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FACULTY OF THE ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

**Romanian Carol, between heritage, music and
theology.
Delicate elements of the Church singing.**

**HABILITATION THESIS
ABSTRACT**

FIELD : THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The Habilitation Thesis is targeted on both my academic career development and the scientific concerns and contributions, by reference works in the field of theology and religious music. The Habilitation Thesis achieved after 13 years from the doctoral thesis, presents in a structured and documented manner my main professional achievements and scientific contributions of this period and is structured in three parts.

The first part of the Habilitation Thesis provides information on scientific research; main scientific post-doctoral achievements which have led to the development of my professional and scientific career (**Chapter 1**). The topics addressed in the research was varied. **The second part** of the thesis contains a number of future directions for the development of academic and scientific career that will complement each other, targeting specific objectives. In **the third part** of the thesis are included personal and general references associated with the first two parts.

Christmas carolling is a custom deeply ingrained in the conscience of the Romanian people, In a unique way Christmas and Christmas carolling tradition around this festival are celebrated in the traditional Romanian village, where the old practices remained unchanged, because the Romanian people have always preserved the national identity, language and faith through customs and traditions. Without the inestimable treasure of Christmas carols, well preserved in its conscience, the Romanian people would have lost itself in the history of European people.

In the second half of the 20th century the Communism tried to tone down the Christmas carols and to drive them away from the people's conscience, especially those of religious substance. Although our people, with its typical wisdom, faced all the destruction attempts of all was sacred in the human soul and preserved the faith and customs especially in the villages: Christmas carol, *sorcova* (New Year's greetings while carrying in the hand a traditional bouquet), *plugușorul* (New Year's procession with a decorated plough), *țurca* (children's game with a small stick sharpened on both sides), *craii* (the three Kings) etc.

The Christmas "magic", splendour, charm and uniqueness owe first to the Christmas carols, which manage to make a change in the people's heart. In an inexplicable and in a totally new way people become now better and closer to their fellows than they have been during the year which is just about to end. Nobody forced them to do so, yet the sensitivity of the Christmas carols gets successful through the impassivity, selfishness and indifference, that have become a scourge in the world we're living in. When listening to the Christmas carols, as so beautifully suggests Mihail Vulpescu, "one can feel the holiness shiver that comes from ancient times and goes by from home to home and from soul to soul".

The time of Christmas fast is a time for preparation for celebrating Our Lord's Birth and also a time spent for Christmas carols and has its particular significance established by the Holy Traditions which come from "ancient ages of poetical customs". Mysteriously this period sets us to the times before Christ when the mankind waited and lounged for God, wanted God to come amidst people. The Birth of Christ is the cradle of humanity, and the fast and carols will help us to that with help of the Holy Communion to make the "manger" of our heart ready in order to

receive the Holy Child that in the way of the Holy Communion wants to rest there and to bring peace and happiness.

The Christmas carol is the link between generations, by creating that united community that Our Lord Jesus Christ wishes to. We all wait the joy of Our Lord's Birth in the cradle form Bethlehem; this joy is brought to our hearts by means of carols.

Christmas carolling is not only a custom; it is a real institution with its own laws. No other custom, no tradition has preserved with a greater interest than Christmas carolling and neither of them is so well organized. We, the Romanians, seem to have preserved Christmas carolling in a more accurate way than any other people; this was caused perhaps that here the carol-singers are of all ages, from four-five years old to the old people.

The carols are popular creations inspired by the Holy Bible and some of them have also a secular nature, having as their source the daily life of the village. The carol-singers are thought to be God's messengers that give people peace and happiness, health and hope. The carols are meant that besides glorifying God, to purify and bless us, to deliver from all what is evil. "When the carols will not be heard on earth, the devils will come out, and so the world will fall into their hands." ¹ The carol-singers' sticks have the power to frighten the devil. Such beliefs offer an explanation for the respect which is paid by the peasants to the carol-singers.

Compared with the Western musical creations referring to Christmas, the Romanian carol is both a language treasure and a remarkable preamble of the Romanian poetry, which passed on, not by printings or manuscripts but by oral way of the old popular tradition.

