you find there constant darkness and grossness. Staying there and doing this night and day, you will find, oh wonder!, incessant joy (206/51).

Gregory Sinaite spoke similarly:

sitting from morning on an edge of a chair, take down the mind from the ruling [position] into the heart and keep it there. And bending down with difficulty and feeling pain in the chest, shoulders, and neck, ceaselessly call with the mind

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<sup>6</sup> The Jesus prayer “was instituted by the Son of God and God Himself”, because Jesus said that whenever believers pray in His name, the prayer will be heard (J. 14:13, 15:23). I. BRIANCHANINOV. *On the prayer of Jesus*. London 1952 [1865] p. 2–3, which can be accepted only when the Jesus prayer is identified with a prayer in Jesus name. A statement that “the scriptural origin of the prayer *par excellence* has been veiled in the West by interpretations of the Scripture which were no longer rooted in tradition” (P. RANSON. *Le starets Païssius Vélitchkovsky et la tradition patristique de l’Eglise orthodoxe*. In: AUBRY. *Saint Païssius Vélitchkovsky*. p. 8) has more of a doctrinaire than explanatory ring.

of the soul: Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Then, if, possibly, because of pressure and pain and from frequent calling it loses sweetness [...] switching your mind to the second half, say: Son of God, have mercy on me. And saying this half many times, you should not change it often out of laziness and boredom: fruit trees frequently transplanted do not take roots. Maintain light breathing so that you will not breathe too boldly, since breathing of the air that comes from the heart darkens the mind, keeping it from the heart, and disperses thought (208/53).

Interestingly, Velichkovskii quoted these physical aspects of Jesus prayer with no comment of his own. Also, because of such physical aspects of the Jesus prayer, its exercise was sometimes compared to yoga<sup>7</sup>.

The physical aspect of the Jesus prayer was important in two respects: the need to internalize it, to make it a spiritual habit, the second nature; also, the need to execute it constantly.

Probably the strongest Biblical argument for a prayer, the Jesus prayer in particular, to be constantly said is the verse, “pray without ceasing (ἀδιαλείπτως)” (1 Thess. 5:17, 2:13), since it urges the believer in the Jesus prayer to repeat it ceaselessly, at all times, in all situations, with the mouth or, preferably, in the mind. However, if “without ceasing” is carried to the extreme, then the injunction can easily be violated when taking a breath and by making any space between two consecutive words or two consecutive prayers. If a split-second space would be allowed between two consecutive prayers, why not a few-second space? a few-minute space? Questions of that sort are not out of place since hesychasts are very keenly interested in the physical minutiae of the prayer as testified by their just quoted statements about the posture during the prayer and about ways to control breathing.

When Paul says that he mentions Roman Christians without ceasing (ἀδιαλείπτως) in his prayers (Rom. 1:9), does it mean that he mentions them in every second? That he mentions only Christians of Rome with the exclusion of everyone and everything else? Hardly. He mentioned them quite often, he had them frequently on his mind, but it does it mean that the only subject of his prayers were these particular Christians. When Paul assured Thessalonians that he remembered without ceasing their work (1 Thess. 1:3), does it mean that in every

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<sup>7</sup> “Disciplines similar to [...] yoga play an important part in hesychast life”, and thus we can speak about “hesychast yoga”. J. GREGERSON. *The transfigured cosmos: four essays about Eastern Orthodox Christianity*. New York 1960 p. 54, 76, cf. p. 55, footnote; the Jesus prayer “links a technique of mental concentration which suggests, and even calls for, a comparison with that of Yoga”. J. GOUIL-LARD. *A note on the prayer of the heart*. In: J.-M. DÉCHANET. *Christian yoga* [original title: *La voie du silence*]. New York 1960 [1956] p. 174; T. MATUS. *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer*. Winchester 2010. For a discussion of the validity of such a comparison, see J. MONCHANIN. *Yoga and Hesychasm*. “Cistercian Studies” 10:1975 p. 85–92.

second he thought about nothing else, but Thessalonians and their works? Did he really have a remembrance of Timothy's name without ceasing (ἀδιάλειπτον), as he assured him (2 Tim. 1:3)? That would at least require that at the very same time at the very same moment he thought about Roman Christians and Timothy. Moreover, when Paul said that he had sorrow in his heart without ceasing (Rom. 9:2), does it mean that he was in a sorrowful mood in every second of his life? What then would his urging mean that Christians should *always* rejoice (1 Thess. 5:16)? Surely, this urging was not limited only to Thessalonian Christians.

