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**THE MOVEMENT OF SPIRITUAL  
REVIVAL IN GREECE IN THE 18<sup>TH</sup> AND  
THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES AND ITS  
INFLUENCE IN THE ROMANIAN  
PRINCIPALITIES**

**Doctoral Thesis**

**- Summary -**

**Coordinator,**

**Fr. Prof. Valer Bel, Th.D.**

**Doctoral candidate,**

**Viorel (Visarion) Paşca**

**Cluj-Napoca**

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## **KEY WORDS:**

*Turkocracy, the Athonite Academy, the Kollyvades movement, Holy Mount Athos, traditionalism, illuminism, Nicodemus the Hagiorite, western influences.*

## **Introduction**

By the decisive events it brought about in the life of Orthodoxy which found itself on the threshold of making the transition from a traditional, hierarchical society and a mediaeval culture to a modern society structured around the individual, freedom and knowledge, the 18<sup>th</sup> century generated a considerable cultural and spiritual revival supported by complex and commendable figures. This century is known as the Orthodoxy's century of 'philokalic' revival.

Fifty years into the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Byzantine Empire was conquered by the Ottoman Turks and the Orthodox Greeks were subsequently faced with a double threat which they had to cope with during the 400 years of Ottoman dominion: islamisation on one side, and catholicization on the other. The Greek Orthodox Church was kept alive by outstanding hierarchs, monks and theologians who strove to support and promote the authentic Christian spirituality.

The present thesis sets out to describe the spiritual revival that was developed in Greece throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, expounding on aspects referring to the Athonite Academy, the Kollyvades movement, the quarrel between traditionalism and the age of enlightenment, the impact movements of spiritual revival and awakening had in Greece and the Romanian Principalities, and portraying some of the foremost figures of Orthodox theology and spirituality who were active during this time: Neophytos Kavsokalivites, Athanasius Paros, Nicodemus the Hagiorite, Makarios of Corinth, Kosmas of Aitolos, Paisius Velichkovsky, Kalinikos of Cernica.

Throughout the analysed period the Holy Mount Athos was involved in the theological, cultural and political disputes and it stood fast as the fixed point of Orthodoxy in the face of the western ideologies that had permeated the whole of Europe. The Holy Mount

Athos was the medium connecting the monasteries of the Orthodox country because it was sought for its culture and its spirituality.

### **Ch. I The situation of the Eastern Church after the fall of Constantinople up to the Turkocracy of 18<sup>th</sup> century**

Following the great schism of 1054 the Orthodox were faced with the menace of catholicisation and the attempts to draw them on an orbit around Rome aside, they were also confronted with the threat of islamisation because the fall of Constantinople triggered a regress of the Christian civilisation and of the institutions that had been based on it.

The Orthodox Church had subsequently entered a new historical period in which the cultural and religious Byzantium continued to exist even after the events of 1453, preserving its status as the spiritual centre of the Orthodox space.

The Christians had to endure a great deal of suffering especially in those provinces where the Turkish rule enforced its policy of mass islamisation: in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Maglen (Greece), where the either Orthodoxy proved to be weaker or the political interests took precedence over the religious. The climax was reached when confessing one's Christian faith or any attempt at making proselytes was punished by death.

Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios and his successors to the apostolic see of Constantinople developed a remarkable activity, struggling to preserve the Orthodox faith within the territory of the former Byzantine Empire, in Greece and the Balkans. By their efforts, the Orthodox Church was able to acquire legal status, rebuild churches, re-establish monasteries, free imprisoned monks, and to reassert its authority in the Christian east, an authority it had lost after the failed union with the Latin Church. In addition to the suffering and vexation caused by the Ottomans, culminating in persecutions, forced conversions to Islam – events which produced a host of new martyrs, some of them monks and even hierarchs – the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of various forms of illuminist ideas that also influenced the Orthodox nations.

