

The Two Witnesses

1. The Holy Mountain from where you can see Constantinople

Towards Chilandar

“These are those who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes..” came back to Dimitrije’s mind, which seemed to have become completely taken over by his heart, whilst the ship set out from the port of Uranopolis, and a crowd of screeching seagulls flew overhead, like lightning flashes, in directions which either followed or crossed over the course of the ship. As he watched the peninsula ending in the high peak of the Holy Mountain, he immediately noticed two bearded monks in black robes and black caps, running black rosaries through their hands.

“I’d like you to bring me a rosary from a monk on Athos,” he recalled the heart-felt request of the young Ivan, who was now starting his studies in theology, and felt a spontaneous desire to sit down beside those two, in the seat that was waiting empty. Excited, still not turning his gaze from the wooded peninsula, through the screeching of the gulls, who had not yet grown tired, nor any quieter, he spontaneously struck up a conversation with one of them, who knew a little English, whilst the other kept quiet and prayed, looking off somewhere into the distance, in the Holiness of continuous prayer.

“Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy...”

For the first time Dimitrije felt *well-being* streaming through his body, after so much suffering, which had threatened to destroy him.

“We are from Russia”, said the monk.

“How long you stay on Mount Athos?” Dimitrije asked.

“Ten years” the monk replied.

“You are from Panteleimon” Dimitrije went on.

“No,” the monk replied, in clumsy English, *“We live in a skete”*...waving with his arm, which meant “a bit further on”.

He asked him again, and he replied, *“It doesn’t matter”*.

Then Dimitrije said, *“You pray for me?”* in his Croatian, tending to Russian.

The monk was silent, and fingered the black, worn rosary, made of a string of knotted wool, broken in three places by a glass bead, and ending in a cross. He then raised his other hand, communicating “*Understood, We pray for you*”. And with that other hand he made a sign like writing a name on a slip of paper.

Dimitrije took a pen and wrote.

That is enough, all that is needed.

“*Our business is to pray*” the other one said.

And Dimitrije again began to pray, which he had been unable to do for a long time as a result of his suffering. He repeated in himself, “*Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy...*” Slowly, like a child getting used to it.

The ship continued on its way along the Holy Mountain, in the landscape of the Aegean Sea which was almost entirely identical to Dimitrije’s Adriatic. Imagining the monasteries and sketes that had found their home here over the long history of Christianity, two millennia, since the Virgin Mary landed on the shore with John the Evangelist, where the Iviron monastery is today. He imagined the caves on the steep cliffs where they lived, where even today ascetics and hermits lived from the blessings it offered.

“They came out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb” again went through his heart, like a refrain, which meant that the source of prayer was open, that it was flowing like a river, like the Source of Life.

“*Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy...*”

“You will experience persecution, since the latest generation is falling apart, rotting and degenerate”, a contemporary Orthodox prophet had said. “You will flee in panic from the East to the West and you need to know how to face trials. You will need to run to places of refuge from the *Beast with seven heads and ten horns*”.

“How did those monks manage to live in those holes before, high on those rocks?” Borka asked him when they were up on the Meteora.

“There could be snakes and scorpions there, weren’t those people in danger of losing their minds?” she went on, mystified, almost unable to understand completely.

“They came out of the great tribulation with their robes bleached white,” Dimitrije replied, gazing to the peak of Athos in the distance, under whose steep sides was St.

Anne, above which the cave of the elder Danilo opened up to the sun. The cave was in a rock which had cracked during an earthquake, stretching from the north-west to the south. When seen from the outside, one was instinctively afraid to go near it, let alone live in it, since it gave the impression that the rock would at any moment crash down, and crush anyone who was underneath it. It came to a halt by a cliff on the corner, and the path was high up, to the east. When you have gone for about 5 or 6 meters, it turns to the right southwards, where there is a window, whilst at the entrance there is a door. On the floor there is a mat and a pillow. There was an elder sitting there, working with his hands and reading books, of which he had plenty.

You had to go into the cave sideways. Still it was impossible to avoid catching your back somewhere on a rock. Having entered, you had to sit down, since it was very small.

At one time in *this narrow cave the elder Danilo lived with the skull of his elder* – whom he had served when he was young: Father German. Danilo showed the skull and said, *“I do not do anything and I have absolutely no good in me. I only hope in God’s mercy and the prayers of an elder. How else can I be justified?”*

“What can I say?” he said to the visitors, who believed in his holiness, “I a sinful man, I am only seeking the mercy of God. That is all I hope in.” He spoke these words with deep conviction, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Who lives in the cave of the elder Danilo today?” Dimitrije asked the Russian monk, gazing into the distance at the sides of the Holy Mountain, sprinkled with light.

“New monks,” the bearded Russian replied simply. He added, “There will be monks as long as there are trials”.

“It is necessary to bless God in trials: he sends them for our good. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength. If we do however begin to complain, even greater trials will come. Anyone who rejects trials, or thinks he can run from them, will always come up against even greater ones. You have to be patient and suffer. The holy martyrs spilled their blood for Christ. We should at least spill sweat and effort. Through trials you gain experience and become perfect. You have to work hard and pray.”

“Can someone pray in peace when his spirit is disturbed by trouble?”

“Spiritual men need to judge that. I am only a simple man”, the elder replied.

“Well, we are not asking you, elder, as a spiritual leader. We are just asking you, since I was in trouble myself once. You can know about trouble from your own experience,” they told him.

“When he is in trouble,” the elder answered, “a man can turn to God in tears and Christ will comfort him. The comfort of the Lord is of the same measure as the trouble.”

The elder Danilo was a Greek, but he expressed himself in Serbian with great ease, which made many people think of him as a Serb. And the reason for this was, as Dimitrije discovered, as follows:

Sometime almost two hundred years ago a sailing ship docked along the coast by the Kafsokalivia skete, with an eighteen year old boy on board, Dimitrije, a Greek by birth, who later became the elder Danilo. He came to the Holy Mountain to live as a monk. Before he stepped onto the holy ground, young Dimitrije decided firmly that he would take as his elder and spiritual leader the first monk he met, and that he would live with him until he died. With this in mind, he stepped out onto the shore and set off up the mountain. When he had already climbed quite high and saw in front of him the elder German, who lived in the cell of St. Artemija, he said to himself, “I will stay with this elder and serve him until he dies. The Lord himself has brought me to him.”

The elder German, born a Serb, was at first sight a skittish, bleak and overbearing character. Not only did he scold his obedient disciple, but he beat him almost every day, especially at first. However, he did not do this meanly, nor was he overcome with rage; he did it by “spiritual reason”, which even his disciple did not understand for a very long time, and nor did others who learned of his behaviour. Despite their strict relationship, the pupil did not leave the elder. Enlightened by blessing, he obeyed the elder in everything without complaining. This went on right up until Father German died, which was forty years.

The cruel behaviour of the elder towards his disciple could not remain a secret. As a result one day the elders from St. Anne came to Father German to persuade him to relinquish his cruelty towards his disciple. The elder replied with the words of the Gospel, “*Your thoughts are not of God but of man*”. Realizing that the elder was acting according to spiritual reasoning, the elders left him, astonished at the spiritual wisdom of Danilo and his dedication to the elder.

After many years living with the elder, Danilo attained deep peace and was worthy of blessed gifts. While he was still on trial, once he lit a fire in the oven to make bread. As he poked the embers, he lost the steel tongs that were lightly attached to the pole. The wood in the oven was burning. Turning to the elder, he cried out, "I'm sorry Father, I have done wrong. The tongs have fallen off."

"Go in and get them out!" the elder said sternly.

"Bless me!" his pupil said.

"God bless you!" the elder replied.

The disciple jumped into the oven, pushed back the embers with his hands and caught hold of the tongs, which were already red hot, and came out with them, not burned in the least.

Soon the news of the miracle spread over the entire Holy Mountain. Not wishing to become the object of general attention, Danilo hid with the elder, living in an unknown place, until the miraculous event was more or less forgotten.

Danilo lived with the elder for two years in the cell of St. Artemija. He then moved with him to Chilandar where they spent another year...

"Do you know that I am a Croat?" Dimitrije asked the Russian monk.

"A Catholic?" the Russian asked.

"Yes, a Catholic," Dimitrije said, "and perhaps truly like the elder German, a Serb, cruelty should be seen with God's eyes and not man's."

And so they parted, as the boat landed at Arsana Jovanica: Dimitrije and the two Russian monks. Those two went on foot up the path to their monastery, in the anonymity of their eternal prayer, and Dimitrije went on with the four Serbian Orthodox believers, towards Chilandar.

They went up hill on foot, by the path.

Then Dimitrije stepped onto the holy ground for the first time and he was excited. It was not an excitement coming from his body, but from some spiritual insight. He felt joy inside and the purity of nature.

He had set foot on the Holy Mountain!

He was filled with a nameless, internal joy, a zeal that was completely unexplainable, which could be compared to the joy and zeal of the discovery new continents, if that joy,

and that zeal could be even deeper, deep as the mystery talked about by the elder from Kafsokalivia: “Let your silence be a secret, in your heart. From the outside it should not be noticed that you are silent; let it remain a secret for other people. As soon as you speak a few words, secretly say a prayer to the Lord in your heart for all people.”

Yes, right from his first contact with the holy ground he felt that he was beginning to love and was opening his heart to all people, just like the gracious heart of God Himself. The four of them climbed on foot up the hill over the sea on the southern side of the peninsula, towards the monastery, which was the spiritual source of Serbian Orthodoxy. He was a Catholic, a Croat, and the other four, Petar, Miloš, Boro and Bogdan, were Orthodox. Petar and he set the pace for their walk, and without turning back they strode up the path, which was once trod by so many humble, bare-footed monks, and even St. Sava himself.

The natural beauty of one peninsula is comparable with so many other peninsulas, for instance Pelješac, where there is also a monastery and church, but still this was something incomparable, for the natural life here had been completely sanctified, it was the reserve of the Holy Mother of God, prepared by her, and by St. John the Evangelist, for the last times. Here the spirit of the world had not come, the warmth of the sun was like a spiritual blessing, here proud, secular men with their spies and their codes perhaps would like to enter, but the spirit of the humble would not permit them, just as, incidentally, a century and a half ago the Turks still ruled the peninsula from their *saray*, but they never managed to subdue it.

