

**“1 DECEMBER 1918” UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA,
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

**Empirical theology, a dynamic and vitalizing reality of the
synergy between academic theology
and Church mission in the contemporary society**

- ABSTRACT -

**HABILITATION THESIS
DOMAIN: THEOLOGY**

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Alba Iulia, 2020

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Abstract

Patrology and patristic literature are, on the one hand, an attraction to study and deeper knowledge of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, identified as “the one” Church, and, on the other hand, a need to transmit this teaching to the contemporary man, having in view that the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ steps in history by the steps of the Saints, guided by the work of the uncreated grace of the Holy Trinity.

According to the unanimous opinion of the patrologists and the researchers, *Patrology* studies the lives of the Holy Fathers and of the Church writers, taking as milestone the decisive importance they attach to the defence of the accuracy of the teaching of the Church and the spiritual benefit provided to one’s contemporaries, but also to the next generations. *Patrology* is a theological discipline whose character is catalogued as historical. Yet, *Patrology* is closely connected to the theological disciplines, especially to the *History of Dogmas* and to the *Symbolical Dogmatic Theology*, and, for this reason, in the Faculties of Orthodox Theology in Greece, for instance, these three disciplines form a common core. The specific of the Faculties and Departments of Orthodox Theology in Romania is that *Patrology* is joined with *Patristics* or *patristic literature*, forming a common body, and one of the justifications consists in the fact that one cannot talk about the life of a Holy Father without referring to his teaching, neither the other way round, because the teaching of a Holy Father fully mirrors his holy-spiritual experience. In this way, *Patrology and patristic literature* bring at hand the considerable treasures of the *Holy Tradition*, which represent, together with the *Holy Scripture*, the organs of the *divine Revelation*.

In the thesis proposed for obtaining the habilitation certification, made up of several parts, we have highlighted two main aspects, namely, our scientific and professional achievements, and our professional career perspectives.

Our scientific and professional achievements refer to our research area, developed by revolving along the following axes:

I) Continuity and increase of patristic theology, this theme being researched from the academic and empirical perspective. This approach has been structured, in its turn, into three themes:

i) *Patrology* and its periods, demonstrating that there is no terminus for the patristic period. Truly, patristic theology represents a unitary and indivisible fact in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ, God's Son and Saviour of the world. Consequently, a division of *Patrology* based on historical criteria or only depending on the major theological debates or crises cannot be supported, just as the separation of the patrological material into "old-Christian and patrologic" or, by extension, into "patristic and post-patristic" or "neo-patristic" is "neither necessary, nor realistic";

ii) Increase of the dogmatic content of the Church teaching. *Patrology* has a permanent theological character, because theology in the "one, holy, universal and apostolical" Church is patristic. This fact explains the efforts of the Church to assure the unity of faith and the integrity of its theological ethos, understanding by this ethos the patristic manner of thinking and living of the Holy Fathers, this manner of thinking and living being recorded, for instance, in the *History of Dogmas* or in the *Orthodox Spirituality*, since the dogma, in its turn, is the fruit of the holy-spiritual living and experience. For this reason, the approach of the *History of Dogmas*, from the perspective of the Orthodox teaching, does not stop at the classical periods according to which the Western doctrine divides the patrological material, but follows the entire dimension of the Church history. However, the increase of the dogmatic teaching of the Church is not realised closing the Orthodox theology in the academic research or in the interpretation of the *Holy Scripture* using rationalist or imaginary criteria, but relies on the premises of man's holy-spiritual life, which are cleansing, illumination and deification, because by the grace-filled work of these premises, the believer, be he a clergyman or a layman, can theologize. In other words, theologians are called those who have reached the vision and the knowledge of God, so that only they can bear the name of Church Fathers and Teachers;

iii) The relation between academic theology and empirical theology. This relation is closely related to the unitary reality of *Patrology* and, consequently, to the organic growth of the dogmatic teaching of the Church. In fact, people keep talking in the Orthodox world about "the rationalist theologian" and "the deified theologian", and, by extension, about "the academic theologian" and "the empiric theologian". The junction useful for students is for the academic theologian to also live the premises of the holy-spiritual life. This fact is founded on the following aspects: a) the scientific-academic research of the Orthodox theology represents only an "introduction" in the true

