

pervasive affective states of identification and allegiance to Romanness on the part of those who were otherwise silent about such attachments. For instance, all Khurramites who were enrolled in military registers and incorporated under Roman law as part of their process of assimilation need not have internalized their identification as ethnic Romans, although Kaldellis claims such internalization was hard to resist. We should probably remain agnostic about the depth of feeling of such institutional or political identifications, especially when externally applied to individuals, unless there is sufficient expression of such feeling by those individuals themselves.

In spite of the resistance offered here, Kaldellis's book possesses obvious merits as a theoretically and historiographically aware investigation of Byzantium's self-ascribed Roman identity. This is a forceful and insightful indeed, seminal book that scholars of Late Antiquity and Byzantium will avoid at their peril.

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Gabriel BUNGE, *The Practice of Personal Prayer according to the Tradition of the Holy Fathers*, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2021, 246 pp.

Gabriel Bunge, the author of the work presented by us, is revealed through his entire work as a learned monk, connoisseur of the Eastern tradition and ostentatious in bringing to light as many valuable works as possible belonging to the Christianity of the 3rd and 4th centuries. Born in 1940, originally from Germany, subject to Western training, he joins the Benedictin order in France at 22 years old. In 1980 he retreated into the mountains of Switzerland in search of the most authentic monachism possible, and in 2010 he was converted to Orthodoxy. He studies with exactitude the Egyptian monachism of the fourth century and the work of Evagrius Ponticus, giving the public reader numerous processes of it, true guidance in the monastic life.

The work of the monk Gabriel to which we refer, *The practice of personal prayer according to the tradition of the Holy Fathers* or “*The treasure in clay vessels*”, already in the third edition in Romanian, through the effort of the deacon translator Ioan I. Ică Jr. and Deisis publishing house, provides a practical guide in the discovery and practice of prayer, so necessary to revitalize and reassume the life of the believers. Structured in four chapters, with an argument introduction and an optimistic conclusion, as well as a series of practical guidelines in the end, the work is decorated with 22 drawings suggestive by their simplicity, made by Francesco Riganti.

The introduction, entitled “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luca 11, 1), underlines the worrying “broad crisis of faith, of clergy, and of laymen as well” (p. 11), paradoxically combined with the multitude of titles, specific to theological and spiritual literature, which the West produces at the same time. With his characteristic lucidity, the scholar monk identifies the cause of this weakness of faith, in the loss of the inner work, which is by excellence prayer, coming to the conclusion that “only in prayer the Christian is actually himself.” (p. 14).

The first chapter resorts to the beginnings of Christianity, seeking to identify the Mystery of communion between believers and God from its origins, founded upon those who had previously experienced this communion: “*By keeping in the living Communion with what was the man originally connected to space and time, enter the mystery of He who, free of these limits, yesterday and today and ever is the same. Beyond space and time, the Communion creates continuity and identity in the midst of a world subject to permanent change*” (p. 29). By placing himself in a spiritual obedience to his forefathers, the contemporary man rediscovers the authentic spirit of living by combining active and contemplative life, arising from psalm chanting, prayer and meditation.

Not at all to be overlooked are the other aspects of the prayer’s order, such as the place and time of its completion, dealt with in Chapter two: “*man consists of soul and body, and since the latter is connected to space and time, the human prayer is actually and constantly carried out in space and time. The choice of the right place and the most appropriate hours of the day or night, are not at all unessential preconditions for what the fathers call the real prayer*” (p. 59). The ways in which prayer may be made, as set out in the third chapter, discover the “gift” of tears, of relentless prayer, accompanied by repentance, words or even silently; and the gestures

done in the time of prayer presented in the fourth chapter: “For *various reasons, in the West all this wealth of body expression has been lost piece by piece, from the beginning of our millennium to the modern age, when only kneeling remains. Until not long ago the believers knelt, both during the Communion divine worship and in personal prayer*” (p. 169).

The whole writing, which is a result of a simple and accessible style, urges awakening, prudence and full assumption of the fathers’ “practices” and “methods”: “*Only those who obey these labours can hope to embrace one day the Fathers knowledge we admire so much*” (p. 235).

As a final conclusion on the interesting incursion made by Gabriel Bunge in the work of the Holy Fathers in general and of abba Evagrius Ponticus, in particular, is the appendix with practical instructions for the accommodation of a place, the setting of a time and the formation of a prayer order, which by specific modes and gestures, to guide the Christian to the fulfillment of Evagrius’ advice: “Do not only speak with pleasure about the fathers works, but ask yourself the laborious accomplishment of their works”.

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