

OVIDIUS UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
DOCTORAL DOMAIN: THEOLOGY

## **DOCTORATE THESIS**

-abstract-

PhD Supervisor:  
Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Emilian Cornițescu

PhD Candidate:  
Pr. Eugen-Marius Ioana

Constanța  
2015

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**The Book of *Psalms* in the Orthodox spirituality**

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**Key words:** psalms, psalter, theology, spirituality, orthodoxy, biblical hymnography, repentance, teshubah, metanoia

### Abstract

*The Book of Psalms* is one of the best-rendered ways of expressing the relationship between man and God in the Jewish community and the experience of human - divine communion. In other words, the *Psalms* can be considered the theological quintessence of the *Old Testament*, as they include the recurring Old Testament themes, of which the most important is to assert the Messiahship of the Son of God.

The *Book of Psalms* reflects a special aspect in the relationship between the chosen people and God, i.e. the way God refers to man. In addition, the *Psalms*, unlike any other book in the *Old Testament*, have a striking approach, explore and give expression to the intimacy of man before God, the Almighty and Just, bringing to the fore the change of conscience, or, in theological terms, the return to God, by repentance.

Nevertheless, the thematic complexity of the *Book of Psalms* goes beyond the aspects already mentioned. The *Psalms* can also be subject to socio-psychological research of the Jewish community, without raising any analytical difficulty. The norms of the Jewish life, the moral precepts indicated in the *Psalms* reconfigure the society on religious vectors and under the guidance of the divine authority. Practically, after Moses receives the *Decalogue* on Mount Sinai, the *Psalms* appear as a morale guide from a Christian perspective, and the moral subject relates to a reference forum who governs the universe, i.e. God.

The *Book of Psalms* is also seen from a cultural poetic perspective in the treasury of poetical compositions of the humanity. The Bible psalm testifies of the artistic way of expressing religious and poetical sensitivity in relation to God. King David had a talent, i.e. work in the art field, and he used it for the praise of his Creator. Thus, the Psalms illustrate the effort of a poet to chant of his relationship with God, with all its afferent modulations, poetry in itself being a privileged language used to dialogue with and about God.

As a prayer of the poet/artist, in fact as a poetic/artistic gesture of relating to the sacred, the psalm becomes a fundamental benchmark in the Jewish-Christian culture, visibly used not only in the privileged field of theology and religious cult, but also in music and literature/poetry. In the cultural field, it is a catalyst by translations and versifications, rewritings and pastiches, by musical compositions, theological and literary interpretations, while remaining topical in the religious cult. Although in the Romanian culture the interest for psalms did not spread as in Occident, the *Psalter* had an essential contribution.

In the light of these framework considerations, this PhD thesis attempts at raising awareness on and actualising the importance of the *Book of Psalms* for the contemporary man who undergoes a religious identity crisis, triggered by secularization. First of all, the *Psalms* represent a sublime prayer form, transposing man into an existential way of exploring the experience of the Divine. No authentic Christian spirituality can be imagined in the absence of the *Psalms*, as the psalm in itself expresses the dialogue between the poet and God.

In assuming a spiritual identity, the *Psalter* has constantly been one of the main concerns of those wishing to repent and gain salvation. The great interest it aroused on a permanent basis was due to both its rich and beautiful content. As any other book in the Holy Bible, the *Psalter* contains high moral-religious precepts, adequate for man's status as social being, who lives in a community and has major duties to fulfil towards it. But, most

importantly, man lives before God and thus, the responsibility he has towards his Creator prevails over any other duty. Man's duties towards God are mainly three: unalterable faith in God, obedience of His commandments and an everlasting love.

Saint Basil the Great highlights these special qualities of the *Psalter* in his Comment on the Psalms: "Now, the prophets teach one thing, historians another, the law something else, and the form of advice found in the proverbs something different still. But, the Book of Psalms has taken over what is profitable from all. It foretells coming events; it recalls history; it frames laws for life; it suggests what must be done; and, in general, it is the common treasury of good doctrine, carefully finding what is suitable for each one."

The same Holy Father offers interesting considerations on the Psalms: "What, in fact, can you not learn from the psalms?" Can you not learn the grandeur of courage? The exactness of justice? The nobility of self-control? The perfection of prudence? A manner of penance? The measure of patience? And whatever other good things you might mention? Therein is perfect theology, a prediction of the coming of Christ in the flesh, a threat of judgement, a hope of resurrection, a fear of punishment, promises of glory, an unveiling of mysteries; all things, as if in some great public treasury, are stored up in the Book of Psalms."

According to Saint Athanasius the Great, in the *Psalter* "are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given."

