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GORICHEVA TOWARDS THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Tatiana Goriczewa, *Prawosławie a postmodernizm*,
trans. G. Ojcewicz, Wydawnictwo GregArt, Szczytno 2023, pp. 155.

Tatiana Goricheva (b. 1943),¹ a contemporary Russian eco-theologian and philosopher, is very concerned about the image of the modern world and the technocratic direction in which humanity is heading. The expression of this anxiety is not only her book *Христианство и современный мир* (1996), but also the earlier one titled *Православие и постмодернизм* (1991, Pol. *Prawosławie a postmodernizm*,² Eng. Orthodoxy and Postmodernism), to which the chapter *Христианство и постмодернизм* (Christianity and Postmodernism), taken from the work entitled *Дочери Иова. Христианство и феминизм* (1992, Daughters of Job. Christianity and Feminism), is a kind of pendant. It is noteworthy that Polish translations of both books mentioned above appeared two years ago made by Polish specialist in Russian Studies and translator Grzegorz Ojcewicz, who had earlier translated Goriche-

¹ The figure of Tatiana Goricheva, who is not widely known even within the Polish community of Russian studies scholars, is introduced by Grzegorz Ojcewicz in one of his articles. See: *Wokół dziennika podróży ekoteologicznej Tatiany Goriczewej. „Człowiek ustawicznie szuka szczęścia”*, „Studia Rossica Gedanensia” 2022, No. 9, pp. 55–60.

² T. Goriczewa, *Prawosławie a postmodernizm*, trans. G. Ojcewicz, GregArt Publishing, Szczytno 2023. All subsequent quotations are from this edition (page numbers are given in parentheses in the text). All translations are mine unless otherwise stated — J.T.-S.

va's essays *Святые животные* (1992, Pol. *Święte zwierzęta*,³ Eng. Holy Animals).

A characteristic feature of Goricheva's eclectic thought merging the reflection on philosophy, religion and culture. Her thinking about modernity is the juxtaposition of various currents of thought with Christianity (especially Orthodox Christianity), as evidenced by the very titles of her books. The trilogy — *Православие и постмодернизм* (Orthodoxy and Postmodernism), *Дочери Иова* (Daughters of Job) and *Святые животные* (Holy Animals) — should be considered the most representative texts of Goricheva's eclectic philosophical thought.

The monograph *Православие и постмодернизм* (Eng. Orthodoxy and Postmodernism) *Orthodoxy and Modernism*, as Jarosław Moskałyk rightly states, “provides the reader with a completely dialectical vision of human reality and the world.”⁴ It is difficult to disagree with the statement of Vladimir Ryzhkov, who emphasises that Goricheva's book was

written in an expressive, dynamic language and will be of interest to anyone who observes the evolution of contemporary culture. It must only be remembered that the meeting with meaning, as the Russian philosopher and historian warns, takes place on a meta-level. Quotations occur as objects of deconstruction.⁵

He is echoed by the translator, who emphasises that the work *Orthodoxy and Modernism* will benefit the most the reader versed in literary and cultural contexts, i.e. “at least moderately familiar with world culture from ancient times to the 21st century”.⁶

Православие и постмодернизм (Eng. Orthodoxy and Postmodernism) is a collection of eight essays, arranged thematically (not chronologically), which the author wrote in the years 1985–1988 while living in France and Germany in forced emigration. The book is a modest philosophical-religious work devoted to reflections on “two

³ T. Goriczewa, *Święte zwierzęta*, transl. G. Ojcewicz, Wydawnictwo GregArt, Szczytno 2022. See: J. Tymieniecka-Suchanek, *Święte zwierzęta bez zwierząt? Recenzja książki Tatiany Goriczewej „Święte zwierzęta”*, „Przegląd Rusycystyczny” 2024, no. 2 (186), pp. 235–248.

⁴ J. Moskałyk, *Posłowie*, in: T. Goriczewa, *Prawosławie a postmodernizm...*, p. 139.

⁵ W. Ryżkow, *Od redaktora*, in: T. Goriczewa, *Prawosławie a postmodernizm...*, p. 19.

