

UNIVERSITY “OVIDIUS” – CONSTANTA

DOCTORAL SCHOOL

SUMMARY

DOCTORAL THESIS

**REDEMPTION IN THE NEW
TESTAMENT AND AT THE HOLY
FATHERS**

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KEY WORDS: Theology, New Testament, Redeemer Jesus Christ, Paul the Apostle, incarnation, redemption, deification, spiritualisation (*pneumatisation*).

Writing a PhD thesis on Redemption is a difficult exercise in order to translate in writing the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, a work better understood by assuming it. But, due to objective reasons, because the present society can no longer rationally get into understanding this sacrament for the existence of man, due to living within the logic of materialism and secularisation, we consider that an updating of this issue is more than necessary. The dogma of Redemption plays a central part within the Christian teaching. That is why, Christianity, in its proper meaning, was named the religion of Redemption. "In Christianity, there is no more fundamental truth than Redemption". It is the most important and divine act; any attempt to get into it or understand it in its completeness does not exhaust its profoundness of sacrament. It is "the forever hidden sacrament of God" (Ephesians 9) and revealed to humans "But when the fullness of the time was come ... to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galathians IV, 4-5), "unto our glory" (I Corinthians II,7) and to "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you" (I Corinthians, I,6). Contemplating on it, Paul the Apostle exclaimed in admiration: "Oh, the *depth* of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Romans, XL 13).

Redemption, in its strict meaning, is the chapter of Christian soteriology displaying the sacrament of our salvation from sin, injury and death, through incarnation, earthly life, teaching, Passions, death and resurrection of the Redeemer Jesus Christ. The dogma on Redemption is strongly connected to the dogma on falling into sin. "As the teaching about falling shows how the man fell from the divine happiness into the depth of perdition and death, as well the teaching on Redemption deals with the way the man ascends through Jesus Christ and steps forward in the work of moral renaissance", understood in such a way, Redemption represents the main mission of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and especially the result attributed to His whole life and activity. That is why, He is often called only by the name of Messiah or Redeemer.

In the Old Testament, we find a simple idea about Redemption, embodied in types, symbols and phantasms. In the New Testament, they insist mainly on the description of

Redemption and of its beneficent fruitage, without insisting on defining the core of this divine act, this is actually the continuous freshness of Redemption, its inexhaustible power of renewal. There is hardly a Christian truth to be stated more from the beginning and to be maintained thereafter in more uniformity. The dogma on Redemption did not established theological disputes with other dogmas (trinitarian, christological, marilogical etc.). Also, it was not disputed directly by any category of heretics. As the Holy Book, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the clerical writers, the symbols and creeds, from the first eight centuries, do not provide an explanatory theory or system on Redemption; they insist on asserting and describing the reality of the historical fact: the Son of God incarnated, suffered, died, resurrected and translated for our redemption. That explains how the dogma on Redemption, although permanently asserted, was not enunciated exactly, as they enunciated, for example, the trinitarian and christological dogmas. But one cannot say that there not any attempts in this matter. Accidentally or during the clarification of another dogma, especially about the christological one, the Holy Fathers and the clerical writers tried to penetrate this great mystery of Christianity, insisting on its different aspects, especially Saint Irenaeus, Saint Athanasius the Great, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Saint Gregory of Nice and Saint John of Damascus, who brought a significant contribution in developing and enunciating the dogma on Redemption, that will be subsequently specified in the theologians' creeds and writings.

Altogether, the work of Redemption is considered as salvation and deliverance of man from the ancestral sin and his ascension on a higher level of existence through and into Jesus Christ. The sin has as many aspects as Redemption has. If the sin is a decadence, Redemption is an ascension, a restoration; if the sin is weakness and illness of the nature, Redemption is recovery and reinforcement of that nature; if the sin is mastering some passionate effusions, Redemption is deliverance; if the sin is straying from God, Redemption is coming closer to Him. That is why Redemption includes the reconciliation of man with God, his enlightenment with the teaching of the Gospel and rising and boosting for the better of his helpless will. Our Lord Jesus Christ performed those three works by His triple service: as bishop appeasing, as prophet studying and as emperor by founding His Church on earth. That is why the exposition on the work about Redemption is made under this triple aspect: bishop service, prophetic and king-like. Paul the Apostle expresses all three of them concisely, when he says that Jesus Christ "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1

Corinthians I, 30). But the centre of the triple work of God is his bishop service by which He reconciled man with God. The other two services are more means towards achieving the main purpose which is Redemption, the prophetic service preparing the man for receiving it, through the enlightened teaching, and the king-like one offering the grace of Redemption and accomplishing the believer into the kingdom of God.

