

THE ACTUALITY OF ORTHODOX CHURCH CANONS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY ECCLESIOLOGICAL DEBATES

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HABILITATION THESIS IN THEOLOGY

SUMMARY

The habilitation thesis, „**THE ACTUALITY OF ORTHODOX CHURCH CANONS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY ECCLESIOLOGICAL DEBATES**,” by Fr. Dr. Răzvan Tudor Perșa, offers a thorough investigation into the ongoing relevance of Orthodox Church canons amidst modern theological and canonical challenges. The study reflects the culmination of the author’s career in Orthodox Canon Law and is organized into three main sections: academic contributions, future research plans, and a supporting bibliography.

First Section: Scientific, professional and academic achievements in thematic disciplinary or interdisciplinary areas

Section I of the habilitation thesis by Pr. Răzvan Tudor Perșa focuses on significant scientific, professional, and academic achievements in the field of Orthodox Canon Law. It examines the reception, interpretation, and application of canonical principles within the contemporary ecclesiological and theological framework of the 20th and 21st centuries. The section is divided into several subsections addressing diverse thematic areas, including the evolution of canonical interpretation, inter-Orthodox and inter-religious relations, and the dynamic between church and state. The author outlines his comprehensive academic work in the last decade, emphasizing his role as a university lecturer and researcher. Dr. Răzvan Perșa’s academic outreach includes lecturing at renowned institutions such as Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München and The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. His role as a Visiting Professor and contributions to international conferences underline his influence in advancing Orthodox Canon Law on a larger scale. Additionally, his editorial leadership in canonical law journals and his active involvement in interdisciplinary research centers reflect his commitment to academic excellence.

He has contributed to the development of Orthodox Canon Law through in-depth explorations of the nature of the canons, their historical reception, and their contemporary applications. His doctoral thesis represents a pioneering hermeneutic approach to interpreting Orthodox canons, comprising a detailed 654-page analysis. This work situates the canons within their theological, ecclesiological, and canonical context, addressing their applicability in modern debates.

The first subsection of the thesis highlights Dr. Răzvan Perșa's scholarly work in advancing the interpretation, translation, and contextual application of Orthodox canons. His research emphasizes the integration of canonical texts into broader theological, biblical, and liturgical frameworks, particularly within the evolving discourse of 20th and 21st-century Orthodox theology. Dr. Răzvan Perșa critically analyzes significant theological movements, such as the „neo-patristic” approach that revisits the teachings of the Church Fathers and the „post-patristic” critique, which advocates for a more modern contextual application of theological texts. By exploring these currents, he offers a nuanced understanding of Orthodox Canon Law, differentiating it from the legalistic tendencies found in Western traditions. His approach repositions canons as dynamic expressions of ecclesial experience that serve pastoral and soteriological goals rather than mere legislative instruments.

Another key area of Dr. Răzvan Perșa's contributions lies in the translation and critical editing of canonical texts. Recognizing gaps and inaccuracies in previous Romanian translations, he has produced a bilingual edition of the canons, ensuring precision and accessibility. His meticulous philological approach has also led to the first Romanian translations of Byzantine canonists' commentaries, offering unprecedented insights into these foundational texts. These contributions not only enhance academic understanding but also provide practical tools for ecclesiastical governance and theological education.

Dr. Răzvan Perșa also examines inter-Orthodox relations and synodal debates, focusing on contemporary issues such as the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016) and the canonical disputes involving the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (2019). His work sheds light on the intricate balance between ecclesiological principles and canonical frameworks, offering strategies to address division and foster unity. Moreover, his scholarship extends to analyzing the canonical dimensions of the Orthodox Church's interactions with other Christian denominations, non-Christian religions, and secular authorities. Through this, he highlights the theological and legal implications of ecumenical dialogues and interfaith cooperation, emphasizing the Church's role in promoting religious freedom and ethical engagement within diverse societies.

Section II: Plan for the Development of Professional, Scientific, and Academic Career

This section of the thesis articulates the canonical vision of the author for advancing the field of Orthodox Canon Law. His future endeavors include producing a critical edition of Byzantine canonists' commentaries, creating a comprehensive canonical commentary on Orthodox Church canons, and analyzing the Romanian Orthodox Church's Statute with particular attention to religious freedom in the European context. These projects aim to bridge the gap between historical canonical traditions and contemporary ecclesiological debates, ensuring the continued relevance and adaptability of Canon Law. Dr. Răzvan Perșa's plans demonstrate his

commitment to addressing pressing challenges within the Orthodox Church while preserving its theological integrity.