For Saint Ambrose, this beautiful book is the "the voice of the Church, a confession of faith in song." John Chrysostom eulogises the *Psalter* when he says that "all Scriptures are sacred, but the Psalms contain something more". Cassiodorus refers to the *Psalter* as the "unaltered well" that constantly springs the living water of salvation. The variety of the *Psalter* content entitles one to affirm that it is not a book in the standard meaning of the word, i.e. a writing with a unitary composition, but rather a collection of texts of large diversity, religious chants, hymns, meditations, prayers etc., appeared in different eras and inspired by various authors.

The study of the *Book of Psalms* is not a recent attempt. It has made the object of research in all times, starting with the first Christian centuries, and in different fields, not only in theology, each field analysing it from different perspectives. By the subjects treated, the *Psalms* have drawn the attention of sociologists regarding the approach of essential principles for living in a society and developing inter-human relations. These Old Testament compositions raise a wide range of problems, but allow for equally extensive explanation and interpretation perspectives.

In the Romanian literature, the approaches of the *Psalms* are concise and well-documented.

The first chapter, *The Book of Psalms - essence of the Old Testament theology and monument of the biblical hymnography*, details the scientific analysis of the psalms, their numbering and classification, as a wider introduction to the theme subject to research.

The second chapter, *The theology of the psalms. Premises of the experience of human - divine communion*, conceptualises the psalms within the Holy Bible, with an emphasis on the Davidian theology reflected in the psalms. The ideas underlying our research are the following: God seen as proniator, judge, omnibenevolent and saviour in the theology of the Psalms; man in his relationship with God; the world - space of God's providential presence; the messianic idea of the Psalms - anticipating man's restoration by grace through Jesus Christ; the Anthropomorphism in the Psalms - exegetical notes; eschatology in the Psalms - theological-dogmatic coordinates.

The third chapter, *Spirituality of the psalms in the patristic hermeneutics*, aims at offering a pattern for the exegesis of the psalms, in terms of their spirituality, following the example of Saint Basil the Great. Our aim is to highlight that the patristic exegesis, far from representing a sterile and mechanical scientific analysis exercise, has its methodology centred in the problematics of spirituality. Church Fathers interpreted the *Holy Scripture* from the perspective of man's spiritual enriching in his path to perfection. The third section of this chapter attempts to underline the recurring themes of the psalms, with an emphasis on virtue, the power to discriminate good from evil, the two ways, God's justice or theodicy, duties towards one's neighbour, peace - existential dimension, condemning the lust of wealth and the usury, the spiritual profile of the believer, family - framework for practising virtues, the problem of the oath.

The fourth chapter, *Psalms 50 - Matrix of spirituality in the perspective of the Old Testament theology. The significance of repentance (teshubah)* highlights the significance of repentance seen from the perspective of the Old Testament theology. Given these reasons, we considered it necessary to dedicate a section to the interpretations of sin as identified by the biblical authors of the Old Testament.

The fifth chapter, *The prayer in the psalms - the authenticity of man in his relationship with God* uses the same methodological line to explain the significance of the prayer *Yahwe Hanneni* („Have mercy on me, O, Lord” Ps 50,1), as mark of the Davidian spirituality and theology.

The sixth chapter, *Famous psalters in Romanian and their spiritual valorisation* offers a different approach, that changes the methodological analysis pattern and focuses on exploring the Romanian cultural field in which the psalms represented an artistic valorisation theme. In this respect, by using several literary works belonging to the Romanian Orthodox Church, we aimed at bringing to the fore, in a general overview, *the Hurmuzachi Psalter, Dosoftei's Psalter in verse, the Romanian Psalter from Iași, the Scheian Psalter, the Slavo-Romanian Psalter of Dosoftei, the Voronetian Psalter, Versions of Coresi's Psalter, Coresi's Psalter from 1570, the Slavo-Romanian Psalter, the Romanian Psalter Editions*.

## I. THE BOOK OF PSALMS - ESSENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY AND MONUMENT OF THE BIBLICAL HYMNOGRAPHY

The significance of the Psalms for both the Jews and the “Gentiles” is difficult to express in clear terms. The psalms reflect the ideal of the religious piousness and of the communion with God, of sorrow for the sin committed and of pursuit of perfection, of walking fearless in the dark, guided by the light of faith, of obedience of God's law, of the joy of worshipping God, of partaking with God's friends, of reverence towards God's Word, of humility under the punishing staff, of confidence when the evil triumphs and wickedness prospers, of peace in the midst of the storm.<sup>1</sup>

The Jews were inspired to take these spiritual meanings and experiences and use them as themes in their songs. Nevertheless, mention should be made that the “Psalms are chants and chants were written to be sung; they were not doctrine treaties, they were not even songs”<sup>2</sup>, as indicated by the Hebrew word תְּהִלִּים, - *tehilim*, „praising chants”<sup>3</sup> corresponding to *Psalms*, and that they expressed the religion of Israel, inherited by the psalmists, and not