The command to pray ceaselessly should be put together with Paul's urging believers to keep hope even in the moment of adversity, and they should be persevering (προσκαρτεροῦντες) in prayer (Rom. 12:12; cf. Acts 1:14, 2:42; Eph. 6:8; Col. 4:2). It seems that ceaselessness in prayer is perseverance in prayer, which is a lifestyle of prayer: not giving up on prayer, thereby, not giving up on God and His help, but keeping on entreaties and supplications, which does not have to mean that prayers should be said at every second, at every part of a second. Maybe even *not* praying at certain times could be more beneficial than praying. When the Israelites were trapped in front of the sea, God said to Moses, "why are you crying out (βοᾶς) unto me? Speak to the children of Israel that they go ahead" (Ex. 14:15), which amounts to saying: stop praying and do something so that what you want to happen happens. After all, there is a season for everything, in particular, there is time to be silent and a time to speak (Eccl. 3:7)<sup>8</sup>. It seems that praying without ceasing, perseverance in prayer, is the lifestyle of prayer, the prayerful attitude even if at a particular moment no word of prayer is uttered, orally or mentally. The Jesus prayer can be a particular form of such a prayerful attitude.

Although the Jesus prayer belongs to the Orthodox tradition, something akin to it was also proposed in other traditions. A protestant author wrote that

many a dear mother of mediocre ability, walking through life, whispering "Jesus" every moment will do more to sweeten and save humanity than all the cunning schemes of diplomats.

He also proposed that every person should make "an attempt to think of God at least one second in each minute"<sup>9</sup>. A Catholic author stated that "by uttering with fervor of faith, humility and love the sacred name of Jesus, you overcome all enemies lodged within your inner self" and "a continued practice of repeating the

<sup>8</sup> In his rendition of Ecclesiastes' "there is a time," John Climacus wrote, "there is a time of ceaseless prayer and there is a time of un hypocritical service (διακονία)". *The ladder of divine ascent* 26.87. *Patrologia graeca* 88, 1032C. This was approvingly quoted by N. SORSKII. *Ustav* 11 (service = служба).

<sup>9</sup> F. C. LAUBACH. *Prayer, the mightiest force in the world*. Old Tappan 1959 [1946] p. 99–100, 106.



name of Jesus disposes us to be open to God's life in us"<sup>10</sup>, and another said that "by often repeating the Jesus Prayer, there grows a new disposition toward nature and creation"<sup>11</sup>. It is just a great spiritual tradition for all of Christianity.

## 2. MONASTIC LIFE

Velichkovskii's life-long devotion was the life of a monk. Dissatisfied with what he saw in the many monasteries in the Ukraine, Moldavia, and even on the monastically acclaimed Mount Athos, in his search for a suitable advisor and acceptable monastic model, he became himself such an advisor and recreated a model of the monastic life in Moldavia, which was widely adopted far beyond Moldavia, particularly in Russia. His idea of monasticism was given in the *Lilies of the field*, but also in the eighteen rules of the Dragomirna monastery and in his letters.

A monk is at the pinnacle of the spiritual hierarchy in any society.

A monk is a fulfiller of Christ's commandments, a perfect Christian, an imitator of and a participant in Christ's passions, an every-day sufferer, a voluntary corpse who willingly dies in spiritual progress. A monk is a pillar of patience, a depth of humility, a source of tears, a treasure of purity, he laughs at everything that is considered beautiful, pleasant, famous and charming in this world. A monk is a suffering soul that incessantly, when awake and when asleep, remembers death (*Lilies* 40).

Also, as Velichkovskii said to his

soul, if you really want to be saved, then get to love sorrows and sighs just as before you loved peace; live as though dying each day. [...] If man does not destroy himself piously through virtue or does not sacrifice his life for the fulfillment of God's commandments and traditions of the fathers, he cannot be saved (1).