In a white long-sleeved shirt and new trousers, Dimitrije walked solemnly, keeping pace with Petar, who crossed himself from time to time, glancing at the many-coloured flowers by the path: red, blue, yellow colours, then at the rolling hills, divided by valleys with an abundance of rich vegetation, pine trees, small conifers... They had already climbed a long way above the sea and come out at the foot of Athos, which actually only began there, since there in the distance, through the sun-filled air, the magnificent mountain itself rose, from which you could see Constantinople, literally, with the eyes of the Trinity, the first Church, not built with hands and united...

“I would so like to pick a flower, but... I don’t know if I should?” said Dimitrije to the four men walking behind him.

“Better not to without a blessing,” one of them said quietly, as though he were keeping an Orthodox vow of silence.

Dimitrije went on further, obediently, and then stopped suddenly, as there, right in front of his feet there was a red petal, lying motionless, with a red edge, like a gift. He picked it up, kissed it and said to Boro and Miloš:

“You see? Our Lady gave me this.”

They were slightly taken aback. A Croatian writer, a Catholic, walking with such zeal and such joy, on their Orthodox path. Bogdan had a certain amount of distrust towards Croats in his heart, he believed that Cardinal Stepinac could not be compared with St. Vasili, but only with St. Sava, whilst this Catholic writer walking before him on Athos said this was not the case, and the media are those who lie, that *Beast with seven heads and ten horns*.

They could no longer see the sea behind them, as they were now on the, who knows whether it was the sixth or seventh kilometre, deep on Athos, looking down into the valley on a few deserted sketes, now feeling as though tiredness no longer existed. Dimitrije could not shake off the impression of the miraculous virgin purity of this countryside, and he felt that he was no longer in the Union, but that he was setting out into a new land, in which Heaven was already present.

For me Paradise is on the Holy Mountain, the Elder said, and many people understood him. He saw this landscape with spiritual eyes and listened to the birdsong. I could talk to the birds like my Elder, he said to himself. And he went on, and on...

When they drew near to Chilandar, there were bathed in light. It was a hitherto unknown light, that sees wounds and heals them. The Catholic Dimitrije knew that this was the light of Orthodoxy, which *healed his wounds*.

Secretly in his heart, he embraced all the brotherhood in love, the entire Church.

Yes, that is what I am doing, Elder.

He looked up and the sky was *plain aire*, like in an impressionist painting, but more than that: it was happiness, resurrection love.

Christianity, *Hrišćanstvo*, whatever, just so it was written with a capital letter and not a small one, is not an ivory tower, theological terminology, a cathedra, cooperation with

the regime – it is the Word, scattered in the *plain aire*, in the Sun, to which eagles fly.
Birds.

It is nature, pine trees and cedars, olives, yellow and red, blue flowers in May, the air we breathe, the birdsong, the cliffs of the bleak mountain and the caves, the refuge from evil men and the helicopters of the regime...

He looked up, remembering still the gulls from the boat... there were no eagles, but he felt that they were flying somewhere. Flying high.

This was the climb.

Man deified and nature deified, kept, protected from the Apocalypse.

And then, deep in the rich green, bathing in the sun, in the valley below them, Chilandar appeared.

It appeared with its walls but also the cranes, in its vulnerability.

“It was sixty percent destroyed in the fire?” Dimitrije asked Miloš.

“Something like that,” he nodded, looking in front of him, sweating.

They looked for a while, excited. In deep silence.

Then they set off downwards and came out on the path right in front of the entrance to the monastery, in the place where at one time a donkey died after he had brought the Three-Handed Icon. Dimitrije could no longer remember where that icon came from, but the Mother of God wanted the Three-Handed Icon with the cut-off hand of St. John of Damascus, to come to Chilandar.

On a wooden sign post it said: “Jovanica – Chilandar – ten kilometres”

“See, we have gone ten kilometres” said Boro.

And so they went in beside the thickly stacked tree trunks, through the burned out skeleton of what were once the walls of the inn, into the very centre of the monastery – in front of the church.

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Astonished, Dimitrije stood between the church and the space of one wing of the monastery, with wooden benches under the roof. Before he went into the sanctuary to

bow to the saints, his gaze took in the entire complex, which on one side was bleak: more than half was left in scaffolding, a skeleton, as though it had been bombed.

The fire that destroyed the monastery a year and a half before, which was reported by all television networks and all other media, came to a halt at one point and so half of the monastery remained, and unusually exposed to some kind of unknown threat it *opened its heart* and it seemed, seen through spiritual eyes, that only the sanctuary, that is its holiness, defended it from that unknown threat, that monster.

“You see,” Miloš came up to him, “the fire stopped in front of the St. Sava tower. Where the sanctuary begins. What was burnt was the inn for pilgrims”.

“I see,” said Dimitrije, and went into the church, which was in three parts, having been extended since the times of St. Simeon and St. Sava.

The old building was imbued with deep faith. Glancing around at the frescoes, crossing himself in front of the icons, Dimitrije moved up to the famous Three-handed icon, before which his Orthodox fellow pilgrims had stopped in deep reverence. He prayed in the deep silence.

He then moved to the coffin of St. Simeon.

When they had paid homage to God, the Three-handed Mother of God and the Saints, they accepted the invitation of the monks to the dining room, where, a little sweaty, they were served with coffee and Turkish delight.

They were mostly silent, but they felt that they had somehow drawn closer to one another.

“The Serbs must have offended God in some way since He allowed this fire,” Dimitrije said, and they accepted it as though they had thought so themselves, deeply humble, silent.

After they had rested a while, Miloš and Dimitrije went around the church, walking past the red and white roses, and sitting in the bower by the vine of St. Simeon. A fresh breeze was blowing, so welcome after their walk.

“The vine of St. Simeon,” said Dimitrije, looking at the green branches climbing over the walls of the church in an arch, over the railings, to the bower. “Doctor Vitasović told me that it heals barren women”

“That is true,” Miloš replied, extremely serious, his forehead speckled with drops of sweat.

“The vine grew out of the body of St. Simeon, the King of Serbia, and father of St. Sava. You saw his sarcophagus?”

“Yes”, Dimitrije replied

“The sarcophagus is behind that window,” Miloš said, pointing at the church window, “The vine started to grow out of the sarcophagus, growing through the window and went on spreading...”

“Incredible,” said Dimitrije, “It sounds unreal, but it makes sense. Simeon was the father of your people, like a kind of patriarch, and the vine grew out of his body...That would be seven centuries ago, would it?”

“That was when it started to grow, but it is still alive today,” said Miloš. “There is a legend, or tradition, that if it happens, if it dies, that will be the end of the Serbian nation.”

He stammered a little so Dimitrije said,

“The elder from the Kafsokalivia monastery, many years before the war in Croatia, and everything that happened, phoned Orthodox Serbian monks, in the night, after their prayers and visions, and told them to pray for Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church, because something very hard was about to happen, and the time would come when for Serbs the only refuge would be in the Church. He was afraid there wouldn't be enough spiritual priests and spiritual people...”

Miloš seemed not to have heard him.

“This vine hasn't died, right up 'til now?” Dimitrije asked, going on from where they broke off before.

“No.”

“Does it really cure barren women?”

“Yes,” Miloš replied, “They get a few berries and then they spend forty days in prayer and fasting. My wife Zorica and I come on pilgrimage here, praying for children. We don't have any yet.”

Dimitrije considered him carefully. It was as though he was seeing his soul for the first time, his Christian soul, and God's plan for his marriage. He already then decided to pray for their plans.

"You are in your thirties?" he asked him.

"I am already forty. And Zorka is too. We met in high school, and we have been together ever since. We have been married a long time."

"What do you do?"

"I design furniture, I have my own company. She works in a bank."

"In Belgrade?"

"Yes."

"Did you become Christians recently?"

"It was a process, a long process. I, for instance, fantasized too much in life. I realized when I encountered Christianity, reading spiritual books, that life is not a fantasy, but a serious business, just like our relationship with God is serious. We need to truly seriously and profoundly be united with God, which finally leads to sanctification. You have to decide to do that."

"So you finally began to be serious?" said Dimitrije watching him carefully.

"Yes," Miloš replied quietly, but from the bottom of his heart.

Dimitrije saw this conversation and Miloš opening his soul to him as God's gift in Chilandar. This was life at work, the beginning of a new life, and nothing like the forced ramblings about "ecumenism". Christianity is a serious business.

"You will make it," Dimitrije said, and smiled at him, whilst the gentle breeze refreshed them after their ten kilometre walk. "You will be sanctified, and you will be fruitful."

Miloš smiled gratefully.

"So, that means," Dimitrije went on, gazing at the miraculous vine coming out of the church window, "You will be in prayer and fasting for forty days..."

"We will," said Miloš, without smiling, but like a man who had decided to take that path.

"Only you and I know this!"

While they were on Athos, the women's group, who were not allowed to go up Athos, but were waiting in Thessalonica until the next day, for a taxi to take them to the monastery in Uranopolis, to embark on a ship about a hundred meters from the monastery, to go on a trip around the peninsula. They were accompanied by the Elder, whom they had visited, and who set off with them, supported by his stick, to say Vespers at the monastery,

A taxi had just appeared in the distance, in a side street not far from the Church of St. Demetrius and Borka and the two women from Belgrade waved to hale it. But the Elder said,

“Don't worry, the driver will stop by himself.”

Borka looked at him in amazement, even a little belligerently, despite her gentleness and her always polite behaviour with older people and those in need.

“The driver will stop by himself,” the elder repeated quietly, and when Borka and the two women from Belgrade lowered their arms, he went on,

“When we are in the car, don't talk to the driver. Only I will talk to him”.

Borka, still amazed, noticed that the taxi came up to them by itself, stopped and the driver opened the door. She mechanically helped the Elder sit in the front seat with his stick, beside the driver whose expression was not very friendly. The three women got in the back.

Just after they set off, with a nervous and sudden turn of the wheel, the driver said,

“I feel like a black cat crossed my path!”

The Elder sat quietly, not moving, whilst his black, worn rosary hung from his fingers.

“Every day I read in the newspaper what the monks and priests and nuns are up to,” the driver said rudely.

With a sudden move he turned into another street, and Borka began to be worried.