This section outlines a comprehensive framework for advancing the author's career in the domain of Orthodox Canon Law, emphasizing key directions for research, teaching, and institutional contributions. Structured around specific objectives, the section integrates previous experiences with future ambitions, presenting a coherent strategy for personal and academic growth within a specialized theological field.

1. Translation of Fundamental Sources of Orthodox Canonical Tradition

A primary objective is the translation of foundational canonical texts into accessible modern languages, specifically Romanian, to address the current gap in scholarly resources. This endeavor builds upon the author's extensive background in philological and theological studies, recognizing that many canonical works remain untranslated or inadequately interpreted. The author highlights the importance of linguistic precision and cultural sensitivity in these translations, ensuring they accurately reflect the original texts' theological and canonical nuances.

The translations aim to: improve accessibility for Romanian scholars and theologians, facilitate interdisciplinary research by offering canonical texts that can be used in studies of history, liturgy, and ecclesiology, enhance understanding of canonical texts' practical applications within contemporary Orthodox theology.

2. Canonical and Ecclesiological Commentary

The second goal focuses on developing an analytical commentary on the canons of the Orthodox Church. The commentary seeks to bridge traditional canonical interpretations with modern ecclesiological and societal contexts. The approach includes: detailed historical and doctrinal introductions to each canon, connections between canonical texts and broader ecclesiastical practices, consideration of contemporary challenges in applying canonical law, such as inter-church relations and liturgical reforms. This project reflects the author's commitment to reconciling historical fidelity with practical applicability, fostering a dynamic understanding of canonical tradition.

3. Canonical Debates on Pan-Orthodox Issues

Addressing current disputes within the Orthodox world, such as the canonical controversy surrounding the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, is a significant research focus. By analyzing these debates through historical, theological, and canonical lenses, the author aims to contribute to: a deeper understanding of inter-Orthodox dynamics and tensions; theological dialogue that respects ecclesial traditions while advocating for unity and clarity in ecclesiastical governance. This research underscores the relevance of canonical law in resolving complex inter-jurisdictional disputes and maintaining ecclesial unity.

4. Commentary on the Statutes of the Romanian Orthodox Church

The final major objective involves producing a comprehensive commentary on the Statute governing the Romanian Orthodox Church, with particular emphasis on religious freedom in a European context. This project will examine: the historical development of the Statute and their alignment of the Romania Orthodox Church with Orthodox Canon Law, interactions between Romanian national identity, church governance, and European legal frameworks, the implications of religious freedom legislation on ecclesiastical autonomy and societal integration. The commentary reflects the author's interest in the intersection of theology, law, and public policy, highlighting the adaptive capacity of Orthodox institutions in a pluralistic world.

Through these objectives, the author articulates a clear plan to further his contributions to Orthodox Canon Law, blending scholarly rigor with practical relevance. The proposed projects emphasize translation, commentary, and critical engagement with contemporary issues, ensuring the vitality and applicability of Orthodox Canon Law in modern ecclesial and societal contexts. This section exemplifies the author's commitment to advancing both personal expertise and the broader field of Orthodox theological studies.

Third Section: Supporting Bibliography

The thesis concludes with an extensive bibliography that underscores the depth of Dr. Răzvan Perșa's research and its impact. His scholarly contributions have garnered recognition both nationally and internationally, with his work cited in leading academic journals and theological reviews. Through his involvement in conferences, editorial projects, and academic collaborations, Dr. Perșa has established himself as a figure in the study of Orthodox Canon Law. His dedication to rigorous scholarship and his innovative approaches ensure that Orthodox Canon Law remains a vital and dynamic field for addressing contemporary ecclesial and societal issues.

Dr. Răzvan Tudor Perșa's habilitation thesis not only consolidates his significant contributions to Orthodox Canon Law but also sets a forward-looking agenda for future research. By combining historical analysis, theological reflection, and practical application, his work affirms the importance of canon law as an indispensable resource for navigating the complexities of modern ecclesial life.