
BOOK REVIEWS

ION IRIMIE

Socrate și Isus: Personalități polare

(Socrates and Jesus: Polar personalities)

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PROFESSOR ION Irimie's meditation about the complementarity and the polarity of Socrates and Jesus begins with a series of reminiscences from his childhood and adolescence. The child Ion Irimie does not understand why Romanians celebrate Easter at a different date than the Hungarians and the Germans if Jesus died only once and he sacrificed himself for all of us. The recommended or the random readings from the high school years Ion Irimie spent in Blaj brought him even closer to these huge personalities, Socrates and Jesus.

Jesus is interpreted by Ion Irimie as a reformer of Judaism who understood that the monotheistic values should be maintained but the message given to Moses had to be overcome. After Jesus passed away, the Evangelists combined, according to Irimie, the little historical evidence with a lot of fantasy. "If God made man in his image, why wouldn't it be possible to have a God in man's image?" (51). Socrates, on the other hand, was a real man about whose historical existence there is credible information in the writings of Plato. Jesus does not exist outside faith, or he exists only as the essence of a religion. "Plato gave us a strongly credible personality, the Evangelists a strongly doubtful one" (52), concludes Professor Irimie. Socrates belongs to philosophy; Jesus belongs to re-

ligious promises, the former uses reason, the latter faith. Socrates invokes God but without institutionalization (the church), without rituals, he does not talk about sin. Jesus continues the Jewish ethical thought for which sin is the fundamental measure of moral human behavior. Jesus introduced, among the other sins, the possibility that one sins by thought, but Jesus also forgave where Moses' God was merciless. For Socrates love is one's quest for his other half. Socrates loves like any other human. For Jesus love is connected to forgiveness, he forgives people because he loves them. Jesus loves like a God, not like a human. Ion Irimie considers that the Evangelists and those who further edited the texts of the New Testament were very careful to repress any sexual element in Jesus. "Jesus the man had to remain asexual. Rather doubtful this position. It could inspire great doubts about the human side in the man-God combination" (87–88). At this point in Irimie's demonstration, I think that we should mention an important characteristic of Judaism. From the Jewish perspective, Jesus was a dissident rabbi, or marriage was a duty for a Jew, and even more so for a rabbi. The Jews did not valorize celibacy as a sign of virtue and holiness. Even the greatest Jewish mystics got married, had a family, had children. "Breed and multiply," says God in the Old Testament. The idea that you should withdraw in the wilderness, in the deserts of Judea, fast or even torture your body in order to purify your mind and spirit, came only with the Christians. Consequently,

we may very well presume that Jesus was married but his followers, keen on making him a God rather than an enlightened man only, expurgated his wife from the Scriptures and probably lowered her to the status of a prostitute.

Coming back to the comparison between Socrates and Jesus, Irimie insists that both are interested in morality. In “Meno,” Plato’s dialogue dedicated to virtue, the views of Socrates on woman are presented. She must take care of the house, protect it and submit to man. Socrates is a “good” representative of the patriarchal Greek society. The woman’s place is in the gynaeceum. Socrates’ wife, Xantippe, has a bad image but she may have been left home with the chores of the household while Socrates indulged himself in the company of his sophisticated friends without caring about the daily needs of the family. No wonder she scolded Socrates when he finally deigned to come back home. Jesus, on the other hand, treated women with a lot of respect and sympathy. He forgave the prostitutes; he understood the plight of women in a very aggressive patriarchal society. That is why many women followed him and believed in him.

Professor Ion Irimie expresses some interesting considerations about Eve and Jesus. Firstly, he notices that Eve, the great sinner from the Garden of Eden, is not mentioned at all in the four Gospels. How can this omission be explained? Ion Irimie considers that the act of forgiveness which is fundamental for Jesus should also include Eve. “She did not take heaven from us, she gave it to us. She gave us the foolishness of love, the audacity of knowledge, the joys of creation” (91). Irimie considers Eve as “the great co-author in our genesis” (91). When the first couple are expelled from the Garden of Eden, they begin history. They have each other and they have a whole world be-

fore them. Ion Irimie mentions then the episode from Luke 7.47 when the sins of the sinful woman are forgiven by Jesus because she has shown great love. Irimie interprets this episode in a very liberal sense: Jesus thinks that sex is not a sin if committed out of love. This woman has loved a lot, she is no sinner. I think the Romanian translation is problematic here. Jesus forgives the sinful woman because she has shown great love for him, not because she has loved many a man (see this episode in King James’ Bible, the famous English translation). Jesus forgives a lot because he loves people a lot, but this does not mean that his love is sexual.