Christmas carolling has many various forms at the Romanian people, but not as it was before the Christianity it's hard to tell. However it was late enough when the tradition began to be mentioned by the different church authors and at that time it didn't distinguish too much from the today's tradition. Undoubtedly that on the January Calends the carol took an special position in the Romanian custom and probably it was very popular and very much used, as well as the festivals which were related to it, otherwise it would be completely impossible to explain how it spread and ingrained so deeply in the whole world. Today we meet mostly the tradition of carols at the Romanian people in two distinct forms: secular and religious. The elements in the Roman custom are much more numerous and more accurate preserved in the secular form, although the Christian ones are not completely missing. A distinction between them is to be made only hypothetically.

The elements and symbols in the Roman carols are the secular component found again in the Romanian carol. The reports between the elements sacred and secular, as well as their fusion in the Romanian carol are two major problems and interest is arisen in them. Among them, an important place takes the phenomena of Christmas carolling as a whole, its integration in Christmas celebration, origin, rituals, steps and the carols significance.

The traditions were strictly respected as there was a belief in their effectiveness. This concern for the correct fulfilling of the customs determined a special attention for their aspect, even if sometimes they haven't changes their meaning.

The traditions during the year, if correctly fulfilled, gave life equilibrium between the times of work and rest, and those who weren't respectful of them were *punished by destiny*. For example finishing the spinning during the winter period was connected to the spring traditions, such as "*hodăitul*" during the Lent when sharp criticism was called against the lazy people.

Those against this criticism were directed were compromised in the village that is why everybody avoided bringing about the witty couplets.

Today these traditions have diminished or have completely faded away. One can seldom find folklore creators and performers; villagers prefer listening to the radio or watching on TV the folklore shows.

The word “custom” characterizes the folklore celebrations connected to a certain event, no matter of its *magic or spectacular* nature. Usually the customs are syncretic not only by their way of expression (poetry, music, dance), but also by their ideologies they rely upon. Thus the sources of the celebrations are numerous. First, man tried to get the favour of the of the surrounding nature forces by different invocations, beliefs and actions, than the religious syncretism became a basic source for the traditions. Another important moment is the confrontation between the old beliefs with the Christian ones (Mircea Eliade mentions that the pagan gods were christened). Thus dragon the *killing hero* became Saint George, the *thunder god* became Saint Elijah and the *goddess of fertility* was replaced with the Holy Virgin Mary.

In the present work I try to offer as many data as possible about the *wonderful* Christmas carol. First of all I present and explain the terms of custom, tradition and their place in the calendar, I analyse the origin and the name of Christmas, I emphasize the presence of this tradition in the whole world, I try to describe the fusion of the ancestral with the new elements in experiencing the Christmas celebration, afterwards I expose an overall view of the carol, its appearance in the Roman paganism and its evolution until turning into an element which belongs exclusively to Christianity.

In today's world the devotion to idols is very present. We are all witnessing a voluntary or involuntary discrediting of the divine calling and that is why there is a severe need for beautiful things and for a musical education. We can tell beautiful things apart from the ugly ones due to the effect of music upon a person's behaviour. For the understanding of music is an act of intelligence, this must be done beginning with the early childhood and in this respect a musical education offers an extra chance in developing a noble character. The world cannot improve if it is not infused by beauty (which is difficult). Orthodoxy represents a beautiful world because, according to Cioran, it has a spiritual meaning and a liturgical destination. A true artist of the Church – especially a musician – must indeed be a believer; his work is an oblation to God and to his fellows. The hymns of the divine offices are a blend of poetry, music and prayer with the Church's teachings. Hymnography represents “the religious poetry dedicated to the eulogies and praises to God and the Saints which are sang during the offices of the Church”. Hymnography is a true dogmatic synthesis of the Church's teachings surrounded by prayer; it proclaims the Christian teachings in a doxological dimension in respect to the greatness of the divine economy.

Hymnography has been an essential part of Christianity starting from the first centuries of the Christian era. During this time, the Christians expressed themselves through the forms and the language of the Judaic liturgical tradition. Saint Paul tells us about “**the psalms, the hymns and the songs from the Spirit**” (Ephesians 5: 19, Colossians 3: 16) and he indicates the importance of the Christian songs. These three types of songs originated in the synagogues that the disciples used to attend daily.

The psalms and the psalmical style have been the first elements borrowed from the synagogues while the Church has given these a fundamental part in its own rite. This style of singing has been accepted with more and more difficulty within the Christian Church in which

the need for the concrete situations, for the believer's wishes and for new teachings was felt. The psalms received new texts and their music new dimensions and, thus, the Christian background was formed.

