

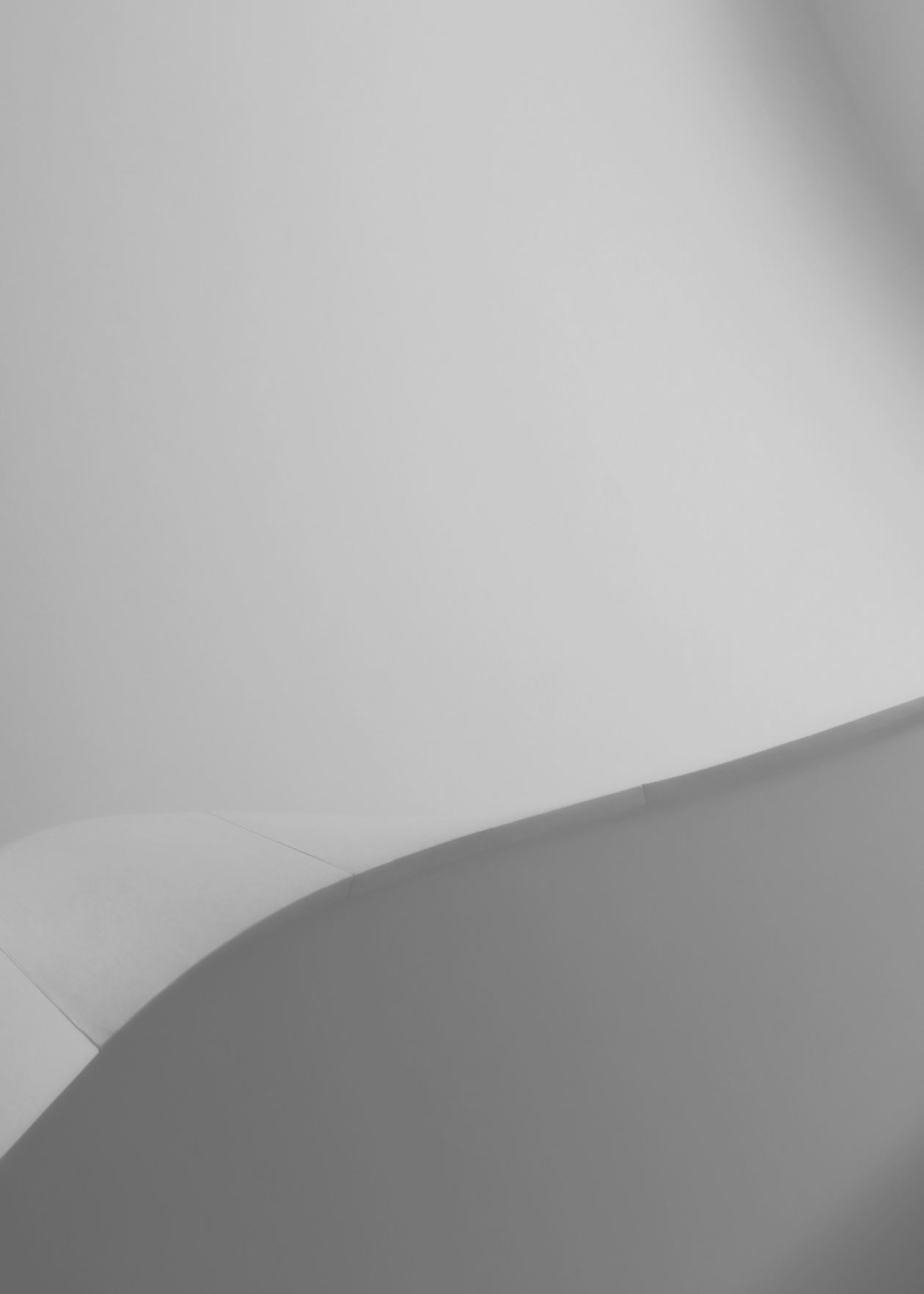
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Spiritual-Religious Literature
Through the Lens
of Comparative Imagology

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Foreword

According to the Belgian scholar Hugo Dyserinck, imagology – as a method studying the images of national ideas – is primarily a contribution to the removal of ideology out of any scientific study pertinent to literature. Although the interest of comparative imagology – also as a discipline of literary method (i.e. literary imagology) – is to examine the image of “the other” in literary texts through the image of foreign (hetero-image) and oneself (auto-image), in the given context of research, much can suggest monitoring the processes of creating a “self-image” (see Dyserinck 1966). Just as non-literary collective judgments about other nations and countries arise and operate, literary and artistic notions of one’s own land are intertwined with national self-images, on the basis of which, many bygone nations thought they had to live. This dimension can also be an incentive for the work of comparatists and other scholars within the framework of comparative imagology (see Leerssen 2007, Pageaux 1988 etc.), also in the sense of contributing to the elimination of misconceptions and ideologies.