<sup>1</sup> *Dicționar Biblic*, J. D. Douglas (Ed.), traducere de Liviu Pop, John Tipei, Societatea Misionară Română Editura „Cartea Creștină”, Oradea, 1995, p. 1087.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 1958, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, Revised Edition*, Paul J. Achtemeier (Ed.), Harper San Francisco, New York, 1996, p. 892, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life and Thought*, Chaim Pearl (Ed.), Carta Jerusalem, 1996, p. 370.



only the latter's religious experiences. Thus, the *Psalms* belong to all Christians, be they Jews or non-Jews. The Romanian term stems from the Greek *psalmoi*, Ψαλμοί (“songs accompanied by the harp”).<sup>4</sup>

There are also several mentions regarding the name of the Psalms within the *Old Testament*, made by Pr. prof. Emilian Cornițescu PhD.<sup>5</sup> The psalms belong to the string lyric poetry. The epic poetry was not developed as it used unreal narrations that did not match the divine inspiration. The prophetic speeches are included in the lyric-string genre, meaning a chant, a poetry or simply a string designating a chant that is not accompanied by instruments.

The psalms are not designated only by means of the word *string*, but by other words that highlight their spiritual specificity and role in a Christian's life. The first term is the Hebrew *mizmor* with its corresponding Greek or Latin term *psalterium*, referring to a string instrument used when uttering the psalms. It is the name of this instrument that gave the general term for the 150 psalms. The original Hebrew word is *tehilim* from the radical *halal* - to praise, as the psalms are dedicated to praising God. A term that is close in form is *tefilim*, designating the prayers that define the content of the psalms and that man addresses to God begging Him to come to his rescue when enemies humiliate him. Several psalms are called *tefila* - prayers seen from the perspective of their content and use for man-, reason for which the translation of the Psalter into Romanian was of primary importance.

*Bible* researchers usually describe the book of *Psalms* as the “chants book of the Second Temple”<sup>6</sup>, which was surely the case. But this description may be misleading if one interpreted that all the psalms were written during the Exile or the post-exilic period. It is important to notice that this type of literature is not limited to the psalms from the *Old Testament*, but appears in various periods of the Jews' history<sup>7</sup>. For instance, it is found during the Exodus (*Exod.* 15, 1-19), or during the period immediately after the conquest of Canaan under the rule of Joshua (*Judg.* 5, 1-31). Hanna's psalm (*1 Kings* 2,1-10) comes from a period that is very close to that of the Judges.<sup>8</sup>

The prophetic literature from the pre-exilic period also contains examples of psalms (e.g. *Hos.* 6,1-3; *Isa.* 2,2-4; 38,10-20; *Jer.* 14,7-91). And the post-exilic period includes passages such as *Ezra* 9, 5-15 and *Nehemiah* 9,6-39, which make reference to various psalms.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is clear that the psalms, as a literary genre, are not an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, this type of poetry could be found with the Babylonians and the inhabitants of Ugarit, as testified by the Ras Shamra tablets.<sup>10</sup> The psalms from the *Old Testament* represent a collection of poems typical for a literary form that the Jews, as well as other cultures, used during the Exodus and until the post-exilic period, or the Second Temple Period.<sup>11</sup> And, certainly, if we were to include the non-canonical psalms, it is clear that this form of literature continued to exist among the Jews for a long time in the Christian era.

## II. THE THEOLOGY OF THE PSALMS. PREMISES OF THE EXPERIENCE OF HUMAN - DIVINE COMMUNION

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Athanase Negoită, *Istoria religiei Vechiului Testament*, Editura Sophia, București, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> See Pr. prof. univ. dr. Cornițescu Emilian, „Rolul și importanța Psaltirii pentru Studiul Vechiului Testament”, în *Studii biblice*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Tomisului, Constanța, 2015, pp. 8-10.

<sup>6</sup> *Dicționar Biblic*, J. D. Douglas (Ed.), p. 1087

<sup>7</sup> See H. Gunkel, *The Psalms*, 1967, Facet Books, pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1962, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> See *Dicționar Biblic*, J. D. Douglas (Ed.), p. 1087.

<sup>10</sup> B. D. Eerdmans, *The Hebrew Book of Psalms*, 1947, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Dicționar Biblic*, J. D. Douglas (Ed.), p. 1087.

