

Pavlos Evdokimov (1901- 1970)

The eyes of Pavel Nikolaievitch Evdokimov saw the light of this world on August 2, 1901, at the turn of the twentieth century, in St Petersburg, Russia. A century that saw two world wars, the rising up and the falling down of the Bolshevik revolution and many important philosophical and psychological discoveries. And after seventy years of fruitful work, he said good-bye to the pleasures of this world and entered the “memory eternal list” on September 16, 1970 in Paris.

Evdokimov studied under Nicolas Berdiaev (1874-1948), a Russian religious and political philosopher and Christian Universalist,¹ and Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944), an Orthodox theologian, philosopher and economist,² at Saint Sergius Institute in Paris. He was among the first pioneers that graduated in theology from this Institute.

Through his years, Evdokimov was admired by many people for his gentleness, patience and compassion. His life was an excellent portrait of diaconal service. The Deacons will learn the true meaning of their ministry in the Church by

¹ Copied from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Berdyaev. Berdyaev, Nikolai. says in *The Truth of Orthodoxy*: “The greater part of Eastern teachers of the Church, from Clement of Alexandria to Maximus the Confessor, were supporters of Apokatastasis, of universal salvation and resurrection. ... Orthodox thought has never been suppressed by the idea of Divine justice and it never forgot the idea of Divine love. Chiefly - it did not define man from the point of view of Divine justice but from the idea of transfiguration and Deification of man and cosmos.” His works are (the first date is the Russian Edition while the second is the English first edition: *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916) 1955, *Dostoevsky* (1923) 1934, *The Meaning of History* (1923) 1936, *The End of Our Time [aka The New Middle Ages]* (1924) 1933, *Leontiev* (1926) 1940, *A New, Freedom and the Spirit* (1927-8) 1935, *The Russian Revolution* (1931)(anthology), *The Destiny of Man* 1931 (1937), *Christianity and Class War* 1931 (1933), *The Fate of Man in the Modern World* (1934) 1938, *Solitude and Society* (1934) 1938, *The Bourgeois Mind* 1934 (anthology), *The Origin of Russian Communism* (1937) 1955, *Christianity and Anti-semitism* (1938) 1952, *Slavery and Freedom* (1939), *The Russian Idea* (1946) 1947, *Spirit and Reality* (1946) 1957, *The Beginning and the End* (1947) 1952, *Towards a New Epoch*" (1949) (anthology), *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography* (1949) 1950, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar* (1949) 1952 , *The Divine and the Human* (1949) 1952, and *Truth and Revelation* (n.p.) 1953.

² Fr. Sergius Bulgakov was one of the founders of Saint Sergius Institute. He was the head of the Dogmatic Theology until his death. His books in English are: *The Bride of the Lamb*. Eerdmans, 2001. (ISBN 978-0802839152), *The Comforter*. Eerdmans, 2004. (ISBN 978-0802821126), *The Friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*. Eerdmans, 2003. (ISBN 978-0802849793), *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist*. Lindisfarne, 1997. (ISBN 978-0940262812), *The Lamb of God*. Eerdmans, 2007. (ISBN 978-0802827791), *The Orthodox Church*. St Vladimir's, 1997. (ISBN 978-0881410518), *Philosophy of Economy*. Yale, 2000. (ISBN 978-0300079906) and *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*. Lindisfarne, 1993. (ISBN 978-0940262607). Copied from: http://orthodoxwiki.org/Sergius_Bulgakov.

reading the life of Paul, the lay-deacon. Many of his students who lived in the CIMADE³ attested to his pastoral and paternal love, his ability to listen and to lead others to prayer. But the attestation of his friend Fr. Lev Gillet⁴ (1893-1980) was extraordinary: “Paul Evdokimov was as much at home in the world of the invisible, heavenly beings...perhaps even more so than his lively presence here. He became prayer, as his writings taught, but he never was less than deeply human.”⁵

Among his closest friends were his colleague Olivier Clément⁶ (1921), Elizabeth Behr-Sigel⁷ (1907-2005) and Fr. Lev Gillet. These clouds of witnesses direct my attention to the milieu and the depth of the thoughts of Paul Evdokimov. I have but to wonder about the kind of conversation that was communicated and communed among them and the spirit that was roaming in that atmosphere. Just by imagining these encounters I feel that I am lifted up and my heart is expounding very fast.

³ Comité inter-Mouvements pour l'accueil des évacués.

⁴ Fr. Lev Gillet was born in Saint Marcelin, France. He was converted to Orthodoxy in 1928 after his disappointment of the Catholic Church towards Orthodoxy. His writings are: *Father Lev Gillet. The Vision. Syndesmos News* 1972 Dec, No 8, *Father Lev Gillet. The Jesus Prayer and Father Lev Gillet. Finding Peace Despite the Suffering.*

⁵ Paul Evdokimov, *Ages of the Spiritual Life* (SVS Press, Crestwood, New York, 1998), p. 6.

⁶ Olivier Clément was born in South France. He was influenced by Vladimir Lossky and Nicolaïe Berdiaev and converted to Orthodox. He teaches at St Sergius theological Institute. His books are: *The Future's Spiritual Foundation, The Spiritual Foundation of Life, To Say Man, Vol. I, Traces of Light, "Even he Dies, Will Live", The Paschal Mystery, The Color of Light, Reflections on Christmas and A Sense of the Earth.* Copied from <http://www.lipaonline.org/writer/ae020.htm>.

