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**Liturgical Service – Identity, Holiness and Up-to-Date
Theological Dialogue**

- ABSTRACT –

**HABILITATION THESIS
DOMAIN: THEOLOGY**

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Abstract

The habilitation thesis entitled *Liturgical Service – Identity, Holiness and Up-to-Date Theological Dialogue* presents my professional and scientific achievements obtained in the academic career, emphasizing the scientific work carried out after being awarded the title of Doctor of Theology in 2012. Also, this thesis presents an individual short – and medium – term scientific research plan and the main scientific research directions within which the proposed research projects fall to potential doctoral students. The present thesis is structured into three parts, uneven in length; each part is divided into chapters and subchapters.

In the first part (*I. Professional and Scientific Achievements*), I present the stages of my professional training and the evolution of my academic career and below my didactic activity carried out in my country can be found (main courses taught, pedagogical responsibilities).

My humanist professional training (theological and legal) and the title of Doctor of Liturgical Theology allowed me to teach a wide range of courses, seminars and practical courses in whose topics I integrated the results of my scientific work.

In the first part of the habilitation thesis, there is a synthetic – quantitative overview of my scientific research activity.

In the second part of this thesis (*II. Scientific Research Activity*), my research activity carried out on three main directions connected to each other is structured in a reflexive and critical manner.

The research activity specific to each research direction is presented according to the following plan: *Objectives, Research Methodology, Research Plan and Results*.

The first research direction developed within this habilitation thesis is considering, by appealing to a series of articles published over time in specialized journals and in collective volumes, reviewing the main landmarks that highlight the identity dimension of the cult in relation to the history and evolution of this nation.

In this regard, I have mentioned a number of aspects that concern the process of the formation of the Romanian nation, through its appeal to the unity of faith, language and culture that have always manifested on Christian precepts, thus favoring an evolution based on communion with our ancestors, but, above all, with God.

Thus, claiming a Roman origin in terms of its provenance, the Romanian or Vlach people, as history would retain it, find the address of their birth inscribed in the space governed by Rome – the city of the seven hills. Although strongly structured on the “Roman gene” in whose content a series of attributes more or less favorable to determining an iconic profile of the human being can be found, the Romanian people, whose existential desideratum was even from its first moments of existence, “entering the Kingdom of Heaven”, an aspiration imprinted by the call of God transmitted to these lands through the Holy Apostles Andrew and Philip, ensured in a very special way its national characteristic. More specifically, with the eyes fixed continuously toward Heaven, from which it metabolized the power to love, to fast and to pray, to forgive, but also to fight for its own becoming, the Romanian borrowed “from the dowry of the Logos”, thus sanctifying a Latin language strongly desacralized by the pagan space of the Roman empire, and transforming it into the “dialogueical bridge” of hearts and souls who shared the same feeling. At the same time, favored by the geographical space and strongly supported by a well-defined desire to particularize their identity state, our ancestors thus secured an authentic cultural profile meant to remain alive under the pressure of the improbable passage of time, thus succeeding to fulfill all the conditions described above, necessary for the recognition of a true nation, as well as being able to place itself in the firmament of history as a nation of its own, from whose soul it is above all, faith in one God – the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit through Whom, dressed in the renewing grace that flows from the altars of the ancient Church, to come to this end, continuously motivated by a thirst for God and understanding its purpose as “people of the Cross”, be it Moldovan, Transylvanian, from Banat, Oltenia or inhabitant of the Romanian country of old, the Romanian felt that only through the communion of the chalice of the Lord, as an absolute model of unity of faith and love, speaking the same language and claiming the same ethnic and cultural values, would he be able to write with his own blood, the unique destiny of brothers separated at certain times from the proud and unhappy aspirations of the great powers of the world. This position favored the achievement of the great historical ideals of the Romanian people – the Union of January 24th, 1859, and the historical gesture of December 1st in Alba Iulia, events that represented in fact the moment of the resurrection of this nation, as well as the historical gesture of the Romanian people, a state which was achieved not by external factors, but rather by a feeling secretly prepared “in God” through the care and sacrifice of our forefathers, who have ceaselessly cultivated the feeling of love and sacrifice, as a Christlike reflex placed in the Christian DNA acquired through the sacraments of the Church. Understanding practically the catalytic role of faith, mysteriously metabolized by the ever deeper “in God” process revealed in a unique way

