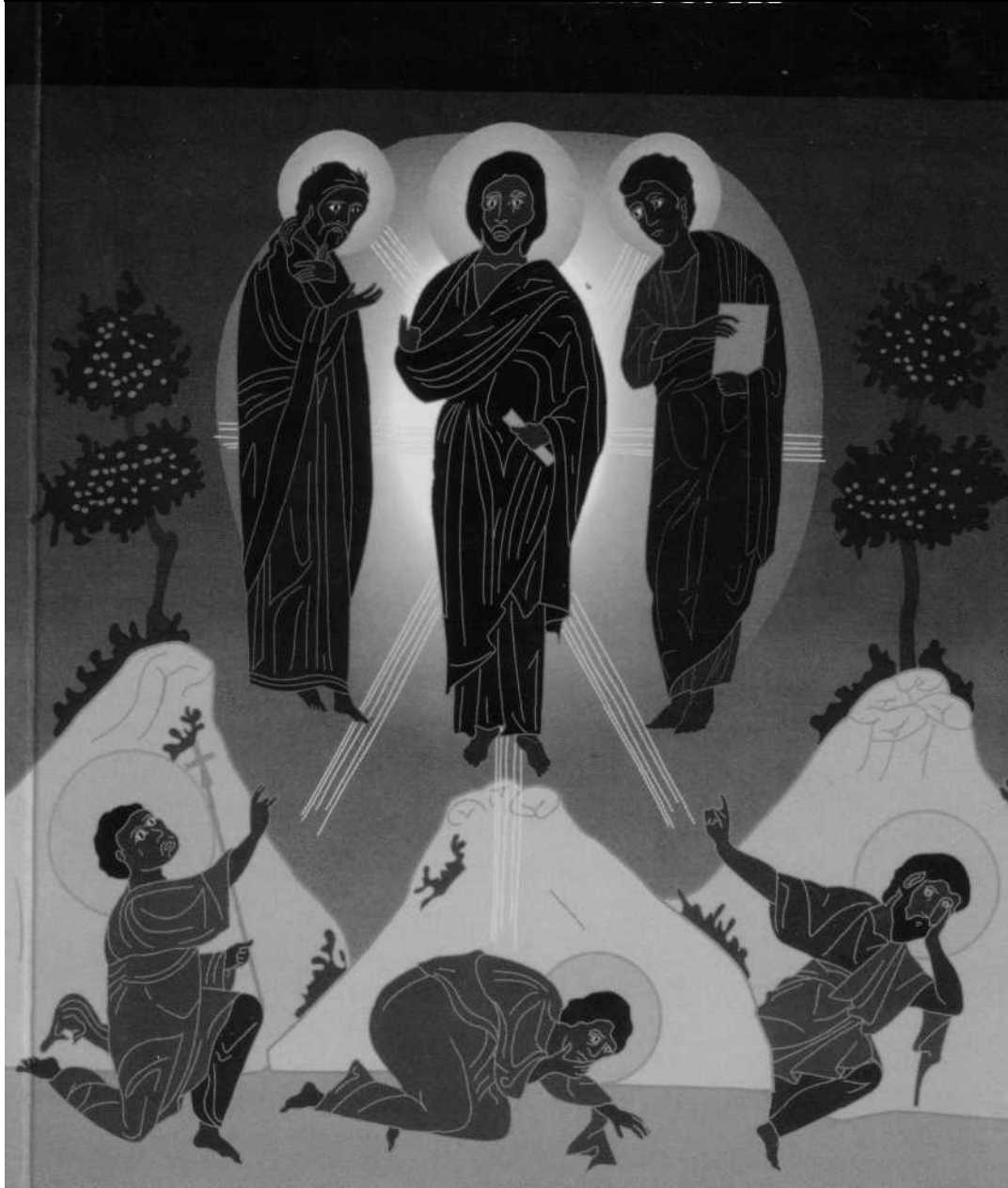

BORIS MOURAVIEFF

GNOSIS

**STUDY AND COMMENTARIES ON THE
ESOTERIC TRADITION OF EASTERN ORTHODOXY
BOOK ONE • EXOTERIC CYCLE**



BORIS MOURAVIEFF AND GNOSIS

Boris Mouravieff was an enigmatic 'third man', known to Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, who found and learned to practise what he clearly believed to be the complete system of which only 'fragments' had been previously published in Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*. On this basis, he formed the 'Centre d'Études chrétiennes ésotériques' in Geneva — now closed. Many of his discoveries are described in his book *Gnôsis*, which contains in its three volumes the fundamental components of that Christian esoteric teaching revealed by Ouspensky in fragmentary form. This Gnosis is not a modern statement of the second century texts known as 'Gnosticism', but a previously unpublished ancient Christian knowledge tradition. Boris Mouravieff taught Eastern Esotericism at Geneva University for many years, and *Gnôsis* is the result of his teaching.

