

Emanuele Franz

YOU ARE ONE

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YOU ARE ONE

Diary of a pilgrim
converted to Orthodoxy,
through Mount Athos, Sinai
and Samarkand
for the Christian Unity



PROMETEJ
Novi Sad

**The Man in Search of the
Father's House
Edited by
Father Dušan Djukanović**

Every human being with a certain maturity and ability has a need to explore, both the place where he lives and the spiritual worlds. In human nature there is a desire to find absolute realities: Good, Truth, Peace, Hospitality, Love. In the material world, per se, these realities do not exist and it is not possible to achieve these goals. Man possesses reasoning and intuition (spiritual sense) as means to attain the absolute goals, so that man comes to the conclusion that one must go beyond to continue his mission of seeking. Slowly, walking on the spiritual paths, he recognizes a very subtle voice and a guide who asks for our consent and our interaction and above all our faith. The human heritage stands in different spiritual schools that explain the absolute realities and, with our possibilities and our whole being, we accept what our inner part, the deepest and most subtle one, confirms.

Once we have discovered the “thread of love” in our hands and hearts, everything else becomes very easy. We have found the hidden path that takes us to the Father's House. It is a relationship founded on Freedom and Love, with an active and trusting collaboration.

The author *Emanuele – Uroš*¹ in the manner of the ancient pilgrims – follows visible and invisible ways to find the Truth and Love. Being Christians, we know that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, presented himself to us as Man and God and showed us true Love, Truth and everything we are speaking about. Emanuel – Uroš, as an authentic Christian, recognizes the sharpest pain in the division of Christ's churches. The only way to restore the lost union is to return to the teaching of our Lord and subsequently of the very Holy Apostles and their disciples.

Everything that has been added over the centuries as a product of human will needs to be re-evaluated and clarified according to the values of the Holy Fathers and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is precisely what the author proposes as the only way for reconciliation between the churches of Christ to have the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. A necessary book for today's man.

Father Dušan Djukanović

¹ Uroš is his middle name received in the Orthodox rite of baptism, it means "little lord" and all medieval Serbian kings wore it: úr (in Serbian: "man", "lord") with the addition of a diminutive suffix.

Ur in German means original, ancient, first, and derives from Proto-Indo-European.

Ur in Chaldean means fire, hence also gold and light. In the Aymara language of the South American peoples, Uros means "clear day".

My approaching to the Ortodox church

On March 11th, 2022, for the first time in my life, I attended a liturgy of the Orthodox Church during my stay in Serbia, where I was for some conferences regarding my philosophical thought and a book of mine about the European crisis translated into Serbian.

I was actually going through a period of profound inner transformation, finding myself hundreds of kilometers from my home, away from friends, family, loved ones, and everything familiar to me.

So it happened that one morning, walking through the streets of Novi Sad, in Serbia precisely, in the Vojvodina region, almost by chance I entered an Orthodox Church attracted by the melody that came out and by the smell of incense.

I witnessed the entire ceremony and I was so impressed that I was moved by it. The believers with their eyes closed swoon as they pray, they kiss the faces of the Saints with the same passion with which they would kiss Jesus himself. But not only that, Communion consists of a sip of wine mixed with bread soaked in a single large chalice from which the priest takes a cup and then pours it directly into the mouth of the devotees leaning before him and, in turn, everyone sucks the bread and the wine from a single chalice with a single cup from mouth to mouth. Thus, a single body is formed and all are members of a single mystical body which is that of Christ.

In the same period, Catholics in Europe, due to the health crisis, live with masks and social distancing, priests have “amuchina” (a concentrated disinfectant solution) on the altar and the peace sign has been abolished due to anti-Covid regulations, while in Serbia the Orthodox all drink from the same cup, they all breathe the same air of incense, they drink the same wine. They fear nothing because God Almighty protects them. I also witnessed an episode that almost made me cry: the Priest distributed a piece of dry bread to the believers, a girl's bread fell on the ground, she prostrated, picked the bread up from the ground, kissed it and put it in her mouth, humbling herself in front of everyone.

The levels of Saint Veronica Giuliani in the heart.

I love the Truth and Power of this Church. Who should you believe?

