

HABILITATION THESIS

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THE PATRISTIC STUDY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH FATHERS IN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES TODAY

Abstract

The habilitation thesis, *The patristic study and the importance of the Church Fathers in theological studies today*, is composed of a brief introduction, three parts and a conclusion.

In the introduction I briefly present the thesis plan and some significant elements of my *Curriculum vitae*.

The first part summarizes the main scientific contributions regarding the patristic studies, starting with the presentation of the doctoral thesis sustained at the Laval University in Quebec, Canada, The Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, in 2008. The thesis topic, *Christocentrisme trinitaire athanasien*, was firstly issued within the graduation license studies program and it has gained consistency into the master's dissertation. I was supported and encouraged in this academic work by my scientific coordinators, Prof. Univ. dr. Charles Kannengiesser, professor emeritus of Concordia University in Montreal, and Univ. dr. Paul-Hubert Poirier, professor at Laval University in Quebec. The novelty of this thesis is the one that shows that in the Athanasian writings, a Christological statement entails a Trinitarian statement, and vice versa. If the great Christian theologians that lived before the Niceean synod (mainly Origen of Alexandria and Clement the Alexandrian), which were sustaining a Trinitarian theology using philosophical concepts and philosophical demonstrations, in their debates with the philosophical thinking of the time, Athanasius prefers to use a Trinitarian theological discourse more catechetical, based on the Bible texts, starting with the mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God. In his anti-Arian fight, the Alexandrian bishop used a theological discourse focused on the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, true God and true man, who revealed us the mystery of the Holy Trinity, according to the principle expressed by Jesus himself in Matthew's Gospel: "No one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him"(11, 27). Therefore, the defence of the divinity of the incarnated Word in Jesus Christ, for Athanasius of Alexandria means implicitly to defend the divinity of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Bible gives him the argumentative support in his theological Trinitarian discourse (based on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word), against that time heresies (sabellianism, arianism, apolinarism, marcelianism).

The fact that I wished to emphasize in this doctoral work is that the Holy Trinity is the fundamental faith of the bishop of Alexandria. The faith motivates the Pope of Egypt to defend, against the Arians, the divinity of the incarnated Word, often by risking his life. The same faith was the reason for him to fight against the pneumatomahians who would attack the divinity of the third divine person. Athanasius is not a theologian by profession, as a bureaucratic matter of speaking, but a shepherd who seriously takes the mission entrusted to him by God. Being encouraged and supported by my scientific coordinators, after sustaining the doctoral thesis, I proceeded to the publication of this paper. The corollary of my work was

the appearance, in the year of 2012, of the book *Le Christ et la Trinité chez Athanase d'Alexandrie*, published by the prestigious French publisher, Cerf, of Paris.

In April 2015, after the establishment of the conceding agreements of the copyright, the Romanian publisher „Gutenberg Galaxy” published the Romanian translation of my book, *Cristos și misterul sfintei Treimi în scrierile sfântului episcop Atanasie de Alexandria* / Christ and the mystery of the Holy Trinity in the writings of St. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria.

The main annex of my doctoral thesis, *De decretis nicaenae / About the decrees of the council of Nicaea (325)*, added as well as an annex to the book published by Cerf, was the subject of a special book published by Galaxia Gutenberg, in which the input was substantially enriched with: references to the perception of Athanasius and his works along the centuries; critical point of view on the Greek text issued by H.G.Opitz in his work *Athanasius Werke*, 2/1, Berlin-Leipzig, W. de Gruyter, 1935, p. 1-31; abundant comments.

In addition to these volumes, the publisher Sapientia of Iasi published other three works: *Atanasiu de Alexandria. Scrisori pascale / Athanasius of Alexandria. Paschal letters*, translation, introduction, notes and commentaries made by Lucian Dîncă; *Atanasiu de Alexandria. Împotriva păgânilor, si despre întruparea Cuvântului / Athanasius of Alexandria. Against pagans, and About the Incarnation of the Word*, translation, introduction, notes and commentaries made by Lucian Dîncă. These two Christian apologetics are of great importance for the understanding of the Trinitarian and Christocentric thinking of the Alexandrian bishop. The third volume published by Sapientia of Iasi, was *Despre preoție la sfinții Părinți ai Bisericii: Grigorie de Nazianz și Ioan Gură-de-aur / About the priesthood in writings of the holy Church Fathers: Gregory of Nazianz and John Chrysostom*.