In the early days of the Church, the term "hymn" or "praise" refers to the hymns from the Old and the New Testament. Vintilescu talks about "the creation of the religious enthusiasm of the early Christians." This term can be identified in the Song of the twenty-four elders (Revelation 5: 9). However, in E. Wellez's opinion the term of "spiritual songs" refers to the melismatic chants such as Hallelujah. The first hymns of the Church were inspired from the Scripture under the influence of the synagogues. They will not only be a part of the cult, but will also influence the future forms of the hymn.

The encounter with Hellenism, inevitably due to the expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire, was a chief phenomenon which influenced the elaboration of a rational theological reflection; it influenced the teachings of the Church and also the cult and its hymnography. Beginning with the second century, the Christian apologists gave answers to the accusations brought against the Christians and explained to the gentiles what the new religion and new faith meant. The Christian apologists tried to find a way in which they could make clearer the Christian message to the cultivated Greeks who had been trained in the school of classical philosophy. Their attempt had some flaws, some exaggerations and some deviations. Beginning with the late second century, the Church was in conflict with Gnosticism. Fathers, such as Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage, have fought against Gnosticism. The conflict has not only been one of ideas, of thoughts, but it expanded to the people through the hymns. The hymn became a means of showing one's doctrine and a means of propaganda. Petre Vintilescu mentions the development of the hymn in the period of the Gnostic conflict and says that: "the inauguration of the hymn as dogmatic weapon and as form of propaganda belongs to the heretics and moreover to the Gnostics."

In the fourth century, the Church used new hymns at the extra-liturgical events. The hymns that have a biblical origin and were inherited within the cult from a century-old tradition were adapted, completed and stylized. Their adaptation and styling were demanded by the new situation created by the heresies and by the Synod of Laodicea's decision.

The **Troparion** is a hymn of the Church which derives its name from the Greek word *tropos* (way, voice) and it can be sung. After the persecutions had ended, the Church's hymnography continued to develop and the Troparions were named according to their contents and their place within the cult: ANASTASIME, THEOTOKION, MARTIRICALE, NECROSIME, APOLITIKIA, PRAISES, EXAPOSTILARII, EOTINALE, CANONS, APOSTHURI.

The **Kontakion** is a hymn formed of numerous stanzas which usually vary from 18 to 30 and which have the same rhythmical structure. A **canon is a rule, a norm** which means that parts of this hymn are formed according to some predetermined rules or norms in regard to their structure, form or order. The 9 odes of the canon symbolize the 9 Heavenly hosts of angels who praise God and whom are imitated by the earthly Church which is also divided into the same number of hierarchical categories: bishops, priests and deacons, subdeacons, readers and cantors, the other minor orders of clergy, the monks and the laymen. The nine odes of each canon are divided into three groups of three odes each, praising the Holy Trinity. The first stanza of each ode is called *irmos* and it serves as a model for all the rest of the stanzas or *stichera*. In the melody, in the number of the verses and the syllables these resemble the ones in the original language (Greek).

The **Romanian folkloric Church songs**. We believe that it is advisable to print a collection of Romanian folkloric Church songs (a *Priceasnar*, as it could be called in Romanian, which would contain carefully selected Romanian folkloric Church songs) that will be a tribute to the beauty of the songs interpreted during the religious offices. These songs are interpreted during the Holy Liturgy, when the priests and people take communion right after “One is Holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ...” or at the end of the religious service. When collecting these songs one must consider the continuous changes that have happened within the Church in regard to how this hymnologic tradition and the tradition of the Romanian folkloric Church songs developed until today and that is why, from all the different versions that are sang in the parishes, only the songs that correspond literarily and melodically to the tradition of the Church can be selected and noted.

It is known that, similarly to carols, the hymns that are part of the Romanian folkloric Church songs represent a true popular theology written in verse. It is true that some of these melodies are not entirely appropriate with their content or with the mysterious atmosphere in which they are sung.