by the sacred and sacralizing word of the Romanian language, with the appearance of the printing press on Romanian soil, contemporaries of this moment, but even their followers, conscious of the unifying power through grace born of faith, understood to leave to their descendants an eternal dowry by which the generations to follow them would be continually alive in the light of Tabor, but also by letting in their being the Eucharistic blood of Christ circulate, vivifying the state of unconditional sacrifice for the Cross of Christ. And all this can be accomplished through a process of hundreds of years aiming to acquire the Romanian praying power due to the opportunity of dialogue with the Holy Trinity, with the Mother of God and with the saints and angels of God in Romanian, as a result of the continuous printing of the main books of worship in the mother tongue of all the Romanian brothers, a fact that has permanently animated and kept alive the desire materialized historically 100 years ago.

Only the placement under the canopy of grace of the Church and the psalmody continue through the mystery of the Romanian word written in the book of worship left to our ancestors, made the Romanian people able to make come true their unity and then preserve their national identity.

In this context, the ceremonial factor of the Church becomes the concrete environment of living and perpetuating the sense of identity marked by the pneumatic aureole acquired through the sacred cultic realities manifested especially in the village, as the space of birth and the original – spiritual formation of the Romanian nation.

The entire process of ethnic becoming described above is also fulfilled through liturgical ceremonies which brought with it the possibility of involving the whole community in a series of events of profound spiritual character.

In this sense, events such as birth, baptism, marriage or burial represented as many opportunities for community expression of the same values on the part of all members of the respective rural community.

In the same register that aimed at the social Union and the implicit manifestation of the ethnic value in the Romanian village,¹ the Divine Liturgy, which has always provided the Romanian with the model of love, forgiveness, gratitude, but also of self-giving, is included with a strong spiritual impact, all lived in the purest way, that of the kingdom with Christ. The Divine Liturgy becomes a mystery of the unity of the Romanian people through the Holy Trinity.

¹ Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae, *Liturghia și unitatea religioasă a poporului român*, in *op. cit.*, Basilica Printing Press, Bucharest, 2018, p.322-341.

Thus, in the preparatory order for the Holy Eucharist we see them commemorated and placed near the Holy Wafer, the one who by invoking the Holy Spirit will become the body of the Lord, a series of saints identified by their service to the Romanian people, be they hierarchs, martyrs and pious. We appreciate that through this image in which the ecclesiological and eschatological character of the Holy Proskomidy is perfectly professed, the Romanian people fully confirm their aspiration of unity, which is born practically from a “Eucharistic feeling” felt as a result of direct communion with Christ, it unites in the present of the Church the people of old and everywhere, of the past, of the present and of the future.

Enjoying the sublime Union with Christ through the sacraments of the Church, but above all through the sacrament of the Eucharist, as well as through the other services of the Church, and thus participating in life in God, as described in the previous pages, the Romanian people have constantly lived the joy of sacrifice, but also of the resurrection with Christ, as his own eucharist. In this state, it became natural to believe that every Romanian was convinced that his whole unitary face was based not only on principles related to speaking the same language, but above all on sharing the same values of faith. The ecclesiastical space became the place where all of the Romanian people were sanctified and transfigured, the Church being the one that hallowed the life of the people with a beauty beyond nature.