⁶ G. Ojcewicz, „Prawo jest silne tylko dzięki dobroci, rozum—szaleństwu, piękno — jurodstwu”, czyli słowo od tłumacza, in: T. Goriczewa, *Prawosławie a postmodernizm...*, p. 11.

powerful cultural blocks.”⁷ Although the title promises more than its content Grzegorz Ojcewicz rightly points out that Goricheva did not set herself the encyclopaedic task of summarising all our knowledge about Orthodoxy and postmodernism in her study. Instead, the scholar accurately interprets the important additional meanings in Goricheva’s monograph that resonate at the intersection of the Orthodox and postmodernism. It is about skilfully noticing a strong energy field, in which “the most important issues appeared not so much for the religious movement or intellectual ferment [...], but the most important issues for the narrator herself”⁸ and these should be paid attention to during the reading. It is worth noticing that Goricheva’s attitude to postmodernism is ambivalent because she sees both its positive and negative aspects, (the former centered around creative concepts while the latter—around dangerous ideas entering the life of Christians). It can also be noted that the philosopher treats postmodernism quite selectively and subjectively because she defines this current of thought only by referring to Slavoj Žižek (see p. 122) to share his critical reflection, later expounded in *Дочери Иова* (Eng. *Daughters of Job*) that “Christianity can answer the current problems of the same last era, which many call the era of postmodernism.”⁹ This somewhat simplified understanding of postmodernism explains why, in Goricheva’s view, the very name and definition of the present times are not significant. It can also be noted that the philosopher treats postmodernism rather selectively and subjectively, as she defines this intellectual trend exclusively through the words of Slavoj Žižek (see p. 122), only to share an important reflection in her later book, *The Daughters of Job*, that “it is Christianity that can respond to the current problems of this same last era, which many call the era of postmodernism.”¹⁰

The book *Православие и постмодернизм* (Eng. *Orthodoxy and Postmodernism*) consists of eight chapters: *The Sacred Without God; Secularized Hell; An-Archaeology of Laughter; The Ridiculousness of the Overburdened Father; Cynicism, Holy Foolishness, and Sanctity; The Christian Fool in the Age of Apophaticism; “Do Not Cast Me Away From Before Your Face”* and *Returning to the letters of*

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ T. Goriczewa, *Córki Hioba. Chryścijaństwo a feminizm*, transl. G. Ojcewicz, Wydawnictwo Greg Art, Szczytno 2023, p. 58.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

spiritual elders. In the Polish edition, each of them is divided into several subsections. Since these subsections are visible in the table of contents, the reader can understand the content of individual parts of the publication at spot.

The examination of the content of Goricheva's book reveals that in the first chapter, *The Sacred Without God*, the author refers to the contemporary world as an era of disappearances. She observes that the European world is becoming increasingly provincial, despite the "acceleration" and urbanisation while the disappearance of holiness causes cities to lose their former role of spiritual centres. Goricheva notes that "homo religious" once lived in the centre. In the past, establishing a settlement was accompanied with a search for cross-roads, for a place that opened up cosmic perspectives and allowed human life to take root in a divine order. The example of this pagan custom proves that the philosopher usually recalls what serves her vision and understanding of the world. Goricheva refers to the religious tradition (like the story of the icon of St. George on Athos) and the symbolism of sacred places such as the burning bush. She points out that the modern world, overwhelmed by speed and technology, becomes homogeneous, dull, grey, and devoid of sacrum. Space ceases to exist as a spiritual experience and is measured only by the time it takes to cross it, e.g. "from the post office to the supermarket — ten minutes" (p. 21). In this way, the ability to perceive the world as a living and holy whole is lost. Goricheva sees the paradoxes of direct and averaged human contacts. In a world dominated by the media, telephone and communication technologies, it becomes impossible to "stand on the sidelines." The philosopher refers to Paul Virilio, describing the modern city as a space of simultaneity, where everything happens simultaneously, but without a real encounter. The city becomes the intersection of communication, not the space of relations. The author notes that despite this network of connections, people do not meet together and their relationships remain shallow. The look at the screen replaces the look in the eyes. People long for an encounter with the other and God without intermediaries (technological carriers), for a meaningful "here and now": they want to become a microcosm, participate in God-humanity, and strive for holiness. Although the world continues to move toward destruction, voices calling for creating a new cosmos are increasingly being heard, voices calling for "New Middle Ages," as in the thought of Nikolai Berdyaev, who observed that technology and money create phantoms of reality. Ac-

cording to Goricheva, today we went even further: from reality (stock exchange, banks), we went to hyperrealities — illusionary realities that do not meet man's spiritual needs. Materialism has ceased to be convincing, and the rational world seems ritualistic and ritualised. Because of this, holiness returns and what was recently considered secular is described in religious language. Goricheva recalls here the thoughts of Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard about the "liturgy of objects," the sacredness of supermarkets and the rituals of everyday life. Then, she asks why modern atheistic thought has become interested in holiness. The contemporary world is like a dream since all values have been abandoned and their restoration is possible only by finding God as the highest value. The author predicts the end of the rationalist subject, discussing the crisis of modern philosophy that idealised the rationalist subject for centuries.