Despite all these hardships the Orthodoxy keep Byzantium alive in the spiritual and political spheres through people and on the level of local autonomies, two of the most important instances being those of Moldavia and Wallachia. After 1453 the Holy Mount Athos endured a 500 year-long Ottoman dominion. During that time the responsibility of supporting the Athonite monasteries and paying the taxes exacted by the Ottoman Sublime Porte devolved entirely on the Romanian Principalities.

## **Ch. II The role played by the Athonite Academy in the movement of spiritual awakening of 18<sup>th</sup> century Greece**

In order to reform the orthodox theological education, the 1593 synod of Constantinople presided by patriarch Jeremias II Tranos (1587-1595) decided that all the metropolitans would establish Theological Academies or superior theological schools in the cities of their metropolitan sees – an objective that was hard to achieve due to the social, political, and economical circumstances.

In 1750 (1743), with the support of the Athonite fathers and especially that of Meletios, the hegumen of the Vatopedi monastery, the ecumenical patriarch Cyril V created a superior school near Vatopedi – later to be known as ‘the Athonite Academy’ or ‘Athoniada’ – in view of enforcing and enlarging the basis for a modern superior education. For this reason they built a magnificent 2860 m<sup>2</sup> edifice with more than 100 rooms, a library and a chapel. The first building of the Athonite Ecclesiastic Academy was erected atop a hill north of Vatopedi and its ruins can still be seen.

The creation of this academy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the decision to set it up on the Holy Mount Athos met an imperative need to revive the Greek education, abiding by the recent requirements as well as by the tradition of the Church.

Mount Athos is the place where the orthodox doctrine of the divine uncreated energies of the Holy Spirit was developed and where the *Philokalia* of the unending prayer was written. Regarding it from this perspective, the Athonite Academy may in fact be considered as one of the highest and most refined school in the whole of Orthodoxy, a unique school of holiness, high theology, culture and art that constantly created and cultivated invaluable spiritual values. From the 10<sup>th</sup> century on to the present day, the tiny athonite peninsula has been home to the leading fathers of the Orthodox Church.

The Athonite Academy was a school that offered higher education to up to 200 young studious men, either monks of Mount Athos or not, with a curriculum composed of classical languages, grammar, logic, philosophy, mathematics, physics, and theology, all of which were to be taught with the help of classical sources and the newest scientific and philosophical discoveries.

Once the Athoniada had been established, the local monastic community began playing a crucial part in the Greek emancipation movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The influence the Academy exerted in the spiritual life of the Church in both Greece and all the other Orthodox countries grew considerably through the activity of famous professors who were deeply involved in the philokalic awakening and revival movement such as Neophytos Kavsokalivites – the first rector of the Academy –, Eugenios Voulgaris – during whose direction the Academy would thrive –, Athanasius Parios – one of the most illustrious Greek professors and theologians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century –, Nikephoros Theotokis, Kosmas of Aitolos, the great missionary also called ‘the Enlightener of the Greek Nation’ and ‘the Apostle of the poor’ who taught not only in Greece, but also in Russia and the Romanian Principalities, more precisely at the Princely Academies in Jassy and Bucharest. Along with these we should also mention a former brilliant student of the Athonite Academy, Iosipos Moesiodax who in his turn taught at the two Romanian academies. The results of their endeavours are still visible in the spiritual life of the Orthodox Church as well as in the educational institutions of the Balkans and Russia.

It should also be mentioned that these people made an impressive effort to reduce the cultural difference between east and west by surmounting the antiquated scholastic neo-Aristotelian system of thought which dominated the Greek schools of Phanar, Bucharest and Jassy, and by being opened to classical philology, patristic theology and Byzantine spirituality, as well as toward the new philosophical systems and sciences developing the west. This effort to create an authentic moderate Orthodox enlightenment in the form of an encyclopaedic synthesis (or an Orthodox encyclopaedism) of antiquity, Byzantium and Enlightenment, philology, theology and sciences was the life-long project of two celebrated scholars of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Eugenios Voulgaris and Nikephoros Theotokis. It must be noted that the Romanians brought their own contribution to the existence of the Athonite Academy and its printing works by the generous alms and donations they gave to the two monks of Vatopedi, Meletios and Gabriel, who travelled through the Romanian Principalities in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century raising funds for this noble purpose.

