

## Argument for Habilitation Thesis

### European resizing of the research in the field of Catechetics and Homiletics

#### - Backgrounds, Achievements and Perspectives -

Among the pursuits that put a mark on my research and teaching activity in the field of Catechetics and Homiletics within the “Andrei Şaguna” Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu, two took priority over the others: *recovering the Romanian educational and homiletic memory* and *aligning the research with the major fields of Christian research*, especially with the European ones. They have also perfectly fit my professional paths: *the study of the history of Romanian Christian Pedagogy*, with special regard to the contribution of Romanian Orthodox Theology in the field, in the past as well as in present times; *Catechetics and its development* as a dynamic discipline of modern pastoral theology; *Homiletics*, source of theological culture, pastoral practice and science of modern communication. For this reason, I have chosen to write my Habilitation Thesis as a synthesis of bibliography and content, specific both to the *development of Catechetics as a science* and to the *recovery of a deficiency of research* in the field, caused mainly by the desynchronization with similar European research brought about by excessive rigor and censorship, during the communist era. Alongside mystical Theology, Catechetics and Homiletics, through their effectiveness, have represented a major source of concern for Communism, an ideology which paid great attention to educational nuances of Romanian theology. To that end, the theme covered in this paper is **European resizing of the research in the field of Catechetics and Homiletics – Backgrounds, Achievement and Perspectives.**

I have chosen the Latin-speaking European area (French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese) because it is the most prolific in producing specialized literature and also because it has generated throughout the last 20 years analyzed by this paper the most important research stream, not only within European Catholic or Protestant Churches, but world-wide. Moreover, my choice of the topic is also explained by my education in the field, gained starting from 1997 – the access to catechumenal and homiletic bibliographies opened up my own knowledge horizon, from which I have informal transferred to the theological, pedagogical and pastoral-catechumenal context of Romanian Orthodoxy.

The lines of research were structured solely by means of published works, taking into account the huge volume of literature, which is impossible to present in a synthesis, as well as personal sources of information, which would later become easier to be consulted by students performing their own research (and consequently we have founded a specialized library within CADCO – *Metropolitan Andrei Saguna*). It is also worth mentioning that for the past five years, all specialized license or dissertation papers have benefited from the bibliography analyzed by us.

The method of identification of European research currents in terms of orthodox praxis is focused on aligning research with our own editorial work, emphasizing by means of footnotes the way in which the information concerning the pulse of European specialized literature had been received and passed on. Furthermore, the Memorandum of Activity attached to the paper lists our avenues of research and the manner in which they have been received.

Therefore, the paper contains an analysis of the content and structure of the main streams of research brought to our grasp by the major contemporary works, intertwining the last 20 years of research in the field, with references to own edits of texts, where applicable.

I entitled the first chapter **Didactic and professional configuration of the academic path** in order to highlight the academic scientific and spiritual path in my own vocational training, made available to the students of our Faculty of Theology and to the Romanian Orthodox Church. I have analyzed the didactic activity within “Andrei Şaguna” Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu, didactic-scientific activities, pastoral services in special situation, zonal diocesan or national training, support activities, the plan related to the practice in catechetical homiletic and Christian Pedagogy area, including the development of homiletic and catechetical spaces of practice closed to those, who belong to the parish or school. In line with these, I have developed, coordinated and supported a number of educational projects / programs. In the field of scientific research I have highlighted my admission in the collectives of Research Centers and Commissions as well as in the scientific boards of prestigious journals. My participation in the academic and cultural life has been doubled by a continuous training effort, in the form of the realization of specific competences of a university teacher. Thus I participated in a series of specialized courses and trainings in the field of academic pedagogy. Internationally, academic recognition came by being accepted in a series of scientific committees and boards for ecumenical dialogue, which were also recorded and by acceptance as a member of a series of international cultural and scientific associations. Within the same chapter, I stressed the awards, distinctions and academic citations obtained.