Goricheva is most critical of modern technology, which she sees as having a magical and ritualistic character. She refers to Berdyaev, who wrote about it in the *New Middle Ages*, and to Virilio, who emphasises that every technical discovery carries a seed of disaster: the invention of railway is simultaneously the invention of railway disaster. The philosopher juxtaposes the atom from Chernobyl to a molecule of the Eucharist: one can destroy the world, the other can save it. It is because disasters today have a purifying function, like the wrath of the gods. Modernity, although polluting the Earth, can, through a radical threat, trigger the process of moral purification. According to Goricheva, catastrophe restores a person's relationship with existence, even if it occurs dramatically and destructively—the irrationality of the modern world forces new existential strategies. She claims that holiness is always associated with hierarchy and qualitative order. Examples of hierarchy are: Jacob's ladder, ascetic prayer, and obedience in the Orthodox Church; democratic relations make sense only within the Holy Trinity. The author emphasises that the sacred hierarchy is entirely different from human subordination – organic, meaningful and integrated. In a society deprived of the Church in its most profound sense, magic takes the place of the sacred. In pagan culture, magic was a sacred sphere and enabled contact with deities. Advertising companies and media promoting consumption use magical formulas such as "black magic," "magic water," or "absolutely original" as the slogans of everyday products. Motorcyclists, dressed in armour, resemble medieval knights. The urban space becomes an arena of magical staging. Pieces of garbage and tickets can function

as holy relics. This situation also has a positive aspect: the Church, devoid of social significance and power, is likely to be reborn in kenosis. A mysterious man who demands nothing from God, who simply enjoys His existence, can reappear in the spiritual space. The author points out that the modern world is inhabited by “artificial man” — machines and computers. Computers are becoming new “idols” to be deified or destroyed. This motif fits into the old myths about the Golem and Frankenstein i.e. the legends about the creation who escapes the control of its master. According to Goricheva, in this way, man takes the place of God or signs a pact with the devil; instead of enlightenment, the enslavement by occult forces takes place. Holiness, unlike magic, does not impose power, but enters into a delicate and personal relationship. Goriczewa analyses the contemporary fascination with initiation as an attempt to overcome spiritual deadness. In a world where “nothing happens,” every change—travel, love, creativity—begins to be treated as a ritual, a potential “ontological mutation,” capable of giving meaning to bland life. She notes that initiation is a response to the lack of real, existential experiences: contact with reality becomes so rare that each confrontation with pain, love or history takes on a ritual dimension. Goricheva connects the interest in holiness and magic with social changes. The contradiction between the coercion of work and the tyranny of private life tears the life of today’s man and ideologies—from Marxism to feminism—are no longer able to reconcile this contradiction. Therefore, rituals and myths replace party programs and slogans and a world of fantasies and myths becomes an ersatz of true meetings while magical spells—of ideology. In this context, Goricheva analyses the thought of René Girard, who believed that the foundation of any culture is violence and sacrifice. According to him, society creates hierarchies to avoid the chaos caused by competition for desired objects. When the tension becomes too great, a “scapegoat” must be found—someone whose elimination is expected to bring purification and peace. Such sacrifice is sanctified, and from it a new culture is born. Goricheva admits that the saint as the creator of new culture is Girard’s accurate intuition, but rejects the identification of holiness with violence. Girard’s thought develops Nietzsche’s concept of “memory rooted in suffering and blood.” As Goricheva shows, philosophy still is based on the belief that there is no good, without evil and the contrast between them is necessary to recognise values; however, Emmanuel Levinas aptly notes that such dialectic trivialises good and makes it

interchangeable with evil, which leads to a situation where categories of good and evil can be invalidated. At the end of the chapter Goricheva describes contemporary forms of sacredness in art, culture and literature.

