

TEO ISSN 2247-4382
101 (4), pp. 120-146, 2024

Theological and Spiritual Exegesis of the Prayer “Pure, spotless...”, with Some Proposals to Improve the Translation in Romanian Language

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Abstract

The Orthodox-liturgical worship is an unceasing doxology. It consists of various rites and ordinances, precisely specified in the Typikon, and in its essence is prayer. From a technical point of view, private prayer has been defined in many ways, but the prayer of common or public worship is the exercise of the community in praising God unceasingly, after the pattern of the heavenly host. In Church prayer never stops, as in heaven the heavenly powers praise God “with unceasing praises”, as the prophet Isaiah, who received the vision (Isaiah 6:3), teaches, and as we, clergy and people, sing in the Divine Liturgy.

From the entire treasury of prayer that the Orthodox Church has, in this study I have chosen to analyse, theologically and spiritually, a well-known text used in worship, within the Great Compline: the Prayer “Pure, spotless, incorrupt...”.

I consider it to be one of the most beautiful prayers dedicated to the Mother of God, but the Romanian translation has suffered certain deviations from the meaning of the original Greek text. For this reason, in addition to the commentary to follow, I will also propose a few small corrections to this Romanian translation, considering the original Greek text, its Slavonic and Russian variants, and some French and English translations.

Keywords

liturgical worship, prayer, translation, theological meaning, spiritual meaning

Moto: “...what more precious gift can we give to the Mother of the Word than the word?... Unloosing the knot of words and leaving free the reins, we will spur the word like a racehorse. And to me, O Word of God, be thou a charioteer: My mind, which is wordless, make it speak ...!”

(St. John of Damascus, “The Second Word of Praise on the all pious Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary”)

I. Motivation of the study

The spiritual life in the Orthodox Church has its own unique brilliance, which liturgical worship gives it, through its ordinances full of interiority and message, impressive in their outward manifestation. In more than 20 centuries of Christianity, the most eminent ecclesiastical writers, Holy Fathers and theologians, concerned and fascinated by divine worship, have written about it, leaving posterity (and therefore us today!) a large theological bibliography on the exegesis of the Orthodox liturgical services, a masterpiece which we call the mystagogy of divine worship.

The external, manifest forms of Orthodox liturgical worship lead to its essence, which is the unceasing praise of God, in Church. This doxology is realized through various rites and ordinances, clearly specified in the Typikon, the worship being in fact prayer read and sung. From a theological point of view, private prayer has been defined in many ways and has its importance in the attainment of salvation by every Christian, but the prayer of common or public worship is far more powerful and “effective”; it is the exercise of the community in praising God unceasingly. In Church prayer never ceases, just as in heaven the heavenly powers praise God forever, as the prophet Isaiah testifies, the one who was made aware of this reality in a vision (Isaiah 6, 3), in a state of ecstasy. Following that heavenly model, in Holy Liturgy we sing in a choir of souls and voices, clergy and people, humans and angels, and the text of the liturgical Anaphora states that “... all flesh ... sings canticles of praise ... with unceasing words, with praise without silence ...”¹.

¹ “The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great”, in: *Liturghier*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2012, p. 248.

From its simple forms in the apostolic age to its present-day splendor, Orthodox worship has been enriched in both quantitative and qualitative ways. Specialists speak of an organic development of the worship, a process of composition both of typiconal forms, of order, and especially of the creation of a hymnographic and euhological treasury of great refinement and beauty. The greatest theologians of the Church, who have mastered the dogmas very well, even to the level of nuances, were also poets, hymnographers or eugraphers (composers of hymnography and prayers), whereas the hymnography and prayers of the Orthodox cult perfectly illustrate the whole system of teaching of the Orthodox faith, “translating” it to the understanding of the people. In other words, the theological metaphor was - and has remained to this day - the best mean through which the “oros” of the Ecumenical Synods, the theologizing of the Holy Fathers, the high thinking of enlightened minds, the feeling and living of mystics have been brought to the level of understanding of people without theological school, but with a pure heart and a sense of sensitive spiritual acuity. Thus, during the 4th-14th centuries, then with certain shorter segments of time and with fewer representatives even up to the 21st century, the Orthodox spiritual treasury was constantly enriched, through the contribution of composers, with hymnographic pieces (complete services of saints) and prayers for various situations in the spiritual life of the faithful, beginning with the adoration of God, continuing with the consecration of the Mother of God and the veneration of saints and on other occasions of piety, in a local or universal context.

From the entire treasure of prayers that the Orthodox Church has, in this study I have chosen to analyze, theologically and spiritually, a well-known text used in worship, during the Great Compline: the Prayer “Pure, spotless, incorrupt...”. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most beautiful prayers dedicated to the Mother of God, and is read by many Christians as part of their daily prayer program. On the other hand, I emphasize the fact that, although well known, loved and read, this prayer has not benefited, until now, in Romanian theology, from any in-depth analysis. The only one who mentions it and who highlights it, dedicating only a few lines to it in his manual is the priest Prof. Ene Braniște².

² Pr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica specială*, Editura Basilica, Bucharest, 2016 (revised and expanded edition by Pr. Nicoale D. Necula and arhim. Chiril Lovin), pp. 117-118.

From the point of view of the prayer, but also from that of the teacher, I must also underline here that, in Romanian, the translation of this prayer has suffered - here and there - certain connotations from the meaning of the original Greek text. For this reason, in addition to the commentary that follows, I shall also propose a few minor corrections to the Romanian translation of this prayer, in the light of the original Greek text, its Slavonic and Russian versions and some French and English translations.

II. Highlights on the author of the prayer “Pure, spotless...”

In general, current sources generally point to “Paul Evergetinos of the Theotokos Euergetis Monastery” – “Παύλου μοναχοῦ, Μονῆς Εὐεργέτιδος”³ as the author of this prayer. Living in the XIth century, this holy father remained in the spiritual life of Orthodoxy through two great works. The first is the founding of a great monastery, which he called Παναγία Εὐεργέτιδος, from where the cognomen of this monk comes. The second is the elaboration of an ascetic-mystical work of synthesis, in which he gathered together parables from the Paterikon, words and teachings from the lives of many saints; this book, later finalized by his disciples, was printed under the name of “Εὐεργέτινος”, in 1783, in Venice, by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite. This important work for the life of monks in monasteries was also translated into Romanian, in three editions: at the Monastery of Neamț, in 1797⁴, at the Monastery of Vatopedi, between 2010-2016 (3 volumes, bilingual edition)⁵ and in 2018, by a private publishing house⁶.

³ *ᾠΡΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ ΤΟ ΜΕΤΑ*, Ἐκδόσεις “Περιβολὴ τῆς Πάναγίας”, Thessaloniki, 2012, p. 225.

⁴ A translation by the hieromonk Climent from the monastery of Slatina, realized from Greek, between 1794-1797.

⁵ Realized through the efforts of the Romanian monks of the Vatopedi monastery’s team of translators-correctors-editors, volumes 1 and 2 being prefaced by Archimandrite Efrem, and volume 3 having the “Foreword” of His Eminence Metropolitan Theophan of Moldova and Bucovina.