⁷ Elizabeth Behr-Sigel was born from a Jewish mother and a Protestant father in Alsace. She was the first woman to preach and exercise a pastoral ministry. She was converted to Orthodoxy at age of 24. copied from <http://incommunion.org/articles/previous-issues/issue-40/elisabeth-behr-sigel-1907-2005> by Jerry Ryan. Her books according to: <http://www.pagesorthodoxes.net/saints/beh-sigel/beh-sigel-bibliographie.htm>: *Prière et sainteté dans l'Église russe*, Cerf, 1950 ; Nouvelle édition augmentée, Bellefontaine (SO 39), 1982, *Alexandre Boukarev, Un théologien de l'Église orthodoxe en dialogue avec le monde moderne*, Beauchesne, 1977, *La douloureuse joie* (avec Olivier Clément, Boris Bobrinskoy et Myrra Lot-Borodine), Bellefontaine, 1981 ; nouvelle édition revue, avec bibliographie mise à jour, 1993, *Le ministère de la femme dans l'Église*, Cerf, 1987, *Le Lieu du coeur, Initiation à la spiritualité de l'Église orthodoxe*, Cerf, 1989; réédition 2004, *Lev Gillet, « Un moine de l'Église d'Orient »*, Cerf, 1993; réédition 2005, *L'Ordination des femmes dans l'Église orthodoxe* (avec Mgr Kallistos Ware), Cerf, 1998 and *Discerner les signes des temps*, Cerf, 2002. for exhaustive list of translated books and texts see pages Orthodoxes website.

A Chronological Biography

- Evdokimov was born on August 2, 1901 in St Petersburg, Russia. His father, a Lieutenant-colonel, was assassinated by one of his soldiers in 1905.⁸
- He was educated in a military school and served in the cavalry of the White Army.
- He began theological studies just before the Revolution began.
- He escaped from Crimea through Constantinople with his family to the émigré community in Paris.⁹
- He got married to Natasha Brunel in 1927.
- He became a founding member of the Russian Christian Student Movement.
- He completed his doctorate in philosophy at Aix-en-Provence in 1942 for his letter “Dostoyevsky and the Problem of Evil.”
- He worked with the French Resistance during World War II under the auspices of an ecumenical agency CIMADE (see note 3 above, p. 1).
- He remarried in 1954 to Tomoko Sakai, a daughter of a Japanese Diplomat, after his wife Natasha died of cancer at the end of the World War II.
- He completed in 1958 *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, (SVS Press 1995) and *L’Orthodoxie* in 1959.
- In 1962 Evdokimov published a revision of his book *The Sacrament of Love*, (SVS Press, 1985).
- After the war, he served on the board of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and taught at the Catholic Graduate Theological Faculty in Paris.
- He was an official observer at the second session of Vatican II in 1964 where the dogmatic constitution on the Church in the world was crafted.
- He fell asleep in the Lord in the hope of Resurrection on Sept 16 1970.

⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *Ages of the Spiritual Life* (SVS Press, Crestwood, New York, 1998), p. 2. Most of this chronology was drawn from this book unless noted otherwise.

⁹ The date of Paul’s arrival to Paris may vary from 1921 to 1927. My guess is around 1923.

His writings

Books and few descriptions

- **Ages of Spiritual Life:** The book is divided in three sections: “The Encounter,” “Obstacles and Struggle” and “The Charisms of the Spiritual Life and the Mystical Ascent.”

The first section, the “Encounter,” includes articles that speak about atheism, faith and spiritual life.

1. “Atheism” he defines it through his understanding of the atheist himself. The atheist “can feel oneself the sole maker of one’s destiny and the master of history”.
2. “Faith” is “the transcendence toward evidence, toward the hidden reality that reveals itself. Faith is a gift.”
3. “Dimensions of Spiritual Life” The dimensions of spiritual life are not humane but divine. It “does not come from below but from above.”
4. “The Ascetic Art and the Dangers of Ignorance” Asceticism for Evdokimov is “only a method in the service of life, and it will seek to adapt itself to the new needs.” Asceticism, in itself, is not the goal of the spiritual life, but it is only a means for the person who is aware and conscious about his interior life. It is a method to reach hope and to help and support. On the other hand, the ignorant of his interior life, “in moments of solitude and suffering, has no social formula to protect him or to solve the conflicts in his soul.”
5. “The Essential Elements of the Spiritual Life” He categorizes these elements in three categories: 1- God’s element that is salvific and man should adhere to it and make it his own, 2- the humanity element that is uncertain and unstable and 3- the Satan’s element that is hostile to humanity and leads us to slavery, submission and perdition.
6. “The Nature or Essence of the Spiritual Life” In this chapter Evdokimov is emphasizing that the spiritual life has a goal to attain or it can be empty of meaning and content. “It is oriented toward this metamorphosis, *putting on the new man*. What makes us new is the fact that we are no longer alone.

At the heart of our transformation, we have *put on Christ*. We are Christ-like.”

7. “The Different Ages of the Spiritual Life” The spiritual life of every person, Christian or atheist, comes to the person suddenly. It is a conversion of the status of the self. “With rare exceptions, the spiritual life comes into being in an event that is called *conversion*. Its precise content is of little importance. It is a remarkable event, a shock followed by a sharply defined passage from one state to another.”

Section II

Evdokimov divides “Obstacles and Struggle” into twelve chapters.

