

The theological education in Kiev and Cluj-Napoca Between history and perspectives

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Abstract:

There was a long history of collaboration between the Ukrainian and the Romanian theological institutions, in particular during the time of Peter Mogila, Metropolitan of Kiev, born in Moldavia. Since then the theological methodology was developed using the common theological tradition of Kiev, Iași or Bucharest. This paper is dedicated, in the first section, to this mutual organisational influence, then, the second chapter is focused on the theological education of Cluj-Napoca in the frame of the heritage of the aforementioned theological academies. Finally, the third section puts in discussion some general principles regarding the theological methodology around the binome *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy* in the contemporary times.

Keywords:

Theological Academy of Kiev, Peter Moghila, Theological education in Cluj-Napoca, theology and experience, ascetic theology.

1. Saint Peter Mogila and the Romanians

We express our joy for being present today at this exceptional academic event, upon the celebration of 400 years of existence of the Academy in Kiev, founded by Metropolitan Peter Moghila. The name of the great hierarch is linked to a *Confession of Faith (Expositio fidei)*, examined and corrected by the Synod of Iași in 1642, translated into Greek by the great theologian Meletius Syrigos and

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The theological education in Kiev and Cluj-Napoca. Between history and perspectives

approved in the Synod of Constantinople a year later. Its translation into numerous languages shows the great importance it had to the heterodox proselytism at the time, confronting Catholics and Protestants.

A remarkable ecclesiastical figure, Metropolitan Peter Mogila was a visionary and a man of his times too. At the jubilee celebrating 400 years since his birth, at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, on November 5th, 1996, Madeleine Gobeil, Director of the Division of Art and cultural life of UNESCO, stated: „Peter Mogila was known as a remarkable theologian, supporter of the enlightenment, humanist, organiser, reformer and especially the initiator of Ukraine’s national and cultural renewal. His numerous projects, which he aimed to accomplish, had a strategic feature and were oriented towards the future. Thus was, for instance, his idea regarding a united Europe, as well as the union of the West and the East.... The spiritual and educational inheritance left by Peter Mogila vows for his exceptional role in the national, European and worldwide development process, as well as the inseparable union of his ideas and deeds”¹.

This exceptional church representative was a descendant of the Moldavian Mogila family, born in Suceava in 1596. Consequently, he represents an important historical gift made by the Romanian Orthodox Church to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. But this remarkable Romanian, through his assumed position, maintained and strengthened kin and cultural-ecclesiastical relations with the home Church, both the one in Moldova and the one in Wallachia. There are numerous examples of cooperation between the Kiev Church and the Romanian countries, seen in school inaugurations, giving out printing offices to various monasteries (Câmpulung, Govora, to the ruler Vasile Lupu), in the assistance given to the printing of the first books, some of them translated into Ukrainian. Moreover, upon the requests of the Romanian rulers, teachers and printers from Ukraine worked in local educational facilities and in the newly-established printing houses. The most suggestive example is the setting up of a college in Iași, in 1640, based on the model of the Kiev school, with a staff of teachers coming from Kiev, starting with Sofronie Pociatki.

There were also exchange visits between the Churches. Varlaam, the Moldavian Metropolitan, pays a visit to Kiev in 1629, and in 1645, Metropolitan Peter Mogila visits Moldova, in Iași, where he officiated the religious wedding ceremony between ruler Vasile Lupu’s daughter, Maria, and Ianuș Radziwil. The light rose in Moldova, shone in Ukraine, but cast its rays again unto the mother ground² and in all neighbouring Orthodox countries and universal Orthodoxy.

¹ Anton Buteiko, „Mitropolitul Kievului, Petru Movilă, marele militant cultural și bisericesc de nivel mondial”, in *Sinodul de la Iași și Sfântul Petru Movilă*, Trinitas, Iași, 2002, p. 19-20.

² *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române II*, EIBMBOR, București, 1958, p. 10.