First published in French in 1961, the three volumes of Mouravieff's *Gnôsis* have since been translated into Greek, and an Arabic text is in preparation. Now — after seven years of work — the translation of the first volume into English is available, Volume II is already translated and will be published in two years, and work has finally begun on Volume III.

Translated from the French by S. A. Wissa.

English text edited and revised by Robin Amis.

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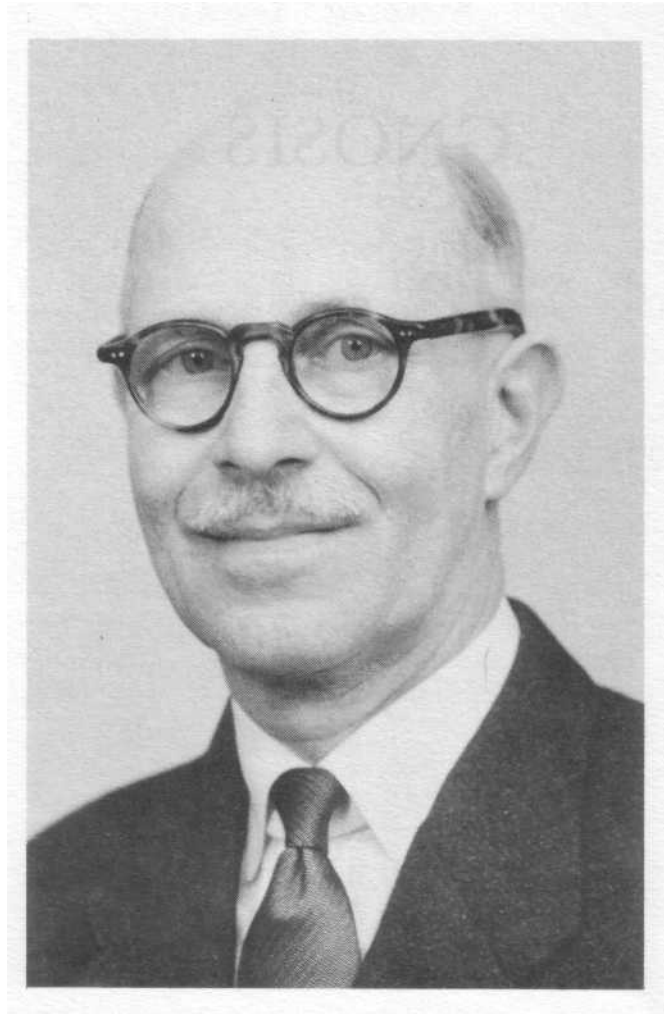


GNOSIS

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Boris Mouravieff

Boris Mouravieff

GNOSIS

BOOK ONE

The Exoteric Cycle

STUDY AND COMMENTARIES
ON THE ESOTERIC TRADITION
OF EASTERN ORTHODOXY

*Translated by S. A. Wissa,
edited by Robin Amis.*

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'This is wisdom which we preach among the perfect, yet not the wisdom of this age nor of the leaders of this age, which will become nothing. We preach the wisdom of God, mysterious and hidden, which was foreordained by God before all ages for our glory, a wisdom that none of the leaders of this age have ever known.'