1. “Negations of Evil and affirmations of Good” This chapter contrasts devil (*diabolos*) and symbol (*symbolon*). Evdokimov clarifies the meaning of the two words and their actions in our life. Although the two words are from the same root (*bolon*) the devil is a divider while the symbol binds together. He says that the devil is not only a divider but he, himself, is divided among himself he is called a *legion*, many. He destroys himself by himself. But on the other hand, in our participation of the Eucharistic symbolism- communion- we will be united to Christ. We, all the believers, will become one and we will bind together.
2. “Three Aspects of Evil and the Evil one” Evdokimov continues in this chapter explaining the manifestations of evil. He says: “Among the multiple manifestations of evil are three discernable symptomatic aspects - parasitism, imposture and parody. The Evil One lives as parasite on the being created by God, forming a demonic swelling. As an impostor, he covers the divine attributes, and substitute’s equality for likeness. Finally as a jealous counterfeiter, he parodies the creator and constructs his own kingdom without God, an imitation with an inverse sign.”
3. “Hell and the Infernal Dimension of the World” Evdokimov finds in Iconography the good tools to explain hell and the infernal dimensions of the world. This chapter can be an impressive teaching on iconography if it was included in a book about iconography. But, this is the way

Evdokimov surprises his readers. They have to expect the unexpected. He says: Iconography echoes the depths of the liturgical texts and present a contemplative reading of them.” He then explains the theological aspects of the icon of the Nativity and compares the swaddling clothes of the infant Jesus with the “winding cloths that the angel will show to the myrrh-bearing women.” He also speaks about the icon of Epiphany describing “the entry of Jesus into the waters of Jordan as if he were entering into a watery grave.” And he sees in the vertical branch of the cross in the icon of the Crucifixion “the descent and the ascent of the Word.” From the icon of the descent to hell- the Resurrection- he concludes from the “luminous halo of glorified bodies” that “death is vanquished and eternal life is proclaimed.” The icon of Pentecost tells him that “the abundant grace of the feast removes all limits.” Evdokimov draws in the descriptions of the above icons our attention to the stark contrast between light and darkness and the common elements that these icons share and their meanings.

4. “Human Suffering” stresses on praying for others even for demons. He says that “every baptized person is bearing within himself the deep wound of the destiny of others” and he has to “become Christ.” Our love towards others will save us and we save them because we love them.
5. “The Message of Pentecost” is announcing that “the beyond becomes the here and the now.” It is a call to every believer to live as a recipient of the Holy Spirit – as the Holy apostles. This Pentecostal age is experienced by every believer who participates in the Divine Liturgy where he experiences the serving of the invisible heavenly powers. His experience of hell is because of his ignorance of the message of Pentecost. We are living in a Pentecostal age and as such we shall act and live. Evdokimov says that “if Communism exists, it is because Christians, unfaithful to the Gospel, have not been able to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.” Christians have lost their hope and became ignorant to the divine promise. They have to remember that the “door of death” became “the door of life.”

6. “The Desert Fathers” Evdokimov in this chapter courageously states that “the monastic asceticism of virginity would like to hasten the end of the world by the extinction of the human species.” The desert fathers placed themselves at the edge of the world – the desert - as an “intermediary zone between the profane world and the Kingdom.” So, they may receive the *parousia*, the second coming, and they may live in the *eschatological time*. They took back on themselves the struggles of the first centuries – the Martyrs. They replaced the arenas of persecution by the desert where they became “athletes of exile.” The rules of the monastic society that St. Pachomius left to his disciples were written by an unknown language called “the language of the angels,” and thus “the monastery is an earthly heaven,” and the monks are venerated as “earthly angels and heavenly man.”

Then Evdokimov classifies and describes the monks who “are dying to the world.” He says about “the grazers,” those who eat only herbs and roots. They made “themselves akin to the animal world” in order to live in peace with the animal world and transform them to become like men. In such the grazers will “reach the utmost limit of humility.” While “the recluses” by choosing the old tombs and caves are “giving up light and language.” They are seeking silence and solitude. They are training themselves to the living according to the conditions of death and to the language of silence “the language of the future world.” Then there are “the dendrites”¹⁰ those who are chained to a tree and contemplate man’s fall from on high. They “are exposed to the winds, they led the life of birds intoxicated with the heavens and with God.” “The stationaries” are those who remain motionless and in a state of perpetual prayer. But “the stylites” are like the stationaries but place themselves on a high column, a place between “heaven and earth.”

The common thing between these forms of asceticism is to “become like little children.” Like children we should stand in front of God. The

¹⁰ From Greek Dendron signifies Tree.

extraordinary and the miraculous for man becomes the norm of the ascetic. The ascetic is like an icon that “tells nothing of his physical appearance...but it shows the radiance of the person beyond history.” He puts off the old man. He changes his eyes, ears, heart and everything and they become those of Christ. The interior of the ascetic modifies even the outward appearance. The flesh will lose its material attributes, but it remains a reality. It goes beyond itself. “With natural but transfigured eyes, the saint contemplates an immaterial light.”

7. “Interiorized Monasticism” Here, Evdokimov goes back to the first centuries of Christianity where the martyrs – Christ fights in person – were “spectacle, witnesses, to the world. This is the “Eucharistic cup’ that Christ and the martyr have drunk. In time of peace, when Christianity was legalized, monasticism became the “equivalent to martyrdom.” “The baptism of blood of the martyrs gave way to the baptism of asceticism of the monks.” The monastic spirituality has a universal character, or otherwise it can be limited and restricted to an elite kind of people as in the case of a “monastic republic”, because not everybody can share the celibacy vocation. On the other hand, a Christian city of God cannot be built, because we can never “impose the Gospel from above nor prescribe grace as a law.” The character of monastic spirituality should be universal. It should surpass the city and the desert to the universal priesthood that every baptized human being has put on. Christian - monastic - spirituality is for every man: clergy, monastic and lay people. It is a call from on high to everyone because “the Gospel in its entirety is applicable to every particular problem in every environment.” Every person is called to be a monk, in the sense that he is living for God and he shares nothing else with Him. But, this monk is not an island by himself. His espousing God is directly involving the creation of God according to the Orthodox teaching.

Evdokimov then contemplates on the answers of the three temptations of the Lord Jesus Christ and the three monastic vows. He sees in the first

temptation – the transformation of stones into bread – the making of bread without sweat, the “elimination of the ascetic efforts,” and in Christ’s answer – Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God – the vow of poverty. He says: “Poverty frees from the ascendancy of the material” while the second temptation teaches faithfulness and chastity that “frees from the ascendance of the carnal.” But the third one the vow of obedience “frees from the idolatry of ego.”

