

Book Reviews

† **D**amaschin DORNEANU, Vicar Bishop of the Archdiocese of Suceava and Rădăuți, *Dimensiunea mistagodică a Săptămânii Sfintelor Pătimiri. Elemente de antropologie duhovnicească (The Mystagogic Dimension of the Holy and Great Week. Elements of Spiritual Anthropology)*, book printed with the blessing of His Holiness Father Calinic, Archbishop of Suceava și Rădăuților, Crimca Publishing House, Suceava, 2022, 863 pp.

This year, at the Crimca Publishing House in Suceava, the doctoral thesis in theology of the Most Reverend Father Damaschin Dorneanu, the Vicar Bishop of the Archdiocese of Suceava and Rădăuți, appeared in an exceptional graphic form. The work is absolutely exceptional, in that it approaches a theme not so rigorously approached so far in Orthodox theology, standing out for its authors “meticulousness and power of analysis and synthesis” “on the basis of an impressive scientific bibliography” (p. 9) as characterized in its *Preface*, the coordinator of this doctoral thesis, Archdeacon Professor PhD Ioan I. Ică jr., from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu.

The work I present, as its title suggests, refers to the paschal mystery of the Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, updated in a unique form in the Orthodox services of the Great and Holy Week. Most Reverend Bishop Damaschin proposes in his work to extend and complete with the Great and Holy Week the exceptional doctoral thesis elaborated in 1978, at the Sorbonne, by the future hieromonk Makarios of Simonopetra, published for the first time in Romanian translation in 2000 by Deisis publishing house, under the title *Triodul explicat. Mistagogia timpului liturgic (The Fasting Trodion Explained. The Mystagogy of the Liturgical Time)*, which he took as a model in the research of His Eminence, managing to successfully accomplish it.

The work is structured in four large parts, organized in 16 chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by conclusions and bibliography.

In the Introduction, His Eminence refers to the motivation for choosing the theme and the objectives he had in mind in the research he undertook. Then he highlights the contributions related to the historical and liturgical aspects of Great and Holy Week, the works that analyze the hymnography of this Week and the approaches regarding the spirituality, with special reference to the anthropological elements found in the liturgical services and the content of the hymnography. The introduction ends with a brief presentation of the compositional structure of the work.

The first part of the work is of an historical-liturgical nature and is structured in three chapters. Thus, in the first chapter is presented the relationship between the Great and Holy Week and Great Lent as part of its formation as a preparatory period for Holy Easter. Is presented the evolution of Great Lent from the on-two days fast to the one-week fast, then three weeks period and filaly 40 days period of fasting. Is presente the evolution and development of the pre-Easter fast of Great ans Holy Week, a preparation that merged with the 40 days fasting period. Also, in this part is not forgotten the patristic symbolism of the main symbolic numbers of this liturgical period: “one”, “seven”, “eight”, “forty”.

In conclusion, this first part of the work represents an attempt to analyze the stages of the historical formation of the Great and Holy Week, in the wider context of the establishment of Great Lent, as well as the way in which this Week was liturgically celebrated, first in Jerusalem and in Constantinople, beginning in the 4th century in particular, as well as in the main Eastern, non-Orthodox Christian traditions (p. 191).

The second chapter presents the general scheme of the celebrations of this Week, beginning with Saturday of Lazarus and ending with Holy Saturday.

The third chapter presents, in broad terms, how the Holy Week was celebrated in other ancient Eastern Christian rites: Armenian, Ethiopian, Syriac Church of the Western Rite, Syriac Orthodox Church and Coptic. It is highlighted the common aspects between the Byzantine rite and these rites, which demonstrates their provenance from the common Jerusalem origin, but also the specificities of each one by insisting on several elements of detail that create a special spiritual atmosphere within these ceremonies.

The second part of the thesis analyzes three elements of the regulations provided by the Typic for Holy Week (fasting, biblical readings and patristic readings), attempting an inventory of the hymnographic compositions of this period. This second part of the work is structured in four chapters (4, 5, 6, 7).

Thus, the fourth chapter refers to the Holy Week fast, the ascetic intensity of the fast being emphasized. First is described in this manner the fast of Holy Week, an essential part of its ascetic dimension. The author highlights its Christocentric character, also of participation in the Lord's Cross, the Eucharistic character, and of Paschal fasting as preparation for partaking of the Mystery of the Lamb.

