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Religion and religiosity
in the context of man's search for meaning.
Researches conducted at the intersection of
systematic and spiritual theology as well as
logotherapy and existential analysis

Summary
of the habilitation thesis

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The present compilation of the author's habilitation thesis statements presents those research and didactic emphases that, after he obtained his doctoral degree in 2006, defined the author's university didactic and research activities in the field of theology. These emphases are related to systematic theology, in particular, to fundamental theology. Fundamental theology is an essential branch of Christian theology. The foundations of the Christian faith are addressed by this scientific field in such a way that central truths of faith that can be related to the following three keywords are examined: God – revelation – church. For nearly a decade and a half, the author has focused on the current problems of the question of the existence of God. The fundamental question of the existence of God is ideological in nature, and the Christian theologian is not only challenged with presenting the rationality of their own religious faith and worldview, but they are also encouraged to learn about alternative or competing worldviews in this field, such as the atheist worldview.

For the author, the result of this scientific endeavour was the recognition that one's own personal religious identity can no longer be found and lived in a sustainable way in the spirit of polemical dissociation from others or contemporaries professing other worldviews, but only through open, critical and self-critical dialogue. One of the fruits of this ongoing dialogue is the further realization that it is worth placing the systematic research on the existence of God today in the context of spiritual theology and the theology of the spiritual life. According to the author, one reason for this is the experience that more and more atheist thinkers today, while denying the possibility of God's existence, value and take seriously the spiritual dimension of human existence, and thus examples of authentic and mature human religiosity. The language of spiritual theology, insofar as it reflects the research into the general, structural laws of spiritual life and human religiosity, and if it is also open to processing the results of serious and relevant researches conducted in the field of psychology of religion, can provide an excellent opportunity for a respectful meeting and effective cooperation of people from different worldviews.

In this context, a further defining emphasis in the author's research is the recognition that human spirituality and religiosity are closely related to the question pertaining to the meaning of life. And the person that poses the question of the meaning of life, even if they profess an atheistic worldview, will sooner or later be confronted with the spiritual, religious dimension of human existence. The question of the meaning of life, for its part, most often

arises when a person experiences the finiteness and fragility of human existence and with it the shocking truth about the immeasurable suffering present on Earth.

Is human life meaningful notwithstanding experiencing a concrete suffering? – research on such and similar issues has been carried out by the author in recent years, who has been trying to open the door to another scientific dialogue, namely the field of logotherapy and existential analysis developed by Viktor E. Frankl (1905–1997). The anthropological views of the psychiatrist and philosopher Viktor E. Frankl provide an excellent basis for the discourse between religious and atheistic worldviews because, according to Frankl, every human being is fundamentally interested in seeing the meaning of their life. And this interest, regardless of worldview, has theoretical and very specific, practical aspects as well.

Taking these aspects into account, led the author, a theologian that researches the fundamental question of the existence of God, to attempt to argue, in his scientific publications as well as didactic and science-promoting activities, for the rationality of God's existence without losing sight of the specific and real life situation of the suffering person. For concrete suffering is often linked to a crippling and long-lasting feeling of senselessness. And today a way out of this, even in the context of religiosity, can best be found only if the suffering person is given the support to recognize the life tasks that await him alone in the circumstances of the present reality.

The present work of the author's habilitation statements in its eight-chapter structure reflects the research emphases outlined above. In the first chapter, the author discusses the question of the meaning of life in a theoretical approach, revolving around the central problem of the circumstances under which this question may pave the way for accepting the belief in the existence of God. In the second chapter, the author examines Viktor E. Frankl's oeuvre and points out the logotherapeutic and existential analytical aspects related to faith and religiosity, highlighting the recognition that Frankl's anthropology is fully compatible with the biblical view of man. In the third and fifth chapters, the author examines the philosophical and theological dimensions of logotherapy and existential analysis, focusing both on the so-called theodicy problem and the close connection between the meaning of life and the question of happiness.

The focus of the fourth and sixth chapters is the extent to which man's search for meaning can be put at the service of Christian evangelization, and how this endeavor can be realized in the context of pastoral care. In the last two chapters, in the context of regional religiosity, the author first undertakes to find out what Catholic identity means today, tomorrow, in the Transylvanian context. Finally, the author seeks to show his future research directions: how can one, given the very complex social reality of our time, reasonably argue for the possibility of the existence of God, while constantly keeping in mind the existential openness of the particular person to shape the world in which they live meaningfully and with personal responsibility.

Along these habilitation thesis statements, the author intends to further develop his academic career, which started 13 years ago. So far, the development of this career is determined by 13 studies published in journals and conference proceedings, which directly reflect the author's area of research, 1 textbook and 15 participation at conferences, during which the author had the opportunity to present the outcomes of his research to the scientific community as an invited speaker. In the field of didactics, being in charge of 6 subjects directly related to his own field of research, he assists university students in the development of relevant professional competencies. Last but not least, 31 undergraduate and 24 master's theses related to his field of research reflect the author's supervising activities.