To a Western Church that is now weak and powerless to face a crisis of values, which requires presenting oneself to God with a mask on one's face or to a Church that teaches not to be afraid in front of God? I then presented myself to the priest and spoke to him in Serbian.

I told him that my name is Emanuele and he shook my hand and was moved. It was an intense moment. Here is the truth.

At that moment, for the first time, in my heart arose a desire to get ever closer to Orthodoxy.

In truth, my journey of faith had been lasting a lifetime, through research, pilgrimages, studies and interior meditations throughout my life.

Years earlier, while I was writing an essay in which I theorized history as a living organism and visualized Christianity as the very blood of this organism, I had to resolve the intricate and millennial relationship between Idea and reality, between body and Spirit. I still remember dreaming of a priest who showed me a key and a door that opened, telling me some things that took me many months to decipher. This priest was dressed in strange and never seen clothes for me, not like a Catholic priest. Only when finding myself in Serbia did I recognize that it was the typical clothing of an Orthodox bishop. And this orthodox priest, who was a saint, I didn't know who he was, but years later I understood that he must have been orthodox. In a dream, he told me truths about the nature of the Spirit. Evidently, from the east, the path was calling me as a Destiny.

A few days later, I went to the Wednesday Orthodox mass, more intimate, being midweek, even more insightful. There were some women, indeed, apart from two or three men, it can be said that there were only women.

The whole environment sends you into a sort of *trance*: the light that enters through the inlaid grates of sacred mosaics, the image of the priest undulating by

the fumes of incense and those uninterrupted songs that send you to another dimension, women who go into ecstasy with their eyes closed, crying, begging God's forgiveness. Well, I witness another scene that has entered my heart: in a penitential moment during the ceremony, some women, instead of a simple bow to the altar, knelt down and laid their foreheads on the floor. Particularly one of those, who even seemed to me to be moaning, kissed the ground several times. I didn't even believe to my eyes, yet I saw her lips kiss the floor. A real ecstasy and an impressive devotion that made me perceive the abysmal gap between the formality and sometimes the coldness of certain Catholic ceremonies.

A few days later I discovered that, in the Orthodox tradition, that Sunday was the so called Sunday of Forgiveness, that is, we ask for forgiveness from everyone regardless of whether they have done something wrong or not, and even and above all if we are wrong, we ask for forgiveness as reconciliation with others.

What a power the Orthodox Church is!

To ask for forgiveness from those who have insulted, offended, mocked, ignored us, means separating ourselves from ourselves.

Just as the seeker of gold separates the noble metal from the mud, so forgiveness, which involves contri-

tion, humiliation and nudity, separates the transient part of ourselves from the immortal side. Forgiving is undressing, abandoning oneself.

Absolute forgiveness is acceptance, forgiveness is love, and love is forgiveness.

Cassandra was humiliated, in fact the God Apollo, God of Light, spat in her mouth. Through this gesture the God infused her with clairvoyance or the ability to see the Truth. After being humiliated, after God spat in her mouth, Cassandra saw the Truth, but no one believed her.

The observations we can make are these: through humiliation, she came to divine knowledge. While Cassandra spoke the truth in the squares, everyone laughed at her and no one believed her which is even further humiliation for those who see the truth.

Now, reflect on the word “credibility”, who is credible? What is applauded by the crowd?

You can arouse ovations and approval by lies and derision in front of truth, like Cassandra.

Being “credible” means nothing, what does losing credibility in front of people means, when the only witness to answer to is God himself?

These thoughts flooded me as I attended the Orthodox ceremonies in Serbia assiduously, almost daily.

On 31st March I met the bishop of the Orthodox Church, Irinej Bulović, a meeting of enormous impor-

tance that will remain forever in my heart. He, a man of God with great sensitivity, also had the concern to say a few words to me in Italian. I bent down and told him that I was honored to know him and that everything is in God's hands.

At that very moment, for the first time, the thought of baptism occurred in my mind and I told him that I wanted to be baptized, because during the pandemic the Catholic churches were closed, while the Orthodox ones were open like the hearts of the Serbs. He was very moved. A memorable meeting.

Moreover, in the following period, during my now assiduous attendance at religious ceremonies, I did not fail in my proposal to "knock" on the Lord's door. In fact, I asked some believers and also priests how I could be baptized, because this desire was getting stronger and stronger in me. But it seemed like it was not that easy.