“Yesterday they said that the caretakers are paedophiles, and in one home run by nuns, where they, you know, I don't know exactly, abused the kids, it went on for years. Then the priests or monks, the devil knows, one or the other, they're all the same, seduced young girls at their religion classes, and ...”

The women looked at the Elder, who continued to finger his rosary as though he had not heard a thing.

“It’s true isn’t it, ladies?” the driver turned round for a second, looking at Borka who froze.

“Have you read the newspapers, seen it on television, do you speak Greek?”

He turned round again, and uttered furiously,

“Idiots!”

He then turned to the Elder and said roughly,

“Isn’t it true, priest, isn’t it? Answer me, is it true what they say in the newspapers?”

The elder sighed gently, as though asleep, looked gently at the driver, and said in a soft voice,

“My child, I will tell you a story. A story, just once, it won’t be necessary to tell you a second time.”

After a few moments of silence, he began:

“There was a man from a village near Thessalonica. Some strangers came from the West, when Greece joined the European Union, and told him to give the police false information about a home for young people, run by nuns. In return they offered to give him a taxi.”

The driver seemed to turn green. He suddenly looked around, and drove up onto the pavement. He turned to the elder and cried,

“Don’t say any more, Father.”

He looked at the women behind him,

“Do they speak Greek?”

“Only you and I know this,” the taxi driver went on, frightened, sweating, panting, looking at the elder, who smiled at him with forgiving eyes.

“And God!” the elder replied lifting his finger.

And he went on:

“He told me this, so I could tell you. Take care to change your life.”

In silence, the driver looked into the elder’s gentle eyes. At one moment it was as though light shone from them, he lifted his hands to cover his eyes. He placed a hand over his heart, and with his eyes closed considered the scenes from his childhood and youth.

Then it was as though he awoke, took hold of the steering wheel, and silently drove the Elder and the three women to the monastery. He did not want any payment, as soon as they got out, he hurried back.

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“Miracles don’t just happen on Athos,” said Borka holding the phone, after Doctor Vitasović had called her from the other end and she told him how much she had understood of the miracle that took place in the taxi.

“Well, friend, monks sometimes leave Athos in Thessalonica and in Belgrade, especially if they are suffering from some physical illness when, as they say, “God loves them.” We are no longer in the Turkish era!”

“And honestly, that taxi driver was even ruder than the Turks,” said Borka,

“Could be. You know what kind of times we live in. And don’t forget that the monks are insightful.”

“Anyhow, tell me, have they disembarked?”

“They should be in Chilandar by now,” said Borka, “and we are going round the peninsula by boat tomorrow. Only that man from Split, Sergije, with a young kid from Smederevo, has lost his passport so we don’t know if they will give him a *diamontrion*”

“Ok. I’ll fix it. The main thing is that they are there. And Father Mihovil?”

“Yes, he is too. A kind, wise man,” said Borka.

“Ok, we have succeeded there too. Here on the television they have starting talking about Chetniks again, some high-ranking officials have come from the West so they have let it be known that they won’t meet with Chetniks, and so on. They are just stirring up the old hatred again, and there are scandals involving Orthodox priests in the media at every turn. The same hatred as against the last Obrenović’s”

“Is Dimitrije in a good mood?” the Doctor asked.

“Well he was on the Meteora. He was thrilled by the name “heavenly catacombs” and told me a bit about his visions, about the Camp of the Holy”

“Slowly,” the Doctor replied.

“I put my finger on my mouth, letting him know, so others wouldn’t hear when he talks about how the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches are one. But he knows that, and doesn’t talk in front of other people. But he told us in company with Croats, about the

fate of the poor children and young people in Bosnia and Croatia, whom the state subjects to such evil deliberately, most recently prostitution from Amsterdam. And at the same time the media attacks the scandals in the church, so it would lose its power to protect those children and young people. He was very convincing.”

“He is convincing. You just need to go slowly,” said the Doctor.

“At the same time he is very interested in Masons. When we were at the White Fortress (*Bela Tvrđava*) in Thessalonica, I mentioned to him that our friend from Belgrade was a member of the Daughters of the Nile, and he asked for information at once. I told him that the details were confidential, but he said never mind. And when Mihailo told him that the Tower in Thessalonica was painted white by the Jews, when the Turks allowed them to do so, since they were paid by Jewish bankers, he got interested again. Otherwise, he is thrilled by our monks. And their spirituality,” Borka said.

“It’s the real thing. You have to look out for Esfigmen,” said the Doctor.

“He is grateful to you because through you, he says, the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to see he needed to visit Chilandar and the mountain in general.”

“Thanks be to God.”

“And when we visited the Church of St Lydia in Asprovalta he kept talking about eagles, and he had his picture taken in front of the sculpture of the Two-headed Eagle in front of the church. He said that for him it was a revelation and that he didn’t know that everywhere in front of our magnificent monasteries, starting from Meteora to the source of St. Petka by Katarina and St. Demetrius in Thessalonica, there is a fluttering yellow flag and the Two-headed Eagle. It is a holy sign, and he told me that saved souls appear in the form of eagles in Dante’s Paradise,” Borka said.

“That’s nice. Let’s go on working. I am preparing for a conference on extra-uterine fertilization in the Union Hall” the Doctor concluded.

After she hung up, Borka went back in her mind for a long time to the images of those days.

She had been amazed by some things, such as today’s event in the taxi, so she did not even attempt to analyze them. She understood that something was happening and what was happening should simply be left to happen, until the threads finally came together. The fact that women were not allowed to go up Athos, and that for eighteen centuries

they had not set foot on Athos (for Empress Milica, according to the Doctor, was carried), would cause a strong reaction in most of today's women, especially "feminists", but she, Borka, was not a feminist. She was a believer and her good heart instinctively led her to be so more and more, but she still needed internal confidence and enlightenment, which she admitted to Dimitrije.

Yesterday tears ran down her face during the liturgy in the monastery church of Mila Arsenica and she truly understood that a Christian must have in himself a deep joy and live it, and that the liturgy, with its singing and prayers, before the icon of the Mother of God, the Source of Life, with red, yellow and white roses stuck around its frame (which Dimitrije pointed out) – was truly the real internal source of both life and joy. Her good heart spontaneously gave complete support to the Doctor in his struggle against the "white plague" in Serbia. She was his sincere secretary and doctor, organizing his appearances in Europe, from Russia and Poland to Slovakia, supporting his body, which was already past seventy and with a by-pass, to succeed in keeping up with the demands of his spirit, which were correct and "humane".

Behind all this there was the assurance that for that "more" it was necessary to fight, and that Good would prevail, no matter how many Giants ruled the world and how much the Red Horse of the Apocalypse, as the Doctor would say, or the "white death" would take life, so it really did seem right to conclude that the Turks were not such a threat as the hidden enemies today.

She sensed the hidden enemy herself clearly, even more than when Serbia attacked Croatia, later whilst following the Doctor on his pro-life campaign. It was logical to wonder about the existence of the devil and demons in the light of so much sexual depravity and so many attacks by the establishment and the media on the Doctor since he had said in public, "I no longer perform abortions, and extra-uterine fertilization is a sin against God".

Against so many enemies, there had to be somewhere some strength, the Source of Life for the "Final Victory", which her soul wished for the Doctor. Since she and the Doctor met Dimitrije, after his talk in Belgrade about Christian Europe, they were linked by a friendship which could only be inspired by Christ.

For the Doctor and her, Dimitrije was a courageous man who went beyond the limits, who was not afraid of the Giants who ruled the world, and who, whilst they were walking along Terazije Square, first showed them the sculpture of the pyramid, set up in the nineteen nineties. He explained to her the effect of the occult on Serbia and Croatia, and how Orthodox and Catholic Christianity must not be divided.

He recognized Evil at every turn, and when they went into the bookshops in Thessalonica, even before Belgrade, on Terazije Square, he said, “You see, Da Vinci’s Code, Paulo Cuelho and Umberto Eco are number one hits everywhere, with the most advertisements, and on the first shelves. Even in Orthodox countries.”

She asked him before that what he thought about Da Vinci’s Code, since it had been banned by the Catholic Archbishop of Belgrade, but everyone was reading it – and he replied that he admired the Archbishop of Belgrade for he was a true Christian, and he knew how to recognize Evil. He then explained in a few words, who the Giants were that controlled the world and culture, and how they used the medium of the bestseller.

They had coffee under Kalemegdan, before the trip to Athos, and talked about all this, they then walked along Terzije Square, walking past that pyramid, which practically no one had noticed, and went into the bookshop, which was open on Sundays.

“A pyramid like this has been set up in Zagreb,” Dimitrije told her, “true not in the middle of the pedestrian precinct, but in an equally dangerous place: beside the new University library. Anti-Christian forces began to tie together the area of the European states and their capital cities somewhere around 1995, when a terrible offensive began by the Beast with the seven heads against all of Christian Europe, as much against Catholicism as against Orthodoxy, after the fall of Communism and the red Dragon in the East.”

She was astounded by these words, although she did not object. They amazed her, but she believed Dimitrije, and she noticed his strong conviction, his inner suffering and godliness.

“It is really true, and we can only fight against it by prayer, if possible together,” Borka knew that he meant the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. And she followed the Doctor, who was saying that our common “victory” was if both Churches “signed” against extra-uterine fertilization.

She understood that the battle was with Giants, and that the enemy had come into the church, although she did not see it as clearly as Dimitrije.

“The spear being thrust into the heart of Christ for the second time has a pyramid as its point” Dimitrije said, and then explained to her how the Pyramid stabs into both the Catholic heart and the Orthodox heart. He then mentioned the Patriarchs of Constantinople.

“After Athos, I am going to Constantinople ,” he said.

“You can see Constantinople from the top of Athos,” he added smiling, mentioning at the same time the eagle that flutters on the flag of Byzantium, and “Byzantium is the first church, the Church of the Seven Councils.”

They drank their coffee and talked on the river bank in Stavros, changing the subject to a slightly more earthly level, chatting about this and that. Sergije was with them too, so she said, “Still, not everyone, those living in the world, can be like the monks”

“But almost everyone needs to be deified, according to their capacity, given by God, that is to leave sin. God gives the opportunity,” Dimitrije said.