As far as understanding and explanation of Redemption is concerned, they enunciated a few different theories ever since the Patristic period, emphasizing more an aspect or another. These are: the theory of substitutionary atonement, the penal, satisfaction, ontological or deification, scholar-like, recapitulative and moral theories. The theory of Redemption, occurring under different forms at some of the fathers and clerical writers, sometimes comes closer to the ontological one. Ultimately, the work of Redemption is reduced to three general aspects: 1) the sacrifice aspect, also including the substitutionary atonement, penal and satisfaction one, 2) the recapitulative one that is strongly connected to the moral one, and 3) the ontological one, or even reduced to two general aspects including all the others: 1) the objective aspect - theocentric, regarding Redemption in its aspect related to God, and 2) the subjective aspect - anthropologic, regarding the aspect related to man. The different aspects of Redemption are but the different faces of the same divine act, strongly interconnected.

Redemption is in complete correspondence with Incarnation, which states its significance. "The word became flesh" - this is the sacrament proclaimed by Christianity: the reality of Incarnation of the Son of God in history. The Orthodox teaching about Jesus Christ, Son of God incarnated, has two inseparable parts: a) the Person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, in its ontological, teandric and hypostatic reality; and b) service of Jesus Christ in its messianic, iconomic and historical configuration. Regarding incarnation, the orthodox theology emphasized the following essential elements.

God who incarnates as Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah of Israel, is the one and the same with "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" (John, 1, 18): "Light from Light, true God from true God". Therefore, Jesus Christ is - and Paul the Apostle insists on this truth - "who is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1,15), "for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2, 9), "our life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3, 3). Jesus Christ is the eternal Logos (Apocalypse 19, 13), the Lord of greatness (Corinthians 7, 3) who became man and became messiah, the Redeemer of the peoples (Ephessians 3, 6; Timothy

2, 5), and not a Jesus of Nazareth that the paschal-apostolic church would have recognised as Messiah and thereafter proclaimed Him Christ and Redeemer. Thus, the one born from "Virgin Mary and Holy Spirit" is one and the same with the Son of God, one of the Trinity, who discovered Himself before incarnation, too. The Son of eternal God is made by incarnation and redemption, Messiah, the Saviour of the world. And not any Messiah becomes the Son of God.

The grace of incarnation (John 1, 14; Apocalypse 21, 3) is always expressed by two names: *theophany* and *birth*. Teophany, because it is about the coming and appearance of the Son of God, the one with the Father, born from eternity, but who does not blend or identify with the Father. Birth, because He assumed His entire humanity from Virgin Mary, i.e. an animated body and intelligent soul, having an hypostasis made up of two natures with their natural features, united with no confusion. A true God and a genuinely complete man, who became man, or what it was not before in order to make man God, what he never was. Therefore, He deified us and is deifying us through His deification, and not only through His Body. Because this is not separated from Him.

The person of Jesus Christ has the hypostatic identity of the Word itself, in which He joined, without blending, divinity and humanity. In this regard, Saint Maximus the Confessor states: "So the Word itself, clearing Itself, veiling Itself with no change and actually receiving the character suffered or the one that we naturally have, and by incarnation, really conforming to the natural sentence, He called Himself as God seen and God from below, having shown the infinite power through suffering-like body. Because the body visibly joined God and became one (with Him), the superior part defeating (over the other), as the Word, by hypostatic identity, really deified the body that He took". "He became one", but not "she-one", is the patristic expression, emphasizing the fact that also in the identity of the unique hypostasis, the heterogeneity of the united ones remained non-merged. Because the first term indicates the hypostasis, and the second indicates the nature.

