



ULBS

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Interdisciplinary doctoral thesis
Specialization of the doctorate: ***THEOLOGY***

DOCTORAL THESIS
THE "MIXED MARRIAGE"
A THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE
ORTHODOX AND THE EVANGELIC
CHURCH: PRINCIPLES AND ETHICAL,
FAITHFUL, CANONICAL AND DOGMATIC
EFFECTS

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Keywords: Church, Holy Sacrament of Wedding, marriage, family, Christian morality, mission, ecumenical dialogue, challenges, society, media, secularization, profanation, modernity, Lutherism, created order, love, sexuality.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Renaissance there have been many arguments about the family. Even more today, in the context of the struggle for family values of the *Coaliția pentru familie* (Coalition for the family), this remains a topical issue in academic and theological circles.

As widely known as this area might seem, there are still areas that invite further research and deepening. First in theology, the subject of the family would not be dealt with without the original exposure of the subject of love. Then, love can not be discussed without the virtue of goodness, and last but not least, one could not give a talk about goodness without referring to the fruit of the Spirit - meekness. The power of meekness can soften even the most stubborn heart. The meekness of our Lord Jesus Christ is attractive to all of us. He said: „Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and humble in heart...” (Matthew 11:29).

It is the same realm of good qualities and virtues under which we develop and present the theme of the family in the bosom of the Church in this work. On the one hand, it is aware that the goal of human life is to maintain divine blessings and to attain the kingdom of God. In the family, moved by the same love and values, spouses can follow the same path of salvation together.

A unified image of love is presented in the sacrament of the Holy Cross. The family is also a cross that the married couple carry together. In their mutual support and motivation, the whole process of growth and spiritual maturity is easier to endure, and also safer. Through the crucifixion of our Savior Jesus Christ, the cross becomes a sign of victory over death as a means of torture. His resurrection is also based on the pillar of love. This resurrection is marked in a special way, owing to the love of the Blessed Mother, the holy apostles, disciples and holy myrrh bearing women. So it was not a supernatural force at work that raised the Savior Jesus Christ from the dead, but the love of His followers: *they loved Jesus so much that they raised Him from the death.*

Hence, by no means purely by chance, the beginning of all things was love, goodness and meekness. All work of creation ends with the appearance of man, who "will cling to his wife and the two will be one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31). Methodius from Olympus, one of the patristic authors, said: „because the origin of the birth of new people is the union between man and woman ... this is probably also represented in the ecstasy of primeval sleep; he should

announce the attraction of the man to his wife when, carried by the torrent of procreation, he lets break loose from his flesh to beget a new man”¹.

The sacrament of love has an overwhelming power, similar to the phoenix bird, which flies up from its own ashes and regenerates itself every time. So is conjugal love, a fire that flares up again and again, which helps the married couple to gain wisdom and loyalty on the holy, unspoiled path of life.

Justification and importance of the study

Similar to the path of life, which rises and tends from the beginning, and is alternately difficult, sometimes easy to walk, this work also followed a route of many efforts and considerations, based on the desire to complete and clarify ordinary religious, social, cultural, moral and identity aspects. This research is illustrative as the fruit of the intense, far from completed study, meditation, and contemplations that spread to a seven year academic course.

Man has always been influenced by his „neighbor”. It is precisely this way in which people get to know each other and come closer in order to ultimately start, understand and deepen a family, was for me the motivation for an extended journey, which I dared to embark on with academic and theological-pastoral research methods. For now I have explored the nature of the Christian family in greater detail: what the family is like, what it is based on, what it produces as fruit, and what is the common path that the spouses take to achieve the goal of their salvation. I have expanded my efforts on an academic level with the teachings of the Evangelical Church. Unfortunately, as I lacked the background of Lutheran traditions and teachings, my work would have been immeasurably difficult had I not had the loving support of Professor Dr. Ștefan Tobler by my side.

The first approach of this work is the consideration of the mystery of the union between man and woman, in an interweaving of the dogmatic and canonical, as well as the practical-liturgical teachings of the Orthodox Church, whereby the doctrinal teaching of the Evangelical Church on marriage is included where possible. From an ecumenical perspective, this topic of the liturgical, practical and dynamic development of mixed families is particularly interesting, in the sense of finding one another among partners who come from different social, cultural and ecclesial milieus. Approaching this topic is a challenge not only on a confessional level,

¹ Metodiul de Olimp, *Banchetul sau despre castitate*, în: *Colecția Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, Volumul X, traducere de Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin Cornișescu, București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1984, p. 253

but also socially and culturally, in the context of today's society, characterized by a particularly dynamic interculturality.