Life must be filled with sorrow to have any chance of salvation, and since monks should be models of Christian life, Velichkovskii made certain that his monks in their life would not be free of suffering. The Dragomirna rules he proposed were based on patristic writings and his understanding of what ascetic monasticism should be.

According to the Dragomirna rules, 1. monks cannot have any private property; 2. they should be absolutely obedient to the superior; 3. responsible leadership is required of the superior; 4. monks must observe the liturgical schedule; 5. observe the refectory rite; 6. and observe personal piety in the cell, particularly through the mental prayer and doing the assigned manual work; 7. monks

<sup>10</sup> G. A. MALONEY. *Inward stillness*. Denville 1976 p. 82–83.

<sup>11</sup> W. STINISSEN. *Praying the name of Jesus*. Liguori 1999 p. 102.

should do assigned chores outside the cell; 8. the superior should watch the level of commitment of monks and evenhandedly execute punishments; 9. the monastery should have a vice-superior and an administrator; 10. there should be thorough screening of candidates for novitiate; 11. newcomers' possessions should be kept in a storage place for return upon possible leaving of the monastery; 12. the monastery should run an infirmary; 13. monks should learn useful manual skills; 14. the monastery should run a hostel outside the monastery; 15. women can be allowed in the monastery only in extreme situations, such as war; 16. a nearby village should have a church with a nonmonastic priest "so that the monastery would remain free of any embarrassment"; 17. a new superior should be elected only from among the monks of the monastery; 18. the monastery must not be venerated<sup>12</sup>.

Through these rules, Velichkovskii wanted his monks to be living examples of virtues he considered important. Faith is the first virtue and faith grows and decreases through the will (*Lilies* 6). Love for God and for people is the second virtue, love that embraces and binds all other virtues (7). Fasting is the third virtue: eating little and getting up from the table still hungry, eating bread and salt and drinking water. This is a royal path of taking food and many were thereby saved according to the fathers. Eating so that a monk is still hungry allows for the body to be submissive to the soul. It is better to eat little than to have complete fasting since after such fasting there is a tendency for overeating; thus, moderation should control fasting.

Knowing one's own measure, take food once a day except for Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays of the Lord. Moderate and reasonable fasting is the foundation and the beginning of all virtues (8).

Also, warm water should be used for drinking since "without warm water stomach of the faster becomes dry and defecation is difficult". Restraint is the fourth virtue; it is

the mother and the bond of all virtues. If you restrain your stomach, you will enter the paradise since restraint is the killing of sin, staying away from passions, the beginning of spiritual life and the advocate of eternal blessings (9).

Vigil is the fifth virtue. New monks should be awake half a night (6 hours) and then go to sleep; advanced monks should sleep for 3–4 hours and be awake for 8 hours; a perfect monk should sleep for only 1 hour. During the day, all monks should take a one hour nap. This is because "reasonable vigil purifies the mind from dispersion of thoughts, makes it light, and brings it to prayer[ful attitude]" (10; 30)<sup>13</sup>. The Jesus prayer is the sixth virtue. "Prayer is the source of all good works

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<sup>12</sup> S. CHETVERIKOV. *Starets Paisii Velichkovskii: his life, teachings, and influence on Orthodox monasticism*. Belmont 1980 p. 133–140. Cf. the *Sekul rules*. p. 205–206.

<sup>13</sup> Reportedly, Velichkovskii himself could not sleep for more than three hours and spent his nights on the translational work, METROPHANES. *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky: the man behind the*

and virtues and it drives away from a man the darkness of passions” (11). Humility is the seventh virtue. Because of it, all sins are forgiven (12). Silence is the eighth virtue. It is “a withdrawal from any worry and confusion of life or mute silence in the midst of the crowd” since the tongue, “a satanic spirit”, can lead to perdition (13). Non-acquiring of things and extreme poverty are the ninth virtue (14). Reflective reasoning/discernment in all things is the tenth virtue; otherwise, the good can turn into evil. Three virtues are most important: first, fasting; second,

incessant exercise in studying the divine Scriptures with reasonable vigil, i.e., according to conscience, strength, and vivacity of each [person]; third, the reasonable Jesus prayer, i.e., with attention of the mind paid to the words of prayer and the internal guarding of the heart (15).