The fifth chapter, consistent in content, is dedicated to the biblical readings of these days, presenting some introductory considerations (the reading of the Bible in the Church and its report in shaping the spiritual dimension of the Triodion). Presented, in the form of a summary table, the current content of the biblical readings are accompanied by historical-liturgical comments, as well as some spiritual explanations of the choice for certain texts. The biblical readings of the Holy Week, the reliving together with Christ of the last part of His earthly life, before His Holy Resurrection, as a fulfillment of the prophecies read during Great Lent, some of which are also repeated in this Holy Week in order to emphasize Passion/Resurrection theme. The Old Testament readings started in the first week of Lent and ended on Lazarus Saturday from the books: Genesis, Parables and Isaiah, are restarted in the Holy Week with selective readings from Exodus, the Book of Job and Ezekiel. As for the readings from the Holy Gospels, they become for the faithful the main moments of updating the mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection, starting with Lazarus Saturday and ending with Pascha. His Eminence thus emphasizes the essentially biblical character of the spirituality of the Triodion and the decisive importance of reading the Bible in the Church, expressing his wish that all these biblical readings from The Old and New Testament be urgently reactivated and revalued in current practice, in which unfortunately they have been almost forgotten. The evolution of the biblical readings this week are accompanied by valuable historical-liturgical comments and spiritual explanations, which happily support the entire scientific approach of the work.

The sixth chapter, dedicated to the patristic readings, gives up the comparative analysis and is limited to presenting the current system of readings from the Holy Fathers, of Savaite origin. The old readings from the Church Fathers, as the author demonstrates, prove to be a consistent support in the initiation that the Church proposes in this period, for its believers. Given that in most Byzantine monasteries there was no preaching, the patristic homilies had the purpose of providing a first exegetical, theological and moralizing commentary on the events of the Holy Week.

In the seventh chapter, the paternity of this week's hymns is clarified, presenting the Holy Hymnographic Fathers as the true mystagogues of the Holy Week. As the author points out: "this week's hymnography is deep in its theological complexity, beautiful in its stylistic composition, and creates a spiritual atmosphere through interpretation in a traditional spirit. It happily complements the biblical and patristic texts and contributes to the preparation of the faithful for Pascha. The Byzantine hymnographers ... sowed in the hymnographic pieces composed for these days not only theological information and lyrical vibration, but above all, their pure and holy living, thus becoming authentic mystagogues of the Holy Passions" (p. 338).

The third part of the work, the most dense, thoroughly analyzes the hymnography of the days of the Holy Week, which are grouped into four sections: Sturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday, in the eighth chapter; Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday and Holy Wednesday, in the ninth chapter; Maundy Thursday in the tenth chapter; Good Friday, Holy Saturday as well as a very short foray into the Easter vigil, in the eleventh chapter. In this part, His Eminence, shows how the biblical texts of the days of Holy Week offer a hymnographic hermeneutic revealing new, theological and spiritual meanings, which can easily be lost in a superficial approach to this treasure of the cult.

In the work, only a part of the texts are selected, some are reproduced in full, others fragmentarily, to support an idea. The author identifies the following themes in the hymnography of this day: emphasizing the divine-humanity of the incarnate Son of God and the theandric character of the virtues; the progressive preparation for the Passion, through the invitation of the faithful to share, spiritually, the Passion together with Christ; the spiritual crucifixion, by killing the passions in order to honor the Holy Cross with dignity on Good Friday; the eschatological theme; the humility

of Christ, as well as the constant presence of the Cross-Resurrection relationship. Each day of Holy Week also contains a specific theme, in accordance with the biblical readings of the day, but also through the presence of a spiritual theo-anthropology: "the stone of the mind and the heart"; the pillars of the virtues; the fruition of virtues compared to the idleness that attracts the curse; merciful love compared to sterile asceticism; redemptive repentance vis-à-vis sin as betrayal; the participation of the entire cosmos in the Crucifixion, the Descent into hell and the raising of Adam as the renewal of humanity, etc. Anticipated throughout Lent, the Resurrection is the seal that Orthodox spirituality puts on every penitential gesture and every virtue worked, being the spirit that animates the entire content of worship and is required to be made present every day, in the theological sense of transition from the old man to the new man, as emphasized by the Holy Fathers, whose reinforcing testimonies accompany the reflection of the entire hymnographic theme of Holy Week.

As His Eminence points out in the content of the work, "the celebrations of these days are not simple liturgical memories of past events", but present theophanies of redemptive events (p.580). "Biblical readings transpose the believer into the atmosphere of the redemptive events of these days, make him contemporary with the participants in it, and refresh the testament-like words left by Christ before His Passion and death" (p. 777).