8. “The Human Being”: Who the human being is the content of this chapter. He says: “We are created in the image and likeness of God; we possess an essential orientation that determines us.” And in order for us to exist is “to participate in being or in nothingness.” So, we may become an “icon of God” by our participation with Him, while our ignorance to His presence we become a “horrible distortion of God.”
9. “The Asceticism of the Spiritual life”: Asceticism- askesis - is for everybody. Every one who converses day and night with God is a monk. So, asceticism is not a form of aristocracy or super-Christian like the belief of Messalians, but “a means, a strategy.” “Christ was a perfect ascetic, but he lived among us and descended into our hell in order to bring his light there.” The rejection of the world by the ascetic is not asceticism but eschatological. The monk is always looking ahead to the end of earthly time where this world will become the Kingdom. So, asceticism is not the aim but the way leading to the destination. The love of one another is the shortest ascetic way to salvation.
10. “The Ascetic Effort” This chapter speaks about the deeds and the sweat of Christians. Evdokimov says: “God works and we sweat.” It is for us to listen to the words of Christ “get up” and then to “walk.” Our ascetic effort is the seeking the one thing needful – the Kingdom of God – “God’s destiny in the world” – and therefore, everything else will be added to us. So our ascetic effort towards our salvation pass through our love towards

others in which we will “save the love of God” that is manifested through our agapetical actions.

11. “The Progression of the Spiritual Life” The spiritual life is an unceasing process, a continuous movement for the acquisition of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is an “incessant and invisible combat.” But first, we should have a realistic vision of the status of our soul in order to purify it. The spiritual life is a gradual ascent. It is not an emotional love. “Its point of departure is humility.” With humility the one finds his own place and confess his realistic state that he is a sinner, he is not worthy of God’s grace – the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. His humility becomes an “exact replica of the divine humility, of the *kenosis*, the self-emptying.” Then the conversion – *metanoia* – begins.
12. “The Passions and the Technique of Temptation” explain the works of temptation in man’s spiritual life. The attention of man’s desire was directed to the outward physiological senses rather than the content of the object itself. It was directed towards the “attractive appearance of the fruit of the tree.” It was desirable fruit. The consummation of the fruit (nature) was premature because it was consumed prior to the communion with God. It was assumed “before man had arrived at the mastery of the spiritual over the material.” Hence began the downfall of man. “The human being was then dominated by passions, by the life of the senses,” and his spirit of discernment was wounded. His reason was estranged from God. Evdokimov stresses that the remedy, the cure, lays only in confession. In confession the ascetic goes deep down his heart – his self – and admit the work of the devil in him and ask Christ, the Son of the Living God, who came to save sinners of whom he (I) the first, to save him.

Section III

“The Charisms of Spiritual Life and the Mystical Ascent” is divided in six chapters: “The Evolution of the Spiritual Life in the East and the West, The Passage from the Old Testament to the New, The Charisms of the

Spiritual Life, *Lectio Divina*: Reading the Bible, The Universal Priesthood of the Laity in the Eastern Tradition, and The Mystical Ascent.”

1. “The Evolution of the Spiritual Life in the East and the West”: Evdokinov in this chapter gives a history of the evolution of monasticism in the West from its austere form – mortification – to the well-balanced asceticism of St. Benedict that followed the ancient tradition of Sts. Basil the Great and Jean Cassian. The ancient tradition divided the monk’s time between the *lectio divina*, chanting of the office, fasting and manual labor which did not last long. The well-balanced asceticism was changed by the Cluny Benedictines which made the offices longer and lessened the manual labor of the monks. In reaction to Cluny the “Cistercians returned to the greatest severity in the rule.” The Camaldolese and the Carthusians of St. Bruno introduced back the penance “with extreme means of discipline.” The evolution in the West continued, but was directed to the East, Jerusalem. The crusaders led the way of the “beggars” at the eleventh century where the 12th century “turned its asceticism towards the poor, humiliated and crucified image of Jesus. Once again mortification was back to Western asceticism. The Dominicans made an asceticism of study in the 13th century while Sts. Bernard and Bonaventure “accentuated the monastic vows and took up the classical stages of spirituality of Dionysius: purgation, illumination and perfection.” The end of the Middle Ages was marked by the impoverishments of spiritual life and anti-intellectualism. But the Renaissance humanized asceticism. Sts. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and Francis de Sale (1567-1622) “went beyond the monastic environment and initiated a secular asceticism.” Sts. Teresa (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591) brought back St. Thomas Aquinas’ attention to the states of consciousness. The 17th and 18th centuries “accentuated the rigorist austerity of the penitential practices” that “manifested a spirituality that appears intellectually impoverished and somewhat static, without the spontaneity and warmth of former times.” With St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) mortification was back

again, but “to satisfy divine justice.” “At present we are witnessing a vigorous return to the sources of the patristic past and original monasticism.”

While these various forms of asceticism were in practice in the West, the East remained faithful to the spirituality of the Fathers. The spirituality of the 14th century was but the revival of that existed from the beginning: “A spirituality that is rooted in eschatology, fully conscious of the world, and preoccupied, above all, with its destiny.”