⁶ Egumenița Publishing House, Galați, 4 volumes, appeared in 2018 (translation, correction, revision after the Greek edition and notes by Ștefan Voronca).

In addition to these mentions, clearly stated, in the official edition of the Old Rite Orthodox Church of Romania's⁷ *Ceasoslov*, I discovered the mention that the prayer "Pure, spotless..." would be the euhological work of St. Basil the Great: *мѣтва Прѣбѣй Бѣѣ, великаго василѣа*⁸. Knowing the akribeia with which the Lipovan Church has preserved its worship and liturgical tradition over the centuries, it can be assumed that this monk Paul will have developed a prayer that St. Basil, in his time, would have written in the worship of the Mother of God. The assumption comes along with what I stated above, in Chapter I, on the development of worship, and is supported on the basis of the liturgical tradition, which in the monastic sphere, but also in the consciousness of parish communities, is said to be "as strong (read «consequent», «steadfast») as dogma". I think it is not by

⁷ Officially named "of the old-believers", and in the Romanian area being known as "Lipovan", the Old Rite Orthodox Church of Romania, with its headquarters in Brăila, with several eparchies in the country and several other suffragan eparchies in Europe and other continents, has an interesting history, which can be partially known from the still unsurpassed study by Bishop Melchisedec ȘTEFĂNESCU, *Lipovenismul, adică schismaticii sau răscolnicii și ereticii ruși. După autori ruși și izvoare naționale române*, Tipografia Imprimeria Națională. Antreprenor C. N. Rădulescu, Bucharest, 1871. See also: acad. Ion NISTOR, "Cercetări asupra cultului lipovenesc din România", in: *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secției Istorice*, series III, volume XXIX, 1946-1947, Monitorul Oficial și Imprimeriile Statului, Bucharest, 1948; Alexandr VARONA, *Tragedia schismei ruse. Reforma patriarhului Nikon și începuturile staroverilor*, Editura Kriterion, Bucharest, 2002; F. E. MELNIKOV, *Scurtă istorie a Bisericii Ortodoxe de Rit Vechi. Partea I: Schisma în Biserica Rusă*, Editura C.R.L.R., Bucharest, 2014 (edited, translated, prefaced, annotated edition by Leonte Ivanov).

⁸ *Часослов - Ceasoslov*, Moscow, 1653, page 25 recto. See the text of the prayer on page 25 recto-verso and page 26 recto, with the following notes on the title page: "This book was edited according to the guidance of the Holy Fathers in the time of the great Knyaz and King Alexei Mikhailovich, ruler of all Russians, with the spiritual blessing of the Father and to Praying God, of the Great and Most Blessed Joseph, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, including the Vespers, the Complines (small, medium, great), the Midnight office, the Hours I, III, VI, IX, and the troparion arranged in the best order, for the Doxology and thanksgiving to God, the Maker of all things and Giver of all blessings, for the needs of all, in: the name of Christ. Added to this book, *Часослов - Ceasoslov*, are the troparions and kontakions of Lent and Pentecost. This printing was begun in the year 7160, in: the month of December, on the 4th day of the month, the commemoration of St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus. The completion of the book was the following year, on March 17, the feast of St. Alexius, in: the 7th year of the reign of Tsar Alexy Mikhailovich of All Russia and in the 10th year of the enthronement of the Father and to God the Prayerful, His Beatitude Patriarch Joseph of Moscow and All Russia".

chance that editions of the *Slavonic Horologion*⁹ are silent about the author of the prayer. Not having, so far, however, strong arguments to support the assumption formulated here, this detail about the author of the prayer remains an open subject of research.

III. The Prayer “Pure, spotless...” in Orthodox liturgical worship. Theological and spiritual analysis of the text

In Romanian, the text of the prayer “Pure, spotless...” is found in three main book sources: the *Horologion*¹⁰, the *Hieratikon*¹¹ and the *Prayer Book*¹², meaning that is used in the public worship of the Church (at the Small and Great Compline), but is also accessible to the faithful for their personal prayer. The transition of this prayer from public to private worship is due to the poetic beauty of the text, its exceptional theological synthesis and its evseival (devotional) force, which responds to the spiritual thirst of every prayer. If at Compline this sacred text constitutes especially the spiritual delight of the monks and is recited only at a time of prayer well specified in the program of monasteries¹³, in the personal prayers, in addition to the

⁹ I have researched the Kiev edition, 1857, which does not indicate any author (see page 120 recto-verso and page 121 recto).

¹⁰ See the Romanian editions of the *Horologion - Ceaslov*, researched by me and quoted in this study (note 53).

¹¹ It is a peculiarity of the *Hieratikon – Liturghier* in Romanian, starting with the Bucharest edition, 1741 (p. 318) this prayer being present in all editions, until the 2012 edition, between Part I of the “Ordinances of Holy Communion – Canon”, which is usually read in the evening and Part II of this “Ordinances...”, which is centered on the 12 prayers to be read on the day of the celebration of Holy Liturgy, according to the ordinance of the Hours. See *Liturghier*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2012, pp. 341-343.

¹² For example, in the chapter “Evening Prayers. Prayers from the Evening Prayer Service”, in: *Carte de rugăciuni*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2016, pp. 61-64.

¹³ The order of the Compline has a powerful mystical significance; it commemorates in the Church, liturgically, every evening, the drama of the soul which tore the soul of the Mother of God when the Divine Body of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, after His Crucifixion and Death, was laid in the tomb - see † DANIEL, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, “Ceaslovul – mistagogia sfințirii timpului zilnic”, in: *Ceaslov*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2024, p. 7.

evening hour when the Christian ends his day, this prayer can be read at any time, depending on the piety that each one has towards the Mother of God.

Even reading such a well-elaborated, “powerful” prayer, one cannot reach a state of spiritual elevation unless the mind first understands the primary, secondary and tertiary meanings of the text, which the heart must feel and on whose impulse it must vibrate. For this reason, in the following, I will try a brief exegesis on the text of this prayer:

“O Virgin, pure, spotless, incorrupt, undefiled, all-pure; thou Bride of God and Sovereign Lady...”;

Written as an ode of high veneration to the Mother of God, the text of the prayer begins with an evocation of the first two and most important attributes of her person: She is the Ever-Virgin (Ἄει Παρθένος) and Theotokos (Θεοτόκος), as established by the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephes, 431).

In connection with the first quality, the string of five adjectives of vocative tone which opens the prayer, emphasizes the perfect purity of the person of the Mother of God, from the spiritual and bodily point of view. The modifier “pure” (“without imperfections”) illustrates Her moral perfection in a world of morally “impure” people in which life faced much compromise; the modifier “pure” refers to the moral height of Her life, standing at an altitude far above the “mud of the earth” (to be understood the grossness of sin having reached its paroxysm, during the tense messianic expectation of all humanity, an expectation which is approaching fulfillment at the moment of the Annunciation); it is thus understood that the prayer is related to a person whose life has gone far beyond the mere level of human life. The Holy Fathers teach that the modifier “incorrupt” refers to the great paradox which is realized, through the work of God, in the person of the Mother of God: the union of virginity with motherhood, a mystery which cannot be understood rationally:

“O, exalted miracle! The Virgin becomes a mother and remains a virgin! Look at this new order of nature. Any other woman, if she wants to remain a virgin, can’t be a mother. When a woman

becomes a mother, she is no longer a virgin. But here, truly, the two are united in the same person. The same woman is shown both Mother and Virgin, and her virginity was not an obstacle to her birth, nor birth corrupted her virginity. Here it was shown that the Lord came down to make us all alive, because He came through a birth without corruption. So, according to our understanding, a woman who was unrelated to a man is called «incorrupt»¹⁴.