(I Corinthians ii: 6-8.)

1. In the original: *nor the Archons of this aeon. Novum Testamentum graece et latine. Textum graecum recensuit, latinum ex Vulgata. Tertio editio critica recognita. Published by Frederic Brandscheid, Fribourg, 1907, Vol. II, p. 258.*

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I thank God for the inspiration bestowed upon me in carrying out some of the very difficult parts of this translation

S. A. Wissa

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*THE LANGUAGE OF GNOSIS:
FOREWORD BY THE TRANSLATOR*

When translators have translated complex and elaborate literary or philosophical works into other languages, they often make excuses for not giving their readers the original with all its shades of meaning, its subtleties and intonations. The translators of scientific works never do this, as they are certain they have been able to translate the complete content. But although Gnosis is a work of esoteric philosophy — with all the shades of meaning that this implies — its author, Boris Mouravieff, has insisted on its scientific precision and on the rigorous scientific method which has been followed throughout. He says in the twentieth chapter of the second volume, Gnosis II:¹ *'Just like positive science, this Gnosis is systematic; it is the same as the other knowledge in its systematic arrangement of the Cosmos, in its ensemble as well as in its smallest parts.'*

Gnosis describes the Cosmos and man with equal precision. Wherever both consider the same subject, its method is systematized in exactly the same way as in positive science. Because of this precision, I have sometimes found it necessary to translate the French text word for word, sacrificing elegance in favour of precision.

The three volumes of Gnosis, like the scriptures, are built on the principle that no special terminology is used — just as the gospels were written in Greek and not in Hebrew, which was the ancient sacred language. At the same time, some of the words used have been given very precise meanings which remain the same throughout the book. The only exceptions to this consistency, says the author, are in old translations made by enlightened men.

These special terms are sometimes explained by notes. I have not hesitated to employ words now little used in the English language, but which prove exactly suitable, such as the word 'ensemble' —which means exactly the same in both languages, and 'notion', which once meant the same in French and English but which is now much less used in English, and often in more narrow ways. Here it is used in its original breadth of meaning.

Two other words should also be brought to the notice of the reader. These are 'gamme', translated by 'gamut', and 'echelle', translated by the word 'scale'.

The author has stipulated that the use of simple terms does not exclude a rigorous precision of meaning. (Chapter II, p. 12) This is particularly true concerning certain important French words: '*savoir*' and '*connaitre*', which

1. P. 262 of the French text.

are more or less indiscriminately translated by the English term 'to know', but which have very different meanings in French. If the reader refers to the sixth paragraph of the first chapter he would read: '...knowledge leads us towards power.' 'Knowledge' here is the translation of the French word '*connaissance*', which derives from the verb '*connaître*'. If we turn to the third paragraph of the second chapter we would see that: 'one can know without understanding, while the reverse is not true' and also that: 'to understand is to know with something imponderable added to it'. Here again, 'to know' translates the French verb '*savoir*'.

We deduce from these two facts that since Knowledge (*connaissance*, not *savoir*;) leads us towards Power, and since knowledge (*savoir*) is nothing but a preliminary step towards understanding, *savoir* is a kind of inferior knowledge which, though indispensable, neither leads to Power, nor is in itself Understanding. Considerations like this have shaped the translation of this book, sometimes involving a choice between accuracy and elegance. These often difficult choices are summarized in the translation notes that follow.

Translation Notes

As the Translator's introduction says, because of the specialized nature and precise terminology of the French original, we have found considerable difficulty in translating certain French words, particularly where modern English uses one word for meanings clearly differentiated by different terms in the French. The most important examples are summarized below, and sometimes also indicated by footnotes to the text:

Niveau / Niveaux: Levels in the psychological or anthropological sense: 'Abaissement de niveau mental'.

