

The International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis

Timișoara, 2020-2022

With the blessing of His Eminence Ioan Selejan, Archbishop of Timișoara and Metropolitan of Banat, on November 13, 2020, coinciding with Bible Day, the inaugural edition of the “Theophany School. The International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis” (ISBE, online) was conducted. This academic event was organized by Fr. Nichifor Tănase, Education Counselor, Archbishopric of Timișoara, Fr. Ioan Mihoc and Fr. Iosif Stancovici, from the West University of Timișoara, in collaboration with the Metropolitan Church of Banat and the Romanian Academy, Timișoara branch. ISBE 2020 focused on the theological interpretation of Holy Scripture from the perspective of theophanic exegesis, a scholarly field that examines divine manifestations in biblical texts and the direct relationship with God. The conference addressed various aspects of biblical theology and exegesis, including “The Logic of the Resurrection as Biblical Hermeneutics”, “The Theology of Kabod or the Glory of God”, and “Spiritual Authority as a Reflection of the Incarnation of the Word in Personal Life”.

ISBE 2020 exhibited a significant international dimension, convening eminent theologians from diverse global regions, including Romania, France, Australia, Serbia, Bosnia, Germany, England, Canada, and the United States.

The commencement of the symposium served as evidence of a collective dedication to biblical scholarship. The proceedings began with introductory addresses by distinguished figures from Timișoara’s academic and political spheres, including: Professor Marilen Gabriel Pirtea, Rector

of the West University of Timișoara; Academician Professor Dan Dubină, President of the Romanian Academy - Timișoara branch; Alin Adrian Nica, President of Timiș County Council; and Professor Loredana Pungă, Dean of the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology. The event exemplified the convergence of Orthodox tradition and contemporary theological inquiry, underscoring the significance of Orthodox theology within the international academic discourse.

The plenary presentations offered in-depth theological analyses, followed by a question-and-answer session that encouraged active participant engagement with the ideas discussed. The first plenary session, chaired by Fr. Constantin Jinga, featured a series of academically rigorous presentations. Fr. Vasile Mihoc, from “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, opened the session with a comprehensive examination of Galatians 5, 1-12, focusing on the theme of freedom in the Christian faith. He emphasized that while modernity is driven by the pursuit of freedom, in practice, individuals and groups often replace old forms of subjugation with new ones, leading to a heightened sense of present bondage and fear of future enslavement. He argued that true freedom is impossible without redemption from the power of sin, which Christians receive through faith in Christ. This faith provides the foundation for genuine freedom, as believers are no longer slaves but sons, and must strive to maintain this liberated state, avoiding a return to the yoke of slavery. Fr. Doru Costache, from St Cyril’s Coptic Orthodox College in Sydney, continued the session with an insightful exploration of Patriarch Abraham, focusing on his understanding of nature and divine experience as interpreted by Clement of Alexandria. Fr. Doru Costache’s presentation highlighted how patristic traditions can offer fresh perspectives on biblical texts. He noted that Clement was the first Christian author to systematically address the concept of knowledge, which for him encompassed both God and the universe. Contrary to the common view, Clement did not see the contemplation of creation merely as a step to be surpassed in the pursuit of God. Instead, he believed that while the study and understanding of the universe lead one to the Creator,

it is also through the knowledge of God that the “Gnostic saint” views the universe. Patriarch Abraham, in Clement’s eyes, exemplified this “Gnostic saint”, embodying both an astronomer and a theologian. Thus, Abraham becomes the embodiment of Clement’s ideal of knowledge and personal transformation. Concluding the plenary session, Fr. Răzvan Ionescu, from the “Dumitru Stăniloae” Orthodox Center for Studies and Research in Paris, addressed the necessity of Orthodox apologetics, drawing on Christ’s words from Matthew 10, 19. His presentation sparked a vigorous discussion on the role of apologetics in the contemporary world, prompting critical reflections on how faith can be effectively communicated in an increasingly dynamic and evolving society.