The lack of “sin”¹⁵ and “purity” are the consequences of the first three. The Mother of God keeps her soul pure and her body spotless and incorrupt, so that she is not defiled, but bright and radiant, and, no longer constrained by any law, she is pure and virginal, being the only person in the history of humanity who has risen to such a state of innocence and purity:

“... She was completely unaware not only of the things of marriage, but also of the thought of desire, having been raised from the beginning in soul and body completely holy and blameless. And in her heart and in her mind no thought of any sin had entered. And in this way she was deeper and higher than all human nature. Therefore the beauty of her soul was pleasing to the King and Maker of all, who sees the hearts and the minds ...”¹⁶.

Somehow resembling in meaning, the used words complement themselves, emphasize and deepen this idea of the purity of the Mother of God. This addressing model, used in ancient and princely feudal, Aulic

¹⁴ St. GREGORY OF NYSSA, “Despre Nașterea lui Hristos”, quoted in fr. dr. Adrian Lucian DINU, *Maica Domnului în teologia Sfinților Părinți*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2004, pp. 92-93.

¹⁵ “Prihană” (Sin) - an act that violates morality, moral guilt, dishonesty - according to the *New Universal Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, Litera International Publishing House, Chisinau-Bucharest, 2007, p. 111.

¹⁶ St. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, “Song and worship, glory and praise, Most Holy and Most Blessed Virgin Mary, and Note on her Immaculate and Happy Life from Birth to Death”, in: *Trei vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2001, pp. 95-96 (translation and afterword, deacon Ioan I. Ică jr.).

literature, and borrowed/adapted into the Christian hymnographic genre is evident by comparing how the Greek text was originally translated into Slavonic, then into Romanian, then into other modern languages, being used in worship in this very way:

ὉΡΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ ΤΟ ΜΕΓΑ Ἐκδόσις “Περὶβολή της Ράνάγιας”, Tsalonic, 2012, p. 225	Часослов Москва, 1653, fila 25 (recto)	Православное Богослужение, Москва, 2010, книга 7, p. 231	Grand Horologion, Diaconie Apostolique, Roma, 1989, p. 54	Service Book of the Holly Orthodox – Catholic Apostolic (greco-russian) Church, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1906, p. 161
“Ἀσπλε, ἀμόλυντε, ἄφθορε, ἄχραντε, ἀγνή Παρθένη, Θεόνημφε Δέσποινα ...” ¹⁷ .	“Несквернаа, не блазнаа, нетлѣннаа, Пречтаа Бгоневѣсто Влдчце, ...” ¹⁸ .	“Нескверная, не блазная, нетлѣбная, Пречистая Богоневесто Владычице ...”.	“Vierge pure, immaculée, sans souillure et sans péché, sainte épouse de notre Dieu ...”.	“O Virgin, pure, spotless, incorrupt, undefiled, all-pure; thou Bride of God and Sovereign Lady ...” ¹⁹ .

¹⁷ For the semantic analysis of some Greek words we used M. A. BAILLY, *Dictionnaire grec-français*, Édition 2020-2023 (nouvelle édition revue et corrigé par Gérard Gréco, André Charbonnet, Mark de Wilde, Bernard Maréchal) - on line - <http://gerardgreco.free.fr/IMG/pdf/bailly-2020-hugo-chavez-2023-02-28.pdf>, accessed August 10-18, 2024.

¹⁸ Although I could not write entirely correctly in Old Slavonic, due to the lack of specific fonts, in: the following short commentary I will use words and expressions from this edition, also transliterated into modern Russian, which is much better known and already used in worship in many dioceses of Slavic Orthodoxy. In the following examples I will therefore use words and expressions in classical Greek, Slavonic and Russian, supplemented by quotations in modern French and English.

¹⁹ Complete title: *Service Book of the Holly Orthodox – Catholic Apostolic (greco-russian) Church. Compiled, translated, and arranged from the old church-slavonic service books of the Russian Church and collated with the service books of the Greek Church, by Isabel*

The sum of unique spiritual qualities that characterize her soul, her life, make the Mother of God a person who has surpassed, by measure, the heights of holiness to which some people have risen through harsh personal need and with the help of God's grace. She is not only "Holy" but "All-Holy" or "Most Holy" (Παναγία). It is in this state of grace and holiness that the archangel Gabriel finds her, when, "... in fear, as a servant ... and in worry ..." ²⁰ he sings to Her: "... Rejoice, O Virgin, who knowest not the bridegroom and are not desirous of marriage ... now I proclaim joy to thee, that thou shalt remain untouched and give birth to the Lord, O most Precious" ²¹. In this way her character traits are bound up with her moral and highly spiritual ones: the holiness of her life made her worthy to serve the icon of the salvation of the human world.

The second quality of the Mother of God, that of "Theotokos" (Θεοτόκος) is prepared by her state of "Pure Virgin" and corroborated with that of "Lady" or "Mistress". The quality of Θεοτόκος is not part of the order of human hierarchies, but shows the Mother of God as the "Bride of God" - through the term (Θεόνυμφε) and affirms Her imperial-spiritual dignity, illustrated in Byzantine iconography by the basilisk vestment, and in Byzantine hymnography rendered by the invocation of her service as "Unwedded Bride" (Χαιρε, Νύμφη Ανύμφευτε! = Rejoice, O Bride unwedded! = Rejoice, O Bride, Ever-Virgin! ²²) who gives bodily birth to the Son of God:

Florence Hapgood. I have also compared with: a) *Horologion*, 1999, p. 371, where the text begins as follows: "Spotless, undefiled, incorrupt, immaculate, pure Virgin, Bride of God and Lady [...]"; and also with b) *Horologion or Book of Hours, the Daily Offices. Translated from Church Slavonic with notes by "St. Tikchon's" Monastery*, "St. Tikchon's" Seminary Press South Canaan, Pennsylvania, 2000, p. 164, where the text begins as follows: "O Sovereign-Lady, Bride of God, spotless, undefiled, incorrupt, most-pure, and chaste Virgin [...]". However, because of its slightly archaic "flavor", I have chosen the 1906 edition, which I have used in this study.

²⁰ Troparion in the 4th Cantic of the Annunciation Prayer, in: *Mineiul pe Martie*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2019, p. 232.

²¹ "Glory... to Praise", at the Matins of March 26, in: *Mineiul pe Martie*, p. 253.

²² See the well-known hymn "Αγνή Παρθένε Δέσποινα" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wJSL-P3zR4> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTD2Lx-6YAI> (in the interpretation of Theodoros Vassilikos or the choir of the Monastery of Simonos Petra - Athos, accessed on August 17, 2024, 10.02 and 10.07) and "The Annunciation Acatistos" - in the *Book of Akathists*, Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 2016, pp. 104-116.