This is a very interesting prioritization: for a Christian, a Christian monk in particular, fasting, studying the Bible and the fathers accompanied with sleep deprivation, and with the Jesus prayer are more important in life than faith and love. Love is said to embrace and bind all other virtues, but it ranks lower than fasting and keeping oneself awake. It cannot be claimed that these three virtues are most important only for a monk, or, better yet, that they distinguish a monk from laity, since “without the ten virtues listed above it is impossible to be saved” (15), which means, there is no difference between monks and non-monks in the exercise of these virtues if one does not want to forfeit the prospect of eternal salvation. What would distinguish monks from others is not the exercise of these virtues, but exercising them in a monastic setting: in total poverty, in total obedience, in the cell.

All monastic life is not the same.

The Holy Spirit through the Holy Fathers divided all monastic life into and regulated three ranks: eremitic, solitary settling; living with one or two more [monks]; and communal living.

A solitary monk relies entirely on God in respect to his bodily and spiritual needs. Monks living twosome or threesome should be supervised by a *starets*, an elder, skilled in spiritual matters and they should be completely obedient to him. Monks in a monastic community live like Christ with the apostles<sup>14</sup>. They should submit to one another and

by completely and perfectly cutting off from and mortifying their will and judgment, be obedient in everything to the superior as to the Lord himself; that

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*Philokalia*. Platina 1976 p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> P. VELICHKOVSKII. A 1766 letter to Dimitrii. In: *Житие и писания молдавского старца Паисия Величковского*, 239; СЧЕТВЕРИКОВ. *Starest Paissi Velichovskii*. p. 111.

is, they should not oppose his commandments and teachings, unless they are not in agreement with commandments of God and teachings of the Fathers<sup>15</sup>;

this would mean that judgment must not be discarded, after all, to be able to know that the superior's commands are contrary to the Orthodox dogmas. The fathers bring testimonies of the Scripture concerning all three kinds of monastic life. Concerning solitary monasticism, they quote the verse: "woe to [him that is] alone since if he falls into sadness, or asleep, or, laziness, or despair no one among people will lift him up"<sup>16</sup>. This, however, is not a verse but a very loose adaptation of Eccl. 4:9-10: "two are better than one [...] for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falls and there is no second to lift him up", which would mean that solitary monasticism should not be encouraged.

Twosome and threesome monasticism fathers call angelic and royal road quoting the verse: "where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am among them" (Mt. 18:20). The verse speaks about the presence of Christ *among* even the smallest number of people, any people; that is, He is also present among four people, five, etc. when they are gathered in His name. This is a case of overwrought literalism in applying a Biblical verse. Velichkovskii, with no explanation, used literal interpretation or metaphoric interpretation (the tongue meant as mental tongue) whenever it suited his needs.

In Velichkovskii's opinion, about communal (coenobitical) monasticism the Bible says, "what is so good, what is so beautiful as when brothers live together" (Ps. 132[133]:1)<sup>17</sup>, which is a fairly general statement and can also be applied to living twosome and threesome and certainly is not limited to monastic life.

Somewhat incongruously when contrasted with his statements about ten virtues and three most important among them, Velichkovskii singled out obedience as the most important of all virtues: "trice blessed obedience is for common life and even more so for the monks the root and the foundation"<sup>18</sup>. "The communal life is the heaven on earth and trice blessed obedience is the tree of life planted there by God", which is the place for novices, where they "escape death by eating its immortal fruit and by utterly and long-sufferingly cutting off their will and judgment"<sup>19</sup>. "The root and foundation of communal living is Divine obedience, the principal of all virtues for Angels in heaven and for humans in the paradise". Such obedience "saves man from bodily and spiritual passions because of humility born of blessed obedience and brings to the original condition, since man will

<sup>15</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 239–240; CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichovskii*. p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 240.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 238.

<sup>19</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 244–245; CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichovskii*. p. 114.

truly become in the image and likeness of God as he was first created”<sup>20</sup>. Such life of obedience is

the shortened ladder to heaven of only one rung of cutting off from the will [...] since the communal life is heaven, and obedience is the holy heaven of heavens: and thus if someone falls away from obedience, he is cast out from God and from heaven

as the fathers say according to Gregory Sinaite<sup>21</sup>. Obedience is here a key element of salvation: obedience automatically leads to humility and humility automatically leads to *apatheia*, to the stage of purging body and soul of passions, thereby restoring man to the state of the first parents in paradise<sup>22</sup>, and thus to deification which apparently is possible even now, on earth, if communal life is heaven and obedience the apex of heavens.