The afternoon session featured a series of paper presentations moderated by Fr. Ioan Mihoc and Fr. Iosif Stancovici. Among the most noteworthy contributions was Dr. Danilo Mihajlović from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, Serbia, who examined the role of Old Testament prophets in community life. His presentation sparked an engaging discussion on the relevance of biblical prophecy today, emphasizing how prophetic messages continue to inspire and guide Christian communities. Other notable academic contributions included Fr. Sorin Bora from the University of Craiova, who presented on “Baptismal Prayers in the Book of Acts of the Apostles”; Fr. Adrian Murg from the University of Arad, who discussed “Holy Scripture in the Philokalian Tradition: Some General Coordinates”; Fr. Marian Vild from the University of Bucharest, who explored “Marriage and Virginité according to I Corinthians 6-7 in the Context of the Greco-Roman World”; Dr. Boško Erić from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “St. Basil of Ostrog” in Foča, Bosnia and Herzegovina, who analyzed “The Exegetical Method of Jacob of Serugh in Mimro on Balaam and Balak”; and Fr. Caesar Marksteiner-Ungureanu from the University of Vienna, who addressed the question, “Is the Justice of Men ‘Like a Rag Thrown Away’ Before God? The Biblical Foundations of (Social) Justice”. The symposium continued with a plenary presentation chaired by Fr. Nichifor Tănase, West University of Timișoara, having invited as plenary speaker Fr. Radu Bordeianu, Duquesne University,

who developed the theme: “The scriptural nature of the Church and the ecclesiastical nature of Scripture. An Analysis of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae’ Ecclesiology”.

The symposium concluded with a roundtable discussion chaired by Fr. Silviu Bunta (University of Dayton & St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary) and Fr. Bogdan Bucur (St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, New York). The academic debate centered on the topic of “Theophaneia School” and Biblical Exegesis, featuring contributions from several scholars: Fr. Ioan Moga (University of Vienna), Fr. Dragoș Giulea (Concordia University), Fr. Ionuț Băncilă (Erfurt University), Fr. Dragoș Herescu (Cambridge University), and Fr. Ioan Popoiu (“St. Brancovean Martyrs”, Nuremberg).

The 2nd International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis, held online from November 11–13, 2021, was organized with the support of the Metropolitan Church of Banat and the Faculty of Letters, History, and Theology at the West University of Timișoara. Centered around the theme “Holy Scripture in Church and History”, the symposium provided a platform for interdisciplinary approaches encompassing theology, philology, history, and the arts. The event was distinguished by its scientific rigor and succeeded in capturing the interest of a diverse and broad audience.

On November 11, 2021, the Pre-Symposium Events took place. Following an introduction by the organizers, Fr. Ioan Mihoc and Fr. Iosif Stancovici, Fr. Marian Vild (University of Bucharest) and Fr. Constantin Jinga (West University of Timișoara) moderated the launch of the volume containing the works from ISBE 2020. The day’s series of lectures began with a presentation by Fr. Ionuț Daniel Băncilă from Humboldt University, Berlin, titled “Straying Away from Jesus: Early Christianity as Multiple Gnosticisms in Western Theology”. This was followed by several papers from professors at the West University of Timișoara: Dr. Gabriela Radu presented “The Relevance of Chrysostom’s Homily I on Philippians with a New Romanian Translation”; Fr. Constantin Jinga discussed “Aspects of Holy Scripture Translations Relevant to Judeo-Christian Interactions

in Medieval Biblical Exegesis”; Fr. Nichifor Tănase explored “Ἐξαίφνης (Acts 9, 3) – As a Locus of Participation and Illumination (περιήστραψεν φῶς)”; Fr. Ioan Mihoc provided insights on “Ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις: Theological Reflections on Titus 2:11 within the Epistle’s Context”; and Fr. Iosif Stancovici examined “Eliezer of Damascus (Genesis 15:2) in Rabbinic and Patristic Literature”.

The first day of the conference, November 12, 2021, began with welcome speeches and proceeded with four paper sessions, each followed by a Q&A segment. The welcome addresses were delivered by Fr. Nichifor Tănase, Education Counselor, Archbishopric of Timișoara, on behalf of His Eminence, the Most Reverend Ioan Selejan, Archbishop of Timișoara and Metropolitan of Banat; Octavian Mădălin Bunoiu, Vice-Rector of the West University of Timișoara and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Physics; Valy Ceia, Vice-Dean and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Letters, History, and Theology, West University of Timișoara; and Dumitru Tucan, Head of the Department of Romanian Studies and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Letters, History, and Theology, West University of Timișoara.

Following the introductory section, papers were presented across four sessions by the following scholars: Fr. Lawrence Iwuamadi, Dean of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, discussed “The Genealogy of Jesus According to Matthew: Purpose of Text and Its Reception in Early Christianity”; Fr. Srećko Koralija, University of Cambridge, UK, explored the “Relevance of the Manuscript Tradition for Corpus-Based Lexical Analysis”; Fr. Marcin Chrostowski, Secretary of the Society of Polish Biblical Scholars, presented on “The Book of Tobit in the Context of the First Israelite Diaspora in Assyria”; Rev. Traian Gheorghe Mocan, from “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad, examined the concept of ‘repentance’ in the five letters of Revelation: Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea (Rev 2, 5; 2, 16; 2, 20-22; 3, 3; 3,19)”; Fr. Mihail Milea, from the “Bishop Kesarios” Orthodox Theological Seminary in Buzău, spoke