“For this reason the Virgin is the Mother of God, that having given birth, she remained a Virgin. Birth is impossible to comprehend, because it is the mystery of God, but the Word came into the Body and was made seen. We know that He remained what He was before, and became what He was not, both Suffering and Unsuffering, that is to say, being one with the Father after his Godhead, and one with us after humanity, apart from sin”²³.

The wonderful, supra-rational act of the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity makes the Mother of God the Theotokos²⁴, and for the Cosmos and for the human race it brings the divine gift of the resurrection of the whole Creation²⁵, beginning with the human being, who “is renewed”²⁶, in the sense that he restores his inner divine image and sanctifies and humbles his nature, in and through Christ, as the hymn writer sings: “I desire to know how the human flesh will suffer the mingling with divinity”²⁷. This truth is echoed in the continuation of the prayer:

“... who didst unite the Word of God with men through thy most glorious birth-giving, and hast yoked the apostate nature of our race with the heavenly ...”;

The Incarnation of the Son of God signified, on the one hand, the assumption, in His eternal divine Hypostasis, of human nature for eternity,

²³ St. PROCLUS OF CONSTANTINOPOL, “Homily 26”, taken from pr. Adrian Lucian DINU, *Maica Domnului în teologia Sfinților Părinți...*, pp. 111-112.

²⁴ St. JOHN OF DAMASCUS says of “Θεοτόκος” that “this name sums up the whole mystery of the Incarnation” - *Dogmatica* (Book III. chap. 12 – “The Blessed Virgin is the Theotokos. Against nestoriens”), Editura Scripta, Bucharest, 1993, p. 115.

²⁵ Troparion in the 9th Canticle of the Matins on March 24, in: *Mineiul pe Martie*, p. 219.

²⁶ Kontakion from the Matins of the Annunciation, in: *Mineiul pe Martie*, p. 233.

²⁷ Troparion in the 4th Canticle of the Matins of the Annunciation, in: *ineiul pe Martie*, p. 231. Sometimes, the hymnography emphasizes and recalls the “wicked nature of men” or “the nature of men enslaved by the enemy”, precisely to emphasize the greatness of God’s work of saving the world from its most deplorable state of decay - see the last Stiphira at the 8th Canticle of the of the Matins of the Annunciation and the Stiphira at the 7th Canticle of the Matins of March 24, in: *Mineiul pe Martie*, pp. 235 and 218.

and on the other hand, it signified the union of the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity with humanity precisely through this fallen nature, which the Son imbues Himself by birth. The text of the prayer in the Romanian renders the human nature as “estranged,” but in the original the sense is of “renounced” - ἀποσθεῖσαν φύσιν, and this nuance is found in the older and more faithful Romanian translations. It seems that the newer nuance was inserted in the Romanian translations through the Slavonic filiera, more precisely through the formula: падшее естество / падшее естество²⁸ - “the fallen nature”.

The Incarnation meant, in fact, the cleansing of the fallen human being from the effects of ancestral sin and its filling with grace, the deification to the point of almost becoming divine by being united with the divine nature in the Person of the Son made Human, the two natures communicating their characteristics. The mutual transfer of energies is done as the Chalcedonian Fathers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, theologized: “in an unmixed and unchangeable, undivided and inseparable form”.

In the patristic literature there is also a mystical vision of this union between the two beings, divine and human, seen as a wedding:

“Here is the undeniable union, and this is the mystic wedding of God, and thus the reconciliation of God with mankind took place, the One who is above nature and being uniting Himself without mingling with our wicked and poor nature and being”²⁹.

Four centuries later, the Byzantine chronicler and theologian Joseph Bryennios deciphers the theological allegory of St. Simeon: the groom is God the Word, the bride is the human nature, the wedding is His union

²⁸ For the Slavonic text I used the above-mentioned source *Православное Богослужение* (в переводе с греческого и церковнославянского языков. Книга 7. Последования Часов, Изобразительных, Повечерия и Полунощницы с приложением церковнославянских текстов), Свято-Филаретовский Православно-Христианский Институт, Москва, 2010, pp. 231-232, with the text transliterated into Russian.

²⁹ St. Symeon the New Theologian, quoted by †HIEROTHEOS, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului. O perspectivă istorică și teologică*, Editura Bonifaciu, 2019, pp. 279 and 282 (translation Monastery of Diaconesti and Tatiana Petrache).

with the human being, the wedding day is the Annunciation, and the one who leads the bride to the altar is the Archangel Gabriel. What was missing in Vrienios's explanation is the place where the wedding takes place, and this is - now to be filled in! - the womb of the Virgin Mary, which becomes the "throne of the Emperor"³⁰, the "divine Church"³¹, the "monstrance of holiness, the golden incensory, the table and candlestick, and the tabernacle of God"³², the "oven in which the divine Bread of life was baked"³³.

This conjoining, union and wonderful communication of the two beings, with direct and perfect fruits for the salvation of the human race begins hypostatically, in the Person of the Savior Christ, and continues with the ascetical work of every Christian, helped by divine grace, to bring the fallen human nature, in obedience to the Spirit, to wisdom, sanctification and salvation. The term "joined together", although nowadays demonetized in the Romanian language, conveys well the idea of this complete, vertical union, accomplished in the Person of the Incarnate Son.

"... who art the sole hope of the hopeless, and the helper of the assailed, a speedy defender of those who flee unto thee, and the refuge of all Christians ...";

The prayer refers to the Mother of God as the only person, close to God, who can help any mortal, especially the despairing, the overwhelmed/"overcome" by a life full of errors. She is of "great help" to all those who, full of zeal, "run" in search of "escape". In the age of utilitarianism, there can be no talk of "using" the power of the Blessed

³⁰ Axion at the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, in: *Liturghier*, p. 256.

³¹ Kathisma at the Matins of the Feast of the Entrance into the Church of the Most Blessed, of Theotokos and of the Most Pure Virgin Mary, in: *Mineiul pe Noiembrie*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2017, p. 399.

³² Troparion in the 3rd Cantic of the Matins of the Feast of the Entrance into the Church of the Most Blessed, of Theotokos and of the Most Pure Virgin Mary, in: *Mineiul pe Noiembrie*, p. 402.

³³ Troparion in the 8th Cantic of the "Canon - Rite of Holy Communion", in: *Liturghier*, p. 340. A similar theological-metaphorical sequence of images summarized by St. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, "Întâiul cuvânt de laudă la preacuvioasa Adormire a preaslăvitei și preacinstitei și binecuvântatei Stăpânei noastre, Născătoarea de Dumnezeu și pururea Fecioarei Maria", in: *Cuvântări de laudă la Adormirea Maicii Domnului*, Editura Sofia, Bucharest, 2008, pp. 21-54.

Virgin for petty goals, even though the little prayers that priests receive at the altar are full of the most strange and selfish requests³⁴. The use She brings to the human race, and in particular to each of her faithful, is far greater and more important:

“... Through you the curse of the first mother was loosed; through you the wall of enmity was broken down; through you the dominion of death was destroyed; through you we have overcome sin; through you virginity was planted among men; through you we learn determination in good deeds; through you we were given wisdom, humility and love ...”³⁵.