In the second chapter, *Secularised Hell*, Goricheva presents, among other things, a new act of the spiritual crisis—not a time of struggle against God or open rebellion, but a moment in which even the sources of negation have been exhausted yet the life goes on. Unhappiness is not the same as suffering — it is its opposite. Suffering can be connected with God, bring meaning, and have a penitential or sacrificial dimension. On the other hand, unhappiness lacks temporal dimension and related dynamics. Not anchored to the past, present or future, it neither leads to any transformation nor provides contact with God. It leads to complete loneliness and isolation. Goricheva recalls the linguistic distinction: happiness is associated with participation, community, and meeting, while unhappiness is a lack of involvement and isolation. She describes contemporary reality as a world of semi-living people who do not survive the community, are not inscribed in history, do not look at themselves, and do not admire themselves. She quotes St. Macarius the Great who told that people are tied to each other with their backs in hell. Hell is a separation from God and other people (stăricea Silvanus), impossibility to love (Dostoyevsky). Such unhappiness affects many real characters similar to the fictional Rodion Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment*, detached from the community, immersed in spiritual schizophrenia.

Goricheva recalls the concept of Emil Cioran, according to which hell is a separation from the natural rhythms of life. It is devoid of life and death, and full of dying trees, lakes and other elements associated with nature, which symbolises the dominance of mechanisation and artificiality. The author also recalls the vision of St. Nil Mirotochiv, who predicted the catastrophic consequences of the end times: drying up of rivers and extinction of fauna and flora. Hell has traditionally been associated with the underground, as in Dante's poem, and this image has survived, but its new forms are more frightening: horizontal, everyday-like, without fire and drama. Goricheva also refers to Hieronymus Bosch, who depicted hell as cold and devoid of flames and joy — people she describes are strangers to each other; they hold themselves aloof and are grotesquely lonely. Institutions are inhuman, parasitic entities, and relationships between people — purely instrumental. Mechanism and thoughtlessness replace free-

dom and everyone becomes an automaton deprived of any choice. In this perspective, “do what you like” becomes the surest route to slavery. The author quotes the thought of Walter Benjamin according to which progress can only be understood as the progress of a disaster. Modernity should be interrupted since a new structure can be built only on its ruins. After the experiences of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Gulag it is no longer possible to talk about history and philosophy as before. These events brought hell to earth, made life apocalyptic.

Goricheva points out that reality today has been replaced by “transparency” without a soul. Gilles Lipovetsky and Richard Sennett describe contemporary open space office, with constant mutual supervision that kills authentic relationships. People become silent although at the same time they are constantly talking — there are too many words but no content. The narcissism of modern man does not know love or passion, does not know silence, does not know encounter. Hellish transparency is cold, soulless and parasitic, unlike a sacral transparency of stained-glass icons. Love is the only way out because it requires presence, sacrifice and growth. Spiritual reality is growth; stagnation means death. As St. Paul writes, personality develops only through love and development: the growth of the body for the building of itself in love. A world that doesn’t grow becomes hyperreal and dead. Hyperreality is a false life, a dead perfection especially pronounced in the West, but present everywhere. The author analyses symbolic figures of hell in literature: the castle in Kafka, the hunter Gracchus, and Nikolai Stavrogin from *The Devils*. Movement around the vicious circle without the ability to enter, absurdity and unfoundedness become hell. Sin exists in and outside man because man loses confidence in himself, cuts off the roots, and becomes impersonal. Goricheva concludes the chapter by reflecting on the possibility of a paradise-like awakening. Where hell gives way, paradise works. Nature, the liturgy of the forest, the Eucharistic symbols of water, fire and earth – these are the traces of paradise, which is reborn through suffering. Culture and creativity become a refuge, a space of meaning and spiritual nourishment. Even everyday objects like bread, water or silence take on a sacred meaning. Modern culture can be barbaric, but it reveals divine order where it survives. Today, interest in the icon, the saints, and the Mother of God returns. It is She — gentle but all-powerful — who protects this apocalyptic time. Her Face, full of tears and victories, shapes our era.