The psalms mark a profound theology.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, at the core of the psalmists' religious life lay the *knowledge of God* that they possessed.<sup>13</sup> They untiringly praised God's glory in the creation, in all the works He did in the skies, on earth and in the sea. He revealed Himself as God the Almighty, the Omniscient and the Omnipresent. He is also the God of history, that guides all towards a final target He wishes to attain. But this Ruler of the world, this King of kings, is also the Lawgiver and the Judge, the Defender and the Saviour of all the oppressed. Therefore, He is merciful and trustworthy, just and blameless, He is the Holy God praised by both men and angels. But God, as seen by the psalmists, is also, uniquely, the God of Israel. The God that revealed Himself to Abraham, to Isaac and to Joseph, that led Moses to rescue the Jewish people, that instituted His covenant for them and gave them the Promised Land, continues to be the God of Israel, the Lord and the Defender of the chosen people.

Having such a high conception on God, it is not surprising that the psalmists found their biggest joy and their supreme privilege in praying to God. Psalmists' prayers are so sincere, spontaneous and straightforward that we are convinced that prayer was part of their daily activity.<sup>14</sup> They believed in God's providence, in His presence, rejoiced in His holiness, relied on His trustworthiness, they believed He is near. In their prayers, they praised God and partook of God, and in times of sickness, need, distress and mockery found their refuge in His powerful hand and repented. In the daily life of the community in which they lived, their behaviour was characterised by loyalty towards God, reverential obedience to the Law, kindness towards the oppressed and joy to worship God.<sup>15</sup>

Given this faith and obedience, it is hard to understand from a moral perspective the *imprecatory psalms* (*Psalms* 35,1-8; 59; 69; 109). Similar prayers resulted from the wish to revenge can also be found in Jeremiah 11,18ff.; 15,15ff.; 18,19ff.; 20,11ff. The fundamental idea of these excerpts from the Psalms, where curses and revengeful punishments are invoked upon the enemies, is expressed in the *Psalms* 139,21ff., "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? [...] I count them mine enemies." This shows that the "psalmists had a zeal towards the Holy of Israel, Who had to make people pay for their deeds, on earth, according to the moral order"<sup>16</sup>. Beyond curses, lies the recognition of a moral divine ruling of the world, the faith that good and evil are important before God, and that, as a consequence, judgements, as well as grace, must be given according to this moral order. Thus, it was natural that man not living under the Law should pray for the destruction of God's enemies by judgement. On the other hand, nowadays the Christians that do not live under the grace, pray for the salvation of every person, although they believe in a judgement that takes place in the present moment, as well as in a future judgement.

As it would seem natural, the theme that we should focus in the first instance is the discourse on God or the theology of psalms, in a restricted sense. All the others themes of

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<sup>12</sup> For the theology of the Psalms, see Jerome F. D. Creach, *Psalms (Interpretation Bible Studies)*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1998; James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994, pp. 29-36; Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, Fortress Press, 1985, pp. 25-51.

<sup>13</sup> See *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Ed.), Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2005, p. 617.

<sup>14</sup> Pr. Prof. Nicolae Neaga, „În fluxul fericirii – Psalmul 118”, în *Altarul Banatului*, an XXXVII, nr. 6, 1987, p. 32-37.

<sup>15</sup> Diacon Prof. Dr. Chialda, „Legea lui Dumnezeu în psalmul 119”, în *Altarul Banatului*, an I, nr. 1-2, 1944, p. 35-41

<sup>16</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, Fortress Press, 2001, pp. 58-75

doctrine or morale are connected to it. It must be remembered that the core elements of the theology of psalms, i.e. the knowledge on God, are of biblical origin. All that the psalmists did was to get inspiration from what Moses wrote about God, based on his visions. The psalms are prayers, praise chants or requests addressed to the God revealed in the burning bush that was not consumed by the flames, or on Mount Sinai, in the midst of lightning and thunders, or in the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud that led the Jews throughout their journey in the desert. "He is the Lord our God - states the psalmist - who hath remembered His covenant forever, which He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac [...] He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen. (Ps. 104, 7, 9, 25).

Another essential theme included in what we call the doctrine of the Psalms is the anthropology. After God and Messiah, mentions of man are the most frequent in the 150 psalms. Thus, "theology" or the study of God is closely linked to "anthropology" or the study of man. How is man depicted in the Book of Psalms? From the beginning, it should be stated that the anthropological vision of the psalmists is both very elevated and well-balanced, man being described as a dignified person, but also as a person with a limited existence. The first aspect is showed in Psalm 8, 5-8, where the psalmist, impressed by the high position attributed to man by God, exclaims: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast made him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands." The idea of this text is that of the priesthood of man, of man's special mission to wisely and responsibly govern and lead the entire creation to its final destiny.