The eschatological dimension of these days of the Lord's Passion is highlighted in this part of the work.

The fourth part of the work highlights some elements of spiritual anthropology, based on the hymnographic, biblical, patristic and liturgical content of these days. This part includes five chapters. Thus, in the twelfth chapter are presented the dogmatic contents of the hymns that support the divine-humanity of Jesus Christ, the passionless God suffering in the flesh, manifested including in the Passion, the Crucifixion and Death. The humanity of the Son of God is also highlighted, which becomes the foundation of our fellowship in the divine fullness of Christ's life, while His divinity ensures the sanctification and deification of our human nature. As the Most Reverend Father Bishop points out: "the Holy Week, in fact, also speaks about man, because only in the light of ... the God-man does the human person find its true ontology. The real humanity of the Son of God, the true and complete man, ensures the fellowship of our humanity with Him, and His Deity, unpassion, but suffering in the flesh and together

with every human person, is the foundation of the deification of man” (p. 769).

In the thirteenth chapter there are captured several dense pages of ascetic anthropology: the initial paradisiacal state, the fall into sin, as a betrayal of divine love, the dehumanizing and disintegrating character of sin, the recuperative and restoring role of human dignity that repentance has, as a transition from to the old Adam, potentially present in everyone, to the New Adam, who is shared with us, sacramentally and ecclesially, as the Life of our human life. In conclusion, as His Eminence points out, ”Lent can always be a textbook of ascetic anthropology, the conclusions of which can be seen in Holy Week of Passions, but also, further, throughout the Easter period” (p. 769).

In the fourteenth chapter are drawn two paradigmatic anthropological patterns: Joseph son of Jacob - the face of the virtues, and the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with myrrh, as a model of repentance. The chapter utilizes both texts from Holy Week and hymns that appear during the Triodion, with a consistent patristic support that accompanies the biblical exegesis of the reports that refer to the two characters proposed for spiritual analysis.

The man-cosmos relationship is the subject of the next chapter, the fifteenth built on the Pauline idea of the passions share with Christ. In this chapter is developed the idea that creation suffers together with man as a result of his fall from the state of its priest, as it suffers together with the God-man at the Crucifixion, as the hymnography of this Week highlights. The cosmological character of cosmological anthropology is explicit: the repercussions of a virtuous or, on the contrary, sinful life, will be mirrored in the positioning of nature around the human person, both - man and the cosmos, being destined for a new status in the kingdom of God.

In the last chapter, the sixteenth, references are made to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the context of Lent and Holy Week. This privileged time can be used for a mystagogic transposition in the capacity of new catechumens, called to recover the lack of the catechetical program that the faithful of the Church were deprived of at their baptism, as well as the lack of catechumenal training after Baptism.

Knowing the meanings of one’s own baptism, as rebirth, as death and resurrection with Christ, as well as repentance, as refreshment of baptism, will make the Holy Week a much-awaited reason for spiritual recollection

and the renewal of baptismal promises, by renouncing Satan, hypostasized in the sins, and the union with Christ, the God-man, the crucified and resurrected One, who becomes the Archetype of true humanity, in contrast to the false models treacherously offered by anthropocentric humanisms, outlined at the beginning of the third millennium, and which already announce major anthropological crises, as His Eminence shows in the content of the work (52).

As a final conclusion of his work, the Most Reverend Father Bishop Damaschin considers that:

“the solution that the Holy Week proposes is the return to *Life in Christ*, the source of the divine deification of the human person. The annual (and Sunday) celebration of His Resurrection from the dead, after we have shared in His Passion, Crucifixion and Death is the guarantee that, for the Christian, Life - and not death - has the last word and that this Life is made available to us by participating in the sacramental work of the Church, especially through the Sacrament of Penance and of Eucharisty” (p. 787).

We are therefore in front of a pioneering work in Romanian Orthodoxy and not only, but I dare say, also in the universal orthodoxy, a work of academic and spiritual achievement, written with such acrimony and spiritual maturity by a young hierarch of the Holy Synod of our Church, Bishop Damaschin Dorneanul. I am confident that from the careful study of this beautiful and dense work, the reader, regardless of whether he is a theologian by vocation or a simple believer of the Church, will be able to reap the rich and abundant fruit of a thorough teaching regarding the Week of the Holy Passions of the Lord, but he will feel obliged to also embark on the path of experiencing the deification of human nature, an experience that the believer works on by participating in the entire sacramental work of the Church of Christ.

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