In the next chapter, *An-Archaeology of Laughter*, the author analyses the contemporary crisis of Western man due to the repression of their vital, spiritual and bodily energy. According to this vision, modern man is a product of consumer society, devoid of spiritual channels connecting the soul with the body and God. The Freudian “me” appears as a neurotic armour protecting against pain but also against life. It points to a fundamental change of perspective that has taken place since the Renaissance, that is a shift from humility and participation in the divine order towards individualism. Today’s apocalyptic era, dominated by technology, has lost the ability to distinguish between the real and the imagined. The world became grotesque, devoid of risk and transcendence. The logic of totality, derived from nuclear physics and psychosomatic sciences, no longer knows causality; everything becomes one whole. An-archaeology rejects the return to “arche,” i.e. to rational sources as spiritual knowledge is born via survival and not through analysis. The goal becomes participatory, full and spiritual knowledge, culminating in the Eucharist — complete union with God. In the apocalyptic world, laughter is not just a reaction, but a spiritual event, an explosion beyond humour or irony. Laughter transcending suffering is an act of liberation and repentance, revealing the divine presence. It is a force capable of breaking through the neurotic armour of modernity. Real laughter does not last long; its catastrophic nature is associated with transience and the destruction of hierarchy. As a spiritual phenomenon, laughter expresses divine freedom and anarchy — the rejection of gravity, history and rational narrative. Laughter becomes a metaphysical act here since it rejects the dialectic and logic of contradictions that only simulate spiritual tensions. Dialectic, in need of rebels and negative heroes, appears to be parasitic and dead. Laughter, unlike her, embraces the whole of existence without the need for argumentation. God’s freedom, his “uselessness,” becomes a model for the human experience of absolute joy. Laughter transcends the distinction between the inner and the outer, between the body and the spirit. Although “idiotic,” everything has its reality and power. Unlike Vladimir Solovyov’s universalist synthesis, laughter defends non-abstract simplicity and individual sovereignty. Laughter shows emptiness as an essential aspect of the whole — it does not deny, but embraces what is useless, inexplicable and accidental. In the apophatic tradition it belongs to, laughter exposes the illusory nature of fullness, meanings and plans. It is a revelation of vanity and at the same time a trace of

a different and hidden fullness. Laughter does not serve humiliation. On the contrary, it exalts the other, confirms his dignity and freedom. Death as an omnipresent and inevitable state is taken up by laughter, which allows it to be captured, experienced and annulled. We laugh because we are always outside — “everywhere, and always we are nowhere” (p. 76).

In the fourth chapter, *The Ridiculousness of Overburdened Father* Goricheva takes up the problem of modern Western civilisation, which formally recognises itself as Christian, dominated by three forces: moralism, family worship and utility. The father in this structure becomes the personification of the entire system of social norms. Such a model of authority, devoid of divine roots, becomes grotesque, ridiculous—as Jacques Lacan described it in the concept of “the ridiculousness of an overburdened father” (p. 77). Only transcendence and divine authority can “relieve” human power. Meanwhile, most modern Christians try to restore the world of bourgeois values—family, moral correctness, utility—without noticing that it is this model that distorts the Gospel. Morality without transcendence becomes violence. Although at the opposite poles of the spectrum, Kant and de Sade achieved similar results identifying morality with suffering. Such an approach results in slavery, hypocrisy, and perversion. Christianity is completely perverted by moralism since true spiritual life is not based on a “moral law” but on its overcoming by goodness, madness (in the spiritual sense) and yourodstvo. Yurodivy, who replaces faith with law and imperatives, remains in the dead end of ethical automatism. There is no concept of “morality” in the Gospel itself. God is apophatic about what is “good”—what counts is mercy, forgiveness and encounter, not norms and principles. The sinner, the publican, and the prodigal son are closer to God than the Pharisee. The greatest sin is not deed, but despair—the loss of hope and forgiveness. Authentic perfection is not moral infallibility, but encounter and co-being. The Christian personality is the creativity and presence of the Face, an unmasked routine of norms. In the USSR, socialist moralism was no less oppressive than religious. It tried to impose ethics without metaphysical foundations but did not eradicate traditional Christian morality, which was still “smuggling”—although often without an explicit religious declaration. In contrast to the Western tradition, Russian spiritual tradition opposes holiness and moralism. In the latter, the creative and the destructive are much closer to each other. Inaction, the flight from will and responsibility, can be a spiritual downfall and

the beginning of spiritual growth. Emptiness and impotence can become the place of God's descent.

