

“LORD, HAVE MERCY” – A PSALMIC PARADIGM FOR THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

Abstract

In this study, I aim to emphasize that the psalmic prayer יהוה רחמי (Lord have mercy) is the early form and the foundation of the Prayer of the Heart. It has been generally accepted that Jesus' prayer, in its established form – Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner – originates in the Holy Scripture, particularly in the Gospels. In this research, I will prove that the New Testament contains an echo of psalmic spirituality. Those who first invoked God's name and asked for divine mercy to be poured out on them were the authors of psalms. To demonstrate this reality, I will resort to the Eastern Orthodox interpretation method without excluding the interpretation rigors of the critical school. I will use the latter especially when I tackle terminological delimitations and identify the occurrences of the imperative רחמי / ἐλέησόν. In this study, I will capture, in a few chapters, how the psalmic Prayer of the Heart (Lord, have mercy) became the prayer of the heart.



DEACON STELIAN PAȘCA-TUȘA

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca
stelian.pasca@ubbcluj.ro

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Introduction

Kallistos Ware (1992, 26-7) and John Breck (2003, 301) claimed that the Prayer of the Heart has two essential moments, namely adoration and repentance, and that it has had several versions, what we now call the prayer of the heart being one such version of this mystical manifestation. I have looked in the Psalms for all types of prayers falling within this pattern, and I have identified an expression that represents their foundation, synthesizing the two moments already mentioned: Lord, have mercy, which in Jewish is

יְהוָה יְחַנֵּנִי and in Greek *Kýrie élēḥsón*. According to Oliver Clément (1997, 26), these words with psalmic origin would be the beginning of a (re)entrance into communion with the One Who is named/called in this prayer for all the believers who belonged to the Early Church and participated in the public divine cult and in particular for those who were in a state of repentance. These perspectives have helped me understand that the purpose of the prayer, *Lord, have mercy*, is the same, irrespective of the moment it is uttered. In other words, the Lord pours out His mercy on all those who say His name and ask for the grace of redemption, irrespective of whether it is psalmist David, an ill person who lived in the time of our Saviour, a newly baptized Christian, a Hesychast or one of our contemporaries.

In this study, I aim to highlight the words, *Lord, have mercy*, which I consider to be the core of the Psalmic prayer and the premises of the prayer of the heart in the Psalms. Before synthesizing the psalmic contexts in which this prayer was uttered, I will underscore the theological content of its words, starting from their Hebrew etymology. I will then emphasize how the spirituality revolving around this prayer was received and used in the time of the New Testament. In the third section, I will present how hesychastic mysticism reached the climax of this means of spiritual manifestation and established the framework for unceasing prayer and, in the end, I will propose to our contemporaries the prayer *Lord, have mercy* as a paradigm for reaching continuous communion with God. To achieve this undertaking, I will adopt the Eastern Orthodox method of relating to the holy text, without however excluding the instruments of the critical school of interpretation whenever the content requires such an analysis. I will mostly resort to patristic literature, particularly Philokalic writings, and to the works of contemporary theologians, who wrote various monographs or studies on the prayer of the heart.

יְהוָה יְחַנֵּנִי (*Lord, have mercy*) – Semantic and Theological Perspectives

The syntagm *יְהוָה יְחַנֵּנִי* is made up of a noun – the proper name YHWH – and an imperative verb, whose root is *חָנַן*, having as basic meaning the idea of *being merciful towards someone* or of *showing mercy towards someone* (Harris et al. 1999, 298; Botterweck and Ringgren 1986, 22-35; Ap-Thomas 1957: 128-48; Lofthouse 1933: 29-35). The verb *chanan* emphasizes indulgence in interpersonal relationships and always entails an active state. Being merciful means getting involved so that the one who needs or asks for help immediately feels the effects of the action undertaken by the

one who owns the desired thing and offers it to the person who wants it (Flack 1960, 137-54). In addition, this verb regulates the relationship between the one who offers mercy and the one who asks for it. The former’s superiority is obvious, as they have something the other does not, and the one who asks for mercy is in no way entitled to receive it. In other words, the one who asks for mercy is entirely dependent on the goodwill of the one who can give it to them and can never force the former to offer it to them. This perspective transpires more accurately from the analysis of the noun חֵן , which derives from the same radical as *chanan*. The basic meaning of *chen* is that of *grace* or *favour* (Botterweck and Ringgren 1986, 24). Finding *grace/mercy in someone’s eyes*, an expression that has 43 occurrences in the Scripture, entailed a favorable disposition on the part of a person toward someone in need of help or who asked for help or salvation (Harris et al. 1999, 299). This term did not involve reciprocity or any constraint. Any legal provision could not force the one who offered mercy to show themselves merciful. As such, they could offer mercy to whomever they wanted and take it back at any time. Nonetheless, mercy requires responsibility, indulgence, and much understanding, especially if it relates to God.