### **Ch. III The Kollyvades movement of the Holy Mount Athos in the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

The Athonite spiritual revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is best illustrated by the so called Kollyvades movement. This movement was influenced by the hesychast revival and defined by a profound attachment to the tradition of the Church. The services the Kollyvades



movement has brought to the Greek Church have yet to be properly appreciated. Up until now the research addressing this phenomenon hasn't gone far enough in its analyses and the movement itself has often been faultily interpreted.

The Kollyvades movement of the Athonite fathers emerged during the Turkocracy – a dangerous and critical period for the cult and the life of the Orthodox Church; its main purpose was to observe the requirements of the divine services such as Holy Communion and the frequency with which it could be administered and to preserve the imperial characteristic of the Sunday by not having any holy offices performed for the dead.

Neophytos Kavsokalivites, with his polemic nature and his canonical and liturgical rigorism has generated one of the most ample and long-lived controversies ever to have stirred Athos and Phanar, echoing from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> when it was resolved during the dramatic events of the Greek independence revolution of 1821-1829. The controversy was centred on the issue of the memorial services for the dead and the use of *kolyva*.

This movement of philokalic revival (pejoratively called of the Kollyvades) was one of the most remarkable and authentic spiritual phenomena the Orthodoxy experienced during the Ottoman reign, a genuine continuation and renewal of the old patristic tradition and an answer the Church offered to the challenges it was faced with in those years. The teachings of the Kollyvades were entirely patristic. Their main concern was to determine the faithful to live their lives in Christ and therefore, the key issues they addressed were connected to the divine cult. They laid great emphasis on the study of patristic texts which could help the believers grasp the original sense of the teachings of the Holy Fathers.

Furthermore, the Kollyvades were the rident spiritual supports of martyrs: they encouraged and prepared people for martyrdom, especially those who had lapsed from their faith but subsequently regretted their action and demanded martyrdom. Saint Macarios Nottara for instance, kindled the divine flame in the hearts of three great neo-martyrs: Polydoros of Nicosia (Cyprus), Theodore the Byzantine and Demetrios of Peloponnesus. Many of these martyrdoms are recorded in Saint Nicodemus's work *The new martyrologe*.

Here are some the outstanding figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who continued and supported the Kollyvades and their teachings: Konstantinos Oikonomos, Kosmas Flamiatos, Christophoros Panagiotopoulos, Ignatius Lambropulos, Saint Nicholas Planas.

Those who live and offer an authentic Orthodoxy must be in tune with the genuine patristic tradition, that of the Kollyvades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that of the 14<sup>th</sup> century

hesychasts, that of the Holy Fathers of the Church. The Kollyvades became and remained the spiritual guides for a proper initiation to patristic tradition.

This is how the fathers' spirituality always remains the same. Depending on the social, political, cultural circumstances of each historical period the Fathers expressed their point of view, by the divine grace, in a dialogue with the philosophy, religion and social trends of their times. The significance of the Kollyvades for the Orthodoxy must not be understood as a religious ideology or metaphysical thinking, but as a way of life which guides the unique destiny of the believer towards theosis within the history and beyond it. The misinterpretations that the hermeneutical approaches to this movement fell prey to should be attributed the criteria employed: the western, materialistic and political criteria rather than their own spiritual criteria.