The way he was talking about transparency and God’s insight into the human soul, and the imminent moment of the Warning, when all of us, not only the monks of Athos, will see ourselves in the light of God, allowed her to link him with the event in the taxi that day, when, although not knowing Greek, by some miracle she understood that the Elder saw into the soul of the taxi driver. It was the first time she had experienced something like that first hand, although the Doctor had told her about many similar miracles on Athos, where she as a woman still could not go. That day there seemed to be a terrible clash between the holiness of the Elder and the sinfulness of the taxi driver, completely submerged in the filth of the world and the media, as those she sensed the awe of God’s grace and love in him, in contrast to the misery of the unrelenting sinner.

“Is it really possible to create a Super-State today that wants to destroy the monks?”

“There are casualties on all sides,” said Dimitrije, “and it is already necessary to prepare a camp for the Holy in the mountains, a refuge from persecution by the State and the Courts.”

When they visited Meteora, he added,

“There is the refuge on the rocks!”

Like Christopher, look into the face of the Child...

“I got on the boat at Uranopolis, next to two Russian monks who were fingering their rosaries,” said Dimitrije to Father Cyril, “There was a crowd of seagulls screaming, flying in all directions around the boat, when it set off towards Athos. I had a picture of people *dressed in white, who had come out of the great tribulation*”.

“This reminds me of a vision that St. Akakije of Kafsokalivia had,” said Father Cyril, “Akakije once saw St. Maxim and many other elders from Athos in white robes.”

“White robes?”

“Yes. Only the **shime** on them were normal. Saint Akakije asked, “Who are these following you?” Maxim answered, “Those who lived in this desert, that I taught in my life-time and who followed my teaching.”

After a moment of silence Dimitrije asked:

“On Athos there are many caves, sketes... many holy relics and many holy monks”

“Yes there are. Many. Akakije lived at the time when the Turks occupied Athos after the Greek uprising, in the 1920’s, and when the monks suffered a great deal from the Turks. It was a school in how to bear difficulties and trials. But there are even today those there that no one knows. They have in themselves a high level of spirituality, not known to anyone. Most of them did not want or do not want anyone to know where they are buried,” said Father Čiril.

“How many demolished huts can we find on these rocks, in which most people who now live on earth would never dream of living in, or even think it possible that someone could live there. But still someone did live there.” Dimitrije sighed.

“This is land soaked in sacred relics”, said Father Čiril.

“I know Father. I am interested in that spiritual tradition, that is still alive today, of the hut dwellers. The skete at Kafsokalivia, which in Greek means “burned hut”.

“Yes, burnt hut. It happened sometimes that a hut was destroyed in a fire, so the fathers moved to another place, perhaps to a cell, or they built a new hut.”

“They were looking for solitude?” Dimitrije asked.

“They were looking for a way to spend their lives in constant prayer, and to avoid “*prelest*” (spiritual delusion), or spiritual indolence. The greatest curse that would spread around the Holy Mountain about a monk was that he had fallen into *prelest*.”

“Yes, we are only refugees in this world. God waits for us in refuges.” Dimitrije signed, He thought for a while. Then he asked:

“Why do people these days get so caught up with their property? This Union they are building, it is based on immovable property.”

“The spirit of covetousness, greed. God calls us to another place,” said Father Ćiril.

“My special desire, Father, is to visit Kafsokalivia, the sides of the Holy Mountain at the end of the peninsula. There the Holy Elder I honour is buried.”

“That is the skete of St. Anne, but no one knows where his grave is. He didn’t want anyone to know.”

“That means, completely hidden” Dimitrije sighed, a little disappointed.

“But you can visit the sketes. There are many huts there and caves in the rocks at various heights. And one of our famous Serbian ascetics, the elder Pachomius, lived on the sides of Athos: he bought a cell above the Kafsokalivia skete. He often went off to the rock on the peak of Athos, where he became immersed in prayer and meditation, which was what he longed for.”

“He longed to rise like an Eagle up to God’s Word”, said Dimitrije.

“Yes, just so. You put it nicely. The higher he climbed, and there is snow up there even in May on the mountain, and it is very cold – he felt the air was somehow cleaner, God’s Word was clearer. He wanted to stay up there for a long time, so he would build a hut for himself in the woods under the trees, feeling the desire to find some kind of shelter where he could live forever,” said Father Ćiril.

“Like an eagle making its nest,” said Dimitrije.

“Yes, you put it very well. The high-soaring eagle. And so finally Pachomius found some uninhabited cave, which exactly suited the needs of his spirit. He quickly moved his belongings into it. It was one of the coldest and dampest places on Athos, at a height where no one lived. But the elder’s faith in God’s provision meant that the damp and cold air in the cave did him no harm. He stayed up there for a while, then came back down to his hut, where on one occasion all he found were ashes. He praised God, and set off

wandering from place to place, burning his dwellings. Once he spent the entire summer on the top of Athos!"

"I envy him", said Dimitrije, with a sigh. Then he added:

"That is freedom, the freedom of eagles."

"Nicely said. Yes. The freedom of ascetics, men of God," said Father Ćiril.

"Your ancestor also walked these paths barefoot, Patriarch St. Sava," said Dimitrije.

"He did!" Father Ćiril cried, and added:

"But I would like to tell you again that the Elder Pachomius spent fifteen years in constant weeping."

"Weeping is the source of everything, even creation".

"Yes"

"And you can only weep in exile, in caves, in refuges"

"Yes. Pachomius said that perfect weeping only occurs from thinking about the sufferings of Christ the Saviour and the love of God. Pachomius did not judge anyone."

"The one who looks down to the earth from a great height does not judge anyone," said Dimitrije, thoughtfully.

"If he received a visitor in his cave, and he had two of them, one lower down, and the other higher up on a vertical rock, he would always go to the higher one, which was very hard to reach, and it demanded a great deal of effort," said Father Ćiril.

"I saw on the Meteora: we wondered how the hermits could climb up those steep, bare rocks!" said Dimitrije.

"Pachomius sometimes used a rope" said Father Ćiril.

Father Ćiril was a young Chilandar monk, with whom Dimitrije immediately began talking in the common language of Christianity. It was the language of St. Gregory Palamas, St. Teofan the Prisoner, St. Serfim of Sarov, or above all St. Symeon the New Theologian. Actually the language which spoke of the immaterial light, which transforms man and the earth from within. As soon as they had exchanged a few words, Father Ćiril and Dimitrije felt as though they had always known each other. Dimitrije noticed the large light eyes in the beautiful bearded face of the young monk, and the smile on the corners of his mouth. Above a kind of shy humility, with which he asked him:

"What were your impressions of Chilandar?"

Dimitrije thought for a moment that he was slightly ashamed of the burned walls, but that was not the case. Chilandar left Dimitrije with an inexpressible impression, just as he found it, wounded. Precisely the simplicity and nakedness of the holy place. Actually he was thrilled by the spirituality of Chilandar.

It is impossible to understand the mystery of the brief dialogue between Father Ćiril, the Serbian Orthodox monk and Dimitrije, the Catholic Croatian writer, from the outside. They understood each other immediately, more in the realm of silence, than in the realm of what was said.

“You know,” Dimitrije said to him, “at the time when Dante’s Divine Comedy was taking place, the Church was already divided into East and West. But still in the light of Dante’s genius, the Eagle flies from East to West, and from West to East. And the division cannot be seen. In Paradise the Church became one. And those who divided both the people and the Church, do you know where they are?”

“In Hell,” Father Ćiril replied.

“At the very bottom, in the Lake of Ice, at the bottom of the funnel, the inversed pyramid. The point of the spear that pierced Jesus’ Heart was a pyramid. The pyramid of painful steel divided Jesus’ Heart. Lucifer, the fallen bird, is waiting at the bottom of the ice, amongst the traitors and spies, those who divide people and Europe”

After a deep silence, Father Ćiril said:

“Dante is real for you today?”

“Yes”

“He is a Latin poet”

“In Hell. In Paradise he is also yours – an Orthodox poet”, Dimitrije replied. “His Paradise is created from the light of St. Symeon the New Theologian”

“But... tell me, you believe that at the bottom of Hell, in that ice, are those who divided us, and who divide the Church?” Father Ćiril asked him.

“Today, they are at the top of the Pyramid, tomorrow, in eternity, they will be at the bottom of the Pyramid – the funnel, the crater, in the eternal ice. Because they deliberately divided the Church of Jesus,” said Dimitrije.

“As far as I remember, at the bottom of Dante’s Hell are Judas and Brutus, who betrayed Caesar.”

“Today we have the new globalized Super State instead of the Old Roman Empire, created on the sum total of betrayal” said Dimitrije.

“You are talking about Masons. Those who act deliberately so they can rule?” the Father asked.

“Something like that.” Dimitrije replied.

Since the inns had been burned down, they all slept in one room at the entrance to the monastery. Together with the Serbian pilgrims was Don Mihovil, a Bosnian Catholic priest, who, like Sergije, joined Dimitrije as a Catholic. Due to problems with his passport, Sergije had not yet been allowed onto the Mountain, he was expected the next day.

They all got up together, following the monks, at four o’clock in the morning, while it was still dark, so they had to light their way with torches. They spent three hours, until the morning, with the monks in prayer and singing. Although the words of the prayers and songs were not completely comprehensible, they cut to the heart, and Dimitrije’s was already full of constant prayer.

In front of the Three-handed icon, the large choir of monks kept guard against the forces of evil, that was clear, and raised their song to the sphere of the angels for the salvation of their homeland and the universal Church.

Time passed as though it were clarifying its most profound essence: it exists, it is given to us, so that we could enlighten the darkness with prayers that rise to heaven, and enter into the essence of Light, the Morning. Dimitrije saw clearly that these monks were the guardians of the sanctuary. He united his own prayers with theirs.

At the same time he felt the essence of the fire that wanted to break into the sanctuary of the monastery. Chilandar was at the heart of the Holy Mountain. Someone wanted to destroy it. But the song of the monks rose to the sky. The sweetest of the voices singing to the Three-handed icon, Dimitrije recognised as the voice of Father Ćiril.

The day broke, and they all went together into the spacious dining room. The laymen at one table, the monks at another. They were served cabbage, bread, wine, olives... They prayed together, then ate in silence whilst one of the monks read from the life of a saint.