The reverse of this optimistic conception is the resignation before the ephemeral character of the human existence. A text that is nearly identical to the above-mentioned one, but highlighting the contrary, is Psalm 143, 3-4: "Lord, what is man, that Thou art made known unto him? or the son of man, that Thou makest account of him? Man is like unto vanity; his days as a shadow pass away. A similar reference is made in Psalm 102, 15-16: "As for man, his days are as the grass; as a flower of the field, so shall he flourish. For when the wind hath passed over it, it shall be gone, and it will know the place thereof no more." These two fragments do not depict pessimism or dejection towards life, but, as previously mentioned, a comprehensive view on realities that are evident for anyone. The psalmist does not remain confined in this thought. It is the short duration of life that determines him to come out of the state of reverie and think of the many duties incumbent upon him in this life. The human attitude towards the Law and morality is not a low-importance aspect for the authors of the Book of Psalms. The righteous man is appreciated and lauded for his virtues, while the unrighteous one is despised and condemned for his wrongdoings. The first Psalm makes an antithetical presentation of the two categories of people, blessing the man that is righteous and fears God and condemning the sinner.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most important factors in the national survival of Israel was the messianic hope.<sup>18</sup> This hope is centred around the revival of David's time, whose reign marked a golden era in the history of Israel<sup>19</sup>; it is on this background that one should see the messianic hope

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<sup>17</sup> Pr. prof. dr. Emilian Cornișescu, „Frumusețea spirituală a psalmilor în Omiliile Sfântului Vasile cel Mare”, p. 208.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. W. L. Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years, Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> John Rogerson and Philip R. Davies, *The Old Testament World*, T& T Clark International, 2005, pp. 158-164.

in the book of *Psalms*. The image of Messiah included in the book of *Psalms* should be regarded from a double perspective.<sup>20</sup>

1. First of all, given that Messiah must be a descendant of the Davidian dynasty, He must be the King in the messianic era. The Book of *Psalms* portrays a messianic *King* of divine origin, against whom nations will rage in vain (Ps 2). The messianic era is described in Ps 72, while in Ps 2 the kingdom is depicted as a universal kingdom which belongs to God, but which is ruled by Messiah, along with God.<sup>21</sup> In Ps 110, Messiah is the King, the Priest and the Triumphant, who is seated in glory, at the right hand of God. Ps 45 shows the eternal ruling of God, while Ps 72 emphasised the universality of the messianic reign.<sup>22</sup>

2. Secondly, the book of *Psalms* prepares man's mind to accept the idea of a suffering Messiah.<sup>23</sup> *Isaiah* 53 finds its parallel in the *Psalms*. The anointed of God, the Priest-King, whose throne shall last forever and whose peaceful and holy reign shall bestow blessing upon the nations, must accept a dreadful suffering (Ps 22; 69, etc.).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, before Jesus Christ interpreted these psalms to the Apostles, they were not considered messianic psalms (Luke 24,27-46). It is only after God enlightened the Apostles, that the Church started to grasp the significance of these passages from the Psalms and included the book of *Psalms* as a book of prayers and chants of the Church.

### III. SPIRITUALITY OF THE PSALMS IN THE PATRISTIC HERMENEUTICS

By way of excellence, Saint Basil the Great is part of the admirable gallery of the Holy Fathers who have defined the Christian spirituality, a true spirituality that fully engages man in a fulfilment and salvation process. Thus, it is only natural to reserve a space for Saint Basil the Great in our work, Saint who evidenced probably better than anyone the spiritual value of the Psalms.<sup>25</sup>

Before emphasizing the spiritual value of the Psalms, we believe that it is necessary from a methodological point of view to define the spirituality from the Christian perspective.

Our relation to God, the prayer, the whole Church cult are included in what we specifically refer to as *spirituality*, they are actually the most perfect expression of the spiritual life.<sup>26</sup>

“In the current linguistic use, by spirituality, derived from *spiritus* we generally understand the things that are connected to inner life and spiritual preoccupations as opposed to the material, corporeal aspects.”<sup>27</sup> The word spirituality includes aspects of the civilization,

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<sup>20</sup> See Diac. Prof. Dr., Em. Cornițescu, „Persoana lui Mesia și lucrarea Sa în lumina profețiilor vechi-testamentare”, în *Studii Teologice*, an XXXVII, nr. 9-10, 1985, p. 606-615.

<sup>21</sup> Pr. Prof. Nicolae Neaga, „Împărăția păcii (Isaia 2, 4)”, în *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, an XXXIII, nr. 8-9, 1957, p. 569-574.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> See Pr. Prof., Nicolae Neaga, „Profețiile despre Hristos în preocupările Sfinților Părinți”, în *Altarul Banatului*, an II, 10-12, 1991, p. 7-10;

<sup>24</sup> See Pr. Prof., Vl. Prelipcean, „Pacea mesianică la profeții Vechiului Testament”, în *Studii Teologice*, an VI, nr. 1-2, 1954, p. 3-16; Pr. Prof., Nicolae Neaga, „Pacea în viziunea profeților”, în *Mitropolia Ardealului*, an XXVII, nr. 1-3, 1984, p. 123-128.