In Maximian thinking, therefore, the presence and the work of the Mother of God in the icononomy of salvation and the “benefits” of the prayers addressed to her have soteriological effects, with general-human, communitarian³⁶, and personal applications³⁷.

³⁴ The debate on this topic at Fr. assoc. prof. dr. Lucian Vasile PETROAIA, “Pomelnicul. Studiu liturgic”, in: *Înmormântarea și pomenirea celor adormiți în Domnul. Texte liturgice și contexte pastorale*, Editura Universității “Al. I. Cuza”, Iași, 2022, pp. 111-152.

³⁵ St. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, “Song and Adoration, Glory and Praise of the Most Blessed Empress...”, p. 203.

³⁶ She is the “new Eve” and “the redemption of Eve’s tears”, in: the Irenaeus key: “a virgin brought us out of Heaven, through the Virgin we have found eternal life again”, the theological theme being present in the theological thinking of Saints Irenaeus of Lyon, Ephrem the Syrian, Epiphanius of Salamis, Peter Chrysologus, Andrew of Crete. For more details and bibliography on the subject, please consult the exceptional work of Prof. Remus RUS and pr. Adrian CAZACU, *Θεολόγος. Enciclopedie teologică*, Editura Crimca a Arhiepiscopiei Sucevei și Rădăuților, Suceava, 2023, pp. 386-388, 197-200, 211-212, 556-557, 79-82, respectively.

³⁷ She is the perfect model for the Christian woman, but also for the spiritual life of every man. Here I give an example of the multitude of gifts that the neophyte receives through the Sacrament of Baptism, gifts that must be cherished and fostered throughout life, with God’s help, with the protection of the Mother of God, with the spiritual assistance of the saints and angels, with the involvement of benefactors (parents of body and soul - godparents, teachers) and through personal need: “1. [...] the renewal of life [...] 2. the shield of faith [...] 3. the garment of incorruption [...] 4. the spiritual seal [...] 5. heavenly brightness [...] 6. the advance [...]”. The Mother of God protects these, respectively, as follows: 1. continually fresh; 2. “untainted by enemies”; 3.

As for “running”, it means, in fact, not a physical haste, but a powerful striving towards the only human person in history who can fully understand every individual, listen to him with genuine motherly love and can help him with great benefit to the attainment of salvation.. This is the spiritual meaning of the word *прибѣжище* - *прибѣжище* (“escape, refuge”), the Slavic equivalent of the Greek *τὸ καταφύγιον*. The text of the prayer alludes to a worldly protection that the Mother of God offers to Christians, but the semantic range of the word suggests that the most fervent “escape” to her as to a protective refuge, where they are safe both in this life and in eternity. Heaven is defined, par excellence, as closeness to the Most Blessed Trinity, the Mother of God, the heavenly powers and the saints, where the saved (“escaped”, “rescued”) from the turmoil of worldly life are welcomed into an eternal communion of joy, light and life.

“... Hold not in loathing me, a sinner and polluted, who have made myself of no worth through my shameful thoughts, and words, and deeds, and who, through slothfulness of mind have been a slave to the carnal lusts of life ...”;

The longing for the Mother of God presupposes a closeness to her, not physical, but spiritual. Even so, it is a great courage and impiety for anyone to seek/look at/approach the Mother of God, being a man of wickedness, “sinful and spotted”, full of ugly thoughts, words and deeds and “utterly impious” and enslaved by a life full of pleasures, of “sweet things”: *καὶ τῇ τῇ τῶν ἡδονῶν τοῦ βίου ῥαθυμία γνώμης, δοῦλον γενόμενον* / *сластемъ унынїа, и лѣности нравомъ раба бывша* / *сластемъ уныния, и лености нравомъ раба бывша*.

For this reason, the prayer, knowing his inner state of sinfulness, recognizes his inability to be a worthy interlocutor to speak with the One who is purer than the heavenly powers, “more honest than the Cherubim, and without compare greater than the Seraphim”. This is also the idea of the present prayer: to snatch the Christian desirous of spiritual elevation from the mire of his fallen life (sometimes “sweet” and comfortable) and to

“undefiled and spotless”; 4. “incorrupt”; 5. untouched; 6. “undefiled” - see the first two prayers after the Gospel, in “The Service of the Holy Baptism” (*Molitfelnic*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2019, pp. 50-51).

bring him before the One who intercedes with God for his pardon. What is important to know is that the Mother of God, although she is "Most Pure", is not disgusted by any "spotted" (unclean, dirty) who desires cleansing, deliverance from sin.

"... But, in that thou art the Mother of the God who loveth mankind, have compassion upon me, a sinner and a prodigal, and accept my prayer which is offered unto thee with lips impure ...";

Addressing through prayer is made to a human person unique for the essential role played in the history of the salvation of the human race: The Mother of God. She is the one who gave bodily birth to the "mankind lover" (Φιλάνθρωπος Θεός). This divine "philanthropic" love, perfect, gives hope to every sinner and defiled (ἁμαρτωλὸς καὶ ἁσώτος), because, following the parable of her Son, the Mother of God shows herself as sung in hymnography, as "the depth of mercies", "the most merciful Mistress", "the most gracious and merciful Queen of heaven and earth"³⁸. Beyond the superlative formulas used by the hymnographers it is seen that She has a different kind of mercy – clemency than what a man or a saint can offer:

"... through virtue the Lord has shown the Theotokos, pure Virgin, to be the lamp of all divine and mysterious light, whereas before good was scattered among all, whereupon, in Her, every form of virtue has centered in Her in a manner above mind and word, and She surpasses them. Therefore, how much was sufficient for all the very good of every age, to whom it had been granted to be good, and how much all - angels and men - had received as graces from God separately, all these gathering and perfecting She alone and offering them as much as cannot be said, abundantly pours grace towards those who honor her, giving them also the fact of reaching out to Her, which is the disk of such great graces ..." ³⁹.

³⁸ Prayer I at the end of the "Akathist of the Annunciation", in: *Acatistier*, pp. 118-119.

³⁹ St. GREGORY PALAMAS, "Omilia 53. Tratat despre Intrarea Maicii Domnului în Sfânta Sfințelor și despre viața ei deiformă dusă de ea aici", in: deac. Ioan I. ICA JR., *Maica Domnului în teologia secolului XX și în spiritualitatea isihastă a secolului al XIV-lea*:

The hopes of Christians are based on the certainty that their prayer is received, heard and fulfilled. The Slavonic version uses the idea of “a sin that wanders”, which is why the phrase грѣшнѣмъ и блѣдиѣмъ / грешнем и блуднем – “the sinner and the wanderer” - is used in prayer. According to the Holy Fathers, sin is both the wandering of the mind and the wandering of the way to salvation. In this sense, the Mother of God is also the guide of the mistaken who return to the right path.

This passage also draws attention to the image of the sinner who prays with “unclean lips” (скверными помыслы / скверных устен), a recurring theme in Orthodox euhology. For example, in the ordinance of preparation for the reception of the Holy Eucharist, the Christian recognizes that he prays “from spotted lips, from a corrupt heart, from an unclean tongue, from a defiled soul [...]”. The cleansing of the lips and mouth from defilement or uncleanness is accomplished by refraining from inveighing foul words, pronouncing bright words, saying fervent and ardent prayers, confessing and receiving Holy Communion, this cycle of steps being inspired by the vision of the prophet Isaiah (6, 3-6) and applied in liturgical worship as follows: “... His mouth is filled with your praise. He opens his lips to the praise of your name ...”⁴⁰.