Dimitrije felt light in his heart and joy, mingled with a deep peace. God created man to live like this, and praise Him like this – he thought.

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That day, in which he prayed with the monks and twice shared a meal in the dining room, talked, visited Milutin's Tower, and the Esfigmen monastery – seemed to Dimitrije to be beyond time. The last thing that located it within the framework of time was an SMS message from a young man, the theology student Ivan, that he received on his cell phone, while he was praying in the chapel in Ierissos a few days before leaving for the Holy Mountain. Ivan wrote briefly: *Today is St. Christopher the Martyr. Tomorrow is Blessed Ivan Merz. On Athos will be the saint's day of Leopold Bogdan Mandić*

Reading the message, Dimitrije was amazed. There he was sitting in a miniature Orthodox chapel, in which the gilded frame of the iconostasis and the design of the chairs, were in the form of a two-headed eagle, and his view was at that moment captured by the Orthodox icon of St. Christopher, the giant carrying the Child on his shoulders.

Did it mean something that precisely on the holy day of the Child-bearing Saint he was preparing to cross the border of the Holy Mountain? What was it Ivan was trying to say?

His memory took him back several years, when with Ivan and a young monk, Mijo, he travelled around Croatia, taking young men and women around, who were acting as Eagles. At one point, while he was driving his car somewhere above Rijeka, Ivan said to him, "You are Christopher, who is carrying us over the river."

"Ha..." thought Dimitrije, carefully considering the Orthodox icon showing the Giant carrying the Child on his back.

Was not the border of the Holy Mountain, and not just the Holy Mountain, but also the road to Constantinople, and to Patmos, actually the Apocalyptic River Orontes, the river of division, the icy river of Cocytus at the bottom of the funnel of Hell – over which the Eagles, the baby Eagles, need to be carried?

And in the end, am I not going to Patmos, the island of the Eagle, of St. John?

He considered the icon in deep thought.

Christopher wanted to serve several masters, kings, but they all had some failing, none of them could be served completely. Until he met the Child. He remained obedient to the Child.

Is there any reality in that?

The fact that he would spend that one important day on the Holy Mountain on the May holiday of St. Leopold Bogdan Mandić, seemed incredible to him. The more so because he immediately realized that the same day was also the holy day of the greatest Serbian Orthodox saint, alongside St. Sava, St. Vasili of Ostrog.

He remembered the priest from the Bay of Priests, Boka Kotorska: Don Trioun, who was so happy last year when Dimitrije testified in Kotor how he had explained to an old lady from Slavonia how to pray the nine days of prayer at the same time to St. Vasili and St. Leopold Bogdan for the unification of the Church.

I will be in Chilandar on the holy day of St. Vasili and St. Bogdan.

At the same moment he wanted to scold himself for finding some hidden geometry in everything, which in the end did not necessarily represent any reality, or above all, any effect, any action or fruitfulness in real life. But still, some power made him begin to pray. He prayed the Orthodox rosary given to him by Father Varnava:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy...”

He then continued with the Catholic rosary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

“Jesus, gentle and lowly in heart, make my heart like your Heart...”

While he was praying like this, he closed his eyes and saw a scene at the end of the performance about the Eagles: Fra. Mijo carrying a boy on his back. Where to?

He was in some kind of darkness for a long time, deep as Dante’s Hell. Deeper and deeper. He prayed for the Eagles, for Fra. Mijo, Ivan...

Precisely the Orthodox rosary.

And then peace came over him, and he left the car park in Ierissos, noticing that night had fallen. And a verse came to his lips.

We went to see the stars.

The stars hung silently in the sky, almost unnoticed, until he had walked for a long time along the deserted beach in Ierissos, in front of which, a dark mysterious mountain, spread the peninsula which he was soon to visit: the place of metaphysics on earth, one of the three fingers of Chalcidice, on which Aristotle was born.

He did not know what he was thinking about...

“While I was in Ierissos a few days ago, walking along the beach at night, the Athos peninsula seemed to me like some kind of dark monster”, Dimitrije laughed in front of Father Ćiril, meeting him in the afternoon by the wall of the Chilandar church.

“Actually Athos is one of three peninsulas. The mountain on the end of the peninsula is for me the location of Purgatory.”

Seeing that Father Ćiril did not reply in his shyness, Dimitrije repeated:

“Yes, yes, I’m not joking, I mean it really. For my soul, the Holy Mountain is Purgatory.”

Surprised again, with a gentle smile on the corners of his mouth and looking away with his big eyes, Father Ćiril said,

“You really like Dante?”

“I do. But not only as a writer, who is convinced that Dante is a paradigm for literature in general, but as a man, as a Christian, as a refugee...”

“You feel like a refugee? That is a comparison with Dante who was expelled from Florence?”

“There is no comparison in the sense of size. No comfort in the sense that Dante was expelled, but I find it easier to bear my own persecution. It is simply the way it is. Croatia has been swallowed up by the Beast.”

“You mean the new world order again?” Father Ćiril asked.

“Of course.”

Touching his bag, Dimitrije took out a small blue booklet, and a larger hard-backed book.

“There: the New Testament and the Divine Comedy. I always have them with me. And in the New Testament I read Revelation most, the last book in the Bible,” said Dimitrije and went on:

“You know, while I was waiting for the boat in Uranopolis, I read the life story of St. Sava. A day before in Ierissos, before going to sleep, I read the Thirtieth Canto of Dante’s Purgatory.”

“An unusual combination!” said Father Ćiril with a smile.

“Only on the surface. It is, you know, interesting to read how, about one century before Dante, St. Sava walked barefoot on these hills in penance, the spiritual patriarch of your

Serbian nation. Then how St. Sava visited other monasteries on the Mountain, and climbed finally to the peak of Athos, which is..."

"Two thousand and thirty-three metres" Father Ćiril finished the sentence.

"Yes. And then to read in the Cantos of Purgatory how Virgil helped Dante to climb up to upper cleansing, up to the place where in the Thirtieth Canto we read:

*"And one, as if commission'd from above,
In holy chant thrice shouted forth aloud;
"Come, spouse! from Libanus:" and all the rest
Took up the song."*

So this was the place of meeting with his bride: "*Come, spouse! From Libanus!*"! The place of meeting with Beatrice, but also with the Church, the true Church. For that meeting we need to be cleansed." Dimitrije concluded.

Father Ćiril was quiet, deeply impressed. He became serious. He was very surprised.

"At the moment when a man meets his beloved, the Church, he needs to be deified," he said.

"And deification, like an internal mystery, I believe takes place in the last Canto of Purgatory. At the same time, you see, Father Ćiril, it is very important that this is where the beginning of the victory over the division of the Church begins. Those who divide others are at the bottom of Hell, in the icy lake of Cocytus, at the bottom of the inverted Pyramid."

After a moment of deep silence, in which it seemed as though Father Ćiril uttered a prayer, he said,

"You then truly came to the Mountain as a pilgrim climbing to the peak of Purgatory... to meet your bride."

Dimitrije remained silent.

Then he said,

"Someone needs to immerse me in the river of Oblivion, Lethe, so I can begin again, to forget the wounds inflicted by Hell. I need to feel the encouragement:

*"And o'er my spirit, that so long a time
Had from her presence felt no shuddering dread,*

*Albeit mine eyes discern'd her not, there moved
A hidden virtue from her, at whose touch
The power of ancient love was strong within me."*

Complete silence came over Chilandar. Father Ćiril's eyes turned beyond the ruins to the far-off hills, and the pine trees on them. He repeated quietly,

"The power of ancient love was in me"

And then he said,

"I will pray for you to be washed in the River Lethe and to feel the prompting of the ancient love."

Dimitrije touched him with his hand.

"Beatrice rebukes Dante on the peak of the hill of Purgatory, because his earthly relationships and passions have taken his wings, since he should have already flown up to where he is now:

*"When thou first hadst felt the dart
Of perishable things, in my departing
For better realms, thy wing thou shouldst have pruned
To follow me; and never stoop'd again,
To 'bide a second blow, for a slight girl,
Or other gaud as transient and as vain.
The new and inexperienced bird awaits,
Twice it may be, or thrice, the fowler's aim;
But in the sight of one whose plumes are full,
In vain the net is spread, the arrow wing'd."*

"That means you were supposed to fly up to Athos a long time ago!" Father Ćiril laughed.

"Well, I was, literally. But the media show us this Mountain like a monster. Listen: last summer, when I came back from the coast, from my holiday, I was wandering around Zagreb, from bookshop to bookshop, looking for two things: an atlas of Europe, where I could find Athos, and the latest world bestseller, The Da Vinci Code."

Father Ćiril laughed.

“Yes, we know about the Da Vinci Code too. It’s a bestseller in Belgrade too, and in Thessalonica. But what a combination! Looking for Athos in an atlas of Europe and – that book!”

“Well, it is a combination,” Dimitrije cried, “Because the Da Vinci Code is a revelation of the modern Hell, the Pyramid in front of the Louvre, whilst the Holy Mountain is a revelation of Purgatory.”

“You are a very interesting man, I must admit,” said Father Ćiril, deeply moved. Then he added:

“In relation to the Da Vinci Code, I have something very interesting to tell you. But first, you go on. It is very interesting, truly interesting.”

“Well, briefly: in one bookshop I discovered from an atlas that Athos is not an island (as I had thought until then!), but a peninsula, one of the three fingers of Chalcidice. This immediately seemed to be very significant, until I recently heard again that phrase, “three fingered Orthodoxy” which is Satanized in the media in my country. Just as many people talk about the extremely negative attitude of monks on Athos towards Catholicism. Then I barely found the Da Vinci Code at my friend’s house, since it had vanished everywhere else, sold out. And I read it, becoming convinced that it is the revelation of the Pyramid in the history of literature, that is, the very essence of Evil, and Dante’s Hell is in fact an inverted Pyramid, a funnel, like, incidentally the one in front of the Louvre in Paris.”

“Do you know,” said Father Ćiril, “that exactly one hundred years ago, in the Russian monastery Optino, the greatest blasphemy was committed in the history of the Orthodox Church?”

“No. What happened?”

“A young Russian intellectual was taken on as a servant at the Optino monastery. He was not completely obedient to his superiors, he lied saying it was too hard for him, for his age, achievements, and one day Satan entered his heart. During the Holy Liturgy, carried by some supernatural strength, he came into the holy temple completely naked and took up the pose of Da Vinci’s man on the altar, like you can see on the drawing of the Vitruvian on the cover of the bestseller!”