theology of the Church, yet by no means the premise of the Church theologising, namely of the theologising that is the fruit of the knowledge of God; b) in the empirical or holy-patristic-charismatic theology, which the Church offers to the world as the only saving reality, man lives the revelation of divine knowledge, namely he knows empirically the revealed God in the framework of the hesychastic way of living, which includes various forms of spiritual asceticism.

II) Actuality of the Holy Fathers' teachings. The holy-spiritual experiences or experimentations are stored in the Church, of whose grace-filled work partakes any believer faithful to the patristic way of living and thinking. Thus, by the participation to the Church life, the respective believer gets to live his own Pentecost and observes that the Holy Fathers' teachings are not anachronic, but always actual. Yet, the multitude of aspects differs from one historical epoch to the next, from one Holy Father to the other, and their research cannot take place only from the strict perspective of *Patrology*, because it would be limitative, but also from the enlarged framework of its relations with many other disciplines, some theological, some lay, and of trying to approach the contemporary man's problems.

These approaches are meant to underline precisely the actuality of the Holy Fathers' teachings, according to the following set of themes grasped by us: 1) hagiology, with references to the Saints of the Orthodox Christian ecumenicity, which includes the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space, namely the area inhabited by the Romanians since their beginnings as a nation. The themes approached were: i) Saint Constantine the Great and the arguments of his proclamation as a Saint of Christ's Church; ii) milestones from Saint Maximus the Confessor's teachings for the contemporary world; iii) messages of the Three Hierarch Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom to the contemporary world. It ought to be mentioned that the Saints from the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic area are included in another research axis, which shall be presented below; 2) the concept of image and likeness; 3) the term *ὁμοούσιος*; 4) the differences between the Holy Tradition and local traditions; 5) the phenomenon of globalization; 6) the dialogue between faith and science, with the subjacent topic: faith and mass-media; 7) problems of bioethics, with special reference to: i) transplants; ii) brain death; iii) suffering; 8) the Confession of Sins and the Divine Communion; 9) the Mystery of the Holy Baptism; 10) the Mystery of the Holy Unction; 11) the Church worship; 12) repentance); 13) the dimension and role of the parish in the contemporary society; 14) the cosmos as Church in the making; 15) community life in the early Church; 16) the holy canons in the life of the Orthodox Church; 17) Christian Pedagogy and moral-religious and spiritual education of the young, with the subjacent topic: the

State and the content of the religion class in the national education system of Greece; 18) Psychology and spiritual life; 19) the political Liberalism and religious convictions; 20) the flow of mentalities in South-Eastern Europe; 21) followers of the Holy Fathers in the contemporary Romanian world.

III) Contributions and patristic references from the Romanian reality, along the period comprised between the 16th and the 21st century. The dynamic reality of the *Holy Tradition*, the authentic interpretation of the *Holy Scripture* and the existential living of the faith in the world Saviour Jesus Christ explains the continuity of *Patrology* and the significance of patristic literature in the life of the Church and its worship, and, by extension, in the existence and perdurance of those who are faithful to the heritage inherited, whether they belong to a family or to a nation. Having, therefore, the conviction, on the one hand, that the patristic period is identical to the life of the one, holy, universal and apostolical Church, embracing any nation on the lookout, on the individual level or by its representatives, for the revealed Truth, and on the other hand, that each nation is defined to the extent to which it perceives man's mystery and the living of this mystery in relation to the *Divine Revelation*, we have approached, in a series of studies and research works, the history of the Romanian nation as it has revealed itself from one epoch to the next, within the limit of the sources preserved. For this approach, we have taken as reference, on the one hand, the Romanians' spiritual tradition, and, on the other hand, the proselytist attempts and echoes of the Western propagandas, especially the protestant one, and the theological debates emerged, to which participated, directly or indirectly, Romanian theologians and scholars, especially in the 17th century. Yet, the research of what happened in the 17th century determined us to look at the Romanian phenomenon even since its beginnings, then to capture those acts of the 16th century that were determining for what happened in the 17th century, but also during the next ones, so that the period covered by our studies encompasses the centuries from the 16th to the 21st.

