

The Soul of the Village

Child, place your hands on my knees.

I believe that eternity was born in the village.

Here, every thought moves more slowly,

and your heart beats less often,

as if it weren't beating in your chest,

but deep within the earth somewhere.

Here, the thirst for salvation is quenched

and if your feet are bleeding,

you sit down on a clay embankment.

Look, it's evening.

The soul of the village flutters beside us,

like a shy scent of cut grass,

like smoke drifting from thatched eaves,

like a game of kids playing on tall graves.

Lucian Blaga opens his poem *Sufletul satului / The soul of the village* with the line "Vesnicia s-a născut la sat." Eternity was born in the village. This sentence is not only poetic but also a theological distillation of Romanian village metaphysics. Blaga suggests that the village is a space where time does not simply pass but condenses, slows down,

and sometimes even stands still. A space in which people do not merely live, but stand within a metaphysical landscape that sustains them, shapes them, and molds them across generations. When Blaga later writes, “The soul of the village stirs deep within”, he is referring to a deep, barely articulable murmur that arises from the depths of the community—a spiritual background hum that holds the village together.

This background noise is not only metaphysical but also pneumatological: it is the breath of the Spirit, which “blows where it will,” which enlivens the community, which permeates time, and which connects people in a way that transcends ethnic, cultural, and denominational boundaries. Eternity, which is “born in the village,” is not abstract. It is the experience of a divine presence that reveals itself in the rhythm of life—and this rhythm is the rhythm of the Spirit. The Spirit is present not only in liturgy but also in everyday life: in plowing, in baking bread, in singing, in silence, in suffering, and in celebration. Blaga’s village metaphysics is a poetic translation of the pneumatological experience that the Spirit of God is at work not only in the sacred but also in the profane.

Here a fascinating parallel emerges with Adolf Meschendörfer’s *Transylvanian Elegy*. While Blaga describes the Romanian village as the metaphysical origin of eternity, Meschendörfer portrays the Transylvanian countryside as a place that bears its history “silently and without complaint.” The elegy begins with the line: “It is a silent land.” This silence is not emptiness, but a space of the Spirit. It recalls the biblical notion that God speaks in the “still, gentle whisper.” Meschendörfer’s silence is the resonant space in which the Spirit of God becomes audible—not in the noise of the cities, but in the silence of the landscape. Blaga’s eternity and Meschendörfer’s silence are two

expressions of the same pneumatological mystery: the Spirit of God is a spirit of closeness, depth, and silence.

To understand this presence, we must examine the deeper layers of history. Transylvania was from a historical point of view not a unified entity. Romanians, Hungarians, Székelys, Saxons, and Roma lived for centuries within a fabric defined by neighborliness but also by invisible borders. Each of these groups brought its own cultural and religious influences, yet shared spiritual patterns emerged in the villages that spread across ethnic lines. Annual cycles—such as winter customs, Easter traditions, or harvest festivals—were celebrated by all groups, often with local and ethnical variations but with similar symbolic meanings: protection, fertility, transition, and community. These festivals were not merely religious events but pneumatological intensifications: moments in which the Spirit renews, strengthens, and unites the community. The Spirit is not exclusive, but inclusive. It creates spaces for encounter, not for separation. Orthodox liturgy, Reformed preaching, and Lutheran church music differ aesthetically, but not in their pneumatological function: they are forms of expression of the same Spirit that sustains the community.

Blaga's line "În sat, timpul se odihnește" — "In the village, time rests" — resonates particularly deeply in Transylvania because it overlaps with Meschendörfer's "It is a quiet land." The tranquility Blaga describes is metaphysical; the silence Meschendörfer describes is historical.

Together, they form the foundation of a spirituality that draws not only from religious practices but also from a deep, cultural experience of time, space, and community. And this experience is profoundly pneumatological: it is the experience of a Spirit who is present not only in heaven but also in the village—in work, in celebration, in suffering, and in the rhythm of nature.

This spiritual world was put to a severe test under communism. The communist state sought to control, reduce, and secularize the religious landscape. Yet spirituality persisted in the village—often in secret, but unbroken. Domestic rituals replaced church rituals: candles, icons, and prayers were observed in private as a quiet form of continuity. Folk beliefs became a space for the survival of spiritual practices. These forms of spirituality were flexible, adaptable, and deeply rooted in everyday culture—and it is precisely this flexibility that is a sign of a spirit not bound to institutions, but to people.