The promotion of diversity in Church, culture, art and society brings with it numerous challenges. As diversity goes hand in hand with the fate of humanity, criticism and studies of social and cultural realities cannot remove the theological, moral and spiritual conceptual pillars of the Christian family.

This thesis is based on an in-depth study of the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers, as well as on the works of Protestant theologians. This is how I became familiar with concepts of marriage as *Weltlich Ding & Geschäft*. My own contribution to research into this broad area of the family consists of a questionnaire (filled out by married couples from mixed marriages) that gave me a holistic picture of conjugal love.

Research question and methods

I was particularly impressed by the importance given to the unification of men and women in the Orthodox and at the same time in the Evangelical Church.

A rich symbolism is used around this event to do justice to the high sacrament of marriage. Hence, the attitude of both churches towards young people who want to enter into mixed marriages is full of wisdom and nobleness.

My consideration was directed initially to the doctrinal, canonical, liturgical and sacramental doctrines of the Orthodox Church, whereby I examined the realities of mixed marriage against these doctrines. The next approach was the question of whether the relationship between spouses who come from such different environments, cultures and areas has a somewhat negative effect on the church customs of the respective partners.

The answer to this question was anything but easy to find. Studying the scriptures, patristic works, and interpreting the laws required considerable efforts. The study of Protestant theologians seemed all the more to throw me into a confusing labyrinth. The ancient German language raised impenetrable walls in front of me, I felt like a pawn on a chessboard, where every movement threatened with the failure of my undertakings. Gradually the hurdles mentioned could be overcome with the help of Professor Stefan Tobler alone. He helped me understand the meaning and sense of the terms *Geschäft*, *weltlich Ding*, *Ordnung*, *Bund*, *Geistliche Regiment*.

In order not to be accused of too dry, abstract and speculative consideration, I have dared to take a spiritual approach in reverse, and instead of following the doctrinal canonical

guidelines of the Orthodox Church I rather pointed to the living profile of a Christian family, which sooner or later through mutual Love and respect of both partners is attached. The historical method, as well as that of critical study, represent a considerable part of my work. In this sense, I have clarified the universality and importance of mixed marriage in a social, confessional and historical sense. The questions in the questionnaire focused on the reasons that led the life partners to marry, such as: the context in which they met or what were the principles that determined them to start a mixed family. The customs and traditions of the married couple, which should then be passed on to their children, were also a sensitive issue.

Man is called by God „to be a witness of His glory and goodness, and only he alone can increasingly enjoy divine love with a sober spirit”².

This divine love far exceeds self-love, and man ultimately transfers it to his neighbor. Mixed marriage thus remains a true gift for people and an inexhaustible source of life and love.

State of research and current relevance of the topic

As God the Creator already expressed in Genesis, man should never live alone and lonely. That is why the family has a privileged place in the lap of the Holy Church. It is no accident that the story of creation ends with the creation of man, nor is it a coincidence that the Savior begins His earthly work at the wedding in Cana. The two ages of marriage seem to correspond. For people today it is still a challenge to understand the image of the family in its paradisiacal dimension in comparison to the Christian family from the New Testament. What is interesting is the contrast between Old Testament marriage and the new family that receives Christ's blessing at the wedding in Cana.

To that extent, the deep meaning of the family in church and society, which is so rich in meanings and roles, has preoccupied numerous professors, theologians, academics, sociologists, anthropologists and scholars from various fields. From the theological perspective, it is presented in the study of the Old and New Testaments, systematically (dogmatic, missionary and moral), historically and also practically (here both ecclesiastical legislation and liturgical practice are included).