“I don’t believe it!”

“I’ll bring you the article this evening!”

“Good,” Dimitrije went on, excited, “but then that means that God gave signs to you, the Orthodox, one hundred years ago about the true essence of Da Vinci’s man – his Satanic essence?” said Dimitrije, amazed by the discovery.

“Yes! We know it. Even then, a hundred years ago, the deepest of the monks in the Optino monastery understood that it was a terrible blasphemy, a truly appalling blasphemy, like an proclamation of the coming of the Anti-Christ,” Father Ćiril said.

“The coming of the Anti-Christ?” Dimitrije repeated.

“Yes. The deepest of the monks interpreted Da Vinci’s man as an attempt by Satan to bring about the prophesied “abomination in the holy place” and that was the origin of the spiritual mobilization of the Orthodox Church to protect the sanctuary. But the Abomination in the holy place only means the free hands of the Anti-Christ to rule briefly,” said Father Ćiril.

“You mean politically?” Dimitrije asked.

“Yes. How else? But also spiritually. Both together,” Father Ćiril replied.

“Then the Da Vinci Code is much more than a book,” Dimitrije concluded.

“Of course! It is not a book, but a frenetic search for Hell. A book can’t become a bestseller because no serious book is frenetic, but meditation,” said Father Ćiril.

After these words Dimitrije remained deep in thought, astonished.

A long time passed and he said no more, while Father Ćiril waited patiently.

“Last summer, you see, I read the Da Vinci Code and now I am reading, as I said, the last Canto of Purgatory – and Revelation. I have actually been reading Revelation constantly for seven or eight years. You told me yesterday that Akakije one saw St. Maxim and many other elders from Athos in white robes. Those white robes, white dresses, are from Revelation, they are standing on the sea of crystal.

“So, what I want to say is, after the Holy Mountain I am going to Constantinople, to the Patriarch, somewhere in Asia Minor, where the first seven churches from Revelation once existed. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. I will end my pilgrimage on Patmos, in the cave of Revelation”

“It sounds extremely interesting!” Father Ćiril cried in surprise and wonder.

“Patmos is the final destination of my exile. I am interested in new life, the new heavens and the new earth. And on Patmos I will read “Paradise”.”

“I thought so!” Father Ćiril concluded.

“And Paradise streamed through the hearts of John the Evangelist and the Mother of God after Golgotha. There Paradise survived. And it survives today in caves, eagle’s nests. I found in Dante’s Paradise, in the Fifth Canto, a picture of the saved, blessed souls flying from the West to the East, and back again, in the form of a Great Eagle”

“And... so...you are flying” said Father Ćiril.

Dimitrije opened the Divine Comedy and read:

“From me... shielded the harlot and the new-formed brute,” Forgive the expression. That’s the last line of the Thirty-second Canto of Purgatory”

“Dante was seeking shelter?”

“Standing in the centre of the Cosmos, on the crystal sea, right on the mount of Purgatory, faced with the corrupt Church, divided and sold to the Empire – he had to ask for shelter, so the true Church could survive. And it did survive: in Paradise”

“Can you read me those last lines?” Father Ćiril asked.

“Here you are,” said Dimitrije, opening the book before him again.

*“Next, from whence before he came,
I saw the eagle dart into the hull
O’ the car, and leave it with his feathers lined:
And then a voice, like that which issues forth
From heart with sorrow rived, did issue forth
From Heaven, and "O poor bark of mine!" it cried,
"How badly art thou freighted." Then it seem'd
That the earth open'd, between either wheel;
And I beheld a dragon issue thence,
That through the chariot fix'd his forked train;
And like a wasp, that draggeth back the sting,
So drawing forth his baleful train, he dragg'd
Part of the bottom forth; and went his way,
Exulting. What remain'd, as lively turf
With green herb, so did clothe itself with plumes,
Which haply had, with purpose chaste and kind,*

*Been offer'd; and therewith were clothed the wheels,
Both one and other, and the beam, so quickly,
A sigh were not breathed sooner. Thus transform'd,
The holy structure, through its several parts,
Did put forth heads; three on the beam, and one
On every side: the first like oxen horn'd;
But with a single horn upon their front,
The four. Like monster, sight hath never seen.
O'er it methought there sat, secure as rock
On mountain's lofty top, a shameless whore,
Whose ken roved loosely round her. At her side,
As 't were that none might bear her off, I saw
A giant stand; and ever and anon
They mingled kisses. But, her lustful eyes
Chancing on me to wander, that fell minion
Scourged her from head to foot all o'er; then full
Of jealousy, and fierce with rage, unloosed
The monster, and dragg'd on, so far across
The forest, that from me its shades alone
Shielded the harlot and the new - form'd brute.”*

Dimitrije closed the book, his gaze fixed beyond the burnt-out remains of Chilandar towards the hillside. Father Ćiril also looked towards the hillside, repeating the line, “*Like monster sight hath never seen*” “This evening I will bring you the article about the blasphemy in the Optino temple,” said Father Ćiril and slowly turned towards his dwelling. He seemed to be floating. Dimitrije had grown to love him.

The ominous portent in the Optino monastery

Dimitrije came across Don Mihovil under the bower at the entrance to Chilandar, in conversation with a young novice born in Bosnia. The innocent, bearded young man, with shining eyes, got on with the older Catholic priest like a child. They were talking about events in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past fifteen or so years, since the war started. The novice had just got up and set off for prayer, and Don Mihovil confided in Dimitrije, happily,

“We completely agree that the New World Order has led Bosnia astray. We analysed the role of the media in it all. That young man has an open heart.”

“But when we arrived at Chilandar, that older, quiet monk, what was his name...”

“Varnava?”

“Maybe, Varnava,” said Don Mihovil, “wasn’t so open. We talked about liturgy, the church in Bosnia, and he was dominant, but the comment at the end was that the differences between us are too great.”

“But Don Mihovil,” said Dimitrije, “we are after all the first Catholics who have come on pilgrimage here. And pilgrimage is the state of our soul, not a debate. For me everything here is a wonderful experience, I am not at all disappointed. In the end, remember what Doctor Vitasović told us.”

Don Mihovil was a retired priest from the Banja Luka Diocese. He spent his entire life in the Bosnian parish, sharing good and bad with the Orthodox believers, but also developing life-long relationships with Muslims. Dimitrije respected his living, practical wisdom, but also the charisma which could only have been born from pastoral work in Bosnia. Don Mihovil was the first to join him on this journey.

“What about Sergije?” Dimitrije asked.

“They found his passport, and they will let him come on the Mountain tomorrow. He will visit the Pantheleimon monastery”

“I am glad for him, he adores Russian spirituality,” said Dimitrije,

And he continued:

“I am so glad about the spiritual conversation with Father Ćiril. He is special.”

“I told Sergije too, Don Mihovil, that everyone should search while he is here according to the needs of his own soul. My soul is following its own direction. So I will soon be leaving for Constantinople on my own. Although I would like to remind you of our

conversations in Banja Luka and Zagreb. About the murders of the priest, last year, Krziewicz, and the other pressures from the Protectorate to expel or assimilate the Catholics in Bosnia. We talked about Tvrtko's suspicious death in Sarajevo. Then it was you who told me in Zagreb how the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagora and Pope Paul VI met in Jerusalem, because at that time they wanted to expel the Patriarch from Istanbul".

"Yes, the Pope visited the Patriarch, that is he met him, precisely on that occasion," said Don Mihovil.

"There, I didn't know that, but it helps me a lot to understand what happened, behind the scenes, as they say. And what I am discovering here is healing my mind. I think the fire in Chilandar was no accident."

"Of course it wasn't," said Don Mihovil.

"And then what happened in Croatia. Sergije has been telling me for a long time about events that are now linked to Father Mijo. Do you know Father Mijo?" Dimitrije asked.

"Is that the young Third Order Franciscan?"

"Yes. We worked together on a show about Eagles. One of those Eagles, a young man called Toma, is the son of a well-known businessman. His friend, who is the son of a famous General, was kidnapped!

"Kidnapped. By whom?" Don Mihovil asked loudly.

Dimitrije shrugged his shoulders.

"There is still time for us to understand these things. Anyway, Toma asked for money from Fra. Mijo, amongst others, as ransom to pay those gangsters. Then the police caught the gangsters but they put Toma in prison, and his father fled from Croatia..." Dimitrije explained, as much as he could.

"That is like a bad dream," said Don Mihovil.

"Like everything in Croatia. But why am I telling you this? It's true I carry everything with me, even here on Chilandar, and further... I mean I carry Croatia, and my friends, but still, this is all like a scene from Hell. Father Ćiril will give me an article this evening which talks about a terrible abomination which took place a hundred years ago at the Optino monastery in Russia."

“For you everything is always linked together!” Don Mihovil laughed, as though chiding a little.

“Well it is. I am not the only spiritual person who thinks so. Anyway, the Optino hermitage church was also burned down about ten years ago. I see things as a whole. Burning the church was no accident, nor unrelated,” Dimitrije pointed out.

“What was the abomination that happened in the Optino monastery?” Don Mihovil asked curiously.

“A young novice jumped into the sanctuary naked, completely naked, from behind the iconostasis during the liturgy, and made an occult sign with his body.”

Don Mihovil was speechless, with his mouth open, he crossed himself:

“God forbid!”

“Over the past year we have often talked about the ritual murders of Orthodox monks, the relationship between the secret services around the world... and the conclusion was that a plan is being made to desecrate the Sanctuary, the Holy Place. We mentioned Jerusalem, remember?” Dimitrije asked, looking Don Mihovil in the eyes.

“Of course,” Don Mihovil replied.

“Over the past year we have researched the mechanisms of Hell, in the area of the three Balkan states. On this Mountain, by all accounts, God is enlightening us about coming out of the Balkan cage of Evil,” Dimitrije said.

“Where are you going now?” Don Mihovil asked.

“I’m first of all going to walk down to the sea, to Milutin’s Tower. I want to think on my own for a while, and listen to the birdsong, like the Elder. Then I will go to the Esphigmenou monastery.”