2. “The Passage from the Old Testament to the New”: Here, Evdokimov moves to speak about asceticism as a healing process. Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of prophecies of the Old Testament, is the Healer of all sinners. He is the Life. “Asceticism is practiced in order to return us to God’s idea of us, to make us very similar to Him.” time is short, the *parousia* is at our door and we should live qualitatively in the last times.
3. “The Charisms of the Spiritual life: Discernment, impassibility, silence, vigilance, repentance, humility, joyful dying and prayer”: In this chapter Evdokimov takes us on a tour of these charisms. He began with discernment. He says: “The spirit of discernment shows how not to confuse the end with the means.” Ascetic efforts are only means to attain the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. We should not make a passion out of our struggle against passion. The ascetic efforts are not the aim, the final destiny, but only the means, the tools, the vehicles that will take us to our destination. Discernment will lead to impassibility. But the spirit of impassibility is not insensitivity. It is not a detachment from passions. It is not passionless, but it is a passion directed toward God; a passion that it “receives its value from the goal to be attained (Holy Spirit).” The impassibility becomes full of love. Love reigns and controls it. The one will have no desire but to venerate and love without distinction.
The charism of contemplative prayer, on another hand, is where the “heart opens itself in silence before God.” There, where the unceasing oral prayers will cease because the soul recognizes the Spirit and it stops from

every mental and spiritual movement. It bows down with awesome, piety, wonder and worship and nothing can be said or is worthy of this majestic moment. But this quietism is not a passive one.

The charism of silence renders the soul its true and correct dynamism. The person becomes more watchful and aware of his sluggishness. He will become more attentive because he is in the presence of His Creator. This “attention develops sensitivity to signs and warnings.” The soul becomes vigilant and ready to repent because it is not a perfect soul as it is required by the Heavenly Father.

The charism of repentance “meditates constantly on our rejection of the one who is crucified love. It is a question here of tears, not of the soul, but of the spirit.” These tears become the purifying waters of baptism.

The charisms of repentance and humility are much related to each other. It is pride that alienated and continues alienating us from God. “In humility lives the communion of sinners, this other aspect is inseparable from the communion of saints.”

Evdokimov explains death and calls it the joyful dying. He says: death is “present in all things as their obvious limit.” “Nature does not know any personal immortality.” But “Christians alone accepts the tragedy of death” because it liberates them from this earthly kingdom and delivers them to the heavenly Kingdom. Christian asceticism goes beyond death to the Resurrection. “The one who has just died finds himself in another dimension.” Death for Christians is the beginning of immortality of the spirit. It is the heavenly birthday. It is a “joyful dying” as St. Seraphim of Sorov describes it. The Church declares memory eternal for the one who is asleep in the Lord. “Memory itself depends on life.”

Regarding the charisms of prayers Evdokimov counsels the state of prayer. He says “enter into yourself, your heart, and make a sanctuary there.” He asks us to learn listening to silence in order to listen to the voice of the Word, and to pray unceasingly in public places. Then, “His voice comes to me in every human voice.” We have to remember that a “single

word of the Publican touched the mercy of God, and a single word, full of faith, saved the good thief.” In our prayers, we ascend from having prayers and praying to become a prayer. We become “living realities created by each word of our prayer.” We must become “prayer incarnate” and “liturgical beings.” So our life can become a pattern of the Lords’ Prayer in its three forms: request, offering and praise. In the morning, we request our daily bread, forgiveness of sins and deliverance from temptations. Then during the day, we offer our daily work, our sweat, as an offering on behalf of all and for all and our “pardon of others and make us thy servants and witnesses.” And at the end of the day we praise God for His grace, love and mercy because to Him is due all glory.

Another way of becoming a prayer is the Jesus prayer. “The invocation of the Name of God is accompanied with immediate manifestation, for the name is a form of his presence.” So the invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ requesting from Him to save us is a theophany that is revealing. This Publican prayer is “the passage from Jesus before the eyes to Jesus in the heart.” It is turning the heart into a temple where the liturgy, the divine presence, is in action.

While the individual prayers are necessary to the ascetical life of the Christian person where he can turn his house, and himself, to a church, Liturgical prayers “introduce us into a collegial consciousness.” They call us to beyond ourselves, to the neighbor and to the enemy. “Liturgical prayer embraces the city, nations, humanity, and asks for peace and unity of all.” “I hear the voice of St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, St. Symeon, and so many others who have prayed the same prayers” and they left their “imprint of their prayers, offerings and intercessions.”

4. “Lectio Divina: reading the Bible”: After this excessive tour of the charisms of spiritual life Evdokimove takes us to explore the importance of the “Lectio Divina.” He says along with the Holy Fathers that reading the Bible is not only for monks. It is for the husband to repeat the Bible reading after returning from the Church. It is his obligation “to set the

spiritual table as he sets the material one.” It is an organic part of one’s spiritual life. It transforms day into a living reading of the Word, where the Word himself speaks unceasingly according to Origen. We should consume the Word after we set ourselves in a state of prayer and asking the “Lord Jesus Christ to open the eyes of our hearts...and illumine our eyes.” “In the liturgy, the people are gathered to hear and then to consume the Word.” “Thus, reading opens the way to God, but it imposes also the duty of communicating to others the revealed message. The *lectio divina* leads to mission, for ‘the Word’, according to St. Paul, consists ‘in the demonstration of the Spirit of power.’”

5. “The Universal Priesthood of the Laity in the Eastern Church Tradition”: From the *lectio divina* to the universal priesthood, Evdokimov takes us in another pilgrimage to understand our ascetic calling. Lay as opposed to cleric was known only in the 3rd century. In the fifth century, the word lay took another “pejorative statement” as opposed to men “those who look after the things of God.” In the Old Testament the word *laikos* meant profane but it was attributed to things. In the Bible, while the meaning is vague, it took the notion of the People of God. “Alongside a functional priesthood (the levitical, priestly caste), Scripture speaks of the universal priesthood of the People of God...The idea of a profane or lay people has no place in the Bible...The Scriptures teach in a most firm and consistent manner the sacred and priestly character of each member of the people.” So, we are all the People of God. In our Baptism and anointment by chrism, “the One and only Christ is spread through the whole Body. We all become priests. “From this equality, some are chosen, set apart and established by a divine act, as bishops and presbyters. A functional difference of ministries suppresses all ontological difference of nature and makes all separation between clerics and laymen impossible...Thus, if a bishop participates in the priestly of Christ by his sacred function, every lay person does so by his very being.” Thus, “the sacrament of anointing

by chrism is the sacrament of universal priesthood...It Christifies the baptized [and he becomes] an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ.”