Placing our interest on spiritual-religious literary works analysed through the lens of comparative imagology, the ambition of this monograph is to point out the influence and significance of Christianity, which has been an important impulse for the formation of the national self-image in Central Europe. It was the Christianisation mission of the Thessalonian brothers in Great Moravia, which was significant in terms of the internal organisation of the empire; the establishment of its law and also its domestic and foreign policy. It is the first chapter of the monograph that focuses on the cultural image of Sts Cyril and Methodius, since the cultural legacy of ancestors and previous generations is part of the self-definition of each national community. The mission of the Thessalonian brothers is generally defined as Christian, cultural, but also national or governmental. The aim of the first chapter will therefore be to analyse one of the oldest literary documents written in the Old Slavonic language, which is *Proglas*. This valuable work of medieval Slavic literature and culture is not only a reflection of the time, but also a means of perceiving the many complex spiritual, historical, social and linguistic phenomena in which

the foundations of state, legal, spiritual and cultural unity were born. From the point of comparative imagology, it brings up many questions: Who are “we” in the interpretation of the legacy of Sts Cyril and Methodius? Does *Proglas* belong to Slovak literature? Did the Thessalonian brothers stand at the cradle of “our” culture? The image of Sts Cyril and Methodius as “our” versus “foreign” in art literature and literary method is the starting point for defining their answers.

The reference to the spiritual and cultural legacy of the Thessalonian brothers and to the more than a thousand-year-old Christian tradition, through which a certain “self-image” of one’s own nation was formed in Slovak literature, also dominated in the works of authors of Slovak Catholic modernism in the 1940s. The chapter entitled *Comparative Imagology and Catholic Literature* thus brings – in connection with newer imaginary approaches – interpretation of texts with a national character, which follow the auto-stereotype (or self-stereotype) as the group’s own established image of itself, allowing reflection of literary images, clichés, national symbols, myths et al. This is also in the sense of Dyserinck’s appeal, to take into account the “non-literary” meanings, while it is important to note, that the forming “self-image” of the essence of the Slovak nation in the work of the authors of Slovak Catholic modernism in the period just before and during World War II, when The (First) Slovak Republic, also referred as the Slovak State, was created. It was a period in which several established authors brought their attention to public affairs and thus crossed the boundaries of personal space. As part of the formation of a certain “self-image” of one’s own nation, it is possible to notice that in some poems and at the interface of some kind of mythicisation, in the sense of not very critically accepted, revered image of oneself and others, the recited national motif is engaged. On one hand, it was caused by the joy of the establishment of the Slovak state and, on the other hand, by the grief over specific tragic events of the time (e.g. the Černová massacre, the Munich Agreement, the Vienna Arbitration etc.). The structural mechanisms of the presented complex of ideas about other nations (especially the image of national oppression and occupation by the surrounding nations) or about individual persons, significantly influenced non-literary historical facts, which are reflected in literary texts.

The third chapter of the monograph is devoted to the circumstances of the historical development of Hungarian Catholic literature, the interpretation of

this concept, the role of such profiled literature, its reflection and evaluation in literary criticism. Through imagological optics, it also follows non-literary views on the ethics and ideology involved, which are surpassed in its aesthetic aspects. It also focuses on the discussion sparked by the literary activity of Hungarian priestly poets in the 1920s and 1930s, which provides a valuable insight into the critical evaluation of “one’s own” and “other” values based on aesthetic, poetic and ideological criteria, providing a picture of Catholic literature through the work of their critics, who either supported or distanced themselves from the literary work of a Catholic-oriented group of authors. In the final part of this chapter, detailed analysis of L. Mécs’s work can be found. It provides a view of system of thinking closely related to Slovak and Hungarian Catholic literature from the 1920s.

Authors