Arhim. Assist. Prof. Benedict Valentin Vesa

With reference to the College of “The Three Hierarchs” in Iași, where 300-400 undergraduates were studying, the teaching was made in Greek and Latin, while the church service was performed in Slavic. In a document of the epoch it was mentioned that ruler Vasile Lupu, „upon seeing the lack of good educators in our country... called good teachers who were willing to learn and teach from Kiev, from Metropolitan Mogila, Archbishop of Kiev, to provide guidance and light to the children’s minds of our country”³. At the College of “The Three Hierarchs” Monastery one could study Rhetoric, Law, Poetics, and Philosophy. Among the renowned teachers from Kiev, other than Sofronie Pociatki, one may mention Ignațiu Kevlevici, Archimandrite Benedict and Gavriil Vlasios, and also Eustatie Logofătul of those coming from Moldova. The college needed a library, and this was taken care of by the ruler Vasile Lupu, who offered eight volumes with the writings of Saint John Chrysostom in Greek, printed in 1616, in England. Nicolae Milescu, spătar (holder of the royal sword and second in rank after the voivode), also gave the library manuscripts of the Greek Metropolitan Matthew of Myra, liturgical and canonical texts. A very important aspect, and not by chance, is that the dedication day of the college in Iași – the Three Holy Hierarchs – is the same with that of the college Moghila at Brațka Monastery. This prestigious institution was meant to train people and get them well-prepared for the state’s institutions and various work sectors of the Church. Historians claim that great ecclesiastical figures studied here, such as the future Metropolitan Dosoftei of Moldova, Abbot Antonie of Bistrița or Nicolae Milescu.

Therefore, among the numerous foundations set by Mogila, educational facilities were a priority, both on the territory of the Ukrainian Church, and outside. Likewise, on the lineage, as well, at educational level, school facilities, especially the theological ones, are tributary to the visions of this great figure of Church and culture of the epoch. He could see very clearly that change, cultural progress resides in education. Hence, he would write to the czar of Moscow, seeking to convince him of the benefit of setting up schools: „the ruler Vasile of Moldova already knows the divine reward that is brought upon by founding schools with faithful teachers.”⁴.

2. The theological Education in Cluj-Napoca⁵

The blessed year of 1918 meant to our people not only the year when Romania was unified, but also the establishment of Romanian institutions, church-relat-

³ Cf. T. Codrescu, *Uricariul*, VII, Iași, 1886, p. 6-8; Maria Magdalena Szekely, Stefan S. Gorovei, „Contribuții la istoria Trei Ierarhilor”, in *Anuarul Institutului de istorie „A. D. Xenopol”*, 30 (1993), Iași, p. 435-438.

⁴ P. P. Panaitescu, *Istoria orașului Iași*, I, Iași, 1980, p. 262-265.

⁵ For details see Alexandru Moraru, *Învățământul teologic universitar din Cluj (1924-1952)*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996.

The theological education in Kiev and Cluj-Napoca. Between history and perspectives

ed or secular, or the recovery of other ones that had vanished due to the threats of the times. Among these, one must mention as well the revival of the old Dioceses of Vad and Feleac, located in Cluj, in 1921, under the name of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, raised to the rank of Archbishopric in 1973, and become – since 2005 – a Metropolitan see. The cornerstone of Orthodox Theological University Education in Cluj was set by the founder of the Bishopric in Cluj, the venerable bishop Nicolae Ivan, during the year 1924, and the official opening was held on December 6th, 1924, with the celebration of Saint Hierarch Nicholas of Myra, patron saint of the first bishop in Cluj.

The Higher Education Orthodox institution in Cluj went, at the beginning, through three institutional stages and through theological, cultural and pastoral progress: the *Theological Institute* (1924-1925), with three years of study; the *Theological Academy* (1925-1948), with four years of study; the *Theological University Institute* (1948-1952), with four years of study and with the right to grant the title of „graduate in Theology”. Unfortunately, however, in 1952, the Communist regime in Romania abolished this theological school institution, inflicting, this way, a major blow to the very Romanian Orthodox Church.

The curricula and the analytical programs of the institutions above-mentioned were made based on the models of the renowned institutes and faculties in Cernăuți, București and Sibiu, which indicates the accuracy of the Higher Education Orthodox institution in Cluj. At the same time, the disciplines were taught by eminent priests and professors of Theology, who studied at famous European universities or at Cernăuți, many of them martyred in Communist prisons.