It is worth noticing that only such a high status ascribed to obedience could lead to Velichkovskii’s statements concerning violations of some church rules. For Velichkovskii, it is an indisputable fact that outside the Orthodox church salvation is impossible. “The Orthodox faith without good deeds is a dead faith, and good deeds without the Orthodox faith are dead deeds”<sup>23</sup>. Apparently, even the smallest infraction against the church deserves eternal punishment. When asked about the admissibility of crossing oneself with three fingers, Velichkovskii responded that the church excludes those who cross themselves with two fingers, not with three, which means consigning such perpetrators to the fire of hell. The one who leads others to the schism – and an encouragement to cross oneself with two fingers would be included here –

even if he performed all the good deeds, and even if he had poured out his blood as a martyr for Christ, which unquestionably surpasses all good deeds, he can in no case expiate his mortal sin, i.e., the schism<sup>24</sup>.

Such schismatics defy the rules recognized by the church and those who oppose the church are no Christians<sup>25</sup>. Similarly with other rituals. Velichkovskii said that priests should use the revised *Trebnik* to perform sacraments, not the old *Trebnik* that the church abandoned; otherwise, they “shall be put to shame on the day of

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<sup>20</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 246; CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichovskii*. p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 247; CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichovskii*. p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> A monk becomes “the «readamized» man,” as phrased by C. D. HAINSWORTH. *Staretz Paisy Velichkovsky (1722–1794): doctrine of spiritual guidance*. Rome 1976 p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Velichkovskii’s responses to questions posed to him in 1794, in CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichovskii*. p. 271.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 257.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 259.

God's Terrible Judgment"<sup>26</sup>. The key to Velichkovskii's answer is obedience, unquestioned obedience to the church<sup>27</sup>, whereby Velichkovskii is excused from posing a doctrinal question, how it is that before Nikon's reform, crossing oneself with two fingers was the only acceptable way and thus using three fingers deserved then eternal punishment, whereas after this reform, the change in one finger in crossing oneself sent to hell those who continued crossing themselves with two fingers. A difference in the use of one finger means in the eyes of Velichkovskii the eternity in hell, even if the offender lives an exemplary life and becomes a martyr, as many schismatics did. Similarly, although Velichkovskii admitted that sacraments performed according to the old *Trebnik* remain complete, the fact of not using new rules, but older rules recognized not long ago by the church exposes priests to hellish afterlife. If "blessed yoke of obedience"<sup>28</sup> is the most important virtue – not love, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, or mercy – then it is not difficult to see the hell populated by Old Believers who daringly crossed themselves with two fingers instead of three.

Velichkovskii referred approvingly to John Climacus who considered the royal road, i.e., twosome or threesome monasticism, to be the best for novices<sup>29</sup>. The fathers advised the same and also communal monasticism, the former being more joyful, the latter being stricter<sup>30</sup>. Interesting is the fact that, historically, the first form of monasticism as practiced by Anthony and desert fathers on the sands of Egypt was of the solitary form, which should be the last stage. Velichkovskii himself did not quite follow the patristic advice since he tried the royal path with one Visarion, but "in place of a father to have God as instructor and the teachings of the Holy Fathers"<sup>31</sup>, basically, he made himself his own spiritual advisor and supervisor. Also, Velichkovskii enlisted as a model of monastic life the life of Christ with apostles: Christ even "established [communal life] on earth for men and set it as an image/model"<sup>32</sup>. Although Velichkovskii mentioned the fact that Jesus "did not have a place to lay down His head" (Mt. 8:20)<sup>33</sup>, all three kinds of monastic life are anchored to a particular place, so that none of them is following Christ and apostles' example of itinerant life. Also, Christ's disciples were quite relaxed about fasting (Mt. 9:14), and even Christ was deemed to be a glutton (11:19), and yet

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 262.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 263.

