

## HABILITATION THESIS SUMMARY

# KNOWLEDGE AND HOLINESS AS PARADIGMS OF DEIFICATION TO THE HOLY FATHERS. ASPECTS OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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When, following a train of events, I took the decision to apply for a PhD degree in *Patrology*, being accepted as a PhD candidate by the late Prof. PhD Constantin Voicu, we together noticed that, as a custom in the Romanian tradition of the last decades, the idea of dealing with a vast subject, which aimed at approaching *in extenso* an author from the patristic or post patristic period, became a well established fact. But, from various reasons, the subjects approached had not always lead to thesis that excelled in the manner of dealing with the subjects of the research. For this reason, I took the decision, together with my doctoral advisor, that my thesis approach only one aspect of the theology of the author aimed, this being, in my case, the post patristic theology colossus of 9<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Photios the Great, the Patriarch of Constantinople, an author whose work had been very little researched in the Romanian theology. Thus, the subject discussed at that time, which became a doctoral dissertation presented in 2007 and published in 2012, was part of the breach consisting of the Theological anthropology that could be identified in the works of the author mentioned above. The great subjects found in connection with the Theological anthropology had represented, not only in those times, our interest and direction of the research labor that we tried to give a well defined breach in the category represented by the theology works of the Holy Father of the Church. Starting from these research niches we accordingly applied ourselves on some patristic and post patristic authors, during our post doctoral research work, and we tried to identify in their works some certain aspects related to the Theological anthropology, relevant not only for the academic research work but also for the spiritual life, more generally. We continued with the research related to Saint Photios the Great, but we also took into consideration other names, such as Saint Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, and, for sure, other Holy Fathers of the Church or other heterodox authors.

This thesis aims at outlining our postdoctoral work and our teaching experience, in order to present them in a synthesis that has a title meant to express these activities: *Knowledge and holiness as paradigms of deification to the Holy Fathers. Aspects of theological anthropology*. Also, addressing these theological anthropology subjects, presented in a reading key focused on the origins and freed by the detrimental scholastic restraints, the thesis is aimed at presenting the way by which the discipline named *Patrology* can integrate in the major structure of interdisciplinary, that profoundly marks the nowadays theology research.

The question that naturally comes forward, from the very beginning, is, of course, why choosing this subject, of the Theological anthropology. The answer resides in the freedom that every researcher of the Patristic and post patristic possess, that is to address certain subjects from the vast works of the Holy Fathers and other heterodox authors, and also, the fact that a main objective of the works of the Holy Fathers has

been the care for the redemption of man, and on this mystery they insisted, altogether with the triadology, Christology, pneumatology and ecclesiology problems. Those named by the Church as Holy Fathers theologized, but this did not come from a publishing impulse, but from a profoundly ecclesial reason, the one of making Christ accessible and expressible to man, created by His image, created as an agent meant to wear in himself the image of his Creator.

Alongside these subjects approached by us in the studies we published, the research subsequent to the doctoral dissertation was focused on some directions that, among the ones listed above, will be synthesized in this habilitation thesis, on the breach opened by the concepts of knowledge and holiness, understood as premises of fulfilling the human nature, and paradigms of its deification. By this meaning, when the Fathers of the Church approach the problematic of Theological anthropology, they answer to a need coming from the very question the Savior addresses His followers: “Who they say I am, the Son of Man?” (Mt. 16,13). Their answer, or their theology, related to this very aspect, that Christ is not stranger to man, but it is, as his Creator, intimately connected to him, to his human nature, being as a Son of God also Son of Man, could be considered, if we are to use a Lyotardian word, as a metanarrative capable of leading the human nature in its restoring epiclesis to deification. If in 1979 Jean-François Lyotard noticed in his work *The postmodern condition* the fact that what characterizes the postmodern epoch is, on one side, the very lack of traditional *meta-narratives* (*grand narratives*) – illuminism, idealism, Marxism, etc- thus, the total depletion of these narrative strategies of humankind, incapable to answer the society in which it lives, and on the other side, the existence of a multitude of languages which have no role but to endanger the speech itself, or, in other terms, offering instead of a real knowledge, a pseudo knowledge, and thus opening, as a contemporary theologian noticed, the way to a new type of Babylon, a very technologized one, leading to a deconstructive – nihilist society, the Holy Fathers offered humanity their own answer related to the destiny of man inside the creation, showing that the answer to humanity’s searches and wishes resided in the knowledge of the Divine Logos, which can be made accessible only by Him, as unity and concrete experimentation of holiness, of the new, hidden life with God in Jesus Christ, His Son, that we inaugurate in the sacred realism of Baptism and of Eucharistic communion. Besides this type of perspective, any other answer would materialize in what we would nowadays call, using the same Lyotardian language, a deconstructive meta-narrative, which could endanger the human dignity itself, incapable of following its existential road, sustained by a certain dynamic of creation, in order to reach the sanctification of nature.

For the Holy Fathers – and Saint Gregory the Theologian exemplifies this aspect in the best manner – it becomes obvious that the agent of our deification is not represented by the words of man, even if they were graceful, or even if they were educational, belonging to a purely intellectual knowledge, but by the Word of God, by Its Divine Logos, embodied for our salvation, by the will of the Father and by the power and the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is the one that leads us into a new relationship with God the Father, through whom we are deified. For the Holy Fathers, even the act of confessing our faith is a profound process of knowing, as even the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith reveals. Only through the Holy Spirit we can become part of living the experience of the inexhaustible Mystery of God, an experience that skips any empiric conceptualization, any language or way of

communication, but which is open to a knowledge that the Holy Fathers call apofactic, and which is beyond the limits of the entirely rational knowledge, of the rational narrative, materializing in what the Holy Fathers call experiation. Experiencing means being part of the Theologia, part of its knowledge; remaining attached only to the empiric ratiōn, holding rationality in higher regard, neglecting the authority of the Spirit means, as shown by Gregory, the great theologian of the Trinity, abandoning the faith.

Theologizing represents the exercise of the spiritual act that, in its turn, comes from a spiritual experiation of the trinity mystery revealed by the knowledge brought forward by the Logos itself, and by the holiness that comes from the act of this type of knowledge, understood as paradigms of deifying the human. It is in fact what the Fathers that lived in the centuries of the great Christological controversy illustrated abundantly in their works, or in their serving – like, for instance, Saint John Chrysostom who, in the midst of his serving, shaped not rarely by the brutal interference of the secular power and politics, proved that holiness transcends any interference of human nature that lost its sacredness – thus opening the way for the great theological synthesis of the post patristic centuries, illustrated, for example, by the theology of the Saint Photios the Great, whom, like the later Palamite theologians, notices the strong organic connection between nature and grace. Approaching the subject of sanctifying and fulfilling the human in Virgin Mary, Photios the patriarch strongly emphasizes that any divine intervention overlaps the natural order. Stressing this point in connection with the creation of the first human, he proves that the act by itself is not an act of nature, but it is not contradictory to it, rather enforcing it, rising it into the epectatic frames of deification.

I consider that, by the articles I published in various academic journals or in the volumes of various scientific reunions ( folded upon the idea of interdisciplinary) but also through the Patristic manuals that got out in 2015, also through the day by day activity at the department of the Faculty of Theology, and by the ministratiōn I tried to serve by the models offered by the Holy Fathers, I concurred to the development of the discipline I teach. Signals I get from the interior of the academic community makes me consider that I could contribute even further, by forming specialists in this research domain.