Ethnic diversity remained spiritually visible. Saxons practiced Protestant domestic piety, often closely intertwined with cultural traditions. Hungarians and Szeklers held fast to Reformed rituals that were strongly family-oriented. Roma practiced syncretic forms that eluded state control and developed their own spiritual dynamics. Romanians found their footing in the Orthodox liturgy, often performed outside the church. Communism did not destroy spirituality, but rather shifted, internalized, and privatized it. This phase explains why spirituality today is so multifaceted and resilient. It has learned to live in secret, to adapt, and yet to preserve its depth—and this ability is pneumatological: the Spirit lives in secret, in resistance, in silence, in survival.

Today, spirituality in Transylvanian villages manifests as a whole, not as the sum of individual denominations. People continue to celebrate together: Christmas and Easter, often with ethnic variations but shared meaning; rites of passage such as weddings and funerals, which are symbolically structured in similar ways; and village festivals that combine religious and cultural elements. These festivals are not merely religious events, but expressions of a spiritual culture that sustains the village as a whole—and this culture is a culture of the spirit.

Folk beliefs serve as a unifying element. These practices are not relics of a bygone era, but living expressions of a spirituality that cannot be reduced to institutional religion. They are an expression of a deep, often intuitive connection to nature, to the ancestors, and to the community.

Occasional denominational differences remain cultural resources. Orthodox churches with icons and incense, Saxon churches with Protestant simplicity, Reformed churches centered on the sermon—all these forms are aesthetic markers that enrich the spiritual landscape of Transylvania. They create diversity without causing division. Ethnic diversity shapes spiritual practice: Romanians combine Orthodox tradition with folk beliefs; Hungarians and Szeklers cultivate family rituals and Reformed spirituality; Saxons preserve Protestant domestic piety and cultural traditions; and Roma practice syncretic forms, often community-building ones.

Blaga's line "Sufletul satului freamătă în adâncuri" takes on new meaning here: The village buzzes not in spite of, but because of its diversity. And Meschendorf's "It is a quiet land" takes on a spiritual dimension: The silence is not emptiness, but a resonant space for a diversity of voices, memories, and forms of spiritual expression—and this resonance is the work of the Spirit.

The past ten years have profoundly transformed the spiritual landscape. Migration plays a central role: returnees from Western Europe bring with them new religious styles, charismatic elements, greater individualization, and new forms of community. Evangelical congregations are growing, especially in multiethnic villages. They offer clear structures, a strong sense of community, and modern forms of communication. Digitalization has made spirituality more visible, accessible, and interconnected: online worship services, religious

influencers, and hybrid rituals define the present. At the same time, forms of civil society spirituality are emerging: pilgrimage routes, nature-based spirituality, and local initiatives show that spirituality today is also practiced outside the churches. Interethnic cooperation is on the rise: joint festivals, restored churches, and cultural associations are turning spirituality into a bridge between groups.

Concrete examples from Transylvania illustrate these dynamics. In a village with an Orthodox majority and a Reformed minority, joint festivals are celebrated, even though the liturgies remain separate. In a former Saxon village, Protestant architecture shapes the landscape, while Romanian spirituality shape contemporary spiritual life. In a multi-ethnic village experiencing evangelical growth, new dynamics, new forms of community, and new spiritual expressions are emerging. These examples show that spirituality in the village is not static but is constantly evolving—and this evolution is the work of the Spirit, who renews, transforms, and enlivens.

Spirituality in the Transylvanian village is more than religion. It is social practice, cultural identity, and a moral framework. It is—in pneumatological terms—the experience of the Spirit who sustains the community, who enlivens diversity, and who transforms history. It is a form of incarnation: the presence of the Holy One in everyday life. It is a form of resurrection: the community's ability to rise anew time and again despite ruptures, migration, political upheavals, and ethnic shifts. It is a form of pneumatology: the work of the Spirit, who “blows where he wills,” and who reveals diversity not as a threat but as a gift.

Transylvania shows that diversity is not a threat, but a strength. Spiritual plurality fosters resilience, community, and cultural depth. Blaga's line “Vesnicia s-a născut la sat” is perhaps more true today than ever, for eternity arises where people live, believe, and hope

together—despite their differences. And Meschendorf's "It is a quiet land" reminds us that this eternity is not loud, but quiet, carried by the stillness of a land that preserves its history, its diversity, and its spirituality without complaint.