“... and exercising thy maternal boldness, importune thou thy Son, who is also our Master and our Lord, that he will open unto me also the compassionate loving-kindness of his goodness ...”;

The Mother of God is presented as the most powerful intercessor of the human race to the Lord and God⁴¹. She shows this power as “the loving Mother of mercy of the merciful God”. Her power of intercession comes, therefore, from her being the mother of the Incarnate Son of God, hence her entreaties cannot be overlooked by her Son, to Whom she says: “...

Grigorie Palama, Nicolae Cabasila, *Teofan al Niceii. Studii și texte*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2008, p. 332.

⁴⁰ The 6th Prayer of the “Mass of the Anointing of the sick”, in: *Molitfelnic*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2019, p. 163

⁴¹ “Prayer to the Most Blessed Virgin of God - Prayers of thanksgiving after Holy Communion”, in: *Liturghier*, p. 371.

Heavenly King, receive everyone who prays to You, and call my name to your help, so that no one may depart from my presence unhelped and unheard ..."⁴².

She has the "boldness of a mother", and this boldness is persuasive, she "embraces" in the arms of requests her Son, who responds by opening his mercy, understood as forgiveness, to every Christian who appeals to him through her. Yes, without her "we are not worthy to be mercied by him unless you, O Lord, will have mercy on us"⁴³. This mercy of hers, as the mother of all earthlings, is poured out upon all Christians, her spiritual children, and in the great ecclesial family she is "the only hope, unfailing, protecting and redeeming ..."⁴⁴. It can be said of this form of merciful infant beatification that:

"... in Christ kinship / kindred is not according to nature, but according to the grace and law that comes from grace ... those who are sons of the law of grace are born from God, they are made perfect above the flesh, they are adopted through Christ ... and are more familiar than sons after the blood. For the baptized, being clothed ... in Christ, though according to nature they are children of others, are made above the flesh by Christ, Who thus overcomes the flesh, and, for He Himself was incarnate without seed of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and to those who believe in His name He gave power to become children of God..."⁴⁵.

The above expressions put the mercy of the Mother of God in harmony with God's all-mercifulness, for the spiritual benefit of Christians, spiritual

⁴² Ikos 10 – "The Acathistos of the Blessed Virgin", in: *Acatistier*, p. 232.

⁴³ The First Prayer at the end of the "Acathistos of the Intercession of the Theotokos", in: *Acatistier*, p. 236.

⁴⁴ St. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, "The Tenth Prayer - Prayers before Holy Communion", in: *Liturghier*, p. 363

⁴⁵ St. GREGORY PALAMAS, "Omilia 57. Despre genealogia după trup a Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos și pururea Fecioarei Maria", in: deac. prof. dr. Ioan I. ICĂ JR., *Maica Domnului în teologia secolului XX și în spiritualitatea isihastă a secolului al XIV-lea...*, pp. 397-398.

sons of the Blessed Virgin and brothers and sisters together in Christ, in the Church.

“... and disregarding my countless wickednesses, will turn me again unto repentance, and show me forth a well-skilled doer of his commandments ... ”;

The request that the Mother of God is asked to transmit to the Lord and to Her Son, for the prayer, consists of three elements that define the complex process of recovery of the sinful man:

- overlooking the “innumerable” personal faults - παριδών μου τὰ ἀναρίθμητα πταίσματα / презрѣвъ моя бесчисленаа прегрѣшенїа / презрев моя безчисленная прегрешения. This “overlooking”, which is her gift, is only possible if the Christian also participates in his own forgiveness and struggles to tear himself out of “enslavement to nature and to those ruthless aspects that reduce us to being just a species, just matter, just ‘flesh’ and ‘blood’”⁴⁶;
- turning to repentance - ἐπιστρέψῃ με πρὸς μετάνοιαν / Ὡбратитъ ма на покаѣнїе / обратит мя на покаяние;
- working “skillfully” the Lord’s commandments τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐντολῶν ἐργάτην δόκμον ἀναδείξῃ με/ и Своимъ заповѣдемъ дѣлателя искусна явитъ ма / и Своим заповедем делателя искусна явит мя.

According to the Slavonic text, the emphasis is on the personal involvement of the one who is rectified by the prayers of the Blessed Virgin. If above he had been forgiven, then accepted in a state of repentance, here he is called to work to fulfill the Lord’s commandments, with “skill”, because the Romanian proverb “Tot pățitu-i priceput!” (Experience Is The Best Teacher) is inspired by the pauline word: “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” (Hebrew 2, 18).

“... And be thou ever present with me, in that thou art gracious, and pitiful, and full of loving-kindness: For thou art a fervent

⁴⁶ Pr. Alexander SCHMEMANN, *Maica Domnului*, Editura Patmos, Cluj Napoca, 2010, p. 21.

Mediatrice and Helper who, in this present life, repellst the assaults of adversaries, and guidest me unto salvation ...”;

In addition to the three requests mentioned in the previous passage, which engage the soul powers of the Christian who comes out of sin and returns to virtue through the prayers of the Mother of God, in the present fragment the Blessed Virgin is invoked to stand by the man who, like the prodigal son, “he came to his senses” (Luke 15, 17) and to be: “merciful”, “compassionate”, “loving kindness”, “warmly useful”, “helpful” - ἐλεήμων, καὶ συμπαθής, καὶ φιλάγαθος . .. θερρμὴ προστάτις καὶ βοηθός / млтиваа и милосердаа и человекoлюбиваа ... теплаа представельнице и помощнице/ милостивая и милосердая и человеколюбивая ... теплая Предстательнице и Помощнице. The multitude of petitions raised to her through prayer reveals, in a subsidiary way, the desperation with which the completely fallen man “clings” to his only possible help: the Mother of God. In this way, the marial hymnography emphasizes this idea: “Heed the pitiful prayers of your unworthy pleadings, who ceaselessly cry out to you, O Most Pure ...”⁴⁷.

The theme of repentance, to which man must once again be helped, comes up insistently. Repentance must not be a transitory state, but must become a way of life, a state that accompanies the time after every human failure. From this point of view, the help of the Mother of God “in this life” is essential for the acquisition of the “other life”. I think that the particle ἀεὶ / присно / присно, translated as “pururea” in the Romanian version, anticipates precisely this passage, from life to Life, from time to eternity, which can only be made in a state of purity of soul.

“... and at the hour of death carest diligently for my wretched soul, driving far from it the dark forms of evil spirits ...”;

The tone of the prayer reaches grave accents, as it refers to the fearful moment of death, considered to take place - for every human person - at an unknown time, but inscribed in the iconomy of God - καὶ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ

⁴⁷ “Canon de vineri seara către Preasfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu. Facere a Sfântului Atanasie, Patriarhul cel Nou al Constantinopolului – Cântarea 1”, in: St. NICODEMUS THE HAGIORITE, *Noul Theotokarion. Canoanele aghiorite ale Maicii Domnului*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2012, p. 92.