Thus, the in-depth study of these themes imposed three research axes, complementary among themselves, and the fruits of this research can be observed in the variety of our studies published not just on the epoch mentioned above, but also on the 16th century, and on the centuries from the 18th to the 21st.

The first axis has had as aim the presentation of the "Romanian phenomenon" since its beginnings, during a period of the Romanian society, when, after the fall of the communist regime (December 1989), the Romanians' entire history was put under a shadow of doubt. For this reason, pushed by the desire of understanding the mission and the spiritual settlement of the Romanian

people, which meant, by extension, our personal definition, as ethnic belonging and confessional testimony, we have analysed and presented the ethnogenesis and Christianisation of this people, its attitudes and fights against the Ottomans, as defender of Christianity, unreeling the thread of history mainly up to the beginning of the 18th century.

The second research axis uncovers various aspects regarding the “Romanian phenomenon” in the history of the Orthodoxy in the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, having in view several coordinates, such as: 1) presentation of the Romanians’ status, back then to be found in three countries (Wallachia or Hungary-Wallachia, Moldova or Moldo-Wallachia, Transylvania or Ardeal), by reference to the Porte, characterized as being a status of “independence while paying a tribute” and “State autonomy”; 2) description of the political situation of the period of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, by mentioning the efforts made by the Romanians to maintain their political status. These were materialized by different means and were nourished precisely by the living of the Orthodoxy as being their tradition of culture and civilization, a reality both different from the tradition of the West, and contrary to the form of civilisation imposed by the Islam; 3) presentation of the personalities and institutions that made the presence of the Orthodox theology felt in the Romanian society, in the course of time, especially during the period of the 17th century, but also during the next ones: a) institutions, emphasizing the role of the Church and of the Reign; b) centres, in this category including parishes, bishoprics, monasteries, writing centres, printing presses, libraries, schools, princely courts, to which we have made reference or to which we have dedicated, to some of them, special analyses, such as, for instance, the printing centres, in close relation with the bishoprics, monasteries and princely courts, depending on the place of creation of the printing presses; c) representatives of the spiritual and cultural life (Saints, hierarchs, clerics, monks, rulers, scholars). The series of those mentioned is great, and to some of them we have dedicated special pages, either in book subchapters or in special studies.

A third axis of our research has had as objective the Western propagandas, and, of them, we have dedicated more research works to the protestant one, not for being the oldest that fell on the Romanians, because the oldest was the Roman-Catholic one, but because it was dominant in the 17th century, especially on the Romanians from Transylvania. It ought to be specified that to the six Synods held in different parts of the Orthodox world, along the 17th century [Constantinople (1638, 1642, 1672, 1691); Kiev (1640); Jerusalem (1672)], by which the Orthodox faith was defended from the protestant innovations and from the actions of the Counter-Reformation, one

needs to add two summoned on the Romanian territory (Jassy, 1642, 1645). These two Synods and their decisions are analysed in our studies, of which some constitute our present research theme.

From the multitude of the conclusions that can be drawn by the one studying the aspects presented above, mentioned suggestively in sub-chapter 1.3. of our habilitation thesis and whose effects have also been recorded in time, so that they are meant to also constitute messages for the present epoch, we shall point out, in this abstract, only two: 1) defining notes of the Romanian spirituality from the beginning of modernization, coming to light as a spirituality rigorously Orthodox Christian (a) and, at the same time, pragmatic and present in the life of the monks and of the laity (b). These notes are demonstrated by many facts, including also the fact that there are no sects born in the bosom of the Romanian people. In this point, one needs to mention the fact observed that the Romanians never felt and do not feel attraction to theological speculations, but to living. For this reason, the dogmatic works are assumed or written only in the moments of strict defence of the faith in front of the Western propagandas, for the rest, the accent fell on the living of the Orthodox faith, a simple example being the large number of monasteries and sketes met in the areas where the Romanians were living; 2) exemplifying remains the close collaboration between the sacerdotal power and the secular one, namely between the Church and the Reign, perpetuating the example of the symphony given by Byzantium, especially as the identity of faith was, often, invoked to prove the unity and being of the State. Truly, the Orthodoxy has been the Romanians' ancestral law, representing the fundamental factor of their identity and unity of faith, language, nation, culture and civilization.