Translated: Level-Levels.

Conflicts with:

Echelle / Echelon —

Echelle: ladder used in a sense of stepladder or sometimes in a different sense as a graduated scale.

Translated: Scale.

Echelon: rung, used in the sense of level (that is static, i.e. it is already there), rung, step—of a stair: one level above another; rank in a hierarchy.

Translated: Step.

This in turn conflicts with and must be differentiated from:

Gamme, in the sense of musical scale of several different but related notes. Translated by gamut — a forgotten English word for a 'musical scale', which is rare but technically correct, if not previously used quite in

the way in which *gamme* was used by the author. The use of this word *gamut* actually originated in French with Guido d'Arezzo (Klein's Etymological Dict, says '*Gamut, n., range of musical sounds from gamma (the lowest) to ut (the highest) — Coined by Guido d'Arezzo. Fr.*') This word also has more than one meaning in the book, and refers in general to a sequence of events developing according to a musical scale.
Translated: *gamut*.

Octave: octave as a complete musical scale from Do to Do.

Translated: *octave*.

Plan: The French word 'plan' is used in what appears in English in two ways, one equivalent to the English term 'plane', the other in the everyday English sense in which an action is preceded by a plan, or as in the Fr. phrase, 'le plan de la creation'. This fortunate double meaning in French does not translate well in English.

Translated: *plan* OR *plane* as appropriate.

Words for road, path or track, intentionally differentiated by the author.

Voie: translated way,

Chemin: translated path,

Sentier: translated track.

Words for knowledge and understanding.

Savoir and related words describe knowledge that is 'outside ourselves', information that we may or may not understand.

Translation: knowledge, to know.

Connaissance and related words refer to knowledge which we contain ... the knowing of that which is outside us by that which is within.

Translated: Knowledge, to Know.

These two forms of knowledge are often distinguished in the text by footnote reference to the French.

Comprendre is understanding. This is within us and is limited by our capacity.

Translated: to understand, understanding.

Savoir-faire is knowledge we can successfully put into practice.

Translated: *savoir faire*.

Older English words brought back into use.

The author distinguishes in French between: *idee* and *notion*, often using 'notion' where normal loose use of English would use 'idea'.

We are doing the same in English.

Translated: *idea* and *notion*.

He uses the word '*ensemble*', (as in '*tout ensemble*'), to describe a loose mixture or combination of different components, often in contexts in which looser use of English would use the word 'whole'. To be precise we have translated this by 'ensemble', correct but now rarely used in English.

Translated: ensemble.

He distinguishes this from various derivatives of the word '*integral*', which translates loosely into the English words 'whole' or 'complete'. In this text these words are used by the author to achieve greater precision, and his meaning has direct links to the mathematical idea of integration.

Translated: DERIVATIVES OF integrate.

Constation: French words that exist in English, but are very little used: A group of words including '*constate*' and '*constatation*', which are used here with very precise meaning.

Translated: 'constate', 'constated' and 'constatation'.

Psychique: The French word '*psychique*' is translated throughout the book as 'mental', used in the same sense that Descartes distinguished mind from body, so that mind and mental refer to the ensemble of intellectual, emotional and instinctive processes. It is used in this way to avoid the occult connotations now attached to the English word 'psychic' — this usage is marked by footnotes. Where the word 'mental' is used without a footnote it directly translates the French 'mental'.

Translated: mental; '*centres psychique*' translated as 'mental centres'.

Because of their importance, certain of these translations will also be referred to by footnotes.

A number of more general footnotes have been added by the translator and editor. These are marked 'Tr.' and 'Ed.' respectively.

