

**HABILITATION THESIS**  
**DOES THEOLOGY NEED PHILOSOPHY?**  
**Contributions to understanding the concept of Fundamental Theology**

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**1. ABSTRACT**

In this habilitation thesis I intend to present my scientific, professional and academic achievements within the realm of theology (with the specialisation of Fundamental Theology) from 1996 – the year in which I defended my doctoral thesis in the domain of philosophy (with the specialisation of the Philosophy of Religion) at the *Gregoriana* Pontifical University in Rome (Italy) – and until the year 2015. The method has a diachronic and synchronic character. Hence, I have divided my habilitation thesis in several chapters focusing on those years which – since 1996 and up to the present – are relevant for containing outstanding scientific, professional and academic results in the domain of Fundamental Theology. Following this formal perspective, I will further present my participation at national and international conferences and at a variety of national and international research projects, as well as my didactic activities at the Roman-Catholic Theological Institute in Bucharest, at the Roman-Catholic Theological Institute in Iași, at the Faculty of Philosophy at the *Al. I. Cuza* University in Iași, at the Faculty of Roman-Catholic Theology at the University of Bucharest, and at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest. From a synchronic point of view, the predominant themes of my habilitation thesis are to be found in the research works on the category of the sacred, of religion and of symbols, on the one hand, and on the other hand, those which aim at a deepening of the faith in the horizon of revelation and of a dialogue between faith and reason, but also that of an ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

Presenting one by one each of my professional, didactic and research activities, I will attempt to cast a light not only on the philosophical, but also on the theological side of my scientific work. Many of my categories and hypotheses of work have been first suggested in the context of certain courses or seminars organised for students, or with the occasion of various research projects for specialists in the field of theology and philosophy, which afterwards grew into full-length articles, studies and books published as such. The feed-back I received from the national and international academic world was, needless to say, quite significant, and, as I felt it as a personal encouragement, I will mention it in due time in the respective pages of this thesis.

Seen as a whole, my post-doctoral activity as a theologian developed in two directions, while bearing in mind the necessities of an integral theological formation

regarding our future clergy and, in the same time, that of the lay Christian faithful in Iași and in Bucharest, where – since 1996 – I have been active in the theological educational system. According to the canons of the Catholic Church that regulate the theological formation within faculties of Catholic theology, the study of theology as such has to be preceded by two or even three years of philosophy and fundamental theology courses. In the domain of philosophy, I have found inspiration in the works of several Christian philosophers; I wrote and translated my own handbooks of Thomistic philosophy. In the field of fundamental theology, I follow in the line of post-conciliar theology. In this sense, I have translated and adapted the handbooks and dictionaries of fundamental theology signed by R. Latourelle, R. Fisichella or H. Waldenfels. The handbook I wrote was the result of a synthesis based on these post-conciliar authors and it was published in 1998: *Introduction in Fundamental Theology*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catholice București. Broadly speaking, I owe my own orientation in this field to Rev. Prof. Ph.D. Eduard Ferent, who himself had followed in the line of the above-mentioned theologians. The starting point of my commitment in the realm of fundamental theology was none other than the social and cultural context in which I found myself together with my students, a context shaped by the direct and indirect impact generated by certain attitudes hostile towards our Christian specificity, i.e. to the revelation of God as One in Three fulfilled in the person of Jesus from Nazareth. Hence, we reached the conclusion that these hostile attitudes were triggered by the adherents of other religions – Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism – the presence of whom has been continuously increasing after 1990, even if apparently their numbers are not spectacular. However, the most powerful criticism brought against Christianity, even aggressive at times, was fathered by various nostalgic supporters of atheistic humanist trends and by those Christians content with the split of the Christian Church. In the circumstances of this tensioned context, I feel the need to emphasise the urgent mission of theologians to teach and defend the whole truth with regard to God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and I therefore endeavour to facilitate opportunities for a dialogue with the non-Christian world (the inter-religious dialogue), with those who do not believe (dialogue with the supporters of the atheistic humanism), and with the other Christians (ecumenical dialogue).