All of them have opened the direction of the second chapter of my paper, subtitled to the general title: **The main original scientific results obtained in the approached field**. In order to handily briefly and solidly emphasize the main original scientific results in the approached field I proposed three research veins, each of them based both on the publishing work and on the results in practice. The three research veins are:

- A. The history of Romanian Christian Pedagogy with special regard to the contribution of Romanian Orthodox Theology in the catechetical and homiletic areas both in the past and in present times.**
- B. Catechetics and its development as a dynamic science of the modern pastoral theology.**
- C. Homiletics, source of theological culture, pastoral practice and science of modern communication.**

In this regard I used as a start point of my research the *Sources – foundation of research into the veins of European catechetical and homiletic theology*, analyzing the

content of several outstanding works in the “encyclopedic” field of the research, **veritable** syntheses of catechetical culture: *Dizionario di Catechistica* (DCH)<sup>1</sup>, **THABOR- L'encyclopédie des Catéchistes** <sup>2</sup> and **Scuola per Catechisti. Schiede per la formazione personale e di gruppo**<sup>3</sup>. These three works have a major shaping effect on the catechetical culture of European parishes, being some of the most ample papers ever published in the field of applied Catechetics. Their main vectors, echoed by us in a series of research papers and published works, underpin a plane that was almost completely missing in the field of Romanian Catechetics and Homiletics – the compared catechetical Pastoral. To this concern we also added as basis *Works dealing with theory of catechesis and homily and the foundation of modern catechetical-homiletic approach*, which depicts the major avenues of substantial development that would shape future research in the field for years to come. A case in point is the volume *Précis de Théologie pratique*<sup>4</sup> and a paper by Emilio Alberich, *Les fondamentaux de la Catéchèse* <sup>5</sup>, which have not only influenced the development of new concepts, but have also helped identify practical uses of pastoral pedagogy in connection with Catechesis. Given their complexity, they cover different fields:

- Priority given to evangelization of society;
- Missionary activity seen as a balance between pastoral of maintenance and active pastoral, which seeks to evangelize;
- Dialogue and inculturation as means of overcoming the gap between culture and faith;
- Personalization of faith as a reaction to sociologic and conventional Christianity;
- Communities, especially small Christian ones, transformed into ecclesial topics and points of reference.
- Thus becomes representative what came to be known as *option for evangelization*, concept which to the Orthodox pastoral culture has echoes from the Apostles' era. The way in which European catechetical theory describes it, leads one to perceive it nowadays as fundamental to the regeneration of our own pastoral and to our catechetical mission. It proposes the conception of a new reality, of a new Christianity predicated on:
  - a) Promoting a new type of Christian – the classic model of the good Christian has been defaced into a caricature of a media-driven society, a neurotic model, demanding new methods of cultural introspection;
  - b) Creating new forms of Christian community, which offers manageable amounts of information and veritable communication, in a real freedom of speech and fostering deep and authentic inter-human relationships. The

<sup>1</sup> Elledici Publishing House, Leumann, Torino, issues 1986 (1) and 1987 (2), 700 pages (2 coll).

<sup>2</sup> The volume was published in Paris, Desclée Publishing House, 1993, 576 pages.

<sup>3</sup> Published with a preface by the director of the Italian National Catechetical Office, Guido Benzi, by the Elledici Publishing House, Torino, 2014, 351 pages.

<sup>4</sup> Deuxième édition augmentée, sous la direction de Giles Routhier et Marcel Viau, Novalis/ Lumen Vitae/ Atelier Publishing House, Bruxelles/ Montréal / Paris, 2007, 891 pages.

<sup>5</sup> Novalis/ Lumen Vitae Publishing House, Bruxelles/ Montréal, 2006, 390 pages.

construction of a community tissue, ecclesial and dynamic; a network in which every outlet of communication becomes a *work-place* for the neighboring cell.

In regard to the **History of Romanian Christian Pedagogy – both catechetical and homiletic**, I have insisted on the contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Theology with its syntheses in the field concerning the past and the present of communicative culture. Thus, I have collected, edited and published a series of specialized volumes and developed a series of materials, especially about the contribution of Sibiu to the Christian Pedagogy science. In this chapter of social pedagogy I note a few syntheses that were proposed in the research area, especially in non-theological ones, precisely from the need to make these aspects of theological culture known to a large number of intellectuals. Thus a second direction has appeared in the historical research, namely the analysis of the culture of the Revelation communication mentality.