6. “The Mystical Ascent”: Then, at the end of this pilgrimage, Evdokimov ascends us on the Mystical Ascent. He states: “No one is a mystic apart from the Eucharist.” Baptism is our dying and resurrection in Christ, the anointing by chrism is our universal priesthood – we will be Christified – and the Eucharist is the communion whereby the Christified becomes a living member of Christ’s body. “By virtue of this communion one belongs to both tables (one earthly, the other heavenly); the same guest is in both worlds: above, the nuptial place, here below, a progress toward the nuptial Kingdom, and at last to the Spouse...The divine Spouse unites himself to his Church and to every human soul.” Therefore, as St. Maximus the Confessor describes: ‘a mystic is one in whom the birth of the Lord is best manifested,’ the mystic is the one who is very sensitive, attentive, and vigilant to the presence of Christ in him. He is the one who, after God, considers each person as God. He is the one who suffers for the salvation of every human being and for God’s creation. His “soul, the image and mirror of God, becomes the dwelling place of God.”

Personal Note

Michael Plekon, the co-translator of this book makes a clear and a define statement by saying: “Paul Evdokimov’s spirituality is open to God, the world and to the neighbor. It is the spirituality of the Great Tradition of the Church, but refreshingly new, rooted in the Bible and liturgy but entwined with the everyday life of home, school and work, a spirituality that is truly ‘for the life of the world.’”

This book allows the person to go beyond the titles of each chapter. It directs him to the Cause and the Aim of every soul. It teaches him the means to get him to pass through obstacles and struggles if he keeps himself vigilant to the voice of God in His creation. God works and the Christified sweats.

- **The Sacrament of Love, The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition.**

This book which should speak about the nuptial mystery, the Sacrament of Marriage, is found to be a classical Orthodox book that is a basic and a must for every home. It is supported by quotations from the Scriptures, the Fathers and modern Eastern and Western theologians. There is a surprise in every paragraph that will lift your eyebrows and your heart and plunge them deep in the ocean of discovering Orthodoxy.

This book contains 7 sections and 49 titles. It is rich in the variety of its content and the explanations of the subjects too. It takes the reader from one glory to another of the Orthodox Tradition.

Introduction

The “Introduction” contains 9 titles. From the beginning, Paul Evdokimov uplifts the mind of his reader and he sets him in the mood of an extraordinary book. He tells him that “Christianity has raised the nuptial union to the dignity of sacrament.” The reader is set now in a state of bewilderment and expectation. Many questions are waging the war in order to have peace and settlement. Christianity, nuptial union and sacrament are trying to fit together in the mind of the reader, Christian or Atheist alike, in order to understand the difference between the teaching of Christianity and that of the secularism.

For this reason Evdokimov goes back to the historical background of marriage and celibacy. He touches on the wound of the ill understanding of sexuality; he says: “sexuality undergoes a progressive spiritualization. The flesh is not an element that one can strike from the spirit or reduce to silence. The flesh is the biosphere where the spirit becomes incarnate when offered to its transfiguring powers.” Sexuality is not a mere physical and physiological attraction and action. It is driven from the spirit that vivifies the flesh. Humanity has reduced it to a fleshly desire, to animality rather, while in the beginning it was not addressed, it was in silence and in contemplation.

In order to rise up the dignity of the nuptial union, Evdokimov started with clarifying the wrong views about marriage and woman; woman as inferior to man and marriage as a remedy against lust.” In the beginning, there was no masculinity or femininity. There was a human monad: Adam-Eve. So,

Evdokimov, and as well as the Fathers of the Church, teaches that “the woman has her mode of being, her own form of existence, the gift of weaving her entire being through her special relationship to God, others, and self.” It is the Fall that broke the oneness of the original archetype – the consubstantiality of complementary principles – the human monad: Adam-Eve – into a bad masculinity and a bad femininity. Here, Evdokimov goes back to the root of the “birth” of Eve from Adam (Gen 2:18). He says, by going to the original Hebraic translation *Ezer-Kenegdo* that the woman is a helper turned toward man. The woman’s charisms are inwardly while man’s charisms are outwardly. She is, the mother, the wife, the sister, the betrothed – she is the protector – while “man is interested in only his own cause.” She was given the gift of “giving birth to the hidden man of the heart.” She, “virgin or spouse, is a mother for all eternity.” A very good example is the Virgin Mary, the Mother of all, at the wedding of Cana has “discovered the thirst of the spirit of men and [has] found the Eucharistic spring to quench it.”

Then, Evdokimov does not stop at this level, but he goes beyond and says that “man does not possess the paternal instinct [religious paternity] in the same way as a woman possesses the maternal instinct...the maternity of the Virgin presents itself as the human figure of the paternity of God. If fatherhood is the category of divine life, motherhood is the religious category of the human life.” So, every human being should become a mother – a place where Christ will be born. And the woman will become the point of encounter between God and man. She is the handmaid of God who will receive the Son that will make the “bond of Jesus Christ with humanity through maternity.” Therefore, “the nature of man is to *act*, that of woman is to *be* – and this is the preeminent religious state.”

After Evdokimov had explained the role of man and woman in the creation, he takes us to the true meaning of marriage. He names it the Nuptial Priesthood. He says that the purpose of marriage is not the common good of society, but that the love of the two lovers will “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; the nuptial Pentecost...The meaning of marriage is taken precisely in the dual and

direct relationship to God.” So, the sexual attraction and reproduction are not the aim of the two lovers, but their aim is to become whole. “Between the two lovers there is only God who is the third term...Married people are considered as forming an order,” a church. “Marriage is eschatological...and love is precisely this crucial point where the original fullness invokes the fullness to come.