Sadek Alfred Wissa, December 1989

FOREWORD

People interested in esoteric matters will probably have read the book by P.D. Ouspensky, published posthumously by his next of kin, titled *Fragments of an Unknown teaching*.¹ The ideas found in that book were gathered by the author from 'G'.² 'G' indicates in that text what is the basis of his teaching: 'for the benefit of those who know already, I will say that, if you like, *this is esoteric Christianity?*'

It is curious in these conditions that the title speaks of an unknown teaching. The Christian Esoteric Tradition has always remained alive within certain monasteries in Greece, Russia, and elsewhere, and if it is true that this knowledge was hermetically hidden, yet its existence was known and access to it was never forbidden to those seriously interested in these questions.

If some passages of the book give the impression, in certain respects, of a syncretic gathering from different traditional teachings,⁴ I have no doubt that — in their essentials — the system disclosed by the fragments that form Ouspensky's work originates from revelations issued by that *Great esoteric Brotherhood* to which the Apostle St Paul alluded in his Epistle to the Romans.⁵ These fragments are therefore drawn from a genuine source. Yet — as correctly indicated by the title — Ouspensky's book contains only fragments of a tradition which, until recently, was only transmitted orally. And only a study of the complete⁶ tradition can give access to the Revelation.

My own relations with Ouspensky, who I knew well, were described in an article of the review *Syntheses*. I must reaffirm here that although Ouspensky had a spirited desire to publish his book during his lifetime, he always hesitated to do so. I myself had stressed strongly the danger of fragmentary disclosure, and uncertainties in the exposition of certain essential points. The fact that *Fragments* was only published after the death of the author, more than twenty years after it was written, supports these assertions.

1. *Fragments d'un enseignement inconnu*, Paris, Stock, 1950. (*In Search of the Miraculous: fragments of an unknown teaching*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1950.)

2. *Fragments*, p. 6. Footnotes have been amended to refer to the English version of *Fragments*. The original references to the French text have been retained thus: [p. 22].

3. *Ibid.*, p. 102 [p. 154] Italicized in the original text.

4. *Ibid.*, particularly p. 15 [p. 35].

5. Romans viii: 28-30.

6. Fr. 'ensemble'.

7. Woluwe-Saint-Lambert, Brussels, Editions Syntheses, issue 144 — November 1957.

The study presented here is directly drawn from the Eastern Christian Tradition: the sacred texts, the commentaries written around these texts, and especially from the *Philokalia* which is, above all, the same teaching and discipline, transmitted by fully authorized individuals. We will find certain similarities between the contents of this study and Ouspensky's book, since the sources are in part the same, but attentive examination and comparison will, above all, show the incomplete character of that book—its deviations from the doctrine. We all know the importance of diagrams in the Esoteric Tradition. They have been introduced to allow the transmission of this knowledge through the centuries in spite of the death of civilizations. Errors on the background of a particularly important diagram were exposed in the previously mentioned article in *Syntheses*. What else should we say of the place given to man in the diagram called 'Diagram of Everything living'?⁹ After several considerations aiming to show the 'nullity' of the man who has not esoterically evolved — the very small place which is his in the Universe — in that artificially complicated diagram he has been placed at the level of the Angels and Archangels. This means he has been shown in the Kingdom of God — represented by the superior inverted 'L'—even though Christ categorically affirmed that entry into the Kingdom of God is closed to those who have not been *born anew*. This second Birth is the object and goal of esoteric work. According to the New Testament,¹¹ the place of *exterior* man, man who has not, so far, produced fruit; whose latent faculties are yet to be developed, is in fact found in that diagram between the two inverted 'L's', where he forms the link between visible and invisible worlds.

There is something else graver still: the concept of the *mechanical-man* has as a consequence his irresponsibility.¹ This is in direct contradiction to the doctrine of sin, repentance and salvation which form the basis of the teaching of Christ.

The greatest genuine faith, human intelligence, and goodwill, are not sufficient to prevent errors and deviations in everything that touches the domain of Revelation but is not totally inspired by it. The errors and deviations of *Fragments* attest to the fact that the book was not written at the orders of, and under the control of, the *Great esoteric Brotherhood*. This means that the facts on which the book was based have a fragmen-

8. *Fragments* p. 204 [p. 289].