In the chapter *Cynicism, Holy Foolishness, and Sanctity*, Goricheva continues her reflections on the present, described as the era of post-nihilism. In her opinion, it is more lost, cynical and hopeless than classical nihilism. Cynicism has become a central problem of philosophical thinking and social life, supplanting utopias and ideals. The philosopher refers to the thought of Peter Sloterdijk: a cynic is a man of "enlightened unhappy consciousness" who does not believe in ideologies or their criticism. A similar cynicism also occurred in the Soviet Union, where many facets of social conformism were masked by indifference and contempt towards power and ideology, but that indifference and contempt were also pointed against the resistance to the same power and ideology. Such a cynic is paralysed by fear and loss of moral certainty. Cynicism means the highest degree of inner enslavement. Holiness is the opposite of cynicism: full of fertility, surprise, wonder and the Holy Spirit. Through God and His action, holiness transforms the world. *Yurodstvo*, as an extreme form of holiness, is an example of the action of the Spirit, which is sometimes perceived as madness, as in the case of Jesus or the apostles. In the face of the death of reason and the fall of utopia, holiness can become the only new way, radical, creative, and capable of profound transformation. Its "madness" does not consist in escaping but in novelty that does not need originality. In the Soviet Union, Goricheva argues, schizophrenia had become a metaphor for freedom and otherness. People considered that "nuts" represented subtlety, depth and incompatibility with the system. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the person with schizophrenia becomes a revolutionary type who decodes all social codes and rules. The world of the "microphysics" of schizophrenia is a world of freedom and resistance to the system, as in Soviet bohemianism, which idealised the "sick" as rebels against enslavement. In the USSR, many "played" madmen, using *yurodstvo* as a strategy for survival. Pretending madness becomes a form of compromise, an escape from responsibility. This ironic, seeming *yurodstvo* often serves only to defend against the world – it is not a service or a spiritual struggle. Humour becomes a weapon against social terror without inner freedom and grace. True *yurodstvo* is an act of holiness – radical, offensive, prophetic. The *yurodivy* provokes the world to aggression to expose its evil and transform it. It operates on the borderline of profanation, gro-

tesque and divine revelation. The history of the Yurodivies — from St. Andrew after the Moscow “madmen” of the twentieth century — is a constant unmasking of hypocrisy, including religious hypocrisy. Their life, often extremely physical, impure, and illogical, becomes an icon of spiritual power and eschatological presence. Unlike cynics, the yurodivy are completely obedient to the will of God and the Orthodox Church. Cynicism remains within the sphere of the earthly world, while the presence and activity of yurodivy opens up the perspective of the Kingdom of God.

In the sixth chapter, *The Christian Fool in the Age of Apophaticism*, Goricheva argues that Christianity is marked by an exceptionally dramatic split between reality and the ideal. This tragedy lies in the fact that it was ordinary people who crucified God. Over the centuries, it was they who became a typical “Christian,” distancing humanity from God. In the history of Christianity, the prophets and yurodivy undertook breaking through appearances and revealing the truth, often through laughter and humility. The figure of the “holy fool” opposes the classic hero: he is elusive, independent of artistic representation, and his holiness is accessible only through spiritual experience. Examples of such humility are the first saints of Ruthenia, Boris and Gleb—their passivity and suffering without resistance formed a paradoxical foundation of holiness. Goricheva explains that apophaticism, negative theology, consists in knowing God through denial, rejection of all concepts, until entering the darkness of Divine ignorance. Its tradition is marked by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa, and John of the Cross in the West. What is brightest becomes the most inaccessible to man. Apophaticism is also present in the Western philosophy and finds a new form in post-modernism today (pp. 115–117).

In the seventh chapter, *“Do not expel me from your face”* Goricheva proves that modern rationalist consciousness is shown as sterile, reactive and devoid of creative power. Cognition is no longer an act of love or an encounter with the Other, but a form of control and assimilation. Referring to Western philosophy (e.g. Nietzsche), she argues that consciousness has become only a reaction mechanism in the world of enslaved people deprived of authentic knowledge and freedom. The author contrasts the relations of fear and domination (e.g. in Hegel’s dialectic) with the evangelical understanding of service. Serving in the Christian spirit does not come from submission, but from freedom and love. It is a spiritually aristocratic, free and

creative attitude. Contemporary culture is obsessively preoccupied with ugliness, disgust, and monstrosity as the only tools able to stir an indifferent world. Repulsion becomes the only reaction capable of shattering boredom and unified reality. The yurodivy, through their repulsiveness and brutal physicality, shatter the illusory world of simulation. However, their disgust is not an end in itself: it is supposed to indicate the possibility of transformation, a more profound mystery hidden behind what is repulsive. The yurodivy provokes revulsion and becomes a mirror of society, physically and spiritually disrupting its established forms. The yurodivy appears paradoxically close to contemporary fashion, affirming ugliness, exaggeration and provocation. However, the madman of God not only arouses disgust but also reveals that God is present even when rejected. It indicates a love capable of transforming, not banishing, but accepting. His presence at the centre of social life attempts to transform hatred and disgust into a salvific recognition of Otherness and the Face of the other person.

In the last chapter, *Returning to the letters of spiritual elders*, the author shares the experience of personal meetings with stariec — Orthodox spiritual guides—as an experience of deep freedom, solace and catharsis. Although seemingly stern and simple, stariec embody holiness that is completely simultaneous with God's will. Their advice and presence are precise, penetrating and full of love—they never generalise or hurt, but lead to inner healing. In a post-Soviet world which lacked true guides in life, the presence of such elders gives the Russians a spiritual anchor. Their authority is not formal, but flows from grace. They do not write books, but letters—always specific, addressed to a particular person, in a specific situation, which makes them deeply personal and unique. Older adults do not utter empty words—each is a living word of God. Their sanctity unites two poles: compassion and severity. They are entirely open to the suffering of others, and at the same time, demanding. They see deeper sin, but also the lost image of God, which they want to restore to man. Through this, they become pedagogues and hyper-pedagogues: their word holds the power of transformation without violence. They remind us that every person is called to holiness and deification. Stariec who often experienced imprisonment, concentration camps or persecution, remain humble and grateful—they do not talk about suffering, they do not see injustice in them. Their testimony symbolises Russia's spiritual rebirth: a return to prayer and asceticism. Prayer,

however, can be dangerous if not appropriately conducted—this is why the elderly are needed as guides. Lists of stariec like icons, speak when a person prays—their meaning is revealed when the heart is ready. The holiness of the elderly transforms reality: they make it a space of God's will. Their presence is a sign that even today it is possible to live in the light—a whole, holy, deeply human life and God's incomprehensibility.

The book *Православие и постмодернизм* (Orthodoxy and Postmodernism) is not only a testament to a challenging period in Tatiana Goricheva's life, but also to the complex times faced by Russian intellectuals, who could not openly express their philosophical and religious views because, in the USSR, to paraphrase Goricheva's words, speaking about God was dangerous. It is also an essential, timeless testimony to the condition of modern man at the end of the 20th century from a Christian perspective. It is worth adding that in this book, Goricheva anticipates interest in eco-theology, especially zootheology, which she will present most fully in *Святые животные* (Holy Animals):

Nature, earth, animals, trees, the whole cosmos today—silent, suffering, disappearing – by its very kenosis speaks of the possibility of [the occurrence of] the Garden of Eden. One can talk about the liturgy of the forest, grasses, screaming birds, the eucharistic symbolism of water, fire, and air—of the transformed, yet not split (Chernobyl-like) atom. Both in the West and in the East, nature is resurrected by martyrdom, the source of which is civilisation (p. 63).

Therefore, it is fortunate that the book *Православие и постмодернизм* (Pol. *Prawosławie a postmodernizm*) has finally been translated into Polish. It is worth adding that Grzegorz Ojcewicz's translation deserves the highest recognition. As Wacław Osadnik observes,

The reader reaching for a translation trusts the translator, believing that the translation received faithfully corresponds to the original. However, translation is a complex intellectual process that requires deep knowledge of the language, its history, and its cultural, philosophical, and social context.¹¹

Ojcewicz's translation is the result of precisely such a process. Readers can confidently approach the Polish version of Goricheva's book. In this publication, we witness a fusion of translator's skill, the exper-

¹¹ W.M. Osadnik, *Analiza i interpretacja tekstu w przekładzie*, in: *Sztuka przekładu — interpretacje*, P. Fast, A. Świeściak (ed.), cooperation of A. Olszta, Wydawnictwo „Śląsk”, Katowice 2009, p. 69.

tise of a translation theorist, and the deep philological knowledge of a literary historian of broad intellectual horizon specializing in Russian studies. The result is a reading experience of very high translational quality enriched by thorough editorial work.

This review was prepared as part of the project *Orthodox Theology Animals in Tatiana Goricheva's essay* and is financed by National Science Centre, Poland as part of the PRELUDIUM Bis-2 competition based on the decision number UMO–2020/39/O/HS2/o2968

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