<sup>28</sup> P. VELICHKOVSKII. *The Dragomirna rules*; CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichkovskii*. p. 136.

<sup>29</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 240–241; CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichkovskii*. p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 241–242.

<sup>31</sup> METROPHANES. *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*. p. 67–68.

<sup>32</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 245; CHETVERIKOV. *Starest Paissi Velichkovskii*. p. 114.

<sup>33</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *On the Origin of Monasticism and What the Name of Monk Signifies*. In: *Little Russian Philokalia*. p. 141.

fasting becomes such an important element of the monastic life. Moreover, Christ's disciples constantly fellowshiped with one another, but Velichkovskii wanted monks to spend most of their time in their cells<sup>34</sup>. Another model of communal life were 8000 Christians in the early church, who lived together claiming no property of their own<sup>35</sup>. However, they did not live quite together since they "broke bread from house to house" (Acts 2:46). Also, as at least the story Ananias and Sapphira indicates, marriages continued to exist, not quite a model for the monastic life. That is, although certain elements were clearly incorporated in the monastic life from Biblical examples, some important elements were just as clearly omitted.

Velichkovskii was a monk through and through filled with monastic attitude from early age, and thus he had a tendency to make monasticism an absolute model of salvation:

Who wants to be saved and please God should turn away from this world and live like one of birds; he should chose a suitable place and stay there by himself or with his spiritual child, enduring privation in the needs of the body – food, clothing, and [other] things; in privation the soul becomes humble and affectionate, and the mind is elevated (*Lilies* 25).

According to Velichkovskii, there are three enemies of man: the devil, the body, and the world<sup>36</sup>. A battle against the world is waged by separating oneself from it, its pleasures, "the delusive mirage of its beauties", its wealth, its joys and live in poverty, like Christ. The body is conquered by separating oneself from one's family, parents, siblings, wife, and children, "for they abide in worldly, earthly bondage like the dead"<sup>37</sup>. Would Velichkovskii really promote abandoning one's wife and children for the sake of monastic pursuits of the husband<sup>38</sup>? If so, then the sacrament of marriage would not count for much. Velichkovskii added a qualifier, but it does not solve much. He said that not all members of the family should be abandoned, but "only those who inhibit your salvation and are earthly minded". For example, if parents encourage children to serve God, these parents must be loved and considered saintly. Does this mean that parents who do not encourage a child to lead a saintly life should not be loved; however, not to violate the Decalogue, even such parents should be honored (τίμα, Ex. 20:12)? or shouldn't they? Also, children by nature are not particularly spiritual making constant demands which

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<sup>34</sup> And yet metropolitan Ilarion that Velichkovskii's teaching about monasticism promoted "a very important view that the monastic life is the life of Jesus Christ and His 12 Apostles". Иларіон. *Старець Паїсії Величковський*. p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *A 1766 letter to Dimitrii*. p. 246; СНЕТВЕРІКОВ. *Starest Paissi Velichovskii*. p. 114.

<sup>36</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *On daily warfare*. In: *Little Russian Philokalia*. p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 134.

<sup>38</sup> The issue was a subject of Sumarokov's one-act play, *The hermit*, where the protagonist abandoned his wife and parents to live an eremitic life.

are of a carnal nature: they want better food, more toys, more entertainment, and the like. Would Velichkovskii really advocate abandoning such earthly-minded children to allow for blooming one's own spirituality? It is interesting to notice that even after Peter was called as Christ's disciple (Mt. 4:18–19), he did not sever ties with his family as testified by visiting the house of his mother-in-law, during which visit she was cured (8:14–15). Velichkovskii also stated that

to live with a wife is natural: this is how the beasts and pagans live; but to live in virginity and purity is above nature: this is an angelic work and the way of life of the holy Saints of God<sup>39</sup>.

In this way, the marital life is reduced to the animal life and the life of unbelievers, whereby an impression is created that true believers are single or those who left their families behind to their fate and that married people by their earthly stubbornness aimed at the preservation of their marriage are as good as animals and pagans, and along with pagans will end up on the wrong side of the hereafter. Velichkovskii was aware of the Biblical warning about the teachings of those who forbid marriage (1 Tim. 4:1–3) but dismissed it by a statement that “this prophecy about various heretics who will appear after us, and also of the Manicheans, the Marcionites, and the Ebionites abominable before God”<sup>40</sup>; however, it is uncertain how Velichkovskii arrived at this conviction.