The events in December 1989 created favourable conditions for the reinstatement of several Romanian Church and secular valuables. In this context, immediately after the Revolution, discussions over the re-establishment of the old University Theological Institute in Cluj were initiated. With all surmounted difficulties, on October 1st 1990 began the lectures of the new Orthodox Theology University Institute in Cluj-Napoca, with the first two years of study (second year undergraduates were transferred from the Institute in Sibiu), with lay and clergy professors, either transferred from Sibiu or Bucharest, or others who were locals. Starting with October 1st, 1992, the institute was welcomed within „Babeș-Bolyai” University Cluj-Napoca, later to become the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, a status held even today.

The process of training undergraduates was and is held in accordance to the curricula and analytical programs approved by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, for which reason, one kept the old structure: *Biblical, Historical, Systematic and Practical Theology*, and later on organised study programs: *Pastoral Theology, Theology-Philology (Didactic), Theology-Social Assistance and Sacred Art*.

Arhim. Assist. Prof. Benedict Valentin Vesa

The faculty prepares students for the levels *Bachelor degree, Master degree and Doctoral studies*, many of them obtaining scholarships in European countries. The majority of the graduates have become parish priests, Religious Education teachers, social assistants, restorers, church painters etc.

The majority of the professors, with doctoral studies abroad, have a rich scientific activity. Likewise, church and lay figures, foreign theological professors have taught and still give lectures in our Faculty. At the suggestion of our Faculty, Orthodox, Roman-Catholic and Protestant theologians and hierarchs received the *Doctor Honoris Causa* title of Babeş-Bolyai University. At the same time, during the doctoral studies, our professors collaborate with university lecturers teaching disciplines that are not theological, such as: History, Philosophy, Philology, Music etc., from various prestigious universities within the country or from abroad. The priests who teach in the Faculty are engaged in missionary-pastoral activities or even social ones, in actions and representations at theological and ecumenical levels, both inside the country and abroad. The Faculty has a library comprising of over 35,000 volumes and a few thousand magazines and periodicals.

On December 6th, 2013, the new headquarters of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca was inaugurated, an ultramodern five-floor building, whose founder is His Eminence Metropolitan and Archbishop Andrei Andreicuț, the second founder, after Bishop Nicole Ivan, of the Orthodox Theological University Education in Cluj-Napoca.

3. Working method – the study of Theology as a premise for spiritual knowledge

With reference to the study method of Theology, a natural question that arises could be uttered as follows: *how can Theology be studied so as to reflect the guidelines unanimously recognised as scientific ones, and, at the same time, so as not to lose its ascetic-spiritual character?*

For a long time and consistently, we have been accustomed to a disjunctive speech of the type „either, or”, bearing the meaning of the opposition between a speculative, rationalist and scientific Theology and a pietistic, empirical-sentimentalist and a dogmatic Theology. On the other hand, the ancient patristic methodology suggests a conjunctive, holistic approach, showing Theology as making explicit the truth of faith in rational, precise and even intellectually rigorous expression, but with a questioning sense, as a state of living and deeply believing in Christ.

Moreover, one may also speak during this period of *three major meanings* of the term „Theology”: *learning about the Holy Trinity*, making the difference from God’s „Economy” or learning about redemption; on the other hand, it marks, in an

The theological education in Kiev and Cluj-Napoca. Between history and perspectives

Evagrian language, *the final stage of knowing God*; or, taken altogether, it refers to *learning about God-like mysteries, nurtured by the spiritual experience*. The third meaning, in the context of the academic study of Theology, best reflects the complexity of the field. *Orthodoxy* is the rational form of perceived revelation (*orthopraxia*), and *orthopraxia* is the experience of joint faith rationally expressed in doctrines (*orthodoxia*). The fundament of this unity is the very embodiment of Christ, who made the Truth be one with Life (John 14, 6). Hence, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow had the courage to argue the following: „None of the most hidden wisdom mysteries of God must seem distant to us or entirely above us (transcendent), but we should adapt our minds with all humility to the contemplation of the divine”⁶.

The study instrument that a theologian uses in this endeavour is reason, followed by faith. Through reason, the theologian analyses both the word of God and the very creation (the Revelation – the objective truth), and through