In relation to **Catechetics and its development as a dynamic science of the modern pastoral theology** I have started from a series of analyses made as a result of academic assumption of a running a set of pertinent diagnoses and introspection vectors – areas of increased catechetical competence – sources and experiences. The main works covered by this chapter include: *L'avenir de la Catéchèse*<sup>6</sup> by Denis Vilpellet, which richly deserves mentioning throughout the great achievements of this former of opinion in the field of catechumenal sociology. I identified a series of anthropological mutations, elements of instrumentalization of life and elements belonging to the culture of disparate elements. Another work analyzed in this part is written by J. Gevaert, - a paper which saw immediate absorption in the Catholic world (Italian edition, Torino 1975/ Spanish edition Madrid 1976), bearing the title: *Experiencia humana y anuncio cristiano*<sup>7</sup>.

Works dealing with western long-term catechetical diagnosis are major beacons for identifying the major veins of any dynamic research which would, in turn, serve as inspiration for future research in the area of general catechetical research. One such synthesis was compiled by the French Bishops Conference, published as *Texte National pour l'orientation de la Catéchèse en France et principes d'organisation*<sup>8</sup> (TNOCF). Its main principles cannot be ignored by Orthodox exegesis and I have identified several of them:

- Organizing catechesis to mirror all stages of life (situations, principles, practical advice)
- Organizing catechesis on *places* and *milestones in modern life* (situations, guiding principles, family, sparking faith in the very young, school, alternative living spaces)
- Organizing catechesis based on *sacramental interrogations* (situations, guiding principles, practical advice)

<sup>6</sup> Les Éditions de l'Atelier/ Éditions ouvrières, Paris, 2003, 136 pages.

<sup>7</sup> We have analyzed the Spanish edition, Don Bosco, Madrid, 1976, 206 p.

<sup>8</sup> The Collection *Documents de l'Église*, Bayard Éditions-Fleurus-Mame-Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2007, 116 pages.

A possible Romanian source of reconstruction of catechumenal and pastoral intervention may be found in the volumes containing interviews and catechesis *Farmacia de cuvinte* (*Word Pharmacy*), (co-author Alexandru Rusu, Agnos Publishing House, 2014, 320 p.) and *Microfonul cu prieteni. Interviuri realizate în cadrul emisiunii Ortodoxia pe înțelesul tuturor* (*The Microphone with Friends. Interviews Throughout the Show "Orthodoxy for Everyone"*) (Agnos Publishing House, Sibiu, 2014, 317 p.). Additionally, radio interviews (Radio România Actualități and Radio Trinitas) have pointed out a series of acute problems of pastoration, have yielded solutions and have revealed potential veins of pastoral intervention. Thus we have synthesized and proposed a series of catechetical papers for immediate pastoral situation as well as for the communicative solutions in Church pastoral. In the area of Catechetics I succeeded to bring in the foreground several recurrent themes related to the European model, which have proved to be imperishable in the context of the disjointed pressure of secularism on youth education. A series of my works constitute **model-catecheses** for approaching the modern world, many of them being the fruit of the meeting in many public conferences. Concerning **the development of catechumenal mentality** I should recall the effort of cultivating the image of a relaxed Orthodoxy, liberated by ideological servitudes. The largest contribution to this effort was recorded by publishing abroad of such contributions, most of them in the space of the journal *Città di Vita* of Florence, where I was coopted in the scientific committee of the journal and that of the Publishing House as well as responsible for the Orthodox rubric (*Tra Oriente e Occidente*), within I published a series of studies concerning the orthodox option of catechization and pastoral communication. One of the continuous preoccupations was to identify the directions of a veritable development of the catechetical research and analysis in the years to come. Without reversing from classical catechesis, the new directions can restore what we need to rediscover the **validation of the Church in the space of communication**.