Thus, embracing the entire Romanian being in grace, the Church contributed through the representatives of the clergy – bishops, priests and deacons, to the realization and maintenance of the national unity of all Romanians. But the greatest force through which “the Church of the Romanian people manifested itself as one and contributed to the unity of this people to the greatest extent was the identity of the church services, having as its center the Liturgy”, the cult remaining, therefore, the ecclesiastical feature of Union among all Romanians.

Feeling through worship, but, above all, through the Divine Liturgy, the joy of loving communion with God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Christian people acquired the power of sacrifice, as the foundation of their unity of nation and faith.

This is how, through their participation in the life in Christ, our forefathers fully tasted the state of sacrifice as an echo of the Cross of the Son of God, materialized both by the martyrdom of Christians in communist prisons, acts from which today their holiness fully penetrates, but also the communion with the people he represents before the throne of the most Holy Trinity, an element from which the profile of the cult is perfectly emanated as a source of identity communion, but also of holiness for the Romanian nation.

The second direction of this research is to expose the sanctifying framework of worship as a pneumatic reality that every believer enjoys in the Church area.

In this sense, in full complementarity with the first investigated direction described above, I highlighted how the service of the Church becomes a source of perfection for the soul living in Christ, both in its personal and community-identity icon.

Thus, becoming aware of the mysterious baptismal implications, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit in the song “How many in Christ you were baptized, in Christ you were clothed”, the Romanian, dressed in the bright robe of the Resurrection, begins his ascent to Golgotha, as an itinerary of suffering, sacrifice and death, but also, of victory through the Cross of Christ. This new reality would open to every Christian the vision of perfection, not individually, but on the contrary, in a community, as an undoubted characteristic of the Church, of which every neophyte becomes a member.

Assuming death with Christ, the Romanian sees his being mysteriously imprinted by the Cross, from which he passes a “feeling of the Trinity”, of asceticism, suffering and sacrifice as the foundation of the great ideas” of Romanian Christians.

Strengthened by the “seal of the Holy Spirit” and United by the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ – as a mystery of death and Resurrection alike, Romanians have remained continuously anchored in the Cross and Resurrection.

Through maternal care for her spiritual children, but also through constant living in Christ and with Christ, the Church has been fully concerned with cultivating the sense of the Resurrection through her entire worship.

We see that through its functions – charismatic, liturgical and didactic or educational, the Orthodox cult represented the indisputable environment of “absorption and living in the Resurrection”, aspects that, through the fidelity assumed at Baptism, the Romanian not only knew, but above all felt how to live authentically.

The praises of the Church have been and remained an echo of the love and manifestation of the grace of God, while cultivating a real sense of the human being’s aspiration for perfection, but also for communion with his neighbor.

Also, the act of Proskomidy becomes an expression of historicity and perfection that, through the image of the Romanian saints, this nation claims in the icon of Christ.

This second part continues with a series of references to the relationship between worship and holiness in the light of the most Holy Trinity.

Through its entire worship, which is an ecclesial and personal celebration addressed to the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, the Church is filled with the Trinity, which implies the participation of the Christian in the new life offered by God as a gift.

In this context, each liturgical gesture bears within itself the seal of the Holy Trinity, which through blessing, singing and prayer pours out upon all creation the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, it is appropriate to point out that through its Christological character, the Orthodox ritual reveals the Savior Christ, as “Head of the Church” – through Whom we enter into communion with the Father and the Spirit. Christ the Lord offers us the image of His own communion with the Father through love, obedience and prayer, thus revealing to us the relationship between God and the world. We see the Lord praying also for the world, because Christ sums up humanity in Himself, recapitulates it, takes upon Himself the burden of sin, presents Himself to the Father bearing this burden of injustice and evil, and also because this world and this humanity are the object of the Savior’s prayer, of His heavenly prayer.