<sup>25</sup> Vezi Preot lect. Dr. Constantin Băjău, „Aspecte din viața creștinilor, oglindite în comentariul Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur la Epistola către Coloseni”, în *Altarul Banatului*, an XVII, nr. 1-3, 2006, p. 24-23

<sup>26</sup> Ieromonah Gabriel Bunge, *Practica Rugăciunii Personale după Tradiția Sfinților Părinți sau Comoara în Vase de Lut*, traducere de Diac. Ioan Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1996, p. 31; Philippe de Lignerolles, Jean-Pierre Meynard, *Histoire de la spiritualité chrétienne: 700 auteurs spirituels*, Editions de l'Atelier, 1996, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

the entire culture and especially man's relation to God and his neighbours. In Christianity the word "*spiritual*" is a referral to the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus Sanctus*). True spirituality is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the human soul. It means that the human existence is subordinated to the spirit that reveals to the human being the heavenly origin of the entire existence and draws the itinerary and the purpose of the spiritual life. In Christianity there are different spiritualities (orthodox, catholic, protestant, etc.) but there are also important spiritualities in the world outside Christianity. The conscious subordination of our spirit to the infinite sovereignty of God means living our own spirituality. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me"<sup>28</sup>. Spiritual life comes from above. It is inaugurated by God himself with the gift of his presence and it develops inside man. This very comprehensive and vague significance of the spirituality concept can have a negative effect on the Christian understanding of spiritual life because very many things that belong to completely different spheres now appear to be spiritual.<sup>29</sup>

Spirituality means the character of what is spiritual but also a set of ideas that characterize a collectivity. In Christianity the two ideas are one and the mentioned danger of considering false spiritualities as true ones no longer exists once we study deeper the orthodox spirituality.

In ancient Christian times, so also in the time of Saint Basil, the Psalter was the prayer book of Christians in their private cult but also of the Church in its public cult.

The interpretation method used by Saint Basil the Great in this important work of his is generally a literal one. The Great Father does not seek hidden meanings in the words of the psalmists except for the cases where the allegoric meaning is expressly highlighted by the psalmist itself as it happens in Psalm 44 which is considered to be a truly messianic psalm by the entire patristic exegetic tradition represented by Saint Athanasius the Great<sup>30</sup>, Saint John Chrysostom<sup>31</sup>, Saint Augustine<sup>32</sup>, etc. This way, the exegesis of Saint Basil the Great is one of the soundest principles of the patristic hermeneutics. In its comment, Saint Basil the Great uses the comment of his predecessor Eusebius of Caesarea, as obviously demonstrated by Garner in *Prefatio* to the work of Saint Basil the Great<sup>33</sup>. This however does not decrease the value of the work we are discussing. On the contrary it reveals the vast culture of its author.

The psalm comment of Saint Basil the Great is not a critic philological work, as Origen's *Exapla* tried to be, but it is a work to disseminate the teachings of the psalms among simple Christians who are eager to learn these teachings and apply them in their daily life, a skilful deciphering of the psalmist's words. The permanent application of the psalmist's words to the everyday life of the Christian is an essential characteristic of the psalm comment of Saint Basil the Great. This is precisely what makes this work so important for the moral and social life of the Christians.<sup>34</sup>

#### IV. PSALM 50 - MATRIX OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF REPENTANCE (TESHUBAH)

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<sup>28</sup> Ap 3, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Gabriel Bunge, *op.cit*, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> *Expositiones in Psalmos*, Migne P.G., vol. XXVII, col. 59-591

<sup>31</sup> *Omilii la Psalmi*, p. 251.

<sup>32</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, vol. XXXVI, col. 485.

<sup>33</sup> *Vezi Homiliae in Psalmos*, PG, Vol. XXIX, col. 208-209.

<sup>34</sup> Pr. Mihai Georgescu, „Idei morale și sociale în comentariul la Psalmi al Sf. Vasile cel Mare”, în *Studii Teologice*, an X, nr. 7-8, 1958, p. 464.

In this chapter we aim to analyse the importance of repentance as an ontological way to rediscover the normality of spiritual life through the psalms' theology. The relevance of this aspect is vital to our scientific approach since it is an essential element in the spiritual valorisation of the Psalms in Christian life. In this respect we will try to achieve a correspondence with the elements of Christian spirituality in order to highlight the verification of the same spiritual exercise that facilitates the man – God personal relation.

Psalm 50, Have mercy on me, O God, definitely defines the profound spirituality in which man verifies its moral conscience as a possibility to normalize life.