With reference to the subchapter **Homiletics, source of theological culture, pastoral practice and science of modern communication** I sought to offer the students and to those interested professionals the fundamental references for their vocational training as people of communication of revealed Truth culture. Because of the need to propose models of rhetoric and cultural information in homily area I proposed translations that through the human model and literary construction to be able to help the positive skills of the mission of preaching. An important aspect – identified as a result of editing and publishing the three volumes with homiletic content by Father Dumitru Belu, recalled at point A, was the need of assimilation of some preaching models. Thus we have made available to the students and the servants of holy altars a series of sermon volumes. They have largely constituted the model and development of the model analysis; some of them are subsequently subject to specialized criticism and are landmarks in the culture of the field. These preoccupations with practical Homiletics have been added to the concern for identifying a repeatable model in the pastoral mission, with a view to systematization related to preaching. Thus, we developed a series of support themes for improving the vocation of preaching about the construction of a mystagogical culture through preaching as pastoral emergency. Therefore the results are recorded by subthemes of culture and homiletic thinking, with persistence in the area of Catechetics and Homiletics. Many of these works and thematizations have improved the

homiletic horizon of the orthodox preaching, being source of inspiration for the pulpit mission. The editing and publishing process is part of experience gained through the effort of homiletic enlighten of the contemporary generation of specialists, hence the effort to develop these skills in students and master students.

In the 3rd chapter **The individual capacity of teamwork and transmission of information** I pointed several aspects of my activity related to coordination, organization and management of didactic activity as well as the effort made to explain and facilitate learning.

The **conclusions** of our Habilitation project are equally as many departure points for subsequent research, areas of interculturality and educational diversity, possible projects to develop a vast catechetical and homiletic science, which would overcome the theoretical gap between the Christian summits of research in the field. We have organized them in this manner:

1. Elements of **anthropology** in the **social pedagogy** of educability.
2. **The human sense of faith** – development of language and communication contents of faith in the contemporary world.
3. The recuperation of the **spiritual dimension** of witnessing the faith.
4. Redimensioning **mystagogy in the public communication** of elements of Christian faith.
5. **Catechizing adults** and the development of **intergenerational catechesis**.
6. **Balancing missionary vocabulary** in relation to social communication.
7. The development of Diocesan Centers for diagnosis and intervention in catechumenal pastoration.
8. **Editing pertinent, informal materials** – implicitly for combating idiosyncrasies caused by false information about religious.
9. Identifying the **relevant criteria** for the reform of parish catechesis.
10. **Rebuilding educability** around the Liturgy while also developing the catechumenate as introductory catechesis, too.
11. **Catechesis as a form of re-introduction and alphabetization** – where applicable, of society supposedly clerical or religious.
12. Adopting the **Scripture Model in Pedagogy** and Pastoral/ Social Psychology – transfer and communion in the ethos of modern social education.
13. **Dialogue with society** as a form of dynamic catechesis.
14. Rediscovering the role of religious experience of communities as an educational and pastoral practice: **the issue of subjectivity and transcendence**.
15. **Agreement between catechesis and pastoral** – the development of catechumenal pastoral as a form of defragmentation of the culture of social intervention of the Church.

16. **The Moral construction of communication**, avoiding moralistic excess.
17. **The relationship between religious education** and other forms of social education: sexual or civic education.
18. **Reviewing the means of catechetical intervention** in the parish: centers of catechesis, research forums, summer schools and training courses.
19. **Continuous training** of priests with an emphasis on their **religious education** in the current social context.
20. **Identification of catechumenal models** of active education in the pastoral of the different churches belonging to the traditional span of Orthodoxy<sup>9</sup>.

From a personal stand-point, within the profile of our professional and specialized career, we have greatly benefited from this “Latin” European literature as it developed not only our ability to absorb new research vectors, but it also helped me identify new pastoral solutions. Such pedagogical works leave no room for confessionism and only accept the ample effort made by the ecclesiastic corpus for dialogue and meek mutual respect. We are of the opinion that in these troubled times faced by a fading Europe, reopening the avenues for catechetical dialogue and meaningful homiletic communication are fundamental. In this light, our thesis is meant to be a mere step towards normalization.



Handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Constantin Valer Necula". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'C'.

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<sup>9</sup> We have revealed these aspects in the essay with the title “Religious Educability of Contemporary Man. Directions in Modern Catechetics” presented at the *International Congress of Theology* in Iași, from 2016.