Also, the publisher Galaxia Gutenberg published other two of my works, *Conciliile ecumenice: Niceea I și Constantinopol I. Monografii / Ecumenical councils: Nicea I and Constantinople I. Monographs și Conciliile ecumenice: Efes și Calcedon. Monografii / Ecumenical Councils: Ephesus and Chalcedon. Monographs*. Another new volume will complete soon the trilogy of monographs of the first seven ecumenical councils.

During 2008 – 2015 I participated in a great number of patristic symposiums in Romania and abroad, having the opportunity to present relevant communications on specific domain of research:

- „Saint Paul formateur et mystique“ (Saint Paul, trainer and mystic), academic session held in Rome, Italy, at the Institute of the sisters of Saint Paul of Chartres;
- „San Paolo di Tarso, teologo e mistico“ (Saint Paul of Tars, theologian and mystic) held in Florence, Italy, with the occasion of the paulinian year, conference organised by „Opera del Duomo“;
- „Exemple de réception d'un texte d'Athanase d'Alexandrie dans la querelle théologique entre l'Orient et l'Occident sur le Filioque“, with the occasion of the symposium „Patristic Studies in the Twenty-first Century“ held at the Jewish University in Jerusalem, Israel;
- „L'influence d'Origène sur la pensée d'Athanase d'Alexandrie dans le ‘De decretis’“, dissertation held at the Aarhus University, in Denmark, with the occasion of the symposium *Origène d'Alexandrie, sources, pensée et postérité*;

- ”Inteligența în slujba credinței. Cazul Sfântului Augustin al Hiponei“ (The intelligence in the service of the faith. The case of St. Augustin of Hypo), dissertation held at the Bucharest University, the Faculty of Romano-Catholic Theology, with the occasion of the yearly congress of SITA upon the theme „Intellect and Reason”;
- “La contribution des Assomptionnistes au développement des études byzantines à Bucarest entre 1938-1947 ”, dissertation held on the occasion of the international symposium ” L’apport des Assomptionnistes français aux études byzantines: une approche critique“ organised by New Europe College, l’Institut Français des Études Byzantines, in collaboration with the Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Justinian Patriarhul“;
- „Elements de theologie et de spiritualite dans la corespondance de Pseudo-Denys l’Areopagite“, dissertation held at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca with the occasion of the international patristic congress dedicated to the Saint Dionisie Aeropagitul.

Also, in 2011 I organized several conferences, sessions and scientific congresses at the Center for Byzantine Studies "Saints Peter and Andrew" in Bucharest. Within these activities I presented several communications, lectures and conferences on specific issues research.

As director of the „Byzantine Library“ of the Center „Saints Peter and Andrew“ in Bucharest, I established on national level, collaborations with „New Europe College”, “Bucharest University”, and the Institute of History „Nicolae Iorga“. On international level, I established collaborations with „Centre National du Livre” and „Institut français des études byzantines” in Paris, “Institut des études orientales” at the University of Njimegen. Since 2011 I am a member of AIEP / IAPS.

The second part of the thesis is dedicated to my professional career. Among my educational activities, I mention:

- „visiting professor" at the Faculty of Theology in Florence between 2008-2010, where I held two courses;
- Teacher at part time at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, master program „Religious Studies - Texts and Traditions", between 2011-2015, where I teach more courses on topics related to the ancient Christianity and to the history of Christian dogmas;
- Since 2013 I am employee of the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Romano - Catholic theology, where I teach fundamental theology, dogmatic theology, patristic theology and philology;
- Starting with 2012 I am the scientific coordinator in the master program "Religious Studies - Texts and Traditions", and since 2014 I have been coordinating more students in bachelor and master programs organized by the Faculty of Roman Catholic theology, being as well a member of several coordinating teams and scientific accompaniment of the Doctoral School within the Faculty of Romano Catholic theology.