The prayer *Yahve Hanneni*<sup>35</sup> – *God have mercy on me* can easily be discovered in the four categories consecrated by the psalms (to praise, to supplicate, didactics and liturgical). In its internal structure, the syntagm God have mercy on me sums up the idea of worshipping God and of humbly requesting merciful grace. This was naturally assumed by the Judaic collective mentality and subsequently was promoted both in education and in the cult structures. The same phenomenon happened in Christianity where the prayer God have mercy on me that was taken over by the New Testament writings was assumed and used by the entire Christian spirituality in view of an inner union with God. In what follows we will systematically present the way in which this prayer was received in the Judaic and Christian specialty literature.

## V. THE PRAYER IN THE PSALMS – THE AUTHENTICITY OF MAN IN HIS RELATION TO GOD

A lot of psalms are true prayers for God for the blessings generously bestowed upon its people (psalms 45, 47, 65, 67, 75, 80, 97, 123, 125, 128, 149). The divine blessings and providential action that are bestowed upon individuals in particular are also highlighted in thanks giving psalms like psalms 22, 33, 35, 90, 102, 115, 144, 145. In other psalms the richness of the ground's fruits is thanked for (psalms 64 and 84).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The basic meaning of the verb *Hānan* from which comes the imperative form *Hannē'ni* – *have mercy on me* is that of *being merciful to someone* or *to have mercy on*, but its meanings have a lot of nuances. The verb *hanan* is used in the Scripture most frequently at qal and hitpa'el. The form qal has the meaning of being merciful, showing mercy, and the other one implies the action of seeking clemency from God (in most of the situations) or from humans (cf. Genesis 42, 21). In both situations the word *hanan* underlines patience within an interpersonal relation. This might refer either to a normal warm welcome or to kindness or to a specially granted favour: clemency, mercy or generosity. In the case of the last category the verb expresses each time a transcendental act. Unlike the verb *hanan* which directs the attention on the person who is merciful, the noun *Hēn* focuses on the receiving person and on what is given. The basic meaning of this term is *grace* or *favour*. Although the second meaning is more important than the first one (regarding the approach of the work) because it refers to the positive attitude of one person towards another who is in need or suffers, we cannot neglect the other meaning. Of the 69 occurrences of *hen* in the Scripture, 43 are included in the syntagm *mā'cā' Hēn Bū'ēnē* – *to find grace/mercy in the eyes of God* or another person (cf. Genesis 6, 8; Exodus 33, 13; 1 Reigns 20, 3 etc.). The correlation of the concept *hen* with that of *figure/face* is not a random one. In the Book of Psalms, God is often asked to turn his face towards people to show mercy (Ps. 24, 16; 85, 15, 118, 58). Thus showing the face includes a favourable disposition towards a person and hiding it proves an adversity, hate or contempt. If God turns his face away, the prayers and the cry for mercy have no answer and the salvation does not appear (Ps. 30, 23-24; 54, 1-2). For more details regarding the origin and the meaning that this word has in the Old Testament see John Kohlenberger and James Swanson, *The Hebrew English Concordance to the Old Testament with the New International Version*, Zondervan Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998, p. 2854; Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, translated by David. E. Green, W. B.

<sup>36</sup> Drd. Macedon Petrescu, „Creația și providența în Cartea Psalmilor”, în *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, nr. 3, 1986, p.78.

Prayers of thanks for deliverance from hardships and difficult times are expressed in psalms 9, 17, 20, 29, 74, 106, 117, 120, 137, 143.<sup>37</sup> The great grace of God is praised in Psalm 102. Most of the psalms are prayers of request that can be used in any circumstance. This is the case of Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 16, 25, 27, 30, 34, 40, 43, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 59, 63, 69, 85, 108, 124, 128, 139, 141, 142. A lot of psalms talk about Israel's enemies which have invaded the country on numerous occasions and committed a lot of crimes. The divine wrath against them is requested in Psalms 73, 78, 79, 82. In Psalms 19, 60, 119, 120, 140 there are requests for special gifts for different circumstances of life. Psalm 11 is a prayer for delivering from hardships and Psalms 12, 87, 101, 122, 142 include requests of a sad soul. Other psalms reveal the sincere desire to see or to be near the Temple of God (psalms 41, 62, 83, 121). The psalms regarding the entrusting of man in the divine power are 26, 46, 61, 70, 89, 90.<sup>38</sup>

Of the *Old Testament* books the closest to everybody's heart and the most searched for was the Psalter. For good reason, because the Psalter has many answers to the unrests of the human soul and the soul which is destroyed by the burden of sin finds its peace and comfort.

