

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA**  
**FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**

**CANONICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CURRENT PASTORAL  
AND MISSIONARY CHALLENGES**

**HABILITATION THESIS**  
**SUMMARY**

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During my academic and research activity I have examined closely most of the fundamental themes and issues of Orthodox Canon Law and Church Law, such as: *the theology and foundations of Canon law, the relationship of Canon Law with State Law, the nature of canons, fundamental canonical principles, sacramental theology from the point of view of Canon Law, the Statute and Regulations of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the State, the relationship of religious denominations with the State in Romania and in the European Union, the evolution of the juridical system and the legal personality of religious denominations in Romania and in the European Union, methods of Church funding, and other important themes of Canon Law.*

My teaching and research activity at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca, as well as the administrative responsibilities in the field of Canon Law at the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate of Western and Southern Europe helped me to understand better the canonical aspects of the manifestation of the Church in contemporary society. Since the beginning of my work, I have been trying to identify the manner in which Canon Law can support the Church's mission and pastoral work in order to bring vitality and coherence to the pastoral ecclesiastical activity.

The results of the my research activity are embodied in books, studies and articles, as well as in my work as canonical counsellor, as member of the Committee for the Statute and Regulations of the Romanian Orthodox Church and as member in the various mixed theological dialogue committees or missions of the Romanian Patriarchate. Being a canonical counsellor of the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016) was a great opportunity to evaluate the manner in which the Orthodox Church assumes the manifestation of ecclesiastical consciousness in its synodal expression at the general level, in order to identify the best solutions for current pastoral and missionary challenges. The present habilitation thesis is a result of my academic and research activity.

In the first chapter of this thesis I have underlined the manner in which the canonical consciousness of the Church can frame the entire life of the Church. The first arguments are brought from the words of the Gospel, continuing then with the contextual canonical regulations. I have emphasised the fact that in Orthodox theology the dogmatic communion expresses the manifestation of the unity of faith and, in order to materialize it, the Church activates *the responsiveness towards the true doctrine* through the *doctrinal consciousness*. The liturgical communion expresses the manner in which the divine service helps us to be part of the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven in this world. The *responsiveness* towards the relation between orthodoxy and doxology is highlighted by the *liturgical consciousness*, and the *responsiveness* towards the relation between faith and life is highlighted by the *canonical consciousness*. The ecclesial

consciousness can be understood in its doctrinal, liturgical and canonical dimensions, intended to help us understand better the mechanisms by which the unity of the Church is protected and the way in which the relation between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy* is expressed. This paradigm has been repeated in history and represented a model for the general ecclesiastical reception of the canonical experiences of the local Churches. The ways of regulating ecclesial life at the regional level, which represent the canonical legislation of the Autocephalous Churches, are also manifestations of the responsibility marked by the canonical consciousness, being in fact a reception of the canonical Tradition in time and space. For this reason, the Church is able to identify, in every historical period and context, new canonical ways of supporting its mission. This can be achieved primarily through an interpretation and assumption of the canonical tradition marked by creativity. In this context we can say that one of the fundamental concerns of the Church is to cultivate the canonical consciousness, or the sensitivity towards the indissoluble link between true faith and the concrete attitude of the Church in historical circumstances.

In the other two chapters of the thesis, I have addressed some of the major organizational, pastoral and missionary challenges, such as the revaluation of synodality as a framework for the co-responsibility of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, the challenges of the internal life of the Church, the preparation and participation in the Eucharistic communion, and the challenges regarding the receiving of other Christians to the Orthodox Church.

The fundamental canonical principles can help us to determine the best ways for organizing and structuring the mission of the Church and to articulate a coherent pastoral-missionary perspective and to understand how we can benefit from the fruits of ecclesiastical service. The fundamental principles of church organization have no value in themselves, separate from the mission. They are validated precisely by their contribution to the realization of the pastoral-missionary service.

The Church has the capacity to endow with new ecclesiastical offices, to conceive new structures of ecclesiastical organization, being able to identify new solutions compatible with its doctrinal and canonical Tradition. The main testimonies of the manifestation of institutional dynamism in our Church are the revalorization of synodality at the general level, including the validation of the *Synaxis of the Primates of the Autocephalous Churches* as a permanent form of manifestation of synodality, and the canonical organization of the Orthodox Diaspora, according to the pastoral necessities in the context of globalization. Regarding to this issue, I addressed the problem of Orthodox Diaspora debated at the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016).

With the population movements of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Orthodox Church consolidated its presence outside of traditional canonical territories.

Thus, a new canonical entity emerged, the *Orthodox diaspora*, which was perceived from the beginning as an atypical form of ecclesial manifestation, for which the Church must find appropriate solutions both from a canonical and pastoral-missionary point of view. Even since the 1960's the presence of Orthodox communities outside of the traditional canonical territories of the autocephalous Churches attracted the attention of canonists and ecclesiologists, and the subject was considered particularly sensitive, and in need of anchoring in the canonical tradition and of communal understanding in the Orthodox Church. It is evident that the diaspora was constituted in time, beginning with ethnic migrations, but an *Orthodox diaspora* emerged which consists of persons who do not consider themselves as members of the ethnic diaspora, a scattering of the Orthodox faith amongst the persons originating from those respective countries. We notice that the document regarding the Orthodox diaspora uses very often the expressions "canonical normality", "in a canonical manner", "established pan-Orthodox practice". Resolving in a canonical manner an issue with which the Church is confronted does not only mean to refer to certain canons, but to resolve the problems in accordance with the canonical conscience of the Church, considering the context and means which the Church has at its disposal.

In close relation with the issue of Diaspora, Church autonomy has to be organized by respecting canonical tradition, and the disagreements between autocephalous Churches with regard to this institution's mode of manifestation in a certain region must be resolved through consensus. The Ecumenical Patriarchy only has a role of mediation and communion vector. For the first time the possibility of organizing local autonomous churches in the Diaspora is evoked in the document of the Holy and Great Council, under the conditions of receiving consensus with the support of the Ecumenical Patriarchy.

One of the most complex manifestations of *canonical economy* is accomplished in pastoral and spiritual ministry. In order to understand its importance, it was necessary to observe how it evolved over time and to determine the concrete aspects of pastoral life in our society.

Taking into account the results of the research, I have concluded that the entire pastoral and missionary work of the Church is conditioned by the revalorization of the canonical consciousness as a sensitivity towards the relation between what we believe and what we live for. The manner in which this relationship is assumed will influence not only the future of the Church but also its power of being a true testimony of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world. The canonical framing of the ministries in the Church is not a strictly legal one, but one of the manifestation of the grace in time and space. In order to be able to cope with pastoral-missionary challenges, it is necessary for the mission of the clergy to come under the episcopal responsibility, which ensures the participation of the person and the local community in the life of the whole Church.