From a theological perspective, the most essential element of the syntagm *Lord, have mercy* is the proper name (Jacob 1955, 38) under which God revealed Himself to His people, a name which defines the godly being (Loichiță 1956: 144). In Jewish mentality, YHWH was God’s name *par excellence*, which, besides its ineffable, mysterious character (Chirilă 2003, 94), held within everything that could be known about God (Breck 2003, 307). Put differently, this name contained a call to knowledge, communion, and a clearer understanding of how God interacts with people. From a linguistic point of view, the vast majority of specialists considered the name YHWH as being expressed through a verbal structure – *to be* (Hebr. יְהוָה from the archaic form *hwh*) (Freedman et al. 2000, 1402; Sakenfeld et al. 2008, 591). A consensus regarding the form of the verb in this name has not yet been reached. Some believed it to be a finite structure, while others saw it as causal. In the former case, YHWH could be translated as *He is*, *He will be* or *He shows himself in the present moment*, and in the latter – *He determines the state of being* or *He brings to life* (van der Toorn et al. 1999, 914). I must mention that these translations are made following the correlation specialists established between the name YHWH and the name God revealed to Moses ($\text{אֱלֹהֵי אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתָּ לְמֹשֶׁה}$) when He called him (Ex 3:14). To give you a broader image of how exegetes perceived this name, I believe it is helpful to mention other translations

as well: Karel van der Toorn understands the name as a promise – *I will definitely be there*) or as a means of underscoring uniqueness – *I am who I am, having no equals* (van der Toorn et. al. 1999, 914; Elwell and Elwell 1997, 883). William Albright considers the expression mentioned above to refer to God’s quality of Creator – *He brings to life everything that comes to life* (McKenzie 1961, 317). Edmond Jacob also adopts this vision, claiming that this name “is an expression of a living God” who exerts His power over life and, therefore, reveals His eternal nature (Jacob 1955, 41). Gerhard von Rad claims this syntagm is an axiomatic formula through which God expresses His almightiness and aseity (von Rad 1975, 180). Edouard Cothenet and Marcel believe the main aim of the name revealed on Mount Sinai is to underscore God’s continuous presence next to His chosen ones (Leon-Dufour 1967, 181). In other words, this name highlights the Lord’s unmitigated presence among those who are the beneficiaries of the promises He once made to their forefathers (Viller et al. 1981, 399; Epstein 2001, 16). This new name through which God makes Himself known confirms the promises He made to the patriarchs and a new argument that validates God’s unchangingness (Vladimirescu and Ciurea 2008: 122). Hans-Joachim Kaus claims this name, frequently used in the Book of Psalms, becomes a guarantee of godly fidelity and the sign of His salvific presence (Ps 23:3; 25:12; 31:3; 106:8; 109:20; 148:5.13) (Kraus 1996, 24). Consequently, the name YHHW “is a simple guarantee, self-repercussion, and self-manifestation of the Lord in His people. His name is God Himself, a manifestation of Yahwe *ad extram* [...] That is why the psalmists are aware and convinced that this name is not something void, because It encompasses everything: justice and salvation, life and redemption, knowledge and wisdom” (Kraus 1996, 24). [our translation]

***Lord, have mercy* – The Core of Psalmic Prayer**

The prayer, *Lord, have mercy*, is not a simple invocation of divine mercy but rather a ferment that requires a living interaction between the one who suffers or longs for communion and God. Consequently, this means of calling God, lover of men, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in mercifulness (Ex 34:6), can be considered the heart of the psalmic prayer and the climax of the manifestation of prayer in the Old Testament. To support these assertions, I will synthetically evaluate the scriptural contexts that determined the invoking of godly name and mercy; I will show the meaning and implications of the prayer *Lord, have mercy* in the contexts I will mention, and I will underscore the consequences of invoking the presence of God the

merciful. However, before doing this, I will mention the psalmic texts in which the syntagm *YHWH honneni* is used and point out its occurrences.

