

The Specificity of Orthodox Theology in the University

25 Years of Orthodox Theological Education in Arad¹

Each science has its own specificity and a framework used to deepen the meanings of the world and of the whole universe. More than any science, the Orthodox theology is integrated into an experimental tradition, understood as the Tradition of the Church. This offers authenticity, verticality and identity. The tradition of the Church is understood neither as traditionalism nor as historicism, but in a vocational, experimental, creative and formative continuity with the monuments of the perpetual Church's Tradition founded in the Revelation. Therefore, the Tradition of the Church imparts the specificity of Orthodox theology and it manifests as following:

a) **The ecclesial identity of Theology.** Theology is and remains in the service of the Church; it is the Theology of the Church, and not an autonomous and self-sufficient form of expression of any theologian. It is based on the Revelation preserved and fructified in the Church, and on the experience of the Church, but not on the autonomous ideas of any separate person, however brilliant he is. The ecclesial identity of theology refers not only to its form but also to its content that creates models with implications in the personal and communitarian life of the world. This is because the ecclesial identity of theology supports the vocational and priesthood identity of the youth and the dynamics of Tradition in post modernity.

The specificity of Orthodox Theology in the University means to instruct trainers according to the experimental and theological basis of the Church life, to the models taken from the lives of the Saints and to a culture

¹ See Cristinel Ioja, *Învățământul teologic ortodox din Arad. Forme. Itinerar. Perspective*, in "Învățământul teologic ortodox din Arad. Itinerar. Forme. Perspective", Editura Arhiepiscopiei Aradului, 2016, p. 17-19.

of holiness, which is the culture of Christ's Spirit, mysteriously present in the Church, in the world and in the human life. The ecclesial identity of Theology is asserted by the historical and eschatological dimension of its approach within the University.

b) The dynamic theology within Tradition. By pointing Theology in the centre of Revelation, of the Church, and of Tradition, it does not mean it is static, but precisely the affirmation of the dynamic principle of Theology as its manifestation in the University. The theological research does not start from reason, but from the revealed fact that it does not exclude reason; yet it calls reason to participate precisely in order to understand the complex and paradoxical meaning of the world. Reason is not excluded in Theology but acknowledged and affirmed, its role being well-defined in the spirituality and experience of the Church. It is not about the autonomous and exclusive reason, or the reason of the fallen man, but about the mind opened to the mystery and aware of its own functions and limits. Theology operates with the spiritualized reason and with the reason unified with man's *nous* and heart and integrated in the Tradition and the sacramental life of the Church. It also works with the dynamic reason, from the inside of the experimental data of Tradition to the confession of faith in any historical context.

The dynamic theology within Tradition means the study of the Scriptural texts and of the so-called monuments of Tradition on the one hand, and, on the other hand, their expression in an interdisciplinary and university context, in order to identify the convergences necessary to a rational and spiritual knowledge of man and of the world. This dynamic of Theology within Tradition is the basis for the mission of Theology in the University and in the conclave of the other sciences. If we are talking about a dynamic character of Tradition in the Church, we can also speak of a dynamic character of Theology within the Tradition of the Church.

c) The experimental-rational method. The study of Theology is primarily based on the experimental-ecclesial method since the person who wishes to know is integrated in the life dimension of the Church. In Orthodoxy, theology does not refer to the remote and strictly rational study of the Tradition texts and documents, without assuming the Orthodox way

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of life, but first of all to the theologian's integration into the Church's life dimension from which he will draw new meanings about the message of God in history for each context. We can see the experimental method as a settlement of the theologian within the Tradition and the Church experience and as accessing the theological knowledge through conscious experience, which is then expressed as far as possible by the criteria of reason. In order to understand the functionality of this method, first of all we must state that knowledge in theology means *participation*, and secondly that in the Orthodox theology there is an inner relationship between knowledge through experience and rational knowledge.

This perspective highlights the paradoxical method of the Church's Fathers. The paradoxical method by which theology operates the anthropological and cosmological data of the world is integral and creates the premises of an integral, experimental-rational, transcendent-immanent, and historical-eschatological knowledge. The paradoxical approach of man - mystery and light – and of cosmos - mystery and light - from the perspective of the revelation Trinity has in its centre represents the great challenge of any science within the University. Man is not only regarded as a body, but in the fullness of his being and in the paradoxical dimension of the person in communion and as a spiritual being; likewise, cosmos is not only seen in the material, utilitarian and external dimension, but also in the spiritual and communal one, as a gift of God made to men and among them.

d) The selective-critical method of Theology. Based on the revelation that is unchangeable and following the Patristic theology embodied by the Fathers of the Church, contemporary Orthodox Theology assumes a selective method as to the philosophies and sciences in the University. On the one hand, it recognizes the scientific character of other areas of research, and on the other hand it selectively assumes data from other domains in order to emphasize the truth which all the sciences and philosophies of the world converge to, i.e. the eternal reality of the incarnated Logos. The selective method of Theology avoids both the complete integration in Theology of the value systems from other sciences in, and the danger of overcoming the skills that would inevitably lead to the conflict between

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theology and science – confirmed by the recent history. Therefore, neither Theology contains any system of any science, nor it can be contained by any system of human self-knowledge. Centred in the Revelation and the experience of the Church, Orthodox theology is open to dialogue with the sciences of the University, and with human society in general.

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