τῆς ἐξόδου μου. The “end” is presented sweetened, as the “exit”, when the soul (called “wicked” - τὴν ἀθλίαν μου ψυχὴν or, in the Slavonic-Russian version even “accursed” - *ѿкаанкаанѿю ми доушю / окаянную ми душу*) will feel great fear. Even before that hour comes, the soul asks to be protected, by the mercy of the Mother of God, from “the dark countenances of the devils” - τὰς σκοτεινὰς ὄψεις τῶν πονηρῶν δαιμόνων / и темныя образы лукавых бесов / и темныя образы лукавых бесов.

In the great battle for the soul, after its separation from the body, between angels and demons, the Mother of God is the most powerful combatant. She protects and sustains the soul freed from the body and forgiven of sins, so that it may ascend in peace to the heavenly abodes; she, called “the wound of long crying”, “the fall of demons” and “the one through whom hell was emptied”⁴⁸, is often invoked in the prayers of Orthodox liturgical worship in this way:

“When it shall be to separate my soul by force from the members of the body, then, Godly Bride stand by me and dispel the warps of the enemies of the incorruptible; break the jaws of those who seek to swallow me mercilessly, that I may pass unstoppable by the rulers of darkness, who stand in the air”⁴⁹.

“... and in the dread Judgment Day thou shalt deliver me from punishment eternal, and shalt manifest me an heir of the glory ineffable of thy Son and our God: All which I shall obtain, O Lady and most holy Birth-giver of God, by thy mediation and intercession ...”;

The reference to the mystery of the soul’s journey to eternity continues with the appeal to the Last Judgment, called the “dreadful day of Judgment” - τῇ φοβερᾷ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως / въ страшный же день праведнаго / страшный же день праведнаго. Therefore, both in the particular judgment and in the Universal Judgment, the best advocate and the most powerful intercessor for the human race is also the Mother of God. This theological

⁴⁸ Ikos 2, 4 and 6 from “The Annunciation Acathistos”, in: *Acatistier*, pp. 106, 108 și 110.

⁴⁹ Sticheron at Friday Evening Vespers – “The canticles of the Resurrection on the Second Voice”, in: *Octoih*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, Bucharest, 2023, p. 179.

aspect is depicted in the great fresco of the Last Judgment on the west wall of the Voroneț monastery and in the "Deisis" icons, where the Mother of God is depicted, together with St. John the Baptist, assisting the Righteous Judge in moments of grave decision at the end of history. The iconographic scenes mentioned also have many hymnographic correspondences such as these:

"In the fearful searching, when the Lord shall condemn me, who have sinned greatly, that I may find you, who are blameless, saving me from condemnation"⁵⁰;

"... Ask Him to write in the Book of Life the souls of those who confess you, Mother of God, that through your intercession, who are completely blameless, I too may obtain the salvation of your Son, the most precious salvation ..." ⁵¹.

With reference to the quality of "Mediatrice" of the Mother of God, the hymnographic literature also points out that she has two other ministries: a) she is "Mediatrice between the Old Law and Grace" and b) she is "Mediatrice between the glory of God and the humility of our body"⁵².

The "mediation and support" of which the prayer speaks are directly proportional to Our Lady's boundless love for man and the world. Her prayer, which overwhelms the Righteous Judge and leads Him to change many sentences of His justice into paternal pardons, makes "for all mankind the experience of pure prayer, whose peerless heights, higher even than the angelic hierarchies, only She alone has reached"⁵³. Therefore, her intercessory prayer and her intercessory intercession will bring to Christians, at the Last Judgment, the fruit which is desired by all who have cherished her in their life on earth, and have prayed to her with

⁵⁰ Troparion from the 3rd Canticle, from the Wednesday Vespers – "Canticles of the Resurrection on the IVth Voice", in: *Octoih*, p. 327.

⁵¹ "...And now...", at Aposticha, from the Saturday Vespers – "Canticles of the Resurrection on the Fifth Voice", in: *Octoih*, p. 459.

⁵² St. ANDREW OF CRETE, "Omilia I la nașterea Mariei", taken from pr. Adrian Lucian DINU, *Maica Domnului în teologia Sfinților Părinți...*, p. 212.

⁵³ Pr. Michel-Philippe LAROCHE, *Maica Domnului Theotokos în trăirea duhovnicească a Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Editura Sofia, Bucharest, 2004, p. 131.

perseverance: deliverance from everlasting torment and the inheritance of God's "glory of the unspeakable" - τῆς ἀπορρήτου δόξης / неизречененный славъ / неизречененной славе.

“... Through the mercy and love toward mankind of thine Only begotten Son, to whom are due all glory, honour and worship, together with his Father, who is from everlasting, and his all-holy, and good, and life-giving Spirit, now, and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen”.

Although the prayer is addressed to the Mother of God, the ending is an ecphronesis with a strong triadic content, as in all Orthodox worship the euhological texts end. Yet this association is not accidental, suggesting the majesty and exalted place of the Virgin Mary in the heavenly hierarchical structures, where the Holy Fathers call her to be “second only to the Most Holy Trinity”, seated at the right hand of her Son and God and enthroned over the heavenly powers and the heavenly host of saints.

IV. Some proposals to improve the Romanian translation

For a correct and complete understanding of the current Romanian text of the prayer, I followed the way it has been translated in the editions of the *Horologion* that have appeared in our country over time⁵⁴,

⁵⁴ For this, I have consulted the following 24 editions of the *Horologion-Ceaslov* in Romanian: Rădăuți - 1745 (printed under the title of *Ceasoslov*, as well as the 15 editions of the 18th-19th century, among those mentioned here, pp. 245-247), Bucharest - 1767 (pp. 186-187), Dubăsari - 1794 (pp. 220-221), Iași - 1797 (pp. 162-163), Bucharest - 1801 (pp. 132 and 133, recto-verso), Brașov - 1806 (pp. 180-181), Chișinău - 1817 (pp. 159-160), Iași - 1817 (pp. 137-138), Bucharest - 1830 (pp. 254-255), Neamț - 1833 (f. 75 verso - f. 76 verso), Brașov - 1835 (pp. 130-131), Neamț - 1835 (pp. f. 75 verso - f. 76 verso), Neamț - 1858 (f. 69 verso - f. 70 recto), Râmnic - 1862 (pp. 185-187), Neamț - 1873 (f. 69 verso - f. 70 recto), Neamț - 1874 (f. 69 recto - verso), Bucharest - 1887 (printed under the title of *Orologiu*, as the other Bucharest edition, immediately following, pp. 138-139), Bucharest - 1896 (reprinted under the title *Ceaslovul Mare*, at Alexandria, in: 2003, pp. 148-149), Bucharest - 1945 (pp. 162-163), Bucharest - 1974 (pp. 159-160), Iași - 1990 (pp. 155-156), Bucharest - 2001 (pp. 188-189), Bucharest - 2014 (pp. 187-188), Bucharest - 2024 (pp. 187-188). About the importance of the *Horologion* in the liturgical and spiritual life of Romanian Orthodoxy, the blessed asleep Patriarch Theoctist said in his “Word Forward” in the

looking at three aspects: lexical content, syntactic-morphological mechanisms and theological background. In what follows I formulate three observations.