on the “Biblical Foundations for Philanthropic Work in the Church”; Fr. Constantin Pogor, from the Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe “Apôtre Paul”, Brussels, presented “The Psalter: From Text to Prayer”; Dr. Florina Maria Băcilă, from West University of Timișoara, discussed “Reflections of the Biblical Book The Song of Songs in the Poetry of Traian Dorz”; Dr. Maria Cristina Trușcă, from St. Gregory the Theologian Orthodox Theological Seminary, Craiova, explored “Ἀρετή – Conceptualization and Lexicalization in a Biblical-Patristic Context”; Fr. Gheorghe Costea, parish priest of the Romanian community in Syria and Lebanon, presented on “Translations of the Holy Scriptures into Arabic”; Fr. Ioan Chirilă, from Babeș-Bolyai University, examined “The Heavenly Priesthood and the Angels in the First Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400 Frag. 1 Col. 1-2)”; Fr. Ilie Melniciuc-Puică, from “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, discussed “The Biblical Message of Ephesians 2, 20 Transposed into Ecclesial Painting”; Fr. Marian Vild, from the University of Bucharest, presented on “The Spiritual Reading of Scripture (Lectio Divina) and Its Importance for the Spiritual Formation of Young People”; Fr. Stelian Pașca-Tușa, from Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, examined “The Sacrifice of Isaac in Byzantine Art: Christological Perspectives of Interpretation”; and Fr. Dragoș Andrei Giulea, from Concordia University, Montréal, discussed “Universal Priesthood and Hierarchies of Grace”.

The second day of the conference featured four additional sessions of paper presentations culminating in a plenary lecture by Fr. Giuseppe G. Scollo, Assistant Professor of Biblical Theology at St. Augustine’s Seminary, Toronto. His presentation was titled “The Strength Needed to Enter the Kingdom of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Luke 16, 16 in Context”. The fifth through eighth sessions were characterized by distinguished theological contributions, including Fr. Nebojša Tumara from the University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia, who presented “‘He Lowered Himself from the Height of Creation’: Jacob of Serugh on the Kenosis of God”; Fr. Marius Adrian Călin from the University of Heidelberg, Germany, who discussed “Marian Devotion in India as

a Theological Construct for an Inter-Religious World”; Fr. Capodistrias Hämmerli from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, who explored “The Modern Philosophical and Juridical Concept of Non-discrimination in the Light of an Exegesis of Genesis 1”; Dr. Maria Cioată, from the University of Manchester, UK, and New Europe College, Bucharest, presented “Traditional Reactions to Modern Higher Criticism: The Case of Dr. Moses Gaster”; Fr. Alexandru Mihăilă from the University of Bucharest examined “Aquila and the Greek Text of Ecclesiastes”; Linda-Saskia Menczel from West University of Timișoara discussed “Hebrew Inscriptions in European Christian Themed Art”; Dr. Emilija Vuković, from the University of Belgrade, provided “A Contribution to the Study of the Kumanica Tetraevangelion (Archive SANU no. 69)”; Dr. Claudiu T. Arieșan from West University of Timișoara explored “Hermeneutics of Joy in Biblical Times: A Patristic Aperçu”; Dr. Eusebiu Borca from the North University Centre, Baia Mare, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, presented “The Flood: Biblical-Scientific Perspectives”; Fr. Cătălin Vatamanu from “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași explored “The Revelation of God ‘Face to Face’ (מִיַּנְפֵּי-לִפְנֵי מַלְאָכַי): The Role of the Revelation of the Face in Divine Pedagogy”.

The research papers presented at the first two International Symposia on Biblical Exegesis (ISBE 2020 and ISBE 2021) have been published in an academic volume, with the blessing of His Eminence Teofan, Archbishop of Iași and Metropolitan of Moldavia. The volume, titled „*Fides quae per caritatem operatur: Studii biblice*”, is edited by Fr. Ioan Mihoc and Fr. Iosif Stancovici and was released by Doxologia Publishing House in Iași in 2023, comprising 495 pages.