Then, Evdokimov closes his Introduction like this: “Fraudulent myths, dreadful alienations, and a vast and hollow literature band together and conspire to disregard the charisms and the meaning of love. A brief restatement is needed in order to trace the great outlines of anthropology, to define the calling of the royal priesthood of all believers and *in the light of monasticism* to understand marriage as a nuptial priesthood. Only by ascending to the thought of God about man, to the astonishing dignity of the new creation, is it possible to grasp the essence of the nuptial community.”

Anthropology

Evdokimov in the section of Anthropology of this book starts to speak about the only thing needful in order to show the true God. It is *metanoia* – “the changing of the being of every believer.” But first, we have to know God and ourselves in order not to form false conceptions. God is the lover of man. God desired to become man and to “make humanity a Theophany, the beloved ground of His presence.” He became man so man can become god by grace. But what constitutes this man who is always in conflict with himself? Man is soul and flesh. “The soul vivifies the body and makes of it a living flesh; the spirit spiritualizes the entire human being and makes of him a spiritual man. The spirit is not a third element – body, soul, spirit – but a qualifying principle.” Then, what is the heart? “The heart is the place of the perpetual presence in Christ... It is where the treasure is... It shows the character of the Incompressible.” So, then who is this human person? Evdokimov answers that he “is *the event* of Christianity.” He is modeled “from above, from the Trinitarian dogma...and after his divine Archetype, Christ... He exists only in God...He is the unceasing transcendence of self toward the divine thou.” He

may become Christ-like and may say with St. Paul: “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” So, the person as an image of Christ, God granted him the gift of freedom. It is not the freedom to chose, but the freedom to create good because the freedom of choice is not a freedom but it is slavery to one of the choices, while the latter is the true freedom. “The person is called to decipher and, in this sense, freely to create his destiny.” Therefore, the person is free to “exist and participate in being or in nothingness.” This participation in being is where the beginning is coinciding with its completion, the *en arche* with the *telos*, and “the *image*, the objective foundation, calls for the subjective *personal likeness*.” Then, Evdokimov concludes his Anthropology by saying that “before the Fall, animal life was outside the spiritual being of man...it was awaiting its proper-spiritualization-humanization...Animal life was added to the human being.” Man’s sin was his desire to marry before the time of God’s will. His senses were directed to outside God, to the beauty of the things in themselves. His attention was distorted from being a liturgical man – the man of the *Trisagion* and the *Sanctus* to being an admirer and a person of desire and passions.

Marriage and Monastic state

The wonders of this book continue to flow from its pages. The section of “Marriage and Monastic state” surprises us with a novelty which determines that we can understand one state through the understanding of the other. The two states are not in competing mood, but both are ascetical ways to man’s destiny in God. Evdokimov says that “the Gospel in its totality is addressed to each person [and] the requirements of the Gospel are the same for everyone...Chastity signifies that one belongs totally to Christ. For monks, it is an engagement of the soul in unmediated relationship, and for the spouses, engagement through the *hypostasis* of matrimony.” The two who become sacramentally one, mono, monk, are called to live the three monastic vows: Poverty, chastity and obedience. “One becomes a spouse to belong in nuptial love only to the Lord (vow of chastity), to be led only by the Lord (vow of obedience), and to have recourse only to God (vow of poverty)...Thus,

marriage includes within itself the monastic state, and that is why the latter is not a sacrament.” The best person that can understand the state of marriage is the monk. The monk has known martyrdom, the *kenosis*, the emptying of one self for the other. The crowns of the married couple are a symbol of this martyrdom, the sacrifice. They both, “monastic holiness and married holiness, are the two faces of Tabor; the Holy Spirit is the limit of the one and the other.” For this reason Evdokimov devotes a chapter to talk about monasticism. He pushes the ill negative conceptions of withdrawal of monks from the world and he transforms them to a positive expansion of the self into the wilderness. He says that “the monastic estate will be viewed as a second baptism. Thus the ‘baptism of asceticism’ replaces the ‘baptism of blood’ of the martyrs...The monk is not someone who diminishes his being, but one who expands it, who truly exists in the image of the existing...True monasticism, however, never leads to isolation, since its task is not to unite man to the Holy Trinity, but to express its human truth among men.” Therefore, every believer is a monk and monasticism is “a normative value of every believer.” Every believer is called to exercise the calling to perfection of the Gospel. He is required to sell everything, offer himself and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. He becomes the “beggar of grace, who discovers the One who is still miserable, more of a beggar, God Himself, begging for love at the door of man’s heart.” His soul longs to the awaiting other, to the lover. His desire – passion - *Eros* [the ecstatic aspect of agape], flowers into agape and into love of neighbor.

From the rich texts about understanding that monasticism is not a state in opposition to the state of marriage, but it is an ascetical way for every believer, then Evdokimov takes us into the understanding of the meaning of “Royal Priesthood.” He says that the sacrament of anointing by chrism is the sacrament of the royal priesthood that belongs to all believers. This differs from the functional sacramental priesthood. “Every [baptized and anointed] lay person is the priest of his existence...by virtue of his sanctified being.” So every person who is sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit is a Christ-bearer. He is called, according to the Gospel reading during the sacrament, to go and

baptize all nations. He is called to become a “missionary, an apostolic man, in his own way.” So, the anointed persons “become Christs according to the grace of heavenly unction. They become kings, priests and prophets of heavenly mysteries.” They are kings because they are the masters of their will. “They rule over the flesh and all the cosmic powers.” They are also priests because they “celebrate the Liturgy through their everyday life...Their presence in the world is like a continuation of the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the day ahead...” And they are prophets too “because they see what the eye has not seen.” The person is “not the cause of [his] destiny, for it is a gift; but it lies within [him] to determine whether [he is] ruled by it or reject it or has dominion over it.” At the conclusion of this section, Evdokimov says: “The world to come will know neither the twin world of couples nor such as the ‘man’ faced by such a ‘woman’ as woman, but will know the unity of the masculine and the feminine in their totality, Adam-Eve restored to the spiritual dimension.”