The imperative “have mercy on me” is used in this form only in the Book of Psalms (4:1; 6:2; 25:17; 26:11; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 41:4.10; 51:1; 56:1; 57:1; 86:3-4.16; 119:29. 58.132). If we also take into account the three related forms חָנַן־יְיָ – Ps 9:14, חָנַן־יְיָ – Ps 67:2; 123:2 and חָנַן־יְיָ – Ps 123:3, this verb occurs 22 times in 16 psalms. In all cases, the verb *chanan* is associated, either directly or indirectly, with God (Ps 25; 26; 86: 15; 119), whether we have YHWH (Ps 6; 9; 31; 41) or one of His other names: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ – Ps 123; אֱדֹנָי – Ps 86:3; אֱלֹהִים is present in this form in four psalms (51; 56; 57; 67); אֱלֹהֵי צְדָקָי – Ps 4.

Generally speaking, traditional exegesis, both patristic and rabbinic, and part of the representatives of the critical school, ascribe 12 of the 16 Psalms to King David. Therefore, the events which inspired or determined the creation of these psalms, hence the uttering of the words *Lord, have mercy*, belong to the life of the second king of Israel: the persecution of the King by Saul (Ps 4; 31; 57; 86), his refuge at King Achish (Ps 25; 55), the adultery he committed with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (Ps 6; 25; 26; 51; 86), Absalom’s rebellion (Ps 4; 6; 25; 31; 41; 86), the three-day plague (Ps 30) and the anointing of David as king of Hebron (Ps 27). The other events identified by specialists are connected to a couple of moments from the life of King Hezekiah (Ps 27; 30; 31; 41; 86) and to the situation of Jewish people during the Babylonian captivity (Ps 25; 26; 31; 56; 67; 119; 123). Considering that the opinions of exegetes have not always been the same as to the events that determined the genesis of the psalms above (which is quite normal), I will emphasize the elements that have to do with the spiritual view of the text. In other words, I will resort to the historical context indicated by most exegetes only to clarify the theological message the psalmist wanted to convey, to which any generation following the one it was addressed can adhere.

The psalmist asked for God’s presence and the pouring out of His mercy as a consequence of his fall into sin, whether it had to do with mistakes from his youth, which he made out of ignorance (Ps 25:7), or with a large ego causing great spiritual pain and severe distress (Ps 30:6), or with wickedness, which drains the soul (Ps 31:10), or with laziness when it comes to fulfilling the Law (Ps 119:28), or with the transgressions and iniquities mentioned in psalm 51.

Another reason mercy is invoked involves direct or secret plots cunningly hatched by enemies. Starting with King Saul and continuing with dignitaries, persons of high

rank (*sons of people*), and *lions*, but also with the members of his house, King David had many troubles tormenting him and sometimes bringing him close to death (Ps 9:13). The association between their behavior and that of lions reveals their cruelty and lack of compassion (Ps 57:5), and their willingness to tear him apart as soon as he fell to the ground (Ps 27:3). The use of terms such as *lurkers* (Ps 55), *net* (Ps 55), chains, ropes, etc. suggests the plots of King David's close ones hatched in great secrecy to expedite his fall. The climax of these plots belonged to Ahithophel, David's advisor, and Absalom, David's son, who caused a rebellion during which the King was forced to leave Jerusalem.

Divine mercy is often requested to end physical suffering caused by illnesses. Even if the psalmist's suffering was physical, the pain he felt filled his entire being, confirmed in Psalm 31 by using the term *eyes, soul, belly, and bones*. The psalmist's existential decline is suggested by such Hebrew terms, which places the one who is suffering next to the dwelling of the dead and far away from their close ones, from life in the light.

The effects of invoking God's name and calling for mercy are visible in every psalm. It is enough to see the psalmist's spiritual state before asking for mercy and compare it with his feelings after God's merciful intervention. If the psalmist wanted to make peace with God, his dwelling in heavenly mercy guaranteed that his sins had been forgiven. The washing and purging with hyssop, the obedience to God, the joy felt in the body and the regaining of its firmness, the blotting out of transgressions and the return of the kind face, the unhesitating, just spirit, the pure, broken, and contrite heart, the joy of salvation, the acknowledgment of sin and the desire to straighten, the redemption through death, the joy of uttering the words of divine justice, the announcement of God's mercy, the regaining of the state of grace and the re-establishment in the environment of communion fully reveal the guarantee that God had shown His great mercy (Ps 51). If he was surrounded by enemies who wanted his death, as soon as divine mercy was poured out on him, the threats of enemies vanished away, and his soul felt free from any constraint or fear. The destruction of the opponents' refuges (Ps 9:6), their disarmament and their falling into their nets (Ps 57:6), the sleeping in peace in times of danger (Ps 4:8), his sitting on a rock and the lifting of his head up above the enemies (Ps 27:6), the refuge taken under the shadow of godly wings (Ps 57:1) or the concealment in the most secret place of the sanctuary (Ps 27:5; 31:20-21) are only a few of the signs which show the salvation of the psalmist. If mercy was asked for the curing of physical illnesses or the removal of spiritual weakness, the first signs