A special place within this philokalic movement belongs to Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, the translator of the Philokalic collection in Slavonic and the one who was responsible for the patristic and philokalic renewal in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia and Romania; he was able to relight a new hesychast movement relying on the spiritual bases of 14<sup>th</sup> century piety in the 'century of Voltaire', invigorating and uniting the Orthodox hearts from the Adriatic to the North Sea. Paisius Velichkovsky lived on the Holy Mount Athos, for 18 years in the Kapsala community pertaining to the Skete of the Prophet Elijah, and later moved to Moldavia. The Athonite monasteries entertained a close connection to the Lavra Neamț by means of frequent cultural exchanges. There, at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, did Paisius Velichkovsky light a different kind of 'lights': those of the Orthodoxy, of patristic and Byzantine tradition. The spiritual influence of the great hegumen was felt in most Orthodox monasteries.

An important result of the philokalic revival was the fact that many patristic texts were edited and reprinted, especially those of the Niptic Fathers who were experienced teachers of spiritual life and prayer. The first complete version (or almost complete if we take into consideration the titles that have yet to be identified in the Romanian versions) of the Philokalia is the Romanian version dating back to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Ch. IV The dispute between the proponents of the movement of spiritual awakening in Greece, between traditionalists and the advocates of the ideas of the age of enlightenment**

The profound changes Europe was undergoing during the age of enlightenment also affected 18<sup>th</sup> century Greece and all the Orthodox nations of south-eastern Europe through the young people who had studied in European universities. After the harsh religious wars, the modern ideas born out of the freedom of thought took Europe by storm, prompting the emergence of a new world, being created in a frantic enthusiasm. Radical social, political and ideological overturns took place and the epicentre of this great upheaval was the French revolution fought under the slogan *liberty, equality, fraternity*. This major event engendered profound political transformations; it affected the contemporary way of thinking as well as the spiritual and ecclesiastical life of people throughout Europe. A plethora of events occurred in only a few years: the United States of America declaring their independence, national awakening, empires being dismantled, radical ideas of the encyclopaedists, the critique and rejection of all religious authority, new ethics and free economy. The west seemed to have finally found its social and political dynamics, one that fascinated the oppressed Greek communities of the Ottoman Empire.

Soon enough the disputes between the Greek illuminist and traditionalist anti-illuminist scholars moved to the Holy Mount Athos, after the Athonite Academy had been established and its professors had initiated the movement for spiritual awakening along with their brilliant students and the Kollyvades monks. This movement sought to stir consciences and to counterbalance to the attempts to westernise and alienate the Orthodox ethos. The Kollyvades monks did not oppose the illuminist ideas by putting forth their own ideology, but by assembling a collection of fundamental texts of the Orthodox tradition: the *Philokalia*.

A significant element is the fact that at the very beginning, the vast majority of the foremost proponents of Greek and Romanian enlightenment, a group that aimed at enlightening the people by means of knowledge and education, were clergymen and monks: illuminists such as Eugenios Voulgaris and Iosipos Moesiodax did not commit the excesses the western illuminists did by refuting any connection with the tradition of the Church, but instead they remained faithful to the tradition of their people and to the Orthodox dogmatic teachings all their lives. Rather than putting forth an ideology, they generated a movement of existential awakening with regard to the fundamental and priority human needs, aspiring to highlight the ethos and the experience of the Fathers of the Church tradition.

The clash between traditional forces and illuminist scholars was inevitable because they belonged to two completely different worlds with radically different visions as to what the spiritual and cultural identity of a nation is and as to the means to be employed in order to emancipate a nation. Paradoxically enough, the western illuminism was met with a stern

opposition in the east, on the one hand, yet on the other hand it stimulated a strong, positive dynamics and an extraordinary creativity in the spheres of writing and pastoral revitalization of the church life. The climax of the conflict between those who advocated the spiritual awakening was the famous quarrel between Athanasius Parios – a formidable adversary of the illuminists, who had a profound regard for the tradition of the Church Fathers and who undertook a monumental project of editing their works, as well as writing various treatises of Christian apologetics, grammar, rhetoric, logic – and Adamantios Korais.