All authors approach this subject with devotion and emotion. Therefore a dynamic view can be observed in all works. In studying these works on the subject of marriage, the importance of the ecclesial unity of life partners became clear to me. The dogmatic, canonical and liturgical

² Pr. David Marian, *Crearea omului și starea lui Paradisiacă*, Brăila: Editura Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae, 2014, p. 11

works are in an indissoluble relationship to one another and cannot be separated. The only means by which the dogma or rule can be overcome is love and sacrifice. This unites and does not divide, it brings together spouses from different ecclesial backgrounds, and it is love that shows us the way to God.

The world of evangelical theology opens a new horizon, rich in concepts and religious beliefs, in which *marriage and family* are viewed as: *a state of created order; a profession and administration of material things; a land of love among married couples; a foundation for personal and social development.*

Structure of work

As an area of overlap between two churches with different traditions and cultures, mixed marriage is in full swing in the middle of a development process. As a principle of work, I have laid the principle according to which the formation of a family in the church begins with the holy sacrament of marriage and celebration of the Holy marriage. The theological perspective chosen here has been enriched by the flexibility of multiple opinions and interpretations. For this purpose, I have used numerous new bibliographic sources which have provided me with a substantial amount of information.

As a result of the above considerations, I chose the title *The Mixed Marriage. A theological challenge for the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches: principles and ethical, faithful, canonical and dogmatic effects.* With this unique orientation, I hope to arouse the reader's interest. The content relates to dogmatic and symbolic dimensions, peppered with biblical theology, church legislation and liturgical practice. It should be noted that this work is not simply a synthesis of the teachings of the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches, i.e. not a crude collection of theological information, concepts and opinions. The authenticity of today's missionary context requires the church to deal honestly with the subject of the family on two levels, the missionary-pastoral one and the academic-cultural.

Overall, the work appears as a whole, divided into four chapters, and thereby complies with academic standards. Towards the end there are general conclusions, reference literature and appendices. The chapters are doctrinally harmonized with one another, the information is logically and uniformly linked.

The first chapter, *The Marriage in Orthodox Theology*, is a rambling interpretation of historical, dogmatic, exegetical, patristic, and canonical elements. This chapter acts as a guide for the Christian family. Academic efforts focused on examining the biblical text from Genesis

chapter 1 and the Gospel of John chapter 2. I referred to the historical context of the creation of the first humans, who constitute the first human family.

Because of this theological truth, in the first subsection, *The Family in the Old Testament*, I emphasized the spiritual beauty of the image of God in man. Using *Biblical Archeology*, I identified the reference elements on which Jews based their families. For them, the family was „those of the same blood, or more precisely, those who live in the same house under the same roof”³. The Bible text in *Genesis* is literally a message from God to people in order to save them. It encourages a hermeneutic reading to understand the love story between God and man. The entire creative endeavor springs from God's infinite love. The laws and orders that God gives to His people also come from love. In this context of the Bible Age, the subject of love is animated and fascinating. By the way, love is a major part of all books in the Bible. The Old Testament family and the wedding are again elevated to the status of a Holy Sacrament when the Savior Jesus Christ comes into the world and by his participation in the wedding at Cana in Galilee.

In the second chapter, *The Family in the New Testament* is given the mystical dimension of the wedding. Theologians who have commented on the Bible helped me to come up with a sensual picture of a bridegroom as a gentleman, who in the Old Testament stands for God the Father. In the New Testament the *Cavalier of Honor* is John the Baptist, who has to prepare the chosen people of Israel for the arrival of the *Bridegroom*. Christ gives marriage a special honor. In the New Testament the wedding is the *renewal of the original blessing*⁴ and the elevation of earthly (human) life come to a higher level of grace. Christ, the Bridegroom of the New Testament, gives the *good wine*. This wine contains the living substance - water - with which creation began. The transformation of water into wine is the picture of purification. The animal sacrifices that were to purify the Chosen People are symbolized in the New Testament through the Holy Eucharist. The Son of God soon becomes the *Bridegroom of Israel*, just as the Father has held this position since ancient times when he gave His people protection. In the family, the married couple realize the sacrament of the kingdom of God. The pattern of man - woman is based on the pattern of Christ - Church, a theological perspective that can also be found in the writings of the holy fathers.

