

Summary of Habilitation Thesis – Protos. CS III Dr. Agapie Corbu

This habilitation dissertation synthesizes the main results of my scientific and teaching activity that I have carried out after the completion of my doctoral thesis. The scientific research that I have concretized in several studies and monographs has focused, on the one hand, on deepening some fundamental themes researched during the realization of the thesis, and on the other hand, on approaching some themes related to those already studied. From the perspective of the studies and monographs carried out in the more than two decades that have passed since then, all these studies focus on complementary aspects of one and the same fundamental problem, Holy Scripture and its place in the theology of the Church, in worship and in the spiritual life of Christians. The results so far can be systematized into three main research directions: 1. Patristic exegesis and its relevance for biblical hermeneutics of the Church; 2. Ecclesiastical biblical hermeneutics drawn from the study of patristic exegesis and texts of the New Testament; 3. Practical application of the principles of ecclesiastical biblical exegesis to texts of the New Testament.

These three directions of research are complementary, representing embodiments of one and the same constant preoccupation related to the ecclesial and traditional approach to the New Testament and to biblical writings in general, a preoccupation that has constantly inspired the effort to deepen the sacred text, to assimilate and correctly situate it in the comprehensive context of everyday Christian life.

I engaged in the first line of research when I wrote my doctoral thesis. I considered it decisive to start from the way in which some of the most representative Fathers of the Church have related to Sacred Scripture, have interpreted it and have used it in their spiritual life. I have started from the theological premise that Holy Scripture is the "source of theology", so that any patristic writing is evidence of a more or less explicit use and interpretation of Scripture.

In the development of my doctoral dissertation, the thorough and in-depth analysis of the work of St. Gregory of Nyssa from the perspective of his biblical exegesis allowed me to identify those elements with structural value for the constitution of a biblical hermeneutics based on patristic biblical exegesis. First of all I analyzed the doctrinal foundation of the exegesis, presenting *in extenso* the links between Revelation and Scripture, the dynamic, progressive, continuous and unitary character of the different forms of Revelation, biblical inspiration and its implications in the spiritual life. Special attention has been given to the features that particularize the biblical word and give it a special place in the life of the Church, while at the same time imposing a certain exegetical methodology. We have presented in detail the dimensions of tradition in general and of exegetical tradition in particular, which is a fundamental element to bear in mind when researching a Christian writer in order to situate him or her correctly in the stream of tradition in terms of which he or she expresses himself or herself.

Also within the first line of research I have synthetically presented those structural elements of patristic exegesis that I have emphasized in my doctoral thesis and subsequent studies. Among these, I note here the Jewish roots of Christian exegesis, the interweaving of intellectual and ascetic endeavor in patristic exegetical exegesis, and the multiplicity of meanings of Scripture. Patristic exegetical methodology is also linked to these meanings, in the synthesis of which we have approached both literal and spiritual exegesis. I have insisted on the modern aspects of patristic exegesis which, according to a still widespread prejudice, are limited to the moral, spiritual and

allegorical aspects of the biblical text. We have also analyzed how the dogma is the synthetic expression of exegetical efforts of ascetical and mystical meditations on the word of God in Scripture, in the context of the life of the Church and the theological, cultural, pastoral, spiritual problems that she has confronted at different historical moments. The most extensive treatment I have reserved for ascetical and mystical exegesis, to which I have devoted studies on authors such as Ignatius of Antioch, Evagrius Ponticus, Dionysius the Areopagite, the *Apophtegmata* of the Desert Fathers, John of Damascus, Syriac authors, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, Archim. Emilianos of Simonos Petras. The conception of Scripture and the methodology followed by the authors studied revealed to me certain constant elements related to the place of Scripture in the Christian life. Based on these conclusions I was able to approach the following main research direction.

The second line of research is biblical hermeneutics, as I have drawn it from the study of patristic exegesis. I have preferred to call this hermeneutics "ecclesiastical", since I have observed that throughout the history of the Church, the engagement with Scripture presupposes and integrates all the other aspects of Scripture that have been highlighted separately: dogmatic, philocalic, liturgical, pastoral, catechetical, etc. At the same time, I prefer the more comprehensive name of ecclesiastical biblical hermeneutics, since we find many elements specific to patristic or so-called "orthodox" hermeneutics also in authors from outside the Church, especially after the biblical and patristic revival in the West. I have presented some conclusions from my studies in the form of hermeneutical principles. Among them I retain the Christological, biblical, doctrinal, liturgical and ascetic-spiritual principles. Also, the careful study of patristic exegesis has provided me with a critical perspective on the school hermeneutics that has been taken up in Orthodox biblical studies in Western theology. Following an increasingly sophisticated route, Western hermeneutics begins with the rhetorical classics such as Quintilian and Cicero, moving on through Augustine, Melancthon, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and then Gadamer, Ricoeur, Heidegger, Foucault.

The conceptual core synthesized in the doctoral thesis I correlated, in subsequent studies, with other elements of exegesis and hermeneutics identified in the Fathers of other theological traditions, other periods of Church history and other exegetical schools, all of which define a true patristic hermeneutical framework. Subsequent exegetical studies have enabled me to find this hermeneutical pattern in the pages of the New Testament itself, in the lesson of interpretation of Scripture that the risen Jesus gives to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The approach to the Lucan pericope (cf. Lk 24, 13-35) on different levels through a structural analysis of the Old Testament background and verse-by-verse exegesis has helped me to arrive at some theological conclusions that define a true Christian biblical hermeneutical pattern. On this pattern have subsequently been based apostolic preaching, patristic exegesis, and the occasional homiletical interpretations of the Fathers, each of which has developed one aspect or another of this pattern to the exclusion of the others.

From the perspective of basing patristic exegesis on this New Testament hermeneutic pattern, the various exegetical schools that have emerged over time. Alexandria and Antioch being the classic example, are only particularizing and developing in their own way the structural elements of the hermeneutic pattern. The reasons for these developments are the preference for a particular exegetical methodology, which in turn is determined by the cultural, ecclesial, historical, theological, etc. context of each author and of each exegetical current established over time. Deciphering the foundation of the exegesis of the Fathers on the New Testament hermeneutic pattern mentioned above, means that between authors who are very different in their concerns and

historically distant, there is a complementarity and unity that is little or not at all highlighted in the scholastic theology. Even when the different exegetical schools profess apparently contradictory conceptions or methods in their approach to the scriptural text, nevertheless, beyond the divergences, we find a unity which stems from a common New Testament hermeneutical pattern.

The third research direction is the exegesis of the New Testament. In each New Testament exegetical approach, I have tried to follow the hermeneutical principles drawn from the study of patristic exegesis. I have presented the conclusions of the exegesis of the texts of the Book of Acts concerning the Holy Sacraments, and I have analyzed the philokalical valences of the New Testament in a series of studies of New Testament lexicography. A singular aspect in Romanian biblical studies is the exegetical relevance of the Syriac version of the New Testament, since, before it was written in Greek, the Gospel was preached in Aramaic, a language almost identical to the Syriac we find in the Peshitta.