The history of redemption can be divided into two large periods: the ages assigned to the incarnation of God and the ages assigned to the deification of man: "The one who created the entire seen and unseen construction only by the power of His will, had before all times, so even before the creation of the world, a too good and unspoken plan about it. And that was for Himself to join, with no change, with the nature of men, through true union in an hypostasis, and to join the human nature with Himself in an unchangeable way. And that was for Him to become

a man, as only He knew, and to make man be God through union with Himself. In this regard, he divided the ages reasonably, arranging some of them for the work through which He made Himself human, and others for the work through which He made man to be God. The end of the ages, decided beforehand for the work through which He made Himself human, reached us, the advice of God regarding incarnation being accomplished by making it. And thinking the divine Apostle about it and seeing that, regarding the ages decided by God to become man, it was accomplished by the incarnation of God the Word, he says that «the end of ages reached us». thus, it is not at all about the ages arranged by us, but those arranged to accomplish the grace of incarnation, that reached their end by the decision of God” (Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Answers to Thalassius*, 22).

Many theological interpretations and explanations were given to the act of Incarnation, either as revelation, or as redemption or deification, or as an act of kenosis. For some, Incarnation is coextensive with God's eternal plan concerning the creation. The Incarnation is concordant with the originary fate of humanity, that of becoming a body of manifestation of God. In Incarnation, the creation is shown as a whole, because the Logos, as general rationale of creation, includes the cosmos in Itself.

For the clerical Fathers speculating in this regard, Incarnation neither comes from the universal history, nor it is a necessity of the evolution of creation, but it is inherent to the iconomy of redemption, that for Saint Maximus the Confessor is coextensive to the iconomy of creation. Others make a direct connection between incarnation and redemption from sin or the restoration of man to his condition before the sin. The sole motif of Incarnation is God's love for men, definitively re-establishing them in their originary communion with their Creator. God moves toward his creation, out of love, accepts the birth after the body, without leaving His eternity. Incarnation is a "new act" in God's life, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus,, in this regard, speaks about "renewal" (...), because the divine nature "renews" in the act of incarnation. Others emphasized the "kenotic" aspect of incarnation, because the God Son wanted to make an example that there is the possibility of a life without sins, even after the fall. That is why, the divine nature compressed, adjusted to man's needs. God did not redeem us from a distance, but He identified with us, as a historical and alive God, that allows Himself to experience the life of man.

The contemporary society is under the empire of a critical cultural dynamism, defined as post-modernism, a term defining a new rule in understanding of culture, religion, society. Christianity, just like religion in general, is subject to the criticism of post-modernism, announcing the paradigm of a "post-modernist Christianity" that should cope with the new requirements of the contemporary society; a Christianity free of the transcendent God, everything being reduced to an immanent and social equation. In theology, some post-modern tendencies are under the deconstructivist Derrida's ideas, others are the mere expression to adjust the Christian theology to the reality of social, ethnic and religious pluralism to the market consumerism.

The programme of post-modernism to set up the Christianity to the new super-technology social paradigm, is carried out on three main directions: devalorisation of dogmas, deinstitutionalization of Church and privatisation of religion or its avoidance from the public area into the private one. They propose a Christianity free of a public, official creed, as a mark of the Christian identity, free of the reference to transcendent, as pronounced by Gerrit Neven: "The true faith can better be imagined without than with God as its object, having a more effective status".

If God is a matter belonging to words, and deconstruction is a matter belonging to language, the post-modern thinking cancels any dogmatic reception in asserting and defending the Christian faith. Doctrinal definitions are futile, and an a-dogmatic theology lays down the boundary of a "faith without precepts and especially without the image of a metaphysical God".

But theology is not an elaboration of the speculative exercise of the reason, it is based on the reality of Revelation. By the act of Revelation of God, Christianity can communicate a teaching of what is beyond the physical, natural world, can have a dialogue about transcendence, without including it in terms and concepts. Although God, in Its being, is impenetrable for ever, as a Person, He states the man as a partner of the loving dialogue. It is probably the inability of philosophy and even of the western theology to understand the orthodox teaching about the uncreated energies, exposed by Saint Gregory Palamas, the teaching on the divine sacrament and its compliance with the human nature, essentially the understanding of orthodox apophatism, that led to a scepticism of the real absence of God from the immanent plan of the creation. Counting on the dialectics of negation in the gnoseological exercise, the deconstruction of theology is

nothing but the expected outcome in the plan of western culture, and "the death of God" is the official voice of non understanding the divine.

The deconstruction of theology written in a typical Derrida manner, lies in the devalorisation of the religious language, and implicitly of the doctrinary teachings, and that is why, the relevance of this PhD thesis proposes an updating of Redemption under its theological and spiritual aspect.