In the book, *Introduction in Fundamental Theology* as well as in other articles and studies which I published afterwards, I maintain the idea that fundamental theology is a young discipline. This formulation together with the discipline itself referred to as *fundamental theology* has first appeared during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Its main reason was to justify in theory the basis of Christian theology and faith. During the period between the two Vatican Councils, fundamental theology used to consist of three parts, each of them treating one of the following *demonstrationes*: 1) in *demonstratio religiosa*, there were approached themes such as religion, God and the possibility of revelation; 2) in *demonstratio christiana*, there were analysed the concrete effects of the revelation in the person of Jesus Christ as the true sent of God; 3) in *demonstratio catholica*, there was shown that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church founded by Jesus Christ and the safe-keeper of Revelation. From the formal point of view, fundamental theology developed in

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<sup>1</sup> In 1828, J. L. Cuzmics published in Torino a book entitled *Theologia christiana fundamentalis*. Likewise, A. Knoll published in 1852 at Insbruck the volume *Institutiones theologiae generalis seu fundamentalis*.

accordance with three main forms of reflection: 1) *the Roman form* which discussed the three forms of *demonstrationes* we have already mentioned; the textbooks were written in Latin and recommended in theology schools throughout Neo-Latin countries; 2) the supporters of the *immanent form* did not renounce completely the Roman apologetics, but criticised it by maintaining – as M. Blondel and A. Lang did – that man is the recipient of God’s word and the Christian revelation is something towards which man has always been aspiring, whether aware of it or not, within the immanence of his heart; 3) the maintainers of the *German form* were paying due heed to the apologetics of immanence as well as to the *demonstratio religiosa*, stressing in a philosophically and theologically manner – such as K. Rahner did – man’s capacity (*potentia oboedientialis*) to hear God’s word and to respond to it.

From the post-conciliar theologians I take over the spirit of fundamental theology, which derives from the concentration on that *proprium christianum*, i.e. the revelation understood as the divine self-communication, final and complete, in Jesus Christ. Bearing in mind the fact that there is a certain incertitude among theologians as regarding the character, the form and the necessity of this discipline, in the sense that all theology from any time and any place should be apologetic, hermeneutic and dialogic, I advocate in my books, studies and articles that fundamental theology enjoys an autonomous status and, as such, it can neither be part of systematic theology, nor of dogmatic theology. And yet, fundamental theology is theological as it has to demonstrate the redeeming and life-giving character which the foundation of the Christian faith has.

The argument concerning the autonomous character of fundamental theology can be supported by the necessity of adopting a methodological pluralism within the process of developing this discipline. Indeed, if fundamental theology requires *philosophy*, and more precisely the philosophy of religion, which analyses the human person as an interrogation about himself and which he permanently asks himself. Since man is the assumed starting point in theology, philosophy is, hence, encompassed within the sphere of commitments specific to theologians. Likewise, fundamental theology also requires the historical sciences, as Christianity is closely interconnected to history, to Jesus from Nazareth, and to the community which followed him and which has transmitted him throughout history. Finally fundamental theology also requires the social sciences, as Christianity is socially concretised in the disciples of Jesus Christ, who are the bearers of a message addressed to society as a whole. The formation of the Church and that of the Christian community cannot elude the laws by which a human society is to be constituted.

In order to explain the autonomous status of fundamental theology, I should resort to the metaphor of a man standing on the threshold of his house. It is true that he who stands on the threshold can be said to be simultaneously inside and outside the house. He can hear those who are speaking in front of the door and those who are speaking inside the house. The obvious intention of a person standing on the threshold is that of entering the house. He can hear people speaking outside – in philosophy, in historical sciences, and in social sciences – and what they think about God, about Jesus Christ, and about the Church, about themselves, the world and the society in which they live, on the one hand, and on the other hand, he can share with those who are outside the knowledge of those who are inside as an invitation to pass through the gate of man’s true redemption, as Jesus himself had said: “I am the Gate” (cf. *John*

10: 7, 9). In the light of this metaphor, fundamental theology is the science of the gate, while dogmatics is the science of the interior of the house. Fundamental theology is addressed to those who seek to understand why the Christian message has a normative character, while dogmatics is addressed to those who are already convinced that the Christian message is a norm.