At the same time, the Christological characteristic of the entire ecclesial cult is because through its content it continues the Lord’s intercession and prayer, in which it practically integrates the whole world. Through the service of the Church, Christ the Lord becomes a living and real presence, Who shares to the world His healing gifts through which the whole world is restored, thus regaining its original iconic image, realities which simultaneously involve an immediate placement of the Christian community in the state of the eschaton, capable of removing every tendency of man to cling to the material side of his existence. In other words, through His entire presence in the Church, the Son of God raises us all to the life of the Holy Trinity.

Thus, through communion with Christ, we enter into direct relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit, who through the blessings of the priests, pours out a rain of gifts upon the faithful.

This Trinitarian physiognomy of the Church extends the experiential dimension of the Christian through the holy sacraments, as well as that of the hierurgies which in fact make up the iconic environment in which the human being is called to perfect himself.

His aspiration towards deification is also confirmed by the continuous celebration of the succession of royal feasts which make the historical event evoked a continuous *today* to sanctify the man willing to remain in the Church’s cultic work.

Since baptism becomes the first and main mystery of the Church through which man enters into communion with God, I have further recalled, by appealing to a series of patristic

sources, several mystical values that the mystery instituted by Christ at the Jordan and continuously actualized by the Church's cultic-baptismal act emanates as God's revealing realities and which ultimately turn the human being into an outpouring of transparency of the Holy Trinity.

Based on all these realities, I have further highlighted how the community consciousness of the human being manifests itself as an expression of the trinitarian physiognomy. In this regard, I reiterated some of the Catholic aspects that the cultic act emanates as a celebration with the saints and angels of God.

In fact, through its narrative, this second part aims to highlight on the one hand the indissoluble link between identity and holiness, in implicit connection with the first part described above. The narrative in fact ensures the process by which the Church reveals the sanctifying mystery of the Holy Trinity, both through the sacraments and through the entire ecclesiastical cult. At the same time, the participation of man in communion with the Holy Trinity is ensured primarily through the mysteries of initiation which give the soul of the unawakened the synodical consciousness of its being, thus mysteriously participating in communion with God in the uncreated light bestowed upon it as a gift of the Creator. All these realities the Church can rejoice only because of the sanctifying intervention of the high priest who actually illuminates the eternal high priest Christ.

The third part of the habilitation thesis brings to light some aspects that value the dialogue between the cult and other spheres of knowledge that actually contribute to the perfection of the human face.

In this sense, in full ideological connection with the above, we have first of all highlighted how the book of worship becomes a vector of national unity, holiness and culture.

Thus, starting with the 16th century, the moment of the appearance of the printing press on Romanian soil, begins the long, but fruitful process of translation and publication of the main books of worship, whose content full of the grace of the Spirit was to mark the beginning of the "Romanian transfiguration" which will finally culminate in the great event in Alba Iulia on December 1st, 1918.

Moreover, we have resorted to highlighting the translation process of the main books of worship, as well as the immediate reference to a number of personalities who have favored this process through their work.

Further, I have highlighted the indissoluble link between the mystery and the culture or education of the Christian. By immersion in the water of holy Baptism, the Christian receives Christ in his three dignities. This reality begets with it a manifestation of man not only to

himself, but above all to God, and through him to the whole world. In this way, through the joy of the “sealing of the Spirit,” the Christian acquires in potency all the spiritual gifts which he is called to perfect in his dialogue with God. But “as a depository of grace,” the baptized man must constantly share his gifts with his neighbor, being convinced that even in this way, as Christ Himself teaches, “by doing to some of these least of my brethren, you have done to me”². Each one of us meets with God through our neighbor as well. As a result, while preserving the awareness of the relationship with God by one’s neighbor, the Christian bases himself on the love and sacrifice due to Heaven, his entire dialogue with the world, offering to the world, as a result of his own act of worship in his dialogue with the Father, the joy of knowledge “in God and with God.”

Thus, in addition to the immediate knowledge of the Holy Trinity and of the entire teaching of the Orthodox faith that the cult offers through the Gospel, the Cross, prayer, singing, icon, in a much broader sense, but unquestionably placed on the foundation of the Christos model, every gesture that came about as dialogue between Christians becomes a cultic act, born practically from the inner imprint of the Christ dignity, but also from the aura of the Spirit.