I have carefully followed the lexical and linguistic particularities of each epoch or region where each edition appeared, trying to draw up a "liturgical chart" of the theological-linguistic and spiritual evolution of this text. The oldest edition that I have researched, published in Rădăuți in 1745 (pp. 246-248), has some peculiarities. It begins with a strong term, "Nespurcată"⁵⁵ (undefiled), instead of "Nepătată" (pure), as in the Bucharest edition, 2024. This word is redundant in the text when it refers to the "spurcatul" (the defiled), instead of the "neîntinatul" (spotless) (the editions of Dubăsari, 1794, p. 220 and Iași, 1797, p. 162, as well as other later editions, use the denotative "curvariul" (fornicator), with direct reference to sins of the flesh; the edition of Bucharest, 1887 replaces the slang with a more acceptable term – "desfrânatul" [debauched]). All the three editions mentioned here use a more spiritual term, that of "cuvios"⁵⁶, (pious), in the phrase "worker of His commandments beholding me" (instead of "iscusit" (skilled), which came to us through the Slavic tradition) and the archaic phrases "înfricoșatul județ" (dreadful county) "Înfricoșătoarea Judecată" (instead of Dreadful Judgement⁵⁷) and "moștean"⁵⁸ (laird) (instead of

2001 edition: "... The *Horologion* is the most important and most complete prayer book of the Righteous Christian ... which, by its rich and dense content, as far as prayers are concerned, can alleviate sufferings and sorrows, remove trials and urges ... strengthen souls tried by silence or unbelief ... it is a permanent and unfailing guide on our journey towards Christian perfection ..." (pp. 5-6).

⁵⁵ The terms "nespurcată" and "spurcatul" (defiled) are also used in the editions of Bucharest-1801, Brasov-1806, Iași-1817, Bucharest-1830, Neamț-1833 and 1835, Brasov-1835, Râmnic-1862, Neamț-1858, 1873 and 1874, Bucharest, 1887 and 1945. The Bucharest edition - 1973 uses the term "nepătată" (pure).

⁵⁶ The editions of Neamț-1833 and 1835 and Iași-1817, use the term "ispitit" (tempted), with a strong monastic accent. The editions of Brașov-1806, Bucharest-1830, Brașov-1835 also use "cuvios" (pious), Râmnic-1862. With the edition of Neamț-1858, the current version used is "iscusit" (skillful).

⁵⁷ The term partially corrected as "dreadful judgment" from the edition of Brasov-1806.

⁵⁸ "Moștean" (landowner) are also used in the editions of Bucharest-1801, Brasov-1806, Iași-1817, Bucharest-1830, Neamț-1833 and 1835, Brasov-1835, Râmnic-1862, Neamț-1858, 1873 and 1874, Bucharest, 1887, 1945, 1973, 2001. The Bucharest edition - 20134 corrects with "moștenitor" (heir).

“moștenitor” - landowner). Also, the word “drac” (devil)⁵⁹, instead of “demon” (demon) was used nonchalantly until late in the 20th century.

The comparative, lexical and semantic tracing of the text, although laborious, shows that successive generations of diorthographers have done their job, particularly by seeking to actualize the language. This has overcome the tributarism of partial translation or even of borrowing certain words from the Slavic tradition, an approach which took too much account of the form of the prayer in Slavic, preserving the text in too many obsolete, archaic forms.

The Romanian translation has also inherited, until now, some problems of form, which have thus entered liturgical practice. I am referring here to a series of eight gerundive verbs present in the second part of this one-page text. From a certain point of view, this series of gerunds gives a certain musicality to the text and provides it with a certain cadence, facilitating the flow of the reading; they also make it difficult to follow the meaning of the text, however, and to understand the prayer in its deeper theological meaning. The semantic-spiritual dilution comes from the limitations that the verbs in the non-predicative moods induce when they are used in excess in the same text, but also from the existence of a mega-phrase (from “And be near me...” to “...your mediation and support”). Here we observe the tributarism of some strictly grammatical translations of Greek verbs in the participle into Romanian forms in the gerundive, while sometimes the translation with the second person singular present indicative or second person singular present conjunctive would be suitable I believe that a balanced revision between the two parts would give the prayer a greater cursivity, form and meaning than in the form published today in our worship books in Romanian. I propose here a scheme, but I ask the reader to follow the proposals in context:

⁵⁹ “Draci” (devils) are also used in the editions of Bucharest-1801, Brasov-1806, Bucharest-1830, Neamț-1833 and 1835, Brasov-1835, Râmnic-1862, Neamț-1858, 1873 and 1874. The Bucharest - 1887 edition introduces the term “demoni” (demons), but the 1945 edition uses the old term; the Bucharest - 2001 edition uses “diavoli” (devils).

	Current verbal form	Proposed verbal form
1	...cuprinzându-L... ...embracing Him...	...cuprinzându-L... ...embracing Him...
2	...trecând... ...disregarding...	...trecând... ...disregarding...
3	...oprindu-le... ...repellest...	...oprindu-le... ...repellest...
4	...îndreptându-mă... ...guidest me...	...îndreptându-mă... ...guide me...
5	...păzindu-l... ...guarding him...	...păzește-l... ...guard him...
6	...izgonindu-le... ...driving them far...	...izgonește-le... ...drive them far...
7	...izbăvindu-mă... ...delivering me...	...izbăvește-mă... ...deliver me...
8	...arătându-mă... ...showing me...	...arată-mă... ...show me...

I consider it necessary, therefore, to change the mode of the last four verbs and to place them in the present tense and in the second person, singular, on condition that the sections at the end of the sentence are transformed into sentences: “And at the time of my exit ...” and “And on the day of the dreadful judgment ...”. As for the last part of the sentence – “... which I shall also acquire ...” - in order to avoid the ambiguous nuance with which it begins⁶⁰, I propose to merge it into the preceding sentence

⁶⁰ If not carefully connected with the previous wording, the question may arise: what “shall I acquire?”: day, judgment or glory? Of course it is the “glory of the glory” of God, but here the text has equivocal expression.

and to use the word “glory” (“... glory which I shall also acquire ...”), even though this is not the case in the original Greek.

A last remark refers to the phrase καὶ πρὸς σωτηρίαν καθοδηγοῦσά / ко спасению наставляющи, which in Romanian is incorrectly translated “and guidest me unto salvation”, but it should be corrected and modified in the text as follows: “and toward salvation teaching me”, possibly “and those for salvation teaching me”.

V. Instead of conclusions

The prayer “Pure, spotless [...]” is an admirable synthesis of Orthodox Mariological theology. The first part, doxological, presents the Mother of God in all her splendor as the Theotoks, the Most Pure Mother of the Incarnate Son of God, the Most Blessed Virgin, Glorious Mistress of heaven and earth, All-holy and All-Blessed. The second part of the prayer emphasizes the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of every believer, when invoked; she comes as a light of the mind, an opener of conscience, a help in the struggle against passions, a guide on the path of virtue, a mediatrix to God for every Christian and for the human race as a whole. It is one of the most beautiful, complex and useful prayers that we have in Orthodox worship, which deserves to be studied more carefully and read more often, for the benefit and the good of the soul.