Students, no matter their level is when enrolling in the Roman Catholic Theology Faculty are invited to explore the roots of the Jewish faith as the basis of patristic theology in the actual pluralist context. I represent the Romano Catholic Theology Faculty at ICUB (The

Research Institute of the University of Bucharest) and I am a member of the editorial board of the magazine *Caieetele Institutului Catolic / Cahiers of the Catholic Institute*.

Along with teaching activity, I publish articles and reviews either in the magazine *Caieetele Institutului Catolic*, either in different magazines in the country and abroad: *Adversus Haereses*, Iasi; *Revista ecumenică Sibiu / The Ecumenical Magazine Sibiu*; *Magazin istoric / Historical Magazine*, Bucharest; *Itinéraires augustiniens / Augustinian itineraries*, Paris; *Bulletin de spiritualite / Bulletin of spirituality*, Chimay, Belgium.

Finally, the third part of the thesis presents a selective bibliography relevant to the specific research areas. Besides the main Athanasian works, which occupies a good part of my research time, *Contra arianos*, *Ad Serapionem*, *Contra gentes* and *De incarnatione Verbi*, *De decretis*, *De synodis*, *Ad antiochenos*, *Epistulae festalis*, *Historia arianorum ad monachos* etc., I also present a secondary bibliography, which takes into account three aspects related either to the historical frame of Athanasius of Alexandria either to the theology, hermeneutics and spirituality of Alexandrian Patriarch or to the struggle against Arius and his followers condemned by the Nicene conciliar's decisions.

The Patristic studies in general, and the Athanasian ones in particular, have been my concern since the earliest years as a student in theology. For several years, my research and academic activity are concentrated on the Patriarch Athanasius of Alexandria and of his theological, social, political and religious context leading conferences and sessions, publishing articles and books in Romania and abroad.

Patriarch's motto is: To resist, not to be afraid of the body death, not envy the heretics, but to cherish above all, the truth. My familiarity with the writings of the Patriarch of Alexandria urged me to propose new working hypotheses in the Athanasian research work. Nationally speaking, at least in the Catholic tradition, I do not know another specialist in the Athanasian thinking, and internationally speaking, the appreciation of my scientific contribution is mainly revealed by the fact that the publisher Cerf accepted the doctorate thesis' publication, and secondly, by the fact that the prestigious collection "Sources chrétiennes" proposed me to come out with notes and comments on the text of the three Athanasian discourses *Contra arianos*.

In conclusion, I present the main concerns in the scientific research within the field of ancient Christianity, the history of Christian dogma and ecclesiastical discipline crystallization and namely:

- further investigations of the first seven ecumenical councils monographs in order to complete the trilogy on the subject;
- the editing of the critical text, comments and notes of the Athanasian discourses *Contra arianos*, in collaboration with Prof. Charles Kannengiesser in the patristic studies collection "Sources chretiennes";
- the Romanian translation of the monumental work of the French researcher from Pont Royal, Sebastien Le Nain of Tillement, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles, justifiés par les citations des auteurs originaux avec une chronologie où l'on fait un abrégé de l'histoire ecclésiastique et avec des notes pour éclaircir les difficultés des faits et de la chronologie* (16 vol.), 1693-1712, written in a medieval French, the work is without equal for fair interpretation, based on specific scientific criteria context in which it was issued.

Vatican II marked a turning point for the development of the Catholic theology all around the world. The importance given to the holy Fathers of the Church means the recognition of the theological heritage, spiritual, dogmatic and mystical left by these people to the Christians till today.

The Congregation for the Catholic Education published a document, “*Studiul sfinților Părinți ai Bisericii în formarea preoților*“ / *The study of the holy Fathers of the Church in the formation of the priests*, inviting to cultivate with more intensity the patristic in seminars and in the Faculties of Theology. Teachers and students are invited to consider more closely upon those who laid the foundations of the Christian theology in their confrontations with the philosophical system of the time in order to have an overview of the history and theology, taking into account the specific features of the patristic environment and paying a more attention to the profound needs and new trends of the theology, spirituality and pastoral today.

The Theology, proposing a speech about the unperceivable mystery of God, always opens new paths through which in different contexts the grace of God accomplishes the salvation. Thus, the theology takes a variety of forms and however, it has only to propose an unique truth about the God, The One in His Essence and Threefold in persons, and the unique truth regarding the salvation of mankind achieved once and for all, in Jesus Christ.