of curing offered the guarantee of the presence of God's mercy. In the case of physical suffering, the signs of God's intervention are obvious: the comforting of pain (Ps 9:13; 31:12; 86:13) and the healing, which entails the raising from the bed of suffering (Ps 41:10-11). Doxological manifestations and gratitude are a constant for those who benefit from God's mercy. This way, God's fidelity, providence, and love for those who call His name and ask for His help are extolled (31:22; 51:14-15; 56:10-11) (Craigie 2002, 255).

For the psalmist, God's mercy is the only thing to save him from suffering. Thus, the prayer *Lord, have mercy*, with all its variations, immediately attracts the attention of God, who instantly pours out his rich mercy on the one who suffers and asks for heavenly help (Bratcher and Reyburn, 1991, 510). Consequently, the psalmist offered the prayer that calls for mercy a central position in the contexts where it is used: five of the 16 psalms (Ps 4; 51; 56; 57; 67) where the prayer of mercy appears to begin with the words *have mercy* and the lamentations of six other psalms (Ps 6; 9; 27; 41; 86; 123) start with the same term. The one who asks for God's mercy does not doubt their request being fulfilled. The only uncertainty concerns the moment when God mercifully intervenes to end the suffering or the besiegement by oppressors. Therefore, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, trust in God and the request for His help are *sine qua non* conditions, without which one cannot receive God's mercy (St. Gregory of Nyssa, 1998, 194).

Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Healing Mercy

The conditions for the pouring out of divine mercy mentioned by Saint Gregory, namely the calling for help and faith, are much more visible in the events of the New Testament, which describe the healings performed by Jesus Christ, Whom the apostles and the crowd considered to be the Lord (*Κύριος*). This is very important, given that the moment He was deified (Parke-Taylor 1975, 104), our Saviour assumed the existential name of YHWH (translated by the fathers of the Septuagint as *Κύριος*), with all the prerogatives the Jews offered Him, except that of Father (Cullmann 1959, 236-7). Due to this linguistic procedure, the Christians of the Early Church assigned to their Lord (Jesus Christ) texts from the Old Testament uttered by YHWH or addressed to Him (von Rad 1975, 187). Thus, the Christological reading of the Old Testament became legitimate. As to the latter fact, I would like to mention that the Fathers assigned the words *Lord, have mercy* from the Christological psalms to

Jesus Christ (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1989: 196), Who mysteriously taught the suffering how to ask for God’s mercy: “Listen, thus, to the prayer of our Master and learn it, for it is why He prayed so that you might learn how to pray...” [our translation] (St. Augustin 1997, 227; Cassiodorus 1990, 39). Therefore, according to bishop Theodoret of Cyrus (2003, 118), this prayer, assigned by the psalmists to Christ, became His prayer, *the Jesus Prayer*, and, through Him, the prayer of the suffering mentioned in the New Testament, of fathers/hesychasts and, implicitly, the prayer of our heart.

The use of the *prayer of mercy* or, better said, of the *heart of the psalmic prayer* in the New Testament opens, through the messianic titles attributed to our Lord, the prerogatives of its transformation into the Jesus Prayer. Those who ask for Jesus Christ’s mercy and acknowledge Him as the son of David confirm the messianic horizon of this psalmic prayer, just as the Church Fathers anticipated in their Christological interpretations. By directly asking Jesus Christ for mercy, the suffering saw in Him the characteristics of the promised Saviour, Who would also pour out His grace on the Gentiles, confirmed by the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter. However, before giving more details about this aspect, it is necessary to mention the evangelical contexts in which the calling for divine mercy appears.