Any discussion about Christian love must include St. Paul and his First Letter to the Corinthians. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Ion Irimie mentions that St. Paul talks about loving one’s neighbor but he accuses him that he neglects to mention our obligation, as good Christians, to love our enemies as well (cf. 105). But St. Paul wrote his famous first Epistle to the Corinthians exactly at the moment when there were contentions in the community and former friends, companions into Christ, were about to become enemies or even became enemies. When we see through a glass darkly, we see not only the Christians we have quarreled with but also our enemies, and this is how our enemies see us. A terrorist who is willing to take his own life in order to kill other people undoubtedly sees through a glass darkly, the glass of his own prejudice, stereotypes, and finally hatred. On the other hand, St. Paul’s role in editing the message of Jesus is very well caught by Ion Irimie who fully agrees with the following appreciation of Michel Onfray. But for St. Paul, Christianity would have been “a kind of Palestinian version

of Buddhism” (109). In other words, St. Paul universalized Christianity but altered some of the founder’s very generous ideas.

Commenting on Socrates and ethics, Irimie considers that the Greek philosopher does not rely too much on gods in his ethical quest. Humans must lead their life according to wisdom. As the son of God, Jesus puts himself as the guarantee of morality. Ion Irimie brings St. Paul himself in favor of this difference between Socrates and Jesus. “For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1.22). Socrates advises us to know ourselves and pursue balance in everything. He does not impose upon people. His maieutic method helps us find the way towards truth. Socrates teaches us humans that we must incessantly look for the truth.

The book ends with a beautiful conclusion. Socrates influenced, profoundly, the way to philosophize, Jesus influenced religion profoundly. The similarities between Socrates and Jesus are superficial, exterior to their beliefs and ideas. They wrote nothing, both were sentenced to death, both were interested in the moral aspects of human lives. The differences between them are more profound. Socrates wanted to surpass mythology via philosophy. Jesus wanted to prolong Judaism into a new religion, Christianity. The relationship between these two enlightened spirits and minds is defined by Ion Irimie as dynamic polarity. To sum up: Ion Irimie’s essay is a challenging book written with conviction and intelligence. Last but not least, it is an invitation to find the truths of our lives following such great examples as Jesus and/or Socrates.



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GHEORGHE CLIVETI

România modernă și « apogeul Europei », 1815-1914

(La Roumanie moderne et « l’apogée de l’Europe », 1815-1914)

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COMME ATTENDU, en 2018 on a vu en Roumanie une riche production historiographique matérialisée par la publication de centaines de volumes de documents, d’ouvrages mémorialistiques, de livres et de monographies dédiés aux événements, mais aussi aux personnalités associées avec la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale et la Grande Union de 1918. Au-delà des ouvrages dédiés à la guerre et à l’année astrale 1918, on a publié aussi des monographies qui ont abordé une séquence chronologique plus ample, qui suit le parcours de la nation roumaine durant l’époque moderne. Par conséquent, l’initiative du professeur Gheorghe Cliveti est non seulement naturelle dans l’historiographie roumaine contemporaine de l’année du Centenaire, mais elle mérite aussi d’être appréciée pour l’immense quantité de travail dans l’élaboration de cette synthèse de valeur d’environ 1 200 pages. L’auteur s’est proposé et a réussi à présenter le destin des Roumains et de l’État roumain dans le contexte des relations internationales de l’Europe entre 1815-1914, plus précisément à partir du Congrès de Vienne, qui a donné une certaine direction à l’histoire du continent pour presque un siècle, jusqu’au déclenchement de la Grande Guerre, à la fin de laquelle le système politique international établi il y a un siècle sera remplacé, tandis que l’architecture géopolitique de l’Europe connaîtra des changements majeurs. L’au-