IV) Contributions to the patristic literature by translations. The translations from the specialized literature, but also from tangential domains, are meant to enrich the bibliographic material regarding the content of *Patrology and patristic literature*. These translations rely on the work of translator, which has its complexity, especially when the texts come from the Greek theological environment. It should be mentioned that we have had preoccupations in the domain of translation into Romanian from the languages Greek, French, English and sometimes German. At the same time, we have also translated from our native language into Greek, French and English.

The thematic presentation of the translations made has the following structure: 1) personalities of the Romanian Orthodox spirituality made known in Greece; 2) personalities of the Orthodox Greek spirituality, but also of other cultural and confessional areas, made known in Romania, by the translation of books, studies and articles.

Concerning the themes approached in the studies and articles translated, they are varied, full of references to the Holy Fathers' thinking and living, and can be grouped as follows: 1) the dialogue between Hellenism and Christianity; 2) the Orthodoxy and Europe; 3) the dialogue between faith and science; 4) the Orthodoxy as therapy; 5) the actuality of a dialogue: Saint Ambrosius of Milan and Symmachus, prefect of Rome; 6) Saint Athanasius the Great's teaching on the Holy Spirit and the heresy of the Modalists; 7) Saint John Chrysostom's attitude to the excesses of the Jews; 8) Saint John of Damascus' teaching on the honour owed to the Saints and the veneration of the Church icons; 9) Saint Gregory Palamas' teaching on the procession of the Holy Spirit, the uncreated energies, the *Holy Tradition*, the monastic life and the interreligious dialogue; 10) Christian identity according to Saint Symeon the New Theologian; 11) the Holy Mystery of Baptism according to Saint Symeon of Thessalonica; 12) from secular Bioethics to Christian Bioethics; 13) *Canon Law* aspects interpreted in the spirit of the Holy Fathers; 14) the phenomenon of the Martyr and Neo-Martyr Saints; 15) liturgical and pastoration topics interpreted according to the Holy Fathers' teachings for the contemporary society; 16) perspectives of the Orthodox teaching on the Mystery of the Holy Baptism; 17) aspects of the controversy about the continual partaking of the Divine Communion; 18) perspectives of the Orthodox faith on the Holy Mystery of Crowning; 19) the concept of disease and the Mystery of the Holy Unction; 20) the ecumenicity of the one Church; 21) the definition of the theologian; 22) Christian Pedagogy and the education of the young from the contemporary society; 23) the Orthodox spirituality and the contemporary reality; 24) "key" aspects of the Orthodox Christian anthropology; 25) re-evaluation of the addition *Filioque*; 26) the pedagogical role of the icons for the contemporary world; 27) *The Old Testament* and the education of the young; 28) *The New Testament* and the challenges of the contemporary world; 29) realities of the history of the Byzantine Empire; 30) the sacred Places; 31) the Holy Synods: the Second Ecumenical Synods; the Holy and Great Synod of Crete; 32) contemporary dialogues; 33) aspects from today's reality of the Orthodox Church in Greece.

In the presentation of the perspectives of our professional career, we have had in view the fact that the objectives of a university vocation encompass several coordinates. Of them, we have emphasized only three, namely, our teaching activity, our scientific research and, in close connection to them, our personal cultivation of the holy-spiritual life, with the sincere desire to be no sounding cymbal in the academic theology, but particularly a soul engaged on the way of personal salvation by everything that is a fact of the empirical theology.