In the Septuagint, the verb *hanan* corresponds directly to *ἐλεέω* (*to show mercy or goodwill*), as it best renders the meaning and nuances of the Hebrew term. The imperative form of this verb (*ἐλέησον*) and the pronominal addition *με* (*on me*) or *ἡμᾶς* (*on us*) always refer to a personal relationship that is full of compassion, whether it is the mercy God pours out on people or interhuman compassion (Martin and Davids 2000, s. mercy). In the Gospels, the imperative *ἐλέησον* is used in 11 verses in the following contexts: the healing of two blind men of Capernaum (Mt 9:27); the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter (Mt 15:22); the healing of the lunatic boy (Mt 17:15); the healing of the two blind men at Jericho (Mt 20:30-31); the healing of Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho (Mk 10:47-48); the healing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:13); and the healing of a blind man of Jericho – most likely Bartimaeus (Lk 18:38-39).

By analyzing these events from the point of view of this undertaking, I have drawn the following conclusions: the calling for mercy mainly had two reasons: the suffering caused by illness (blindness and leprosy) and the attacks of the enemy and the murderer of men (acc. Jn 8:44) through possession; some ask for mercy for themselves, while others for their family (the father for his lunatic son, the Canaanite woman for her daughter); in some cases, mercy is called for individually, while in others two or

several people join to ask for Jesus Christ’s help; one of those who asked for mercy was not part of the chosen people, namely the Canaanite woman (Blomberg 2001, 242); the names they used to address our Saviour are the following: Son of David (Υἱὸς Δαβὶδ – Mt 9:27; Mk 10:48; Lk 18:39); Lord (Κύριε), Son of David (Mt 15:22; 20:30-31); Lord (Κύριε – Mt 17:5); Jesus (Ἰησοῦ), Son of David (Mk 10:47; Lk 18:38); Jesus, Master (Ἰησοῦ, ἐπιστάτα – Lk 17:13).

If we compare the evangelical contexts with the psalmic ones, we can notice the following: illness and physical suffering can be a common cause for the request of mercy; the same holds true for the plots of the enemies, only that the level at which the battle takes place is different; the lunatic boy and the Canaanite woman’s daughter were being possessed by demons; we know that the former was suffering terribly – the demon threw him into the fire and into the water to take him to death – and the Canaanite woman’s daughter was severely oppressed by a demon; besides individual prayer, mercy is also called for by several people in both categories of writings; perseverance in prayer characterises the requests of the suffering; mercy is called for when man is overwhelmed by his suffering, being helpless when faced with a test which goes beyond his own power; in the gospels, we have an element of novelty, namely that mercy is called for by some for others (the father of the lunatic asks for mercy for his son); the case of the Canaanite woman is also special, as she believes that the healing of her daughter will be perceived as an outpouring of divine mercy on her (St. John Chrysostom 1994, 600); the *prayer of mercy* is used by a woman belonging to another people, along with God’s proper name and with a messianic title – this is extremely important, considering that someone from another people knew what the right way to ask for the Lord’s mercy was; if in the psalms the prayer is addressed to God, the Lord, in the Gospels mercy is asked from Jesus Christ, the Lord of the New Testament; another difference with respect to the psalmic texts is the onomastic register – in the gospels, our Saviour is called: *Lord, Son of David, Jesus and Master*.

In conclusion, the invocation of the divine name and the request for mercy undergo no theological change, whether the authors were the psalmists or the suffering who lived in the times of our Saviour. The contexts that determine the calling for mercy are similar; the need for salvation is just as visible, and the effects of the outpouring of mercy are present in the psalmic paradigm. It is extremely relevant that the prayer of mercy is addressed to the Lord of the Old Testament by the psalmists and to the Lord of the New Testament by those who acknowledged this quality of Jesus Christ

(Stine 1992, 494). An important step for the prayer of mercy in the New Testament is that the heart of the psalmic prayer became the Jesus Prayer, given that it was addressed directly by the suffering of Jesus Christ.

The Prayer of the Heart / the Jesus Prayer in Hesychastic Practice

In Eastern Orthodox spirituality, the prayer of the heart or the Jesus Prayer is considered a form of continuous prayer in which one experiences the mystical life in Christ by having the mind descend on the altar of the heart to mysteriously live in communion with the Holy Trinity. It is evident that the complete formula of this prayer, which most mystics recommend – *Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner* – has a biblical origin. It is enough to draw such a conclusion to look only at the names and titles assigned to our Saviour. Even the rest of the prayer is inspired by the scriptural text, the words by which mercy is called for belonging to the tax collector who prayed at the temple (Lk 18:13). However, this formula can also be synthesized through a biblical syntagm this time from the psalms – *Lord, have mercy*. This summarises the two structures that make up the Jesus prayer: adoration and repentance (Gouillard 2008, 202). I believe it would be much better to say that the foundation of the prayer of the heart is this psalmic prayer, which was developed over the years by adding specific divine names and by underscoring its penitential character.