From a pastoral point of view, I notice that there are a number of Christians who have their own doubts and uncertainties, which are unconvinced and sceptic as regarding the normative character of the Christian message. This state of facts render fundamental theology both necessary in itself and autonomous from dogmatic theology. However, in order that this message could become relevant for the Christians and non-Christians of today, it is necessary that whenever fundamental theology is proposed, it should have in view the context in which it is to be proposed. Here I distinguish between the confession of faith and the theological discourse, between faith and theology. As a consequence, the context of Christian faith is not identical to the context of theology, although the context of faith as object of reflection is part of the context of theology. The context in which fundamental theology is to be proposed today, comprises a variety of specific elements, from among which I mention the critiques brought against the Christian message and its specificity; the human person as (un)able to hear the word of God and to respond to it; the plurality of languages, cultures and social conditions in which the Christian message should be translated and proposed; the limitations of human understanding; the scandal of the evil; the experience of moral degradation and the aspiration towards redemption; the human person as a seeker of meaningfulness; the competition between various offers of meaning and redemption etc. Still, from the primordial context of theology, which happened to be science and its institutionalisation in schools, there have remained several a-dogmatic presuppositions, which we should bear in mind whenever proposing fundamental theology today, namely common places, under the aspect of context and method, between theology and philosophy, between theology and science.

With reference to the Romanian context of theology, I have come to the conclusion that the success of the Christian message can be endangered when: 1) the message is being contested; 2) the message fails to be understood; 3) the message does not reach its potential listeners.

In the first place, the message can be contested by the rival offers of redemption made available by other religions, especially by the Oriental religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism etc.), by atheism and the atheistic humanism, and by the split of the Christian unity. To all these contestations, the reply comes from apologetics or fundamental theology, which is not restricted to rejecting and counteracting the arguments brought against faith, but even proposes reasons in favour of faith, paying due heed to the specificity of social and historical circumstances, while attempting to open new opportunities for the Christian message to be properly understood and received. This means that apologetics is not a mere reaction, it cannot be determined and provoked from the outside, but rather it has its own initiatives. Moreover, apologetics does not blame unconditionally, does not employ polemical instruments, on the contrary, it endeavours to explain and establish a climate of mutual understanding, so as to convince the other of the Christian truth not by means of compulsion, but by attraction.



Nonetheless, the message may fail to be understood because the general horizon of understanding implied by the theological context has been completely erased or dissolved amidst a multitude of limited horizons. In this case, in order to save the universal specificity of Christianity, there should be overcome the issue of philosophical hermeneutics, which attempts to clarify the meaning at a historical level by adopting a way of life enlightened by the horizon of redemption alternatives made available from the past of a certain community of faith. In other words, we should pass from the theoretical (philosophical) signification to the practical (theological) signification.

Finally the message may fail to reach its potential listeners either because they are not attentive enough, or because they lack the proper disposition, or because the messengers themselves are incapable of communicating efficiently. In this respect, fundamental theology is the theology of dialogue as well as a frontier theology. An authentic communication or a true dialogue has a ternary structure: a) an *I* in relation with b) an *you* about c) something. Dialogue means 1) self-reference; 2) reference to a *you* and 3) in relation with something where a) and b) intersect each other and which has a retro-active influence on the *I*. when all these three criteria are fulfilled, then it can be said that we have a real *dia-logue*, *com-munication*, and *inter-subjectivity*. The ternary structure of any dialogue or of any communication has to be present in the fundamental theology of today, so as to enable it to recover certain neglected theological elements: 1) the subject of theology are the human persons; 2) the recipient of any theological dialogue and of any preaching the faith are the people themselves, not as objects but as subjects of theology. Following in the footsteps of J. B. Metz, I am convinced that succeeding to not overlook the subject, together with a positive promotion of the subject role held in theology by the Christian faithful, is a decisive element for the future of Christianity. Two directions in which the dialogue and the communication are to be applied seem urgent today: the missionary activities, where the opening towards cultural and religious diversity should not led to a diminishing of one's fidelity towards one's own message and identity; and the pastoral activities with an opening towards world-wide solidarity, provided that the element that leads to the seeking of solidarity at a world-wide level is not the theoretical principle of all people's equality by virtue of their having been all created in the image of God, but the concrete experience of unjustifiable inequalities between people, social strata, nations and Churches.

In brief, I plead for the thesis that theology needs philosophy, as theology is but a continuous reflection on the Christian message, while the act of thinking is in its essence a philosophical activity. The common place where these two disciplines can intersect is the human person. Philosophy is related to theology as a question is related to its answer. Both disciplines threat about the fundamental questions of mankind: philosophy attempts to articulate them in a manner as comprehensible as possible, while theology strives to shape an adequate answer. Those points of contact, incorporating method as well, between theology and philosophy highlight the autonomous character of fundamental theology in relation with dogmatic theology. My own contributions to the development of this theological specialisation include works in which I have elaborated methodologies, thematises, and arguments in favour of a dialogue between faith and reason, in favour of the inter-religious dialogue and of that pertaining to the ecumenical sphere.