Saint John Chrysostom considers the *Psalter* as a teaching treasure, a book anyone can read. He says "If you are poor and because of poverty you cannot buy books or if you have books and you do not have the time to read them, take into consideration the answers given by the Psalms that you have heard here. Not once, not twice, not thrice but very many times you will feel a great relief. You will come to realize the importance of this. No one should say "I cannot know their power if they are not explained to me because even before the explanation just hearing them is enough in order to be understood by anyone."<sup>39</sup>

In what regards our interests in this section, the content of the psalms is varied, some have a historic character, make direct or indirect reference to events experienced by the people or by their creator himself (9, 10, 43, 48, 49, 72, 74, 77, 86, 88, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 113, 16, 135, 136); other psalms have a didactic and dogmatic character, describe the almightiness of God evident upon creation and the care he has for all its creatures (103); others have a moral character, expressing the repentance for the sins committed and imploring divine mercy (50)<sup>40</sup>. However, most of the psalms are created as a prayer under its three aspects: praise, request and thanks giving.

## VI. FAMOUS PSALTERS IN ROMANIAN AND THEIR SPIRITUAL VALORISATION

The Romanian Principalities maintained close contact both with Latin Christians and with Byzantine Christians. Many monks and hierarchs sought refuge in the Romanian Principalities because of the hard times in history. Romanian rulers have supported Mount Athos monasteries politically, economically and culturally. From here, Saint Nicodim, originary from Macedonia, born from a Greek father and a Serbian mother seeks refuge in Wallachia and builds the Vodita and Tismana monasteries. In the Romanian monasteries many calligraphers and miniaturists copied manuscripts necessary for the divine cult. The

<sup>37</sup> Vezi Arhim. Gerasim Timuș, „Note și meditațiuni asupra Psalmilor”, în *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, an XI, nr. 1, 1887, p. 44-70.

<sup>38</sup> Vezi Drd. Macedon Petrescu, „Despre rugăciune în cartea Psalmilor”, în *Studii Teologice*, an XXXV, nr. 9-10, 1984, p. 666-672.

<sup>39</sup> Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Psalmi*, traducere din limba greacă veche de Laura Enache, Doxologia, Iași, 2011, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Vezi Pr. T. Negoită, *Psaltirea în cultul Bisericii Ortodoxe*, București, 1940, p. 21-22.

wide circulation of these Slavonic and Romanian manuscripts is also certified by the fact that today they are carefully kept in the great museums from Moscow, Mount Athos, Vienna, Oxford, Munchen, Siria and Jerusalem. Romanian monasteries accommodated true rare libraries which unfortunately have been lost. A lot of Romanian manuscripts have been recovered from the Neamt and the Bistrita monasteries (from Wallachia). Numerous copiers were priests or monks who went to great lengths to copy the cult books and especially the Psalter. Nicodim himself was a monk with a vast knowledge and a talented calligrapher. Before the print was invented, the art of calligraphy flourished. Philipp the hieromonk, Gavriil Urikovici or Melantia from Leontopol are but a few of the Romanian calligraphers and the miniaturists who worked in the principalities or for the Romanian principalities.<sup>41</sup> Some of the Romanian calligraphers are Atanasie Crimca, Teodor Mirișescu, Radu Drăghici or Popa Ion Sârbu. Today, the Romanian Academy Library has over 80 Psalter manuscripts in Slavonic and Romanian and many other documents have gone to museums or foreign libraries. It is important to mention the fact that the texts of the cult books circulated in Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia long before the foundation of the Romanian feudal states.

The Psalms have been an inspiration both for the universal literature and for the Romanian one. Ion Heliade Radulescu observes the importance of translating holy books for the formation of the Romanian language. The Bible texts, once they were translated, appeared in a historical moment for the Romanian people, “We have the Bible on the eve of danger”.<sup>42</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The Psalter, as all the other Old Testament writings, is a religious-moral guide, applicable to all times, inclusive current ones. These psalms inspired by God, are highly valuable for Christians from a moral perspective, as they cultivate pioussness and fight against sin. Being written under divine inspiration, all psalms, as well as all the Old Testament writings, lead man to Jesus, Who after Ressurrection and during His three years and a half of public activity, preached about those written about Him, apart from Moses’ Law and the Prophets (Luke 24, 44). Contemporary deviations could be avoided by discovering the spiritual beauty of the pslams. Rejecting faith and leading a disorderly life results in a moral-social impas that characterizes the entire Christian Europe. This religious-moral harm spreads like a disease that makes its victims in a society deprived of the Christian reference points. The best remedy for limiting or eradicating this social malady is to support the religious principles and those contained in the book of pslams, as they have a broad spectrum for extirpating evil from Christians’ lives.

The return of the modern man to faith can be achieved by learning the Christian values and having a positive thinking which is linked to good and social justice. It is this context that should include the message of the Psalms - a true spring of virtues that any man needs to follow.

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<sup>41</sup> *Idem*, p. 35

<sup>42</sup> I. H. Rădulescu, *Biblicele sau notiții istorice, filosofice, religioase și politice asupra Bibliei*, Paris, 1958, după Al. Andriescu *Psalmi în literatura română*, Editura Universității A. I. Cuza, Iași, 2004, p. 143



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