Monasticism is a great tradition both in Eastern and Western Christianity. Particularly in the Middle Ages monasticism was the only beacon of spirituality and culture in Europe. This is, however, a patristic tradition and should not be forcefully derived from the Bible. It is not incompatible with the Bible, but there are no prescriptions or commands in the Bible concerning monasticism. Therefore, vigorous attempts to root it in the Biblical accounts can only undermine credibility concerning the validity of monastic life rather than reinforcing it.

Velichkovskii did not introduce anything new to the Eastern monasticism. His goal was to revive traditional monasticism, pour spiritual life into the dry monasticism of his times just as Nil Sorskii did three centuries before him<sup>41</sup>. He stressed the importance of studying the writings of the fathers of the Orthodox church since he wanted Eastern monasticism to shine in full spiritual glory of the Orthodox faith. This is, however, testified only very weakly in his own writings. A far better testimony is his own complete devotion to the monastic life he

<sup>39</sup> VELICHKOVSKII. *On the Origin of Monasticism*. p. 138.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*. p. 139.

<sup>41</sup> Direct influence of Nil Sorskii's monastic regulations on Velichkovskii was emphasized by М. Боровкова-Майкова. *Нил Сорский и Паисий Величковский*. In: *Сергею Федоровичу Платонову ученики, друзья и почитатели: Сборник статей, посвященных С.Ф. Платонову*. Санкт-Петербург: Типография Главного Управления Уделов 1911 [reprint: Düsseldorf 1970] p. 27–33.



championed, and, in this sense, his life represents much better and much more convincing theology than his writings.

## ŚWIATOPOGLĄD MONASTYCZNY PAISIJA WIELICZKOWSKIEGO

### Streszczenie

Paisij Wielickowski (1722–1794) był niestrudzonym tłumaczem pism patrystycznych z greki m.in. *Filokalii*, obszernej antologii ascetycznego monastycyzmu. Był również autorem niewielkich traktatów: *Zwój: rozdziały o modlitwie duchowej*, *Lilie polne*, i listów. Modlitwa duchowa należy do wielkich tradycji chrześcijańskich i winna być traktowana jako owoc tych tradycji. Modlitwa duchowa – modlitwa umysłem, modlitwa w duchu, wewnętrzna, cicha – ma mocne podstawy biblijne; natomiast nie ma biblijnego uzasadnienia dla jej szczególnej formy, mianowicie modlitwy Jezusowej, jak to próbował uzasadnić Wielickowski. Jest ona tworem tradycji patrystycznej i w najlepszym wypadku można uznać, że nie pozostaje w niezgodzie z zasadami biblijnymi. Monastycyzm należy również do wielkich tradycji chrześcijaństwa Wschodu i Zachodu. Szczególnie w wiekach średnich był jedynym światłem kultury i życia duchowego w Europie. Jest to jednak tradycja patrystyczna i nie należy jej wywodzić bezpośrednio z Biblii, tak jak to czynił Wielickowski. Monastycyzm nie pozostaje w sprzeczności z Biblią, lecz nie ma w niej przepisów czy przykazań dotyczących życia zakonnego. Wielickowski nie wprowadził nowych zasad życia zakonnego na Wschodzie. Jego celem było odrodzenie monastycyzmu, wlanie życia duchowego w więdnące życie zakonne jego czasów – podobnie jak Nil Sorski uczynił to trzy stulecia przed nim. Wielickowski podkreślał wagę studiowania pism ojców Kościoła, gdyż pragnął, by życie zakonne Wschodu jaśniało pełnią chrześcijańskiego życia duchowego. Znalazło to jednak słabe odbicie w jego pismach. O wiele lepszym świadectwem jest jego zupełne poświęcenie się życiu zakonnemu – i w tym sensie jego życie jest o wiele lepszą i bardziej przekonującą teologią niż jego pisma.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Paisij Wielickowski, prawosławie, monastycyzm, modlitwa Jezusowa.

**Keywords:** Paisii Velichkovskii, orthodoxy, monasticism, the Jesus prayer.