In this key, the education of one’s neighbor in the spirit of the Cross of Christ imbued with the blood of the sacrifice, but also illuminated by the grace of the Resurrection, undoubtedly echoes Heaven.

Therefore, the Church possesses forms of worship in which the content of sanctifying education is fully found. Thus, through the preaching that follows each liturgical service, the priestess – high priest, priest or deacon by word-of-mouth shares with the audience the word full of divine pedagogy arising from the pages of the Holy Gospel.

By every cultic gesture the Church becomes not only a school of reason, but at the same time, having as its head the Savior Christ, it learns consciences with prayer, fasting, forgiveness, but above all love, all this having divine origin in that the Lord Himself manifested them throughout His stay on earth. It is known that within the Ecclesia, through the joint work of conscience with the grace of God, man becomes wise, capable at any time of sharing with others the gifts acquired in the “school of Heaven.”

This education acquired under the halo of the grace of the Spirit becomes for the Christian the medium of self-giving placed at the service of God and of his neighbor.

² Mt. 25,40.

Having become aware of the gifts received, and having the conviction that the second birth acquired through the threefold immersion calls him to deification, thus offering him the liberation of human nature from the bonds of bodily birth, as well as a real adoption of the Spirit, the Christian who is willing to acquire the likeness according to God resorts to a genuine pilgrimage of life placed on the path of education and intellectual becoming in the light of divine grace. Thus, the whole process of learning to which man in communion with his Creator resorts is transformed into a dynamic design of the interior impressed by the prophetic or teaching dignity that the one who became a member of the Church has received in order to fulfill in this way the call that God addressed to him as a form of confession and continuous intellectual and spiritual redefinition. In this context, feeling the “sound of the Spirit,” the man who is eager to acquire knowledge as a form of obedience and fulfillment of God’s will metamorphoses through his own intervention the entire educational source, placing it under the dome of grace of the Church, in which morality and good become echoes of the Kingdom of Heaven poured out into the world by Word, especially by the Spirit.

Only a moral education under the nimble of divine grace can offer the person the authenticity of the validation of the educational act not only by the kingdom of this world whose ruler “has nothing” in God, but above all by the eternal image of the Kingdom of Heaven. By cultivating the science of morality, man will be able to harmonize his whole being, in which, in the absence of active consciousness, reason, will, feeling and freedom compete in the loss of the divine image, thus placing him in a desacralizing position with real impact on the society in which he lives. In other words, only by keeping the Spirit full of divine morale in work can the educator resort to other forms of education—intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and social—as a wholeness and sanctifying endeavor of his own being and of the whole world.

Beyond the educational traditionalism that has been the genealogical tree of pedagogy for centuries, the ever-advancing contemporaneity today proposes a series of offers considered modern, evaluated as alternative pedagogical approaches³, such as Montessori, Waldorf, Freinet and step by step.

At a brief glance at the educational programs proposed by these “alternative pedagogues” we can see a strong focus on the student, in a process of cultivating physical and practical skills and occupations rather than supporting and deepening Christian values equally.

This part is then complemented by a series of references to issues that ensure pastoral care of the family in accordance with the requirements of the present.

³ See: Stefan Popenici, *alternative Pedagogy*, Polirom Printing Press, Iași, 2001.

In an extremely difficult historical moment when the Romanian family finds itself strongly affected by the otherness occasioned by the primordial material factor, but also constrained by the desacralizing air of European secularism, it is for the pastor of souls to try to restore the love confession made by the two spouses in the icon before the ancestral altar of this Christian nation, as well as the effort to counter some forms of false love that throw more and more souls into the darkness of hatred and passionate egoism.