³ Ion Reșceanu, *Familia după Vechiul Testament*, Teză de Doctorat, București, 2001, p. 2

⁴ Preafericitul Părinte Daniel, *Cuvânt de început la Congresul Internațional <<Familia creștină, o binecuvântare pentru Biserică și societate>>*, în: *Familia – binecuvântare primordială pentru umanitate eternă*, Available on line: <https://arhiepiscopiabucurestilor.ro/stiri/evenimente-bisericesti/familia-binecuvantare-primordiala-pentru-umanitate-eterna> (site accesat în data de 5 august, 2020)

In the third subchapter, *The Wedding in the Scriptures of the Holy Fathers*, I evoked advice and recommendations from the Holy Fathers to the married couple, as well as theological insights of singular beauty and inexpressible value. For example: „Those who want to get married should take great care”⁵. The foundation of their marriage should be love, so future family life will lead to eternal salvation. Because *marriage is God's house*, the spouses must „remain undivided in divine love”⁶.

Against the background of the missionary profile of the Church, illustrated throughout its work, as the starting point of the last two sub-chapters, I have laid the conditions and also the obstacles in the way of carrying out the sacrament of marriage, as well as the canonical teachings and decisions on the Possibilities of conducting a wedding service in the Orthodox Church between Orthodox and Evangelical partners. According to Orthodox custom, the wedding is celebrated in the Church because „the wedding is a living icon of God, a <<Theofanie>>”. These sub-chapters differ in their predominantly historical approach, as the relationship between church and state not only had a purely academic, but also a well-developed political, social and cultural dimension. Among the relative obstacles that usually stood in the way of weddings was the *difference in religion* (Mixed marriages)⁷.

So sensitive is the Church's responsibility for the spiritual integration of her sons and daughters that it is compelled to appear as *a physician who must administer the medicine of eternal spiritual salvation*. Taking into account the high sensitivity of the context, as a result of my historical and canonical research, I have considered the possibility of holding a wedding service in the Orthodox Church between an Orthodox and a Protestant spouse. In order to meet and support its believers, the Orthodox Church has worked to maintain canonical doctrine, but at the same time, thanks to its spiritual authority, has also worked outside the canonical limits; thus, without restricting the performance of the wedding service, it adopted the *principle of oikonomia*. The only condition remains that the couple's future children be baptized Orthodox.

In the second chapter, entitled *The Marriage in the Theology of the Evangelical Church*, the academic focus was placed on Martin Luther's theological thinking about marriage. The wedding in the Evangelical Church takes place with song, sermon, the swearing of the oath by the married couple and prayer to bless the newlywed couple.

⁵ See Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Cateheze maritale, Omilii despre căsătorie*, Sibiu: Editura Oastea-Domnului, 2004

⁶ Paul Evdokimov, *Taina iubirii, sfințenia unirii conjugale în lumina tradiției ortodoxe*, pp. 101-102

⁷ Pr. Traian Costea, *Căsătoria din punct de vedere: Istoric, Dogmatic și Canonic*, p. 116

According to Martin Luther, marriage is to be understood as a component of the created order: „Die Ehe ist eine weltliche Ding”, or of the material world: „Schöpfungsordnung”. The writings of evangelical theology describe the marriage *as the center of all occupations and deeds of man*. The principle of the union of the married couple must be love. The love between man and woman *is the greatest and deepest of all*. In love alone, the couple can struggle through life's difficulties. In each of the associated sub-chapters, I have emphasized the academic and spiritual details of Martin Luther's teachings, which in turn refer to the works of the German theologians Markus Matthias, Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, Dietrich Rössler, Helmut Thielicke, Albrecht Peters.

Luther puts the theme of marriage under the sign of four principles: the first relates to the creation of the first human couple in Eden; the second concerns the love and seriousness of the *marriage candidates*; the third principle is the foundation of woman's creation, and the fourth principle is love. In the *Traubüchlein* Luther sees marriage as „*a worldly estate*” and marriage as a *worldly (secularized) work (activity)*, or „*ein weltlich Geschäft*”. Martin Luther sees family life in connection with the persons of the Trinity; The person who intends to enter the marital status must see it as a creation, order or *custom, a blessing and a sign*. According to evangelical theology, the moment *Adam and Eve were married in paradise lacks a personal sign from God*. Married couples know the Creator in His love of order. Theological interpretations see marriage as a *household*, but at the same time as *a land of love between the spouses*. Under the sign of love, they create a new image of marriage viewed from the inside and fulfill their *calling* and the purpose of their creation in the family.