I should mention that the Desert Fathers also used other formulas or, better said, other short prayers, not only those mentioned above. Their desire to pray unceasingly, to be in communion with God, was much more important than the words through which they reached that state. The main source of inspiration for these prayers was the Holy Scripture. The syntagms *Maran atha!* (*The Lord is coming* – 1 Cor 16:23; Rev 22:20) or *Lord, save me!* (Mt 14:30) were among the first prayers uttered by the Christians of the Early Church (Breck 2003, 301). Hermits also used to take certain verses from the Holy Scriptures and say them for a long while until they replaced them with others. Saint Macarius the Great, who organized the monastic life in the Desert of Scetis, recommended several types of prayers to his disciples and allowed them to choose whichever option they found more suitable for the practice of the unceasing prayer. His recommendations included the following verses: *Lord, help me!* (Mt 15:25), *Save me, I pray, O Lord, as you wish and know!* (Ps 118:25) (Gouillard 2008, 38), *Let you will be, O Lord, as you wish* (Ps 33:22) or *Blessed be, Lord Jesus, help me!* (Ps 28:6). Abba Anthony used these two prayers: *Lord, save me as You know!* (Ps 3:7; 20:10) and

Lord, cast me not away! (Ps 51:11; 71:9); Saint Cassian repeated the words: "Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!" (Ps 70:1); and Abba Lucius recommended unceasingly uttering Psalm 51, which begins with the words "Have mercy on me, O God!" (*Patericon* 1997, 234). Thus, emphasis was not on a certain prayer, but on the continuous invocation of God's name.

Nonetheless, it gradually became widespread that this act of praying unceasingly should be achieved by uttering the prayer whose fundamental structure was the name of our Saviour: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God". Even if these names were not always used or not all at the same time, the conclusion was that there could be no communion with the One Who was called to come into the heart without them. Moreover, some Fathers believe that the last stage of the prayer of the heart could entail only one word (Jesus) or two (Lord, Jesus), as Diadochos, bishop of Photiki used to pray (Gouillard 2008, 52).

The one who lives among others but who wants to adopt this practice of the Church is recommended to start their continuous prayer with the short formula *Lord, have mercy*. According to Oliver Clément, this prayer was used by novices since the Early Church. Its penitential character prepared the Christians for a higher stage, in which they could utter the name of Jesus (Clément 1997, 26). The famous pilgrim Egeria wrote in her diary that this prayer was frequently used in the cult developed on the territory of the Holy Land in the first Christian centuries. She also noticed a unique practice, which involved children. After each name mentioned during the Vespers service, they answered with the words *Lord, have mercy* (Egeria 2006, 85). However, the prayer *Lord, have mercy*, which Rev. Ioan Bizău considers to be "a summary of the prayer of the heart and the true prayer of Eucharistic community" (Bizău 2009, 124), was also used by the great mystics of our spirituality. [our translation] St. Niketas Stethatos mentions an episode in which his spiritual father, St. Symeon the New Theologian, uttered this prayer when he saw and was surrounded by the uncreated light: "... astonished as he was, he started to cry out loud unceasingly: *Lord, have mercy*, as he remembered once he came back to his senses. At that moment, he was unaware that his voice was uttering words and that others could hear them..." (Gouillard 2008, 120). [our translation]

Therefore, this prayer, which Metropolitan Bartholomew of Cluj recommended to the faithful as a continuous prayer, could be a solution for those currently seeking unceasing communion with God. The words *Lord, have mercy* can be uttered both by

novices and those who reach a state of mystical ecstasy and partake of the radiance of God’s glory.

Conclusions

The Prayer of the heart or the Jesus Prayer, as we know it today – *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner* – originates in the scriptural practice of invoking the name of God. The early form of this prayer can be found in psalmic writings.

The prayer *Lord, have mercy*, uttered for the first time by the psalmists, became a means by which they and those who followed their example established an accurate, personal contact with God. Entire generations of believers adopted this model of prayer to reach a state of communion with God. Hesychasts took this biblical model of unceasing prayer and perfected it, creating even a complex method of uttering these words, which entails a unique breathing technique. Contemporary believers can adhere to this model of prayer to experience the possibility of praying unceasingly and directly feeling God’s presence.

In the future, it would be desirable to outline and assert more firmly the scriptural, in the particular psalmic, origin of this prayer, which has decisively influenced Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

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