In Memoriam

to

Dr. Charles B. Ashanin

by Theodore J. Nottingham

Dr. Charles Ashanin has left in the wake of his life on earth an extraordinary legacy. Numerous individuals of all ages and all walks of life have been touched to the core of their being by his unique agape and will carry his memory in their hearts forever.

Dr. Ashanin’s great love and awareness of God gave him rare insight into the souls and spiritual needs of others. He saw and felt things of the spirit in ways that most people cannot. Though he never claimed to be so, Dr. Ashanin was a true mystic, combining an all-consuming devotion to the Presence of the Holy with gifts of clairvoyance, wisdom, and a profound understanding of Scripture and of the writings of the early teachers of the Faith. As a scholar of early Church History, he inspired many students with his genuine living out of the Gospel through his care of their souls. At the university of Ghana in Lego, African, at Allen and Claflin universities in South Carolina, and finally for 23 years at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana, Dr. Ashanin was more than a professor -- he was a mentor, beloved friend, and companion on the spiritual journey.

Dr. Ashanin’s deep life of prayer and compassion also committed him to ecumenism, to the Body of Christ in all its manifestations. As a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church with twelve hundred years of Slavonic spirituality in his soul, he worked closely with students studying for the Protestant ministry, enriching their traditions and perspectives of the Gospel in the manner of a true “staretz” (spiritual guide). This ecumenical commitment cost him greatly. For its sake, he suffered the disdain and persecution of colleagues whose “modern” Christianity mocked and rejected his devotion to the ways of the early Church.

This virtual martyrdom never deterred him from caring for Christians of all traditions and he remained to the end a luminous example of the true ecumenical spirit, which is nothing less than the imitation of Christ in all aspects of life.

Born in Montenegro in 1920, Dr. Ashanin graduated from Cetinje Seminary and expected to serve his beloved Serbian Orthodox Church until he found himself on the “hit list” from both the Nazis and Communists who decimated his country during World War II. Forced to flee his homeland and his family, he eventually made his way to England and Scotland where he earned a Ph.D. from Glasgow University under the tutelage of leading theologians such as the Disciples’ own William Robinson. Later he established a deep friendship with Dr. Ronald Osborn which brought him further into the ecumenical world of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Dr. Ashanin’s personal impact on the people who loved him is inmeasurable. Each one has a personal story of the special influence he exerted upon their mind, heart, and soul. Along with the living testimonial of his exceptional Christian spirit, Dr. Ashanin has left us with his book, “Essays
on Orthodox Christianity and Church History,” along with numerous articles, his remarkable foreword to the book, “The Spiritual Wisdom and Practices of Early Christianity,” his chapter in “The Vision of Christian Unity” and interviews in several video programs including the nationally televised “The Resurrected Life: Understanding the Meaning of Easter” and “Sharing the Spiritual Journey.”

This tribute closes with Dr. Ashanin’s words quoted from the video “Turning toward the Light”:

“That transcendent ocean of Love, of Goodness, of Truth is behind us in our earthly pilgrimage assisting us to embody within our historical and earthly life enough of that vision to transform existence into its likeness. This is my hope for the world. And this is why we should use our talents to celebrate or portray or testify to that kind of vision. That is why the artist should paint his images, why the poet should compose poetry to celebrate this vision, why the musicians should do likewise, and why we -- all of us individually in our earthly life -- should share with each other sacramentally something of that vision to ennoble each other’s lives by the gift of it which is really given to each one of us if we stretch our hands to receive it. (This vision is) the eucharist of self-sacrificial love of God on behalf of Creation, and especially of us human beings whom He loves, I don’t understand why, but I know that He does.”

Note: Dr. Ashanin will be featured in the broadcast of "The Resurrected Life" across North America. (See http://www.disciples.org/offcomm/easter.htm) Other videos of his deep wisdom are available from the Office of Communication (http://www.disciples.org/offcomm/tv.htm).