The aggressive impregnation in the public mind, but especially of our young people, of the conviction that the family is nothing more than an outdated institution “without the support of modernity”, in which “canons” opt for the expression of free manifestation of love, it has generated as many needs for adaptation and pastoral strengthening that the Church must embrace in order to achieve its ultimate goal, namely that of redefining the consciousness of the divine dimension of love placed in the sacred space of Christendom.

In this sense, the most important virtue which the Church promotes in the light of the mysterious Spirit-filled and which contemporary society itself is clamoring for, but in a way truncated by secular individualism, is love. Like the “unbroken bond,” love between people is “the magnet that draws them to one another and does not let them go away, to scatter into the unknowns and dangers of loneliness.” But it is important that this feeling be cultivated from childhood, “in the fear of God” and “in the teaching and admonition of the Lord”, as a result of the parents’ direct involvement in the education of children. There are not a few maternal models, recalling here Antuza and Emilia, mothers of Saints John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great, who sanctified themselves by planting in the knowledge of their own children the love of God and of men, as the foundation of communion with the Holy Trinity, but also with the whole mysterious corpus of the Ecclesia extended into every Christian.

The primacy of love as the mysterious foundation of the “harmonization” of man and woman according to the “profile of the cross of Christ”, as evidenced by the consecrated ritualistic texts, is also the power to counteract the multiple reasons that lead more and more families to divorce.

Practically forgetting the sanctity of the family which has become through the work of grace “a small Church,” the Christian of our day chooses to break the unity of love in favor of the passionate abundance of nature, bringing with him a profound fall into the “devaluation of desacralizing infirmities.”

The ideation process based on the sanctifying education of the Church, which is mainly generated from its cult and teaching, which produces both reverberations in the family and in society, thus offering the dialogue between worship and education, between the cult and the

institution of the family, one can see continued by the appeal to the mysterious connection between the liturgical service and religious poetry. In this sense, we have evoked the depth of the Mariological cult as it emerges from the faithful verses of the nun Theodosia Letcu. I have resorted to this evocation, considering that the dialogical value between worship and poetry is brought into light, as well as the perfect maternal face of the Mother of God so necessary for contemporary mothers.

In this context of conceptual dialogical richness of the cult, we also included here literary aspects through the appeal to the work of the monk Nicolae Steinhardt, through whose epistolary content we can fully feel the mystery of sobriety that we have evoked above.

Everything is continued through social references on which, through the expression of the rural as well as the urban ethnicity, a cultural projection of the national consciousness is created.

Also, through the lexical sacramentality of the Spirit, we have harnessed the communicational factor that the word cultic actually possesses, as a force for the restoration of being through the uncreated grace it shares, both as a gesture of prayer and as a vehicle of verbal connection between people.

The horizon in which the cult applies its dialogical richness can be seen extended by appealing to a series of principles and aspects from the sphere of psychology, insisting in this case on some details concerning the psychology of the elderly man.

The work is completed with a series of references to the pastoral depth of the hymns of Saint Ephrem the Syrian, as well as several analyzes related to the field of church music manifested in the Banat area.

In a current context in which the interference between worship and politics becomes increasingly visible, manifested especially in national spaces under the pressure of authoritarianism, this third part discusses in an Orthodox spirit of worship and the relationship between the Church and the State authority, this can at any moment be the framework for the development of a dialogue between ritual and the political principle designed to provide by their coalescence decisions capable of ensuring to all people the guarding of the gift received from God, which defines itself as life.

The third part of the habilitation thesis (III. *The evolution and development of the academic career. Research directions and course of action*) two sections are structured. In the first section I present an individual scientific research plan; it contains five research projects that I am trying to achieve in the short and medium term, more specifically in the next five years. In the second section, I outline the main directions of scientific research

which are to be brought under the attention of potential doctoral students. The proposed research topic is presented as a natural continuation and a deepening of the scientific research activity in the field of liturgical theology and pastoral theology, which I carried out after defending my doctoral dissertation.