“Love and the Sacramental Love” is the title of this section. Evdokimov asks what love is. He answers with Ramuz that love is found when “one and one cease to be two, and remain one.” It is where one is found in the other. It is where “the love of two creates of itself a personality...The beloved being is not a god, but a royal gift, radiating the presence of the Giver...In transcending the sensual, love gives an unsuspected depth to the flesh...it makes one view the soul of the other in terms of radiance, and attains the level of knowledge that belongs only to the one who loves.” Loving is to know. Love is a prophetic revelation. The lovers recognize one another suddenly. “Love wells up at the precise moment when ‘some hidden hand unveils to him the loveliness that others cannot understand...One is loved for what one is, which allows one to accept oneself and to receive one’s own being as a gift...The whole fascinating mystery of love lies in the spiritual conquest of the other, of the inaccessible.” The matrimony unity of the two lovers is “seen as the image of God Himself.” This unity forms “the nuptial love-community,an

ecclesial dyad, a domestic church.” So, what is the proper aim of marriage? Evdokimov places the aim in the spouses themselves and not in procreation or as a safe net from adultery. The aim is to become one with the beloved and “to strive to design an object on which to pour itself.” It is to create freely, out of the abundance of love, a reflection of the self in the world, “a new face that is called to become an icon of God. The aim, as the fruit of the nuptial love-community, is to keep the Theophany of love present on earth, though God has many ways to do so. Then fatherhood and motherhood continue to reveal the Trinity - Love in action - among His images. The union on the altar aims to allow Christ to be present in the wedding and initiates the eternity of the domestic Church, the ‘House of God.’ The presence of Christ at the wedding of Cana – every wedding – is a manifestation of His glory. He “bestows a sacramental gift upon the betrothed,” and the moment will “become the moment of Christ, the Bridegroom. “the more the spouses are united in Christ the more their common cup, the measure of their life, is filled with the wine of Cana and becomes miraculous...By loving each other the spouses love God. Every moment of their life rises up like a royal doxology, like an unending liturgical chant.” The presence of Christ at the wedding is sacramental. It transmits the grace of God “in the church, through the church and for the church – the united couple...” Through the sacrament of marriage, and every sacrament, the visible and the invisible are united. “Thus, for the sacrament of marriage, the husband and wife enter upon the Eucharistic synaxis in their married life.” Therefore, the sacraments “are not only signs that confirm the promises of God, neither are they means to invigorate faith and trust; they do not merely give, but *contain*, grace and are *channels*; they are at the same time instruments of salvation and salvation itself, as is the Church.” But, this union is established from the beginning in Paradise: “The love of Christ for the Church becomes the archetype of marriage, and in this wise it exists before the couple, for Adam is created in the image of Christ and Eve in the image of the

Church.” Then Evdokimov concludes this section with the explanation of the symbols and prayers used in the Byzantine Rite of Marriage.

Sexual and Nuptial Chastity

The section “Sexuality and Nuptial Chastity” uncovers “the energy of sex is a creative force proceeding from the spirit.” It is not a mere desire, lust and passion towards the attractive beauty, but rather, it is a calling of unity. It is a fulfillment of the need to and for the other, to be one with the beloved. “In nuptial life, sexuality reveals its symbolic meaning: while passionately seeking unity, the one flesh, it goes beyond itself and wakens the thirst for realities that it only foreshadows and symbolizes a single being. Love invites one to an encounter with the emotions of the body, but only the spiritual can achieve this.” Therefore, “the sexual energy is freed from its animalism; it becomes human,” and therefore, the sexual desire will be controlled and the sexual union will procreate voluntarily for the sake of bringing forth a child wanted after a time of prayer and meditation.

Institution

Evdokimov in the last section “Institution” speaks about the institution of marriage. He gives a quick list of canons and a short history of its development. But, he concludes that “Orthodoxy does not have a unified code for all the Churches.” The Orthodox Church permits divorce and marriage annulment as a divine dispensation. “The reasons for annulment are: the death of the very matter of the sacrament (love) through adultery, religious death through apostasy, civil death through condemnation, and physical death through absence.” Also, the Orthodox Church considers consanguinity to the seventh degree as an impediment and the marriage age for men is 18 and 14 for women. The marriage of the believer to the unbeliever is allowed as long as the latter promises to respect the Orthodox faith of the spouse and the children should be brought up in the spirit of the Orthodox Church. The Church shows a feeling of reservation for subsequent marriages. The deacons and priests are forbidden to be married after their marriage. Then, Evdokimov concludes this section and this book with the subject of divorce. He says that

divorce is not a solution, but it is there where there is nothing else can be saved. “The majority of nuptial disagreements are due to some spiritual failure: a refusal to follow the heroic way of life, a rejection of repentance.” This divorce will not promote love and will not give right for another nuptial union.

Personal Note

This is just a glimpse of the pages of the content of this book. Paul Evdokimov is not easy to be read and understood. Each title contains unexpected information that forces the reader to question why is he saying this? What is the connection between the title and the subject? His information is aiming to envelop the majority teaching of the Church about the subject in order to well up the thirst of the modern man.

Paul Evdokimov in this book indeed corrects many false and distorted understandings. He indeed uplifts man – Adam-Eve - to his true role that was intended by the Creator. Love was embedded in man by Love Himself to epiphanize love in the creation.

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¹¹ As found in <http://www.pagesorthodoxes.net/mariage/evdodimov-laics.htm>

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" L'Art moderne ou la Sophia désaffectée "

http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/french/contacts_evdokimov_moderne.html

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