One day, while I was at mass, I timidly decided to approach the priest in an attempt to receive Communion. But he, immediately recognizing in my heart that I was not Orthodox, affectionately told me that I could not take part in the sacrament of the Eucharist. My stay in a foreign land was therefore such that I was barred from God's table unless I was first baptized.

Rightly the Orthodox priests wanted to test my Calling and I continued to knock not for weeks, but for

whole months without failing in my purpose. Indeed, I was so sincerely determined to devote myself to God, that right there in Serbia I heard a voice in my heart telling me to go to Mount Athos, the Sacred Mountain.

On April 6th, I had an overwhelming vision that took me out of my consciousness.

By dint of meditating on the nature of Being and on God's Design, I had such a devastating vision that I got really impressed: I went so far this time as finding myself in such an anguish that I had to throw a light in my face and spend several long minutes trying to go back to myself. Yet I prayed the good Lord to let me return to earth, because I could not bear that experience for a long time. To realize that I was awake I even had to bite my finger, to get back to earth.

It all started while, during the night, I was managing a reflection on the lucidity of conscience, I practiced eliminating any object proper to conscience as far as it had no object, but only itself. Well, at the height of this experience I saw the universe around me empty, emptied of everything, it was an all-nothing. Here in that moment the supreme peak of self-awareness was able to say: "I am here, not there", and while saying so, in an instant, I perceived the supreme peak of a luminescence and in the following instant the extreme lie of this luminescence.

This border, this line, I have crossed it. In fact, I also said to myself: “-I am here-, but what does “I am” mean? I go beyond -am- I am above being, my consciousness is not being, because being is also an object and I don’t want objects, but pure consciousness”.

That’s when, visualizing myself as a point located in space, the “I’m here” appeared to me throughout its heaviness, gravity and illusion too.

The -here- was the antithesis of what I was looking for, and what I wanted to achieve. I had to cross the line, therefore no longer a point, but several points, as many as the grains on the banks of the Ganges, and a cloud of conscience, finally, a non-localized cloud I penetrated.

I wasn’t in one spot, I couldn’t tell -I’m here- but not even -I’m there-, I was such a sort of extra-consciousness that I wasn’t even consciousness anymore.

I can define it as a *no-consciousness*, and in any case, it is a dimension of the psyche so beyond human custom as to be impossible to conceive, it is not human. As there are non-ordinary states besides gaseous, liquid and solid as far as matter is concerned, so no-consciousness *is* not consciousness, it is not unawareness, it is not trembling, it is not delirium, it is not sleep or imagelessness, it is rather a kind of perception of the non-localized self, impossible to say otherwise. I just know that I prayed a lot to come back to my senses, because I would have gone crazy to look beyond that.

Then I said to myself, why are we here? What are we doing here, on this side of the line, if everything is there, beyond the line, in *ignorance*?



The arrival in Serbia, in Novi Sad
and the meeting with the Orthodox world

Mount Athos: on the sacred mountain

My experience on Mount Athos starts from the experience I had with the Serbian Orthodox Church after my stay in that land. There, in the Vojvodina region, in the areas of ancient Roman Pannonia, I participated for the first time in my life in the ceremonies of the Orthodox church, for which I was amazed so much.

The gap between Western Catholicism and Serbian Orthodoxy is such as to make me believe that the former is something analogous to a historical reenactment while the latter is an actual evocation. While Catholicism emulates something distant, like the design of something, Orthodoxy is that original something.

This is seen very clearly by the devotion and self-abandonment typical of the Serbian Orthodox faithful people. I have seen with my own eyes the faithful people in the Serbian Orthodox churches weeping, moaning as they threw themselves on the ground in front of the altar, with the same prostration before the Saints and such veneration and adoration as to be an abyss compared to the simulacrum which has now become the Western religious world, papier-mâché with no more substance, carcass without meat, corpse with no more identity and values.

This springing relationship with a living reality, that of a living God, which the Serbian Orthodox Church

puts into being, exuded in my heart such a desire to immerse myself in the liturgy that I was even willing to cross seas and mountains to reach the very heart of the orthodoxy, I'm talking about Mount Athos.

Autonomous and independent theocratic republic, although formally headed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, it is an absolutely independent territory in the Chalkidiki peninsula in Greece, so much so that it is a school and model for all orthodoxy.