The theological issue of Redemption was treated in the Romanian theology continuously, being an essential element of Christology. We can mention here Alexiu Comoroșanu - *Prelegeri academice de Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Academic lectures on Orthodox Dogmatics) (Cernăuți, 1889), Iosif Olariu - *Manual de Teologie Dogmatică* (Textbook of Dogmatic Theology) (Caransebeș, 1907), Metropolitan Irineu Mihălcescu - *Dogma soteriologică*, (Soteriological dogma) (Bucharest, 1926), Nicolae Chițescu - *Răscumpărarea în Sfânta Scriptură și în scrierile Sfinților Părinți*, (Redemption in the Holy Book and in the writings of the Holy Fathers), PhD thesis (Bucharest, 1937), *Teoria recapitulațiunii (anakephalaiosis) la Sf. Irineu*, (Theory of recapitulation at Saint Irenaeus) in „Studii Teologice”, year VII, 1938-1939, pp. 115-140, *Întrupare și Răscumpărare în Biserica Ortodoxă și în cea Romano-catolică*, (incarnation and Redemption in the Orthodox Church and the Roman-Catholic one) in „Ortodoxia”, year VII, 1956, no. 4. p. 538-576, Benedict Ghiuș - *Faptul răscumpărării în imnografia Bisericii Ortodoxe*, (Act of redemption in hymnography of the orthodox Church) in „Studii Teologice”, year XXII, 1970, no. 1-2, p. 70-103, *Faptul răscumpărării în ciclul Întrupării*, (Act of redemption in the cycle of Incarnation) in „Studii Teologice”, no. 3-4, p. 230-249, *Faptul răscumpărării în ciclul vieții publice a Domnului*, (Act of redemption in the cycle of God's public life) in „Studii Teologice”, no. 5-6, p. 406-430; *Faptul răscumpărării în ciclul Sfintelor Patimi*, (Act of redemption in the cycle of the Holy passios) in „Studii Teologice”, no. 9-10, p. 649-684; *Faptul răscumpărării în ciclul Învierii*, (Act of redemption in the cycle of Resurrection) in „Studii Teologice”, year XXIII, 1971, no. 3-4, p. 186-210; *Faptul răscumpărării și diavolul în imnografia Bisericii*, (Act of redemption and the devil in the hymnography of the Church) in „Studii Teologice”, 1971, no. 9-10, p. 692-719, Maxim Nicolae - *Răscumpărarea în teologia Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, (Redemption in the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor) in „Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei”, 1981, no. 7-9, pp. 447-469.

After the 90's, a series of Romanian theologians brought in the limelight the issue of Redemption approached in dependence with Incarnation. Our contribution does not want to be a reiteration of what these theologian stated, but it proposes to gradate Redemption at the level of new testament and of concept.

Our analysis traced the emphasis of those orthodox theological directions to explain Redemption on the hermeneutics of biblical texts, of the relationship between Incarnation and Redemption in the explanations of Saints Athanasius the Great, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Nicholas Kabasilas and, not lastly, of the gradation of the importance of Redemption within the existential dimension of the present day man.

To that effect, I used the exegetical - hermeneutic method, by which I interpreted the biblical texts in a dogmatic perspective, the analytic method, by which I offered the significance of some biblical terms defining Redemption, such as: λύω, λύσις, καταλύω, εκλύω, απολύω etc., and the systematic method, that helped me provide a dogmatic framework to the meaning of Redemption and to the consequences implied by it for the salvation of man. For a more thorough approach of the subject and of the conceptual delimitations, I appealed to different dictionaries and encyclopaedias: *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Barclay M. Newman, Jr., Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft United Bible Societies, Hendrickson Publishers, 2003; *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Ed.), Baker Book House Company, Grand Rapids, 2005; *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, Ralph P. Martin and Peters H. Davids (Eds.), InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1997; *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman (Ed.), Grand Rapids, Cambridge, 2000; *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier (Ed.), HarperCollins Publishers Inc., New York, 1996; *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 4, David Noel Freedman (Ed.), Doubleday, London, New York, 1992; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Abridged in One Volume*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Comapany, Grand Rapids, 1985. The specialised literature includes the writings of the Holy Fathers (*Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, (Fathers and clerical writers), EIBMBOR, Bucharest and J. P. Migne (Ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus*, Paris, 1844-1866), well-known biblical comments in the biblical research of the New Testament, theology books and studies.

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