The new elements that strengthen the academic discourse in the theology of the Evangelical Church are defined in the sub-chapters: *Theses of the Evangelical Theologian Heinz-Dietrich Wendland on the theology of sexuality and marriage, as well as in relation between marriage and sexuality in Luther's thinking and in Lutheran orthodoxy, according to theologian Markus Matthias*. After intensive study, the following focal points of the ethics of marriage can be recognized: it is the public commitment of man and woman that builds the basis of marriage and family life; the purpose of marriage is not individualism and personal interest, but the spouse is called to fulfill the words of the *Great Catechism*: „In love and harmony ... wholeheartedly and with all sincerity”.

The married couple have to obey God. The marital relationship also has a healing effect at the same time. The need to be together turns a marriage into a family through the procreation of children. Luther described marriage as *God's field of work and love of neighbor*. The

fulfillment of marriage is a promise made by the couple who love to break the boundaries of individualism and materialism

In the third chapter, *Marriage in Mixed Marriage in the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches*, I referred to the liturgical, sacramental and spiritual context of the marriage, and the rite and symbolism of this Holy Sacrament from the perspective of the Orthodox Church first, and then I highlighted the marriage in the Protestant Church. In the subchapter *The Wedding in the Evangelical Church - Rite and Symbolism*, doctrinal aspects are emphasized in connection with the ecclesial dimension of the wedding ceremony. The real meaning of marriage is in accord with the image of the Church. The novelty of the researched topic can be found in the sub-chapter *Doctrinal-liturgical common points of the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches on the wedding service in mixed marriages*, which takes care of the liturgical and pastoral dimension. To begin with, I have dealt with the differences and rites of the liturgical moments. Therefore, I also highlighted the similarities in the religious ceremony. All of this has a crucial role in the ecumenical dialogue between the two faith communities.

Mixed marriage can play an important social role when the love and loyalty of the spouses leads to their eternal salvation and when they follow the example of Christ's love for the Church (His Bride). In so far as love represents the life of the church, Christianity is a religion of love. Therefore, this Christian love should be able to overcome every legal and canonical hurdle. In other words, conjugal love is „the impossible possibility”⁸.

In the last chapter, *Empirical Research*, I dealt with the results of the questionnaire applied to nine families, eight of which live in Germany and only one in Romania. In my endeavors I have tried to describe the internal situation of mixed marriages in Germany, as well as the respective relationship of the spouses to their Orthodox and / or Evangelical Church. For further explanations from the Romanian Orthodox Church, I have designed a new questionnaire, addressed to pastors. Here I have graciously given answers: Most Holy Serafim - Orthodox Metropolitan of Germany, Central and Northern Europe, Archimandrite Andrei Ionița and Protopope Iosif Rădulescu. On the basis of the answers received, I concluded that the social, cultural and pastoral situation is different in the individual cases. By observing the law, the Church strives to observe the dogmas and teachings of the Holy Fathers, but is forced to show a paternal attitude towards spouses who wish to celebrate their wedding in the Orthodox Church.

⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *Postul Mare. Pași spre Înviere*, traducere și studiu introductiv de pr. dr. Vasile Gavrilă, București: Editura Sophia, 2013, p. 48

General conclusion, perspective of the work, bridges between the Orthodox and the Evangelical Church

Both spouses need love and peace to unite their lives under the Holy Sacrament of Marriage. These feelings and facts are all the more needed in mixed marriage. Orthodox and evangelical theological individualism refers to a certain kind of interpretation of dogmas and divine sacraments. Therefore, both churches are called to strike a middle ground and to work out principles that meet the believers' desire for mixed marriage. As far as the Orthodox Church is concerned, it remains relevant that its own dogmatic, canonical and faith-based traditions and teachings are not corrupted without violating the attitude of the Evangelical Church.

Basically, the real benefits of mixed marriages are to be seen so that believers' feelings are not hurt or compromised. The Church is called to unite and not to separate. Mixed couples are also called to share in the joy of the Trinity as free, sober persons who are able to give and receive love.

The churches would have to take on a radically new existence, which does not lack the connection to tradition and liturgical practice, without the loss of their dogmatic, liturgical, community of faith and canonical authority.