The improvement of our teaching activity can take place by realising several acts whose content is simultaneously pedagogical and educational, like: a) continual improvement of the teaching and assessment methodology; b) stimulation of the students' participation in the process of knowledge teaching and acquisition; c) periodical updating of courses, syllabuses and curricula pertaining to the disciplines included in the Programmes of Bachelor of Science/Arts and Master Degrees, facilitating, at the same time, the students' access to new information, but also to connexions with the other theological disciplines, and the dialogue with the series of lay disciplines; d) creating course supports available for the students, updated using new bibliographic references; e) encouraging the students to participate in the Erasmus Mobility Programme, assisting their accommodation and the contacts with the professors from the university centres of Athens, Thessalonica and Sofia etc.

The development of our research activity revolves around several preoccupations, claiming our participation, and, at the same time, our work on several projects, of which some are in the long term, while others in the short term. Of these, we shall remind of: 1) translations from Old Greek; 2) translations from Modern Greek; 3) translations from modern languages; 4) continuation and completion of several older projects, concerning, for instance, the personality of Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem (1669-1707) and critical editing of the three volumes he published in Jassy and Râmnic, during the period 1692-1705; 5) taking on new research themes regarding the dialogue between faith and science, Orthodoxy and Bioethics, editing an in-depth life of Saint Niphon, Patriarch of Constantinople, to which shall be added many aspects of the Holy Fathers' teachings, according to the participations in International and National Symposiums and Congresses; 6) participation in the yearly organization of the International Symposium of Târgoviște; 7) continuation of the coordination of the Visiting Professor and Erasmus Mobility Programmes in collaboration with university centres in Europe.

As every well-meaning man, we hope that our experiences and achievements, accumulated by the grace of the One God glorified in the Holy Trinity and according to His oikonomia, may represent authentic milestones both for the academic communities from the country and from abroad, and for the students pursuing their intellectual and spiritual formation in the university and cultural centres of Târgoviște and Alba Iulia.

Yet, the authenticity of these milestones depends on the extent to which our personal cultivation of the holy-spiritual life represents a permanent preoccupation for ourselves, as we are aware of the fact that what gives value to academic theology is precisely empirical theology. This

aspect relies on the spiritual reality and experience of the Pentecost on the personal level, namely on the access to the content of the *divine Revelation*, so that any personal contribution, written or spoken, may carry not just the mark of the work of reason, but also of the mind, in other words, it should be not just the fruit of intellectual efforts, but also the expression of the experience of the way of thinking and living specific of the Holy Fathers, and, in the absence of this experience, because of our sins, the respective contribution may illustrate, according to our maximum strength, the application of the Church method of follower of the Holy Fathers of the Church of the world Saviour Jesus Christ.

This attitude allows the dialogue of the Orthodoxy, which we represent not just by personal conviction, but also by assuming the university career in a Faculty of Orthodox Theology, with the challenges of the contemporary society, to be founded on the reality of the holy-spiritual life, with the aim that man should understand his mission on this earth, the cultivation of perennial values should become a constant, and the assuming of the Romanians' ancestral law should remain for all of us an enduring legacy for the future generations.

The message understood by studying *Patrology and patristic literature* for the contemporary Orthodox Christian is that it is not meet for the Holy Fathers to be followed or imitated in an exterior manner, on the contrary, the contemporary Orthodox Christian ought to refer himself, by his own living, to their way of thinking and living (τὸ πατερικὸν φρόνημα), without which his lot is the weakening of his spiritual reflexes and of the patristic criteria. In fact, theology or, rather, the fact of theologizing represents a divine work and reality, having patristic foundation and liturgical orientation in the framework of the Church.

Consequently, the Orthodoxy does not represent a historical epoch. It represents the truth of history, because it has a past, yet, all the more, it has a present and a future, and its guarantor is the Church conscience, according to which empirical theology represents the only dynamic and vitalizing reality of the synergy between academic theology and the Church mission in the contemporary society.