In Romanian, the term of *priceasnă* (in plural *pricesne*) which is the equivalent of the folkloric Church songs has its ethimological origin in the Slavonic word *prěčistīna* which means pristine. It represents the hymn or the chant of the Orthodox Church that is sung during the priests and the people’s communion; that is, within the cult. The cult is nothing else but the religion in action and, thus, the Orthodox cult has proved to be active by creating wonderful things in the *Koinonikon* and in the carols.

Koinonikon (from the Greek **Kinonikón**) is translated through “song sang in common” (the hymn of the communion). In the early Church, during the priests and the people’s communion anentire psalm was sang having the chorus “Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah.” Throughout time, the ritual developed and transformed to the form it has today. The *Koinonikon* is sung at length, in the rhythm and in the papadic style of the song which preserved until this day a great liberty in the choice of its rhythm and modulation; the musical discourse presents itself in a variety of embellished sounds which are almost independent from the literary text.

Carolling is an ancient tradition rooted in the conscience of the Romanians although it is encountered in the entire Christian world. Christmas and the tradition of carolling that accompanies it are experienced in a unique manner in the traditional Romanian villages where the ancient rituals have been kept unspoilt because the Romanians have always kept their national integrity, their language and faith through their customs. The Romanians as nation would have faded inside the history of the European culture if it were not for the priceless treasure of our carols.

The Universe of Byzantine music is a profound one that is why every side should be analysed for getting to the essence of psaltical soul of the singing. Every sign has a certain meaning, every mode has a certain composition and every singing genre is interpreted in a certain way. It is important to search and analyse the historical evolution of every of the mentioned categories for being able to form a holistic image about what Byzantine music meant and means.

Among the subjects we study, music plays a tremendous role in our formation. It can transform man, it can make him sensitive, loving and brave. Let us recall the character which the traditional ancient Greek modes had: one was warlike, another was melancholic, each of them having a strong impact on people. If we analysed this issue thoroughly and if we put music into practice, in the sense of obtaining what we want, we would see results, we would realise that

through its meanings and power, music can bring unsuspected positive ways in Christians' life, educational formative ways.

Referring to the musical education of Christians, we must take into consideration what is normal and natural in their psychology that is the fact that in Christian life music interweaves with living. The Church must cultivate this side of Christianity through a careful supervision of singing, as way of interpretation, but also as types of singing which it approaches and promotes. Priests and chanters must have a pleasant, clear, melodious voice; more than this, the priest must include music among his pastoral concerns. Good singing in the worship depends on the priest, therefore he must teach the faithful the chants, and he must also choose and prepare the readers and the chanters.

Nowadays, the way in which the Liturgy is sung is more and more a subject of debate, whether it should be sung in an omophonic or in a choral way. First of all, it cannot be sung anyhow. One must take into account all the four musical styles it comprises: recitative, irmologic, stichiraric and papadic and which must be interpreted as such. Not only the style of the song must be well interpreted, but also the vocal qualities of the interpreter must be taken into consideration. A pleasant interpretation involves vocal education, an effort must be made in order to develop a good breathing technique and voice impostation, and then all the mentioned elements must be put together as a whole.

Acoustics deals with all aspects in relation to sound, such as production, propagation, influence and sound analysis, sound interaction with different materials, propagation in space and sound perception and its effects on humans and animals.

The acoustics of the churches and the concert halls is opposed to the sound insulation of the buildings against noise. When we insulate a building against sounds we try to eliminate or reduce the noise level, while for places of worship or concert halls we want to hear a religious service and a vocal or instrumental concert under the best possible conditions. It is clear that to achieve this we will seek to stress the sounds and to emit them equally in that space.

The expansion of Christianity from the Judaic area to the Hellenistic one led to the emergence of new forms of singing which gradually became actual genres. These were then established in writing in neumatic psaltic notation, a musical writing which was adapted by our people, too, but developed in the spirit of the ethos of our faith. This tradition must be preserved, but also promoted in the entire Romanian area and I do not think that it would be improper if this psaltic notation were studied even at school or highschool levels.

The responsibility of organising beautiful singing in the church belongs to the priest, in the limits of preserving our Romanian tradition. If singing is well-organised, people come to Church with pleasure and delight. We all know that music is an important element in the Orthodox cult, therefore one must be careful so that what is sung is not alien to the spirit of Orthodoxy.

In the context in which Romania has entered various European and international structures we must promote our psaltic musical treasury and make it known to the whole world, not leave it aside, preferring to take what is new or belonging to others.

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