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## OCTOEQUE

*A Christian*

«□ *Quid potest esse adspectu pulchrius*□ »

□ («□ *Est-il rien de plus beau à la vue*□ »)

Cicéron,

□□□□□□□□□□ *Cato Major, de senectute*53

Oui, mon cher Christian,

Le temps est le signe sensible,

La face palpable de l'éternité.

Et nous, mon Ami, nous sommes

La figure du mouvement du temps

Et le mesure du temps du mouvement !

Ainsi parlaient jadis les grands philosophes

Qui contemplaient l'infinité ordonnée des étoiles

Et le ciel palpitant dans le coeur aimant de l'homme.

Mais nous, nous, mon Ami,

Saisis par la beauté des changeantes apparences,

Abîmés dans l'infinie vanité du désir,

Nous nous croyons à jamais immortels.

Or, parfois, il arrive que par le plus pur des hasards,

Nous entrons, distraits, dans une simple église

Pendant que les prêtres, vêtus de chasubles brodées d'or,

Chantent le Divin Octoèque.

Alors, intime et silencieux

Et pleine de douceur incommensurable

S'allume en nous l'image douloureuse de notre Dieu,

Et notre âme, on sait trop pourquoi, émue, bouleversée

Eclate en larmes

Comme si elle avait compris subitement

Que l'Homme sur la Croix

Avait ramassé en sa sublime humilité

Toute la durée des siècles,

Toute la succession harmonieuse des temps !

Tel est, ô mon cher Christian, l'ordre invisible,

L'architecture mobile

Qui préside au monde créé !

Athanase Vantchev de Thracy

A Paris, ce mercredi 30 novembre, Anno Domini MMV

**Glose** :

**Octoèque (n.m.)** : du grec *octoèkhos*, « les huit tons », nom donné, dans l'Eglise orthodoxe à un livre qui contient tout ce qu'on chante pendant les offices, selon les huit tons du Plain-Chant.

**Incommensurable (adj.)** : du bas latin *incommensurabilis*. Mathématiques : se dit des grandeurs qui n'ont pas de mesure commune, dont le rapport ne peut donner de nombre entier ni fractionnaire, **irrationnel.**

*La racine carrée de 2 est incommensurable avec l'unité.*

Sens littéraire :

Qu'on ne peut mesurer, évaluer par manque de commune mesure,

**irréductible.**

«

□

*La sensation des littératures est chose personnelle, irréductible, incommensurable* »

(Bourget). Qui ne peut être mesuré, qui est très grand,

**démesuré, illimité, immense.**

**ENGLISH (My translation into English)** :

**OCTOECHOS**

*To Christian*

*'Quid potest esse adspectu pulchrius'*

*('There is no think more beautiful for our eyes')*

Cicero,

□□□□□□□□□□ *'Cato Major, de senectute, 53'*

Yes, my dear Christian,  
The time is the sensitive sign,  
The tangible face of eternity.  
And we, my Friend, we are  
The figure of the movement of time  
And measure of the time of the movement!

So spoke in days of old the great philosophers  
Who contemplated the orderly infinity of stars  
And the sky palpitating in the loving heart of the man.

But we, we, my Friend,  
Seized by the beauty of changeable appearances,  
Engulfed in the infinite vanity of the desire,  
We consider we are for ever immortal.

But, sometimes, it happens that by the purest of the fates,  
We enter, distracted, in a simple church  
While the priests, dressed in chasubles embroidered with gold,  
Sing the Divine Octoechos.

Then, intimate and silent

And full of immense sweetness  
Lights up in us the painful image of our God,  
And our soul, we don't know exactly why, moved, upset  
Bursts into tears  
As if it had suddenly understood  
That the Man on the Cross  
Had collected in his sublime humility  
All the duration of the centuries,  
All the harmonious succession of times!

Such is, o my dear Christian, the invisible order,  
The mobile architecture  
Which presides over the created world!

Paris, November 30, 2005

**ENGLISH :** □

**NORTON HODGES' TRANSLATION N° 1:**

**Octoechus**

*For Christian*

*'I could not say that I have seen anything more beautiful.'*

Cicero,

□□ *Cato Major, 'On Old Age' 53*

Yes, my dear Christian,  
time is the outward sign,  
the tangible face of eternity.  
And we, my Friend, we are  
the face of time's movement  
and the measure of how long time's movement takes!

Thus spoke in ages past the great philosophers  
who contemplated the well-ordered infinity of the stars  
and the heavens beating in the loving hearts of men.

But we, we, my Friend,  
enthralled by the beauty of shifting appearances,  
engulfed in the infinite vanity of desire,  
we believe ourselves to be for ever immortal.

But, sometimes, by the purest chance,  
it happens that, absentmindedly, we enter a simple church  
where the priests, in gold-embroidered vestments,  
are singing the Divine Octoechus.

Then, intimately, silently,  
and full of boundless sweetness  
there lights in us the painful image of our Lord,  
and our souls, moved, shaken,  
for reasons we know only too well,  
burst into tears  
as if they had suddenly comprehended  
that the Man on the Cross  
gathered into his sublime humility



all the passing centuries  
the whole harmonious parade of time!

Such, my dear Christian, is the invisible order,  
the mobile architecture  
which presides over the created world!

*Translated from the French of Athanase Vantchev de Thracy by Norton Hodhes*

*01.12.2005.*

## **NORTON'S TRANSLATION N° 2 (LA BONNE)**

### **Octoechus**

*for Christian*

*'I could not say that I have seen anything more beautiful.'*

Cicero, Cato Major, 'On Old Age' 53

Yes, my dear Christian,  
time is the outward sign,  
the tangible face of eternity.  
And we, my Friend, we are  
the face of time's movement  
and the measure of how long time's movement takes!

Thus spoke in ages past the great philosophers  
who contemplated the well-ordered infinity of the stars  
and the heavens beating in the loving hearts of men.

Yet we, we, my Friend,  
enthralled by the beauty of shifting appearances,  
engulfed in the infinite vanity of desire,  
we believe ourselves to be for ever immortal.

But, sometimes, by the purest chance,  
it happens that, absentmindedly, we enter a simple church  
where the priests, in gold-embroidered vestments,  
are singing the Divine Octoechus.

Then, intimately, silently,  
and full of boundless sweetness  
there lights in us the painful image of our Lord,  
and our souls, moved, shaken,  
for reasons we know only too well,  
burst into tears  
as if they had suddenly comprehended  
that the Man on the Cross  
gathered into his sublime humility  
all the passing centuries  
the whole harmonious parade of time!

Such, my dear Christian, is the invisible order,  
the mobile architecture  
which presides over the created world!

*translated from the French of Athanase Vantchev de Thracy by Norton Hodges*

01.12.05.

**Notes:**

**Octoechos or octoechus** : Greek word meaning “eight tones”. The Octoechos is the fundamental structure for classifying and describing modes in byzantine music. According to tradition, the theory and practice of *echoi* (Greek plural of “echo”, word meaning tone) is codified a system comprising eight modes. Octoechos is also name, given, in the Greek Orthodox Church, to a Book which contains all that clerks and people sing during the Divine Offices, according to eight tones of Plain-Chant.

**Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.):** one of the greatest statesmen, philosophers and orators of Ancient Rome.

**Cato Major (234-149 B.C.):** Cato the Elder or Cato the Censor. In Latin *Cato Major* or *Cato Censorius*

. Roman statesman and moralist, whose full name was Marcus Porcius Cato.

**De senectute:** about oldness

**Chasuble:** a long sleeveless vestment worn over the alb by a priest during services.