It is a peninsula with almost 2000 monks spread over 20 monasteries. Practically an immense open-air temple.

Subjected to very strict rules of discipline: absence of internet, obligation to dress appropriately, no clubs, bars, no roads, if not rough mule tracks, no women, for thousands of years, not even female animals, frugal meals, obligation for the pilgrim to participate in all religious services, practically all day, no photographs, no drinks between meals, and so on.

Moreover, there is no tourism, it is not supposed that one goes to Mount Athos "for a tour". The pilgrim must have a special permit from the monastery that invites him, and this permit is granted, if it is granted, only after evaluating the candidacy of the faithful with his reasons attached. So, deeply touched in my heart and determined to reach the sacred land by paying any sacrifice, I wrote a long and heartfelt letter to the Hilandar Monastery of the Serbian Orthodox Church

on the Holy Mountain. To my immense surprise, the answer was given just a few days later, and here I was granted special permission to spend one night, two days during Holy Week, before the Orthodox Easter. Such a joy gave me a heartbeat.

The Holy Mountain, in Greek Αγίου Όρους (Agíou Órous) has been sacred long before the Orthodox. Indeed, Mount Athos has been sacred since we heard of it. The name itself, Athos, indicates a giant who, in the gigantomachy, threw a boulder against the Gods and it stuck into the sea thus becoming Mount Athos.

Homer talks about it, in the *Iliad*, almost in 800 BC, when he writes that Hera, the consort of Zeus, passed over it.

“Hera instead left the summit of Olympus with a leap and flying over Pieria and the amiable Hematia rushed towards the snowy mountains of the horse-breeding Thracians, with their high peaks, without touching the ground with their feet; then from Athos he headed towards the wavy sea.”

Homer, *Iliad*, XIV, 225-229

Moreover, the poet *Hesiod*, in the tragedy of Agamemnon, makes Mount Athos the seat of Zeus, and we are about the year 458 BC.

“He sent another signal up to now, through the messenger fire: Fida towards the Hermean Rock of the island of Lemnos, and from the island thirdly the great flame welcomed the peak of Athos which belongs to Zeus.”

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 284

And again, the sacred mountain was encountered by Jason and the Argonauts in their enterprise to reach the Golden Fleece, as Apollonius of Rhodes recounts in the third century BC.

“While Jason, weeping, took his eyes off his land, they skirted Melibea and Omole and at the following dawn, Mount Athos rose before their eyes.”

Apollonio Rodio, *Argonautica*, 5, I chant

Mount Athos has therefore been sacred since the dawn of time and men have always perceived the presence of the divine on those lands. The call in my heart to go there was so strong that it prompted me to leave. That was the reason why I organized myself to arrive at the monks of Hilandar on Holy Tuesday, April 19th, 2022. I left Belgrade the day before, on the 18th, for Thessaloniki, the Macedonian city founded in honor of Alexander the Great's half-sister. From there I would have moved by bus to northern Greece towards the Chalkidiki peninsula to Ierissos.

In Ierissos, due to bad weather in the morning, I couldn't leave with the small fast ship that was supposed to take me to the shores of the sacred mountain and so I had to move, in the same morning, to Uranopolis, and from there deal with the bureaucratic formalities for departure. In fact, at the port of Uranopolis, the last outpost before entering the mountain, there is the customs and a police checkpoint. Well yes, since you are about to enter an independent Republic, going there consists of crossing a border. So, I had to provide the permission I had, otherwise they wouldn't print me the special visa for entry, the *Diamonitirion*.

After an abundant waiting hour on the ship, I set foot on the sacred land, and the first thing I did, having set foot on Mount Athos, was to kneel down and kiss that eternal soil, bursting into tears.

Immediately afterwards, an off-road van loads a few pilgrims who were on the coast and begins a journey along rough paths, no roads, only white mule tracks, without human structures. Almost an hour's journey in the forest in which one could only see an infinite green without any humans but just wild nature and then, as if by magic, a castle appears, the one of Hilandar. I was living a fairy tale, an out of this world experience, it really feels like going back a thousand years. A place suspended in space-time, where the flow of events, as well as the sun and the seasons, is marked by liturgical schedules.