“You know it is not recommended for us Catholics to visit Esphigmenou. They call them zealots, they are radically opposed to ecumenism, and they accuse the Patriarch of Constantinople, and they’ve even broken off relations with him” said Don Mihovil.

“Listen, Don Mihovil. I didn’t come to the Holy Mountain for that reason. I came as a mystic, climbing up the Mountain of Purgatory. Do you understand? As a man, whose heart was bleeding, precisely in my Croatia, in Bosnia, for ecumenism. You have followed my Calvary, when they attacked me and insulted me...for ecumenism, yes, precisely for the sake of ecumenism.”

“Of course I was there.”

“So listen to me then: when the boat docked at Jovanica, the four of us, five, four Serbian Orthodox and I set off on the march of ten kilometres to Chilandar. Believe me, I felt true happiness in my heart. I can’t describe it. So somewhere near the end, actually when we had already entered the monastery through the ruins, I looked at the fist of my right hand. On the tips of my little finger and ring finger, I had had black marks for many years which made my skin rough. They were the result of the pressure, the terrible pressure I was exposed to in Croatia for my ideal of ecumenism. They wanted to destroy me socially, and as a man of the church. My blood results were bad.

“So I looked, when I arrived, covered in sweat, at Chilandar, those two cuticles, and the two black marks had gone. Look...”

Dimitrije stretched out his right hand to Don Mihovil.

“My skin is like a baby’s again!”

Don Mihovil made no comment. Dimitrije did not expect him to.

“My experience of the Holy Mountain is my own. I have an experience of healing. Deep inside me. But above all, I admit that as a soldier, as a warrior, I am wounded. That I have internal wounds. I sleep badly like our veterans suffering from PTSD. And here, in front of the Three-handed icon, in front of the Presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist, who landed on these beaches two thousand years ago – I want to dive into the River Lethe, to forget the Hell I have been through, and feel a new impetus, to fly up to Paradise.

“Yes, that is what I want.”

Don Mihovil was silent.

“Now, to continue with what I said a while ago. For me the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople, who were looking for ways of unification in the Holy Spirit, are not masons, as they are for some who write books about it here, and who call themselves zealots and that they are guarding true Orthodoxy. After this Mountain, I am going to Constantinople to visit the Patriarch. Then I am going to Ephesus and Patmos. That is for me the path from Purgatory to Paradise, with this Orthodox rosary in my hands,” said Dimitrije, showing Don Mihovil the black rosary.

“Just be careful you are not dreaming, Dimitrije. In Esphigmenou and in other places, they are opposed to ecumenism, and they don’t follow the Patriarch,” said Don Mihovil.

“Why are you looking back, into the funnel of Hell? The Holy Mountain is the stairway to Heaven. The Heavenly Jerusalem comes from above, like a Bride,” said Dimitrije, and added:

“Here on the Holy Mountain, is the buckle of Europe.”

Slightly confused, Don Mihovil asked Dimitrije to tell him what Father Ćiril was going to give him in the evening about the abomination in the Optino Monastery.

Leaving him, Dimitrije set off to walk to the sea. It was a short walk, a path which quickly led to the northern shore of the peninsula, whilst on the previous day they had covered the ten kilometres setting off from the southern shore.

He enjoyed it just as much. But the word “enjoy” was somehow inappropriate, since it was a feeling of internal joy, excluding the senses. Again he felt what he called the purity of nature, but also the holiness of nature. It was an extraordinary fact that since the days of St. Sava, that is the time when St. Sava and St. Simeon founded the monastery, over the centuries, pilgrims, Serbian Orthodox believers had walked precisely on this path, even King Dušan himself, as testified by *Dušan’s Cross* standing beside the path. It was unusual that Dimitrije, a Croatian Catholic, was walking this way, with his thoughts of the River Lethe and the healing of his memories, the health of his memories, forgiveness, the path ahead – to Paradise.

When he came out by the sea and looked at it, he was astonished by the cleanliness of the water. He looked at the bottom, full of sea urchins all around. No one had ever swum there. And here, on this peninsula, no woman had ever set foot for eighteen centuries, as the Madonna herself wished.

Dimitrije remembered the scene of the islands, the towns and the beaches on the beautiful Adriatic coast, where soon after the motorway was complete, the whole of Europe would begin to arrive. And it would become a place of sin and debauchery. In the silence, walking by the crystal clear water towards Milutin’s Tower, where for centuries Serbian Orthodox believers had landed on pilgrimages of penance to Chilandar and other monasteries – Dimitrije remembered his summer holidays on the Adriatic, his

conversations with the fisherman Tin on the Third Island, about the beaches and avoiding the beaches, about places where thousands of young and not so young people partied.

It was forbidden to come to the Holy Mountain with short sleeves. And on these shores there had never been beaches, since the time when the Virgin Mary landed there with John. Phenomena like Reality Shows, promiscuous femininity, disrespect for older people and maturity and the family, the world of the famous and the jet set – that Hell – remained behind him. “*A shield from the Harlot and the new form'd brute*”

Tired, he reached Milutin's Tower, and sat down.

He sat for a while listening to the sound of the sea.

The state of his soul was clear.

Clear as the bottom of the sea.

A pearl in a shell from the sea bed. Father. Heavenly Daddy.

He remembered the suffering, the persecution. The onslaught of anger in his soul. And the conversation with Sergije when they were walking in Maksimir park about St. Maxim the Confessor and his long-suffering. We are no better than others. Even Dante was no better than those in Hell. But he accepted the long walk of suffering, the Christian path, up a steep climb, long-suffering, for the salvation of others who were trapped in the dragon's Gnostic circle of pleasure and pain. The drama of modern man is greed, pleasure, which must end in pain, in the jaws of the Harlot and *the Monster sight hath never seen*.

His soul sank as though into a deep well, as he remembered the people he loved, people who had suffered, those who had persecuted him... Once more he remembered Miloš, sitting in the bower by the vine of St. Simeon, talking about his decision to be a Christian, and his desire for a child. He remembered St. Christopher the Christ-bearer.

He analyzed in his soul the events from the previous summer until this May, from the moment when he set off in his car to the coast, the Islands, at the end of July, after the July issue of the magazine had come out, and for the first time he experienced the beauty of sun-bathed Croatia from the new motorway. As though from this summer, from now, he was going down to the bottom of the funnel of Hell... and all that was still going on. In the region of the Balkan states an Imperial Army was being formed which was not Christian... Crime, murders.

Terrorists!

Universal video surveillance of all movement. Sociometry and social engineering.

Apart from Revelation and Purgatory, in Ierissos he had also read *Hundreds* by St. Maxim. And he remembered one sentence: “*Consider in your heart the faces of women and the enemy neutrally, with no passion*”

And like a serpent, doubt arose in his own heart. Of hypocrisy. Of...

He took the rosary from his pocket and began to pray.

Have mercy...

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On his way back he turned towards Esphigmenou

The countryside was beautiful, and when the monastery arose before him, built on the seashore, he noticed fields planted with vegetables. A small elder walked past him, a monk. A large number of monks were hoeing the land with rhythmic movements on the broad cultivated area of land in front of the entrance to the monastery.

In the middle of the wall there was a church, and around it accommodation. Dimitrije came across a young Serbian novice. He began to talk but it was as though Dimitrije did not hear him. His words did not go into his soul.

If someone in the name of a defence of true Orthodoxy, like a zealot, talks about and gives out books showing that the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople are members of Masons' Lodges ... somewhere there, for Dimitrije, was the end, the end of that wonderful reality of the hut-dweller, the penitent, the inhabitant of Athos, looking at the Sun.

Returning from Esphigmenou by the same path, he remembered an apocalyptic image shared with him on one occasion by Dr. Vitasović. *Black helicopters circling around the Holy Mountain*. With nets on ropes, raising the monks into the air.

What does it mean?

Dimitrije was convinced that the Holy Mountain of ascetics, this Camp of the Holy, was under the scrutiny of the Union and its police, as it had once been under the scrutiny of the Turks and the Sultans.

When in the twilight he returned to Chilandar, there was a photocopied article waiting for him, *The Ominous Portent in the Optino Hermitage*.

The novice was received in the Optino manner – hospitably and kindly. They gave him a room in the hall, where guests were also received, and as his service they gave him what, as an initial test, the Optino elders take all those through who want to join their family, whatever their education or knowledge: to peel potatoes in the kitchen or to do the washing up. Since the new volunteer – novice had a good voice and was quite a good singer, he was assigned to sing on the right hand side. But this work seemed to be insufficient to the novice, and he imposed on himself a prayer burden that was too heavy for him. He began to pray at night at the time which was perfectly assigned for rest of the tired body. This was noted by the elders in the hall where the novice had his cell...

The elders called the novice to see them and said:

“You can’t act so wilfully. You could harm yourself and fall into the devil’s prelest (deception). Do what has been blessed for you, but don’t take on any more.”

Soon after the elders had given him this advice, the singers on the right side of the choir noticed the obviously odd behaviour of the novice: he did something while they were singing in church for which the choir had him sent to the monastery infirmary. In the infirmary extreme rage overtook him almost immediately. They had to bind him and put him in a room where he could not hurt himself, or other people. They shut him in there, in this crazed state, behind steel bars, with a small window, behind a strong bolted door, and reported his case to the academy.

This happened on 1st August 1904, and one day later there was such a disastrous outcome which neither the Optina monastery, nor the Russian church had ever seen before, it seems, since its very foundation.

In the Vaveden Temple (the Optino summer assembly church) the morning service was underway. It was being conducted by an old monk, Father Paladium, a middle-aged man, of great spirituality and enormous physical strength. They were singing “More Holy than the Cherubim”. Father Paladium came down with the censer through the church and was standing in the place in the temple farthest from the altar. The altar was empty, even the verger had gone out somewhere. There was a large crowd in the church, since many of the brothers were preparing themselves for communion and there were many people

ready to take communion amongst the pious laymen. All at once, through the open western door of the temple, someone came in, ceremoniously and arrogantly, completely naked. Beside that entrance door itself on the left-hand side, was the Founder's casket, beside which two or three young monks in full strength were standing; there were monks and lay people in the dining room as well as in the church. They were all so astonished that no one could move from the spot... In the same arrogant fashion, with magnificent strides, the naked man walked past all the shrines, up to the icon of the Mother of God of Kazan, which was behind the right-hand choir stalls, crossed himself sincerely, bowed before her, to the right and left, as monks do, bowed to the people praying, and went up to the right-hand choir stalls. This all lasted no longer than two to three minutes, but it probably seemed like an eternity to those watching it. No one in the temple moved, as though they were nailed to the spot by some force.

As soon as the naked man stood in the choir stall, like dry leaves in autumn, when a storm breaks, the singers, all grown monks, scattered on all sides, one even hid under the pew – driven by fear and panic. And then in an instant, the naked man jumped up to the Royal Doors, opened them with a strong blow, and with one leap jumped on the Holy Throne, grabbed the cross from it and the Gospel, threw them onto the floor far off to the side, and sat up straight on the throne, facing the believers, raising both hands, like someone “who would sit on the Throne of God like God, claiming to be God” (II Thessalonians 2:4) (this reminded many people of the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci of the naked man with widespread legs and arms like a five pointed star, a pentagram, “the seal of Cabal and Freemasonry”)

The wise monks of Optino understood it as such...

This naked man was precisely the novice who, despite the will of the elders and without their blessing, wanted to sanctify himself and got into the state of darkness of the soul that spiritual men call “prelest”..

Then all the monks, as though the chains had fallen from their legs, all at once jumped at the “newly proclaimed god” and not a second passed, he was already lying under the throne, with his hands and legs bound, with arms bloody from the glass, from when he broke the iron railings and the glass frame of his prison, and with such a Satanic, ironic, evil smile on his lips, that one could not look at him without a secret horror.

He almost killed one monk, hitting him on the temple with the heavy cross with the relics; but the Lord turned the blow and he only hit him on the surface of the temple bone. He also punched the same monk in the ribs and the result of that blow, in the form of a dent in his side, can be seen on the monk even now.

When they had returned the erring academic to his cell, it seemed that, closed in tightly like that, he immediately came to his senses and responded like a healthy man...

“What came over you?” they asked him, “Do you remember what you did?”

“I remember,” he replied, “ I remember it all very well. I had to do it: I heard a voice ordering me to do it, and it would have been bad for me if I hadn’t obeyed the order...

When I, having broken the window frame and bars on my cell, took off my underwear, I went, naked like a new Adam, no longer ashamed of his nakedness, to fulfil the commands of the “invisible one”, and then I heard that voice again speaking to me: “Go as soon as you can, hurry, so it won’t be too late!” I only did my duty towards the one who sent me.”

When this terrible event took place which resulted in the temporary closure of the Optino church of St. Vaveden and its small body of priests, then the most spiritual of the brothers, saw in him a portent of a terrible future, recognizing in him all the signs of the times before the coming of the Anti-Christ.”

“You know”, said Father Ćiril, “this happened a hundred years ago. But barely ten years ago in the same monastery, three monks were ritually murdered”.

“Do they know who did it?” Dimitrije asked.

“The murder weapon was a sword with the word “Satan” and the code 666 on it. The monks were stabbed in the chest, back, sides and groin. The blows were inflicted with great professionalism, expertly, deeply, so the victims would bleed deeply. They found the murderer. They found books on him on Satanism and black magic. The murderer was in contact with Satanists in Kiev. He himself said, “*I wanted to take revenge on God through his servants – monks. I kept hearing a voice saying to me “Monks are enemies of Satan. If you don’t do this now we will lose the war. The war between God and Satan”.*

After a short pause, Dimitrije said thoughtfully:

“It is quite clear. But as far as I can see Satan’s offensive began precisely ten years ago. What happened in Optino is just a terrifying portent.”

“It seems that way.”

“Now I understand why Orthodox believers, even here in Chilandar, keep guard of the holy relics, so heretics wouldn’t come close to them,” said Dimitrije, referring to what happened the day before, when he waited in line with the Orthodox believers to kiss the relics in the sanctuary, and when it was his turn, the guardian monk came up to him and asked, “Are you Orthodox?”

Apart from that, Father Ćiril was embarrassed, and now he was embarrassed, to have to tell him that non-Orthodox “by the rules” were not permitted to stand in the sanctuary. Dimitrije would never forget the expression on Father Ćiril’s face in the sanctuary. As though he were apologising, with deep discomfort, he told Dimitrije that Catholics were not permitted to stand in the sanctuary.

“Wasn’t the pyramid on Terazije Square in Belgrade set up in the same year as the pyramid in front of the University library in Zagreb? Ten years ago?” said Dimitrije, going on from where they had stopped.

“I didn’t think of that,” said Father Ćiril.

“But it’s true”, Dimitrije went on.

“Regarding the burning of the monastery and the temples,” said Father Ćiril, “The Donski monastery and Sergijev Posad were burned. Last year the archimandrite of the Holy Trinity St. Sergius Lavra was hanged in his cell. Over the past ten years in particular Orthodox temples in the Holy Land have been exposed to attack, especially the Church of the Holy Grave in Jerusalem. The sanctuary has been broken into twice, and sacred things broken.”

“I think I can agree with you that if what happened a hundred years ago was a portent, what has happened over the past ten years is the *final offensive of Satan*,” Dimitrije concluded

“But,” he went on, “then the naked *Da Vinci man* breaking into the Sanctuary, is truly the product of the Mason lodges in the last times, so that mankind would become aware of the *abomination in the holy place*... that is coming”

Father Ćiril did not reply.

Sergije finally arrived at the Panteleimon monastery. He was thrilled by the Divine Liturgy in the temple, the faith of the monks, but also amazed at their silence. They let him sleep in the room of a Russian monk, who was *silent* the entire time.

Sergije still had fresh in his mind his memories of Rome: a month before he went by boat from Split to Ancona, to pay homage to the great deceased Polish Pope. His impressions mingled in his mind. He knew that a saint that Dimitrije respected had been an ascetic in Pantaleimon: St. Silvanus. Dimitrije frequently quoted St. Silvanus' famous saying, "*Bury yourself in Hell and do not despair*".

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Dimitrije walked for miles on the hills of Athos, along winding paths, amongst the colourful May flowers, bathed in the sun, talking with the birds. He was healed.

He was happy. *He regained his creative power.*

He gazed into the distance at the high mountain of Athos, in the white mist. He focused on its peak, from which, on clear days and in good weather, you could see all the way to the Dardanelles and beyond to Istanbul, Constantinople.

He sat on a rock and imagined a cave, in which, buried in snow, at a great height, Pachomius lived with his disciple. Snow is falling, falling, and piling up so high that it begins to frighten the disciple. His courage fails him. He decides to leave Father Pachomius.

"We will be suffocated under the snow and we won't even be buried as Christians," he said. And it was not only the snow that made him afraid. Occasionally, even in warm weather, rocks would break loose somewhere higher and roll downhill with a terrible crash, flying past the cave, as though the Day of Judgment had begun. Then there were the demonic scarecrows. Until now the elder had encouraged him by his faith and firmness, *but now he lost faith in Pachomius.*

He took his bag, said to Pachomius, "Farewell, Father," and went out of the cave, stepping across the snow, looking to see how he would go down to the path leading to the village. But as soon as he stepped onto the snow he slipped and plummeted downhill. He slid like that for a kilometre, unable to stop himself.

The elder watched him from above, and prayed his disciple would not be hurt. The disciple finally slid up to the trees which were not covered in snow. He got up onto his feet, looked up at the elder, and bowed. Only then was the elder at peace.

Dimitrije, looking at the white peaks of Athos in the distance, thought how it was not easy to be up in the heights, and how easy it is to lose faith. Pachomius gave him the strength to *face the heights* and prays for those who have lost faith in him, preoccupied with the lowland.

The snow did not touch his heart, Dimitrije thought.

He looked once more at his right hand, on which the two black marks had faded away, like a symbol of everything that had attacked him in Croatia. He began to remember everything he had gone through, travelling to this Mountain. Since last summer on the islands, in Croatia.

He remembered the vision of a holy Orthodox woman: in the last times, an army comes to Athos, and ladders are let down from Heaven. There are many ladders climbing to Heaven.

He could not forget the fluttering yellow flag with the Two-Headed Eagle of Byzantium, on the peaks of Meteora, the heavenly catacombs, when he was there with Borka, Sergije and Don Mihovil. He remembered a drawing. Up on Meteora: from the peak of the incredible rocks, where they had built a church, the monks fought against the Turks who tried to climb the rock, whilst the Mother of God watched it all from on high. The *Theotokos*, with the saints. The Turks lost the battle and fell amongst the steep cliffs of the Meteora rocks and altogether it resembled a landscape from Dante's Hell, but also Purgatory, and Paradise.

The Byzantine flag, with the two-headed eagle. It was only on Meteora that he understood its meaning. Someone had Satanized that flag, but its essence was sacred, sanctifying, unifying. Someone set it up in Hell, and it flutters down there, like in Dante, in the Father's Catacombs. Someone printed over it, on that Flag, the *terrible stamp of the Chetniks*, as if it were some zealous, "patriotic" defence of "Orthodoxy", but that flag, in its history, fluttering towards the Heavens, however far it was Dantean, martial, was in fact, in relation to the Church, unifying.

He took his calendar from his bag and with a shock realized that that day, when the sun broke through on Athos, was the day of Our Lady of Fatima.

The miracle of the Sun in Fatima. The Sun, that is I, your Heavenly Father, and I am not an old man, but eternal youth, eternal energy of the civilization of the Light, which scatters all plots, ambiguities, cunning – Hell. I am coming. Fatima, that is the highway to – Me, to Triumph. To great joy. After you have sunk into the River Lethe and forgotten the culture which killed you, to destroy you, there comes my Civilizations, as a process, like the *Light of Hesychasm*.

In the calendar Dimitrije noticed that a few days before, on St. Christopher's Day, it had also been St. Pachomius Day.

He looked for a bird in the sky, and from his heart he sang:

*“When you see two eagles flying
One to the East, one to the West
In a wide arch
Above the bleak, high cliffs
On which Christians find refuge
When there is no more faith on earth
Know that the Temple and the worshippers in it
Are numbered
Like Christopher, look into the face of the Child
And say to him: “Go, the new heaven
And the new earth will show you their face
In the morning
Nothing will be as it was
The face of man, deified
Will await you with the kind expression of a mother.
Do not turn back.”*