9. *Ibid.*, p. 323 [p. 451].

10. John iii: 3, ff.

11. Markiv: 11.

12. *Fragments* p. 19 [p. 41].

tary character. In the esoteric realm, all fragmentary knowledge is a source of danger. The works of ancient writers, such as St Ireneus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote about the heresies of the first centuries of our era, confirm this. We learn, for example, that certain gnostic schools, seeing the imperfection of the created world, and without searching for the reason for the existence of these imperfections, have, by a shortcut of thought, jumped to conclusions such as the feebleness of the Creator, His incompetence, or even His evil nature. Thus the incomplete is the true source of all heresies. Only what the Tradition calls the *Pleroma*, which means *Plenitude*, including *Gnosis* in its totality, offers a guarantee against all such deviations.

13. Ephesians iii: 18-19; *Didache*, *passim*; St Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, *passim*, etc.

PREFACE

Esoteric studies help us to make sense of the evolution of man and of human society. This explains the increasing interest these studies have aroused in cultivated circles. Yet, paradoxically, many Europeans who feel drawn to these researches turn their eyes towards the non-Christian Traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism and others. It would certainly be exciting to compare esoteric thinking in these different systems, because the Tradition is One, and whoever delves deeply into these studies will not fail to be struck by this essential unity. Yet to those who desire to go beyond pure speculation, the problem appears in a different light. This unique Tradition has been and still is now being presented in multiple forms, each meticulously adapted to the mentality and spirit of the human group to which its Word is addressed, and to the mission with which this group has been charged. For the Christian world, the easiest way; the least difficult way to reach the goal, is to follow the esoteric Doctrine which forms the basis of the Christian Tradition. Actually, the thought of a man who has been born and formed at the heart of our civilization, be he Christian or not, believer or atheist, is impregnated with twenty centuries of Christian culture. It is incomparably easier for him to begin his studies starting from this environment, rather than to adapt to the spirit of an environment different from his own. Transplantation is not without danger, and generally gives hybrid products.

We might add this: that all the great religions which have issued from the one Tradition are messages of truth — *otkrovenie istiny* — yet each of them addresses itself only to a part of humanity. Christianity alone has firmly announced its oecumenical character right from the start. Jesus said *'and the Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony unto all nations.'*¹ The power of the prophecy of the Word, as expressed in this phrase, cries out after twenty centuries: the Good News, first taught to a restricted group of disciples, has since been effectively spread over all the earth. This prodigious expansion is due to the fact that the Christian Doctrine, in its perfect expression, aims at a general resurrection, while other doctrines, even though they belong to the Truth, essentially aim at individual salvation and are therefore only partial revelations of the Tradition.

Thus this teaching is fundamentally Christian.

The Christian esoteric Tradition is based on the Canon, the Rites, on Menology, and lastly on the Doctrine. The latter is an ensemble of rules,

1, Matthew xxiv: 14.

treatises and commentaries given by the doctors of the (Ecumenical Church). These texts were in large part assembled in a collection called the *Philokalia*.² In addition to these *sources*, there are isolated writings by other ancient and modern authors, religious and secular.

Most of the writings of the *Philokalia* were intended for people who had already acquired a certain esoteric culture. One can say the same for certain aspects and texts of the Canon, including the Gospels. It must also be noted that, being addressed to all, these texts cannot take account of the abilities of each person. This is why Bishop Theophan the Recluse, in his preface to the *Philokalia*, insists on the fact that without help *nobody*³ can succeed in penetrating the Doctrine. This is also why, together with written sources, esoteric science conserves and cultivates an oral Tradition which brings the Letter to life. Oriental Orthodoxy has known how to keep this Tradition intact by applying the absolute rule of Hermetism in each particular case. From generation to generation, ever since the time of the Apostles, it has led its disciples up to mystic experience.

