

Abstract of the Habilitation Thesis

The importance of the study of the Holy Fathers for contemporary theology

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The habilitation thesis with the title: *The importance of the study of the Holy Fathers for contemporary theology* highlights my achievements from the conferment of the doctorate until now. The present paper begins with an introduction in which the importance of the study of the Holy Fathers for contemporary theology is shown, naturally imposing itself as a result of didactic and pastoral activities, research projects, but also publications in the field.

The patristic writings represented and represent the "succession" or the apostolic heritage, that is, the treasury of the Holy Tradition, which has an inestimable value for the life of the Church, but also of every Christian¹. However, the positioning of the Holy Fathers in the history of human existence, but also in literature in general, even if a lot has been written about them, has not been estimated and evaluated as it should be. This, because the Holy Fathers created as inspired trainers the theology and thought of the Church.

Through their lives, but especially through their writings, they represent and express the new spiritual reality, which appeared at the moment when the Son of God became Incarnate. In this sense, the Holy Fathers are the inspirers and creators of a new spiritual dimension in the world, and in the history of universal literature they occupy a place of major importance. For this they were considered the most valuable writers of their era².

The neopatristic movement of the second half of the 20th century, which was promoted by great theologians such as: Georges Florovsky (1893-1979) His call to return to the Holy Fathers, his effort to make patristic writings the main source for modern theological thought, had a strong impact on all modern Christian thought³); Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958 Beyond the polemicist, we discover in him the master of neopatristics, the theologian of the apophase, of the Person and of the Holy Spirit/Spirit⁴); John Meyendorff (1926-1992), Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) and Ioannis Zizioulas, (1931-2023).

A unique and original event in the history of the Church, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) gave birth to a new stage in the life of the Church. The New Pentecost, as the

¹ Priest Prof. Dr. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrology*, Vol. I, Publisher of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1984, p. 11.

² Prof. Dr. Stylianos G. Papadopoulos, *Patrology*, Vol. I, Introduction, Second and Third Centuries, Translation by Lecturer Dr. Adrian Marinescu, Byzantină Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 64.

³ <https://www.crestinortodox.ro/parinti/parintele-george-florovsky-121356.html>

⁴ <https://humanitas.ro/autori/vladimir-lossky>

Council was called by Pope John XXIII (1881-1963, the one who convened it) begins the renewal and reform in the Church, giving it a new image⁵. Thus, in the Decree on priestly training *Optatam totius* says: "the contribution of the Eastern and Western Church Fathers to the faithful transmission and development of each of the revealed truths as well as in the subsequent history of dogma will be shown"⁶.

Therefore, the examples and teachings of the Holy Fathers, confessors of Tradition, were especially evaluated and valued by the Second Vatican Council, which, thanks to them, was able to acquire a more vivid awareness that the Church has about itself, and to individualize the safe way, especially for liturgical renewal, for a fruitful ecumenical dialogue and for a contact with non-Christian religions, making the ancient principle of unity in diversity and progress in the continuity of Tradition bear fruit in the circumstances of our days⁷.

The Second Vatican Council encouraged the return to the Holy Fathers, also called the return to the sources. Thanks to the Holy Fathers we are the beneficiaries of the biblical and liturgical movement, because Origen (185-254/255), Saint Augustine (354-430), together with the other Fathers of the Church are our guides to understand the soul and spirit of Holy Scripture, provided we do not neglect the advances made by the biblical sciences. As for the Holy Liturgy, the Holy Fathers were not content only to explain it to the catechumens and the faithful, but they shaped it, they built it, but above all they lived it. Thus, Saints Basil the Great (330-379), Ambrose of Milan (339-397), Cyril of Jerusalem (313/315-386) and John Chrysostom (354-407) had an important role in composing and explaining liturgical texts. Therefore, the biblical and liturgical renewal would be incomplete, if we do not return to the Holy Fathers⁸.

The importance of the Holy Fathers for contemporary theology has been highlighted by great scholars, among whom we mention: Mons. Louis Duchesne (1843-1922), Aiemee Puech (1860-1940), Pierre de Labriolle (1874-1940), Gustave Bardy (1881-1955, long considered the dean of French patrologists)⁹, Johannes Quasten (1900-1987) Hans van Campenhausen (1903-1989), Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), Jean Daniélou (1905-1974; at the request of Pope John XXIII participated as an expert at the Second Vatican Council), Henri de Lubac (1896-1991; a participated as an expert at the Second Vatican Council), Claude Mondésert (1906-1990). The three great theologians had an important role in launching the *Sources Chrétiennes*¹⁰

⁵ <https://librariasapientia.ro/reviste/mostenirea-conciliului-al-ii-lea-din-vatican-ii-cuvantul-si-lumea.html>

⁶ *Conciliul Ecumenic Vatican II Constituții, decrete, declarații*, Ediție revizuită, Arhiepiscopia Romano-Catolică de București, 1999, p. 200.

⁷ <https://www.magisteriu.ro/categorie/dicastere-vaticane/congregiata-pt-educatia-catolica/>

⁸ Adalbert Hamman, *Fathers of the Church*, translated by Rev. Stefan Lupu, Sapientia Publishing House, Iasi, 2005, p. 8

⁹ https://www-encyclopedia-com.translate.google.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bardy-gustave?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=ro&_x_tr_hl=ro&_x_tr_pto=sc

¹⁰ <https://sourceschretiennes.org/qui-sommes-nous/figures-sc/p-claude-mondesert-sj>

collection, which was founded in 1942 in Lyon - France. It proposed the renewal of Latin theology and Eastern spirituality, as well as for ecumenical rapprochement. The Sources Chrétiennes collection had a decisive role in the renewal of theology in the second half of the 20th century, but also a huge impact at the Second Vatican Council¹¹.

The importance of the study of the Holy Fathers for contemporary theology was also highlighted by the Congregation for Catholic Education, taking into account the particular needs of our days. In this sense, the document signed by Cardinal William Baum on November 10, 1989 expresses the desire: "that a more careful study of the Holy Fathers lead everyone to a better knowledge of the Word of God and to a renewed youth of the Church, which had and has in the Holy Fathers its masters and models"¹².

In their writings, the Holy Fathers cultivated scientific research with great passion. Thus, the natural sciences, the exact sciences, and their annexes were the object of study of many Holy Fathers. In this sense, we can mention those who were part of the Alexandrian, Caesarean and Antiochian schools, the great Cappadocian Fathers Saint Augustine (354-430) and culminating with Saints Maximus the Confessor (580-662) and John Damascene (675-749), who in their writings contributed all the science of their time. The Holy Fathers who were part of the great centers of Christianity: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Carthage and Constantinople extensively researched the composition of matter, described and analyzed the three kingdoms: mineral, vegetable and animal, talking about the composition of the atmosphere and the stars.

They also studied astronomy, geometry and mathematics, and Origen (185-254/255) is the product of such a school, which he would lead. The Holy Fathers were masters of the liberal sciences: philology, oratory and dialectics, arousing the admiration of some educated pagans, such as Porphyry (233-309) and Libanius (314-394). Therefore, in their writings the Holy Fathers harmonize the human with the supernatural, and the limited human spirit is carried through the steps of perfection to the ineffable light of the Godhead with which it is united forever¹³.

Observing the current ecclesial reality highlights that the demands of the general pastoral care of the Church and, in particular, the new currents of spirituality demand solid food and reliable sources of inspiration. Faced with the sterility of so many efforts, we spontaneously think of that breath of true Christian wisdom and authenticity that springs from patristic works. It is a breath that has already contributed, even recently, to the deepening of numerous liturgical, ecumenical, missionary and pastoral issues, which, received by the Second Vatican Council, are

¹¹ <https://sourceschretiennes.org/qui-sommes-nous/historique-sc>

¹² <https://www.magisteriu.ro/studiul-sfintilor-parinti-ai-bisericii-in-formarea-preoteasca-1989/>

¹³ Priest Professor Ioan G. Coman, *Problems of philosophy and patristic literature*, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1995, pp. 46-49.

considered a source of encouragement and light for the Church today. Here, therefore, the Holy Fathers show their vitality even today, but they still have many things to say to those who study or teach theology¹⁴.

Thanks to the Holy Fathers, the first Christian millennium was of a catholicity, which was maintained, even if there were also some slippages towards schisms. Unfortunately, the second millennium followed, the one of confessional division, but also of intense unsuccessful efforts to restore Christian unity. Starting from the model offered by the Holy Fathers, rediscovering the catholicity of the first millennium continues to be the great hope of the third millennium. Throughout history we could observe that confessional schisms have put and are putting the relevance of the Christian presence and witness and the contemporary society in the most serious way. All this shows the futility of human efforts to restore Christian unity, but above all the shortcomings of Christians in the complex and inexhaustible catholicity of the mystery of Revelation that was given to the Church and preserved by the Holy Fathers. Therefore, only the return to the treasure preserved and transmitted by the Holy Fathers could bring the force to unify the existing polarities and overcome the false antinomies that have appeared in the history of the Church and societies: divine and human, contemplation and action, event and institution, liberal and conservative, a spiritual unity and human, social and cultural diversity of all mankind. So the solution is the theoretical assumption and practical realization by all Christians of the catholicity and orthodoxy of Revelation. This can be accomplished by permanently connecting to Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, the two sources of Revelation in the Church. Only by returning to these sources, which were preserved and transmitted within the Church by the Holy Fathers, will the dough of the Gospel leaven all the confusion of the Church and contemporary society¹⁵.

The conclusions highlight why the study of the Holy Fathers is important for contemporary theology. The thesis continues with the presentation of the evolution and development of the professional, scientific and academic career, in which the course of the author is presented after the defense of the doctoral thesis in 2003, going through the publishing activity, the conferences and research programs to which he contributed, but also with the presentation of future projects Research.

¹⁴ <https://www.magisteriu.ro/studiul-sfintilor-parinti-ai-bisericii-in-formarea-preoteasca-1989/>

¹⁵ Rev. Prof. Ioan Ică, deacon. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Renewal in contemporary Orthodox theology: meaning, problems, dimensions*, in: Karl Christian Felmy, *Dogmatics of the ecclesial experience Renewal of contemporary Orthodox theology*, Introduction and translation: Fr. Prof. de. Ioan Ică, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1999, p. 6.