The 3rd International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis, held online from November 10–12, 2022, was themed “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem! Prayer, Thanksgiving, and Worship in Times of Peace and War”. As with the previous editions, the symposium took place virtually with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Ioan, Archbishop of Timișoara and Metropolitan of Banat. This third edition featured notable international

participation from Europe, Asia, and North America. Welcome addresses were delivered in English by Mr. Octavian Mădălin Bunoiu, Vice-Rector of the West University of Timișoara; Mrs. Valy Ceia, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Letters, History, and Theology at the same university; and Fr. Constantin Jinga, Coordinator of the Department of Pastoral Theology at the Faculty. On behalf of His Eminence Metropolitan Ioan, Fr. Nichifor Tănase, Diocesan Counsellor at the Education and Youth Activities Sector of the Archdiocese of Timișoara, conveyed the message. The conference comprised fifteen sessions of presentations and discussions over the course of three days.

On the first day of the symposium, November 10, 2022, the following lectures were presented: Fr. Anthony Giambrone from the École Biblique et Archéologique in Jerusalem, Israel; Fr. Capodistrias Hämmerli from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland; Aleksandar Danilović from the University of Heidelberg, Germany; Petros Vassiliadis from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; Fr. Mihail Milea from the Orthodox Theological Seminary “Chesarie Episcopul” in Buzău; Fr. Cătălin Vatamanu from “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași; Fr. George Cosmin Piț from Sibiu; Mihai Handaric from “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad; Fr. John Applegate from the University of Manchester, United Kingdom; Fr. Nichifor Tănase from West University of Timișoara; Fr. Olimpiu Nicolae Benea from Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca; Dr. Kees den Biesen from the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, Italy; Dr. Wojciech Kosek from the Pontifical John Paul II University of Krakow, Poland; and Fr. Iosif Stancovici from West University of Timișoara.

On the second day, November 11, 2022, lectures were given by: Fr. Stelian Pașca-Tușa and Ștefan Gabriel Solomon from Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca; Rev. Traian Gheorghe Mocan from “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad; Fr. Cătălin Varga and Irina Deftu from “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași; Peter C. W. Ho from Bible College of Singapore; Fr. Ionuț Daniel Băncilă from Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany; Nenad Božović from the University of Belgrade,

Serbia; Fr. Rafał Zarzeczny from the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, Italy; Fr. Stelian Tofană from Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca; Fr. Ion Sorin Bora from the University of Craiova; Fr. Adrian Ioan Murg from “Aurel Vlaicu” University; Fr. Dragoş Andrei Giulea from Concordia University, Montreal; Fr. Alexandru Atanase Barna from the University of Bucharest; and Fr. Ioan Mihoc from West University of Timişoara.

On the third day, November 12, 2022, the following scholars delivered lectures: Fr. Stefano Cavalli from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem, Israel; Nun Bartholomea Raithel from Dionysios Trikkis & Stagon Monastery, Obernhof, Germany; Emilija Vuković from the University of Belgrade, Serbia; Ovidiu Neacşu from Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca; Fr. Nagi Edelby from Saint Joseph University of Beirut, Lebanon; Fr. Marian Vild from the University of Bucharest; Daniel Mihoc from Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu; Fr. Ilie Melniciuc-Puică from “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iaşi; Eusebiu Borca from the Northern University of Baia Mare; Marek Iréneusz Baraniak from the University of Warsaw, Poland; Fr. Srećko Koralija from the Free University of Amsterdam, Netherlands; Il Akkad from the University of Belgrade, Serbia; Hieromonk Iriney Pikovskiy from Moscow Theological Academy, Russia; Fr. Silviu Nicolae Bunta from the University of Dayton, Ohio, United States; and Ljubica Jovanović from the American Public University System, Charles Town, West Virginia, United States.

The proceedings at ISBE 2022 were conducted at an elevated scholarly level and were observed remotely by a substantial audience for each session. One of the primary objectives of the symposium was to promote Eastern biblical exegesis on a global scale and to emphasize the significance of prayer in contemporary contexts. The 2022 symposium welcomed participants from sixteen countries, fostering a collaborative and intellectually enriching environment. The current issue of *Teologia* journal features some of the papers presented at ISBE 2022, arranged alphabetically by author.

Over the course of its three editions (2020–2022), the symposium has attracted the participation of approximately seventy experts, educators,

researchers, and students, underscoring its increasing global prominence. Participants included theological students from a diverse array of countries, such as Romania, Serbia, Greece, Israel, Poland, Russia, the United States, Italy, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, among others.

In conclusion, the ISBE is emerging as a pivotal event in the realm of biblical exegesis. The symposium has vividly illustrated the transformative power of theological dialogue and interdisciplinary collaboration. Through the exchange of ideas and perspectives, participants have not only deepened their understanding of sacred texts but have also contributed significant new insights into the field of biblical interpretation. This event has established itself as a valuable reference point for biblical theologians and scholars, offering a unique platform to disseminate knowledge and advance theological discourse within a contemporary framework.

Rev. Ioan MIHOȘ