All of Athanasius Parios's anti-illuminist writings are apologetic, they confront and refute the accusations brought by the atheists against the Christians, the Church, the clergy, the monks, the customs and the traditional values. Nowadays when the whole of Europe is on the verge of adopting the French version of the a-religious and secularized state, when many of its leaders wouldn't even mention its Christian origins, when all the institutions are de-Christianised and degraded – with noticeable consequences in the spiritual balance and welfare – the words of Saint Athanasius are topical and prophetic.

A proof that the Orthodox Church did not oppose the enlightenment of the people or that of the sciences is the modern curricula of the Athonite Academy and of the various schools and academies in Greece, Bucharest and Jassy. However, the Kollyvades also stressed the need for a spiritual renewal: they edited the Philokalia as a reaction to the anthropocentric humanism of western illuminism.

## **Ch. V The issue of the western influences in Nicodemus the Hagiorite's works**

Whereas the western illuminists advocated a break from the tradition of the Church and promoted the culture and the modern ideas, the Kollyvades' 'enlightenment' – especially that of Nicodemus the Hagiorite – avoided sterile polemics and set up a well structured positive programme to revitalise the authentic Orthodox way of life in all its ascetic, mystical, liturgical, canonical, moral, and biblical aspects, by editing and reprinting the sources of the genuine Orthodox patristic and Byzantine tradition. Nicodemus the Hagiorite will dedicate his entire life to this project beginning with 1777, publishing an astonishing number of patristic books which form a 'unique encyclopaedia of Orthodoxy'.

In this confrontation with western illuminism Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite promoted 'a return to the sources', to the unadulterated tradition of the Church and of the nation, rediscovering the depths of patristic writings and the beauties hidden in the Philokalia. He fought against the anthropocentric stance of the illuminists by asserting the theanthropic

tradition of the Orthodox Hellenism at a time when it was shaken by a severe cultural and spiritual identity crisis.

Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite is remembered in the history of modern Greece and Greek theology as a noteworthy example, as a man who promoted Orthodox traditionalism. Some Athonite monks accused him of having committed dogmatic errors; he was consequently deemed a heretic and was exonerated only 22 years afterwards by the Holy Koinotita of the Mount Athos, when he was called 'defender of the dogmata of Christ's Church'. On April 13<sup>th</sup> 1807 the priors of all 20 Athonite monasteries acknowledged in a letter that his faith was untainted.

In his theology, Nicodemus the Hagiorite championed the study of the Holy Scriptures and of the Holy Fathers and the need to follow a traditionalist path in theology, one that would preserve dogmatic and moral accuracy. Father Theoklitos of the Dionisiou monastery rightfully said about Saint Nicodemus that he unites within him the monk and the philosophers, the fighter, the teacher, the defender, the writer and the confessor of Christ's truth.

His most substantial contribution to the affirmation of the religious life of the Church was his own way of life: a commendable monastic life lived in observance of the eremitic prescriptions. This spiritual experience is illustrated in the works he wrote either alone or with other monks, documenting the spiritual path that he took and that he recommended we also take.

Lately, some have criticised his lack of originality, whereas others stated that Nicodemus had ushered Latin doctrines in the Orthodox spirituality such as frequently taking Holy Communion, by editing books written by Roman-catholic authors in versions adapted to suit the Orthodox ethos. Two theologians accusing him of adopting catholic teachings and falsifying and westernising Orthodox thinking and spirituality are Theodore Lavriotes and prof. C. Yannaras. The former wrote in 1938 that books such as *Imitatio Christi* and *Spiritual exercises* are catholic compositions and our Orthodox brothers may easily be led astray by them. The latter penned the harshest attack against Saint Nicodemus, accusing him of being not only subject to western influences but also of being estranged from Orthodox piety, having transformed the Gospel of salvation into ideology and religion, of 'judicial terrorism' against the faithful, of a form of pietistic-sectarian individualistic ethicism.

The issue of the western influences Nicodemus the Hagiorite and the Greek Orthodox theology of the 18<sup>th</sup> century may have been subjected to is extremely complex and as Theodore Zizis noted 'the debates in this matter are unfortunately far from coming to an end'.

These influences are undeniable and they are generally acknowledged by the scholars, but there is still the question of their extension and of their limits: how far do they reach? Most Orthodox scholars believe that these western influences have much more to do with the working method, the writing technique, the terminology and the language Saint Nicodemus used and that they did not alter his Orthodox teaching as a whole. Although this issue of heterodox influences on Orthodox theology is quite old it still draws the attention of Orthodox and western theologians alike, without there being any consensus in sight. The case of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite shed some light on the matter, but nevertheless, the ultimate clarification of this problem remains a task Orthodox theology has to address.

### **Conclusions**

The Holy Mount Athos remains to this day the centre of spiritual culture, the highest schools of monasticism, safeguarding the purity of the faith and that of the piety for the whole of the Orthodox east. Those who came here were taught the secrets of monastic life and became permeated with the Christian wisdom, with the Orthodox askesis and culture. This is also the place where the vital activity of copying and translating the works of the Holy Fathers began due to the fact that the rich libraries, fertile nuclei of Orthodox theological scholarship numbering over ten thousand manuscripts, offered the possibility to immerse one's self in study to those who entered them.

Orthodoxy was kept alive only thanks to the Holy Mount Athos with its pivotal position within the Eastern Church; this small peninsula was a matrix, a vital, irreducible centre of the Orthodox Church in all matters regarding its faith.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, prior to the revival movement, the Athonite monasticism went through a spiritual crisis precisely because it had distanced itself from the traditional teachings of spiritual cleansing and enlightenment in view of opening one's soul to God – the purpose of Christian life and even more so of the monastic life. Undoubtedly, observing monastic oaths and commandments to the letter, the religious services, private prayer had always been at hand. But were they enough for a monk wishing to purify his soul and attain the experience of perceiving Christ's presence in his heart? Were they helpful enough in the terrible, unseen struggle taking place within the souls of monks and Christians earnestly desiring to abide by God's will? Certainly not!

The emergence of the Kollyvades' movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – first in the Athonite milieu and then beyond it – a movement centred on liturgical spirituality brought with it a return to the roots of Orthodox patristic tradition.

The spiritual revival of post-war Romania, associated with the translation of the Philokalia into Romanian by the reputed contemporary theologian Dumitru Stăniloae, originated in fact in the spiritual awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century, a pan-Orthodox movement that continues to bear fruit, even today.

There is no doubt that the Philokalia as *an instrument of theosis* as it was justly called by Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite, is the root and the actual source of almost all authentic theological tendencies that surfaced within the Orthodoxy beginning with the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century up until present day. This movement cannot and must not be limited to and identified with the dispute over the funeral services or the kolyvas – a frequent occurrence sadly enough.

There are two periods in the culture of Eastern Europe that have valued and increased the number of spiritual writers. The first of them was the hesychasm of the 14-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, to which we owe a first series of massive translations of the philokalic literature into Slavonic; these translations circulated in Russia and in the Romanian Principalities where church Slavonic was used in religious services. The second one was the new hesychasm of the 18<sup>th</sup> century connected with the figure of Paisius Velichkovsky and his younger Greek contemporaries, Makarios of Corinth and Nicodemus the Hagiorite.

Although it had to endure the Turkocracy, the Orthodox Church has always been able to find the resources it needed to provide answers to the challenges coming from the west, and to assert its identity and the spiritual treasures preserved within its tradition, which the west had long lost. The Orthodox Church has always been the main cultural expression of a nation and the Orthodox remain to this day deeply rooted in the tradition of their faith, a tradition that shaped their mentality and their culture.

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