If hermetism has provided a safeguard for nearly twenty centuries, it must be said that circumstances have now changed. At the current point in history, as at the time of the Coming of Christ, the veil has been partially raised. Therefore, for those who want to advance beyond book knowledge, which never goes beyond the domain of information; for those who intensely seek the true sense of life, who want to understand the significance of the mission of the Christian in the New Era, the possibility will exist of initiation into this divine Wisdom, *mysterious and hidden?*

We have turned to the Slavonic text of the scriptures each time the meaning given by other versions appeared to present certain obscurities. This is for two reasons. The first is that the translation into this language was made in an era still rich in sacred exegeses, where the spirit of the texts remained close to their original meaning. The second is the fixed nature of the language: the Slavonic languages, Russian in particular, remain very close to the old Slavonic language, the language which is still in use in the divine services of the Orthodox religion in the Slav countries.

2. The Russian edition was issued in 5 quarto volumes, published under the supervision of Bishop Theophan the Recluse by the Saint Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos.

3. Underlined in the original.

4. Fr. 'constater'.

5. I Corinthians ii: 6-8

As for the antiquity of the Slavonic text, one can say this: it is generally attributed to Constantine the Philosopher, better known under the name of St Cyril, and to his brother St Methodius, both learned Greeks from Salonika who knew the Slavonic language perfectly. So, arriving in Chersonese of Tauric, St Cyril found in the ninth century that the Gospels were already written in this language. It is, therefore, infinitely probable that they were written in a period when the forms remained alive — as stated by the Apostle St Andrew, who taught Christianity in Russia in the first century of our Era.⁶

The fixity of the language is an equally important element if one wants to go back to the original sense of a given text: it is known that the fixed nature of the Coptic language allowed Champollion, starting from the liturgic formulae of this language, to establish the equivalence between Coptic writings and Egyptian hieroglyphics. The old Slavonic language has remained alive and has undergone few modifications to the original: the ritual formulas in particular are strong evidence of this fact. That is why the Slavonic text of the New Testament, as well as writings of ancient authors translated into that language, have particular importance for the seeker today.

6. The Slavonic text is also frequently quoted in the following works: *Unseen Warfare*, translated into English by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., *Early Fathers from the Philokalia* and *Writings from the Philokalia* — same translators and publisher.

INTRODUCTION

Homo Sapiens lives immersed in his everyday life to a point where he forgets himself and forgets where he is going; yet, without feeling it, he knows that death cuts off everything.

How can we explain that the intellectual who has made marvellous discoveries and the technocrat who has exploited them have left outside the field of their investigations the ending of our lives? How can we explain that a science which attempts everything and claims everything nevertheless remains indifferent to the enigma revealed by the question of death? How can we explain why Science, instead of uniting its efforts with its older sister Religion to resolve the problem of Being — which is also the problem of death — has in fact opposed her?

Whether a man dies in bed or aboard an interplanetary ship, the human condition has not changed in the slightest.

Happiness? But we are taught that happiness lasts only as long as the Illusion lasts... and what is this Illusion? Nobody knows. But it submerges us.

If we only knew what Illusion is, we would then know the opposite: what Truth is. This *Truth would liberate us from slavery.*¹

As a psychological phenomenon, has Illusion ever been subjected to critical analysis based on the most recent discoveries of science? It does not seem to be so, and yet one cannot say that man is lazy and does not search. He is a passionate searcher ... but he misses the essential; he bypasses it in his search.

What strikes us from the very beginning is that man confuses moral progress with technical progress, so that the development of science continues in dangerous isolation.

The brilliant progress that has come from technology has changed nothing essential in the human condition, and will change nothing, because it operates only in the field of everyday events. For this reason it touches the inner life of man only superficially. Yet from very ancient times it has been known that the essential is found within man, not outside him.

We are generally in agreement in thinking that humanity has arrived at an important turning point in its history. The Cartesian spirit which destroyed scholastic philosophy is now in turn being left behind. The logic of history demands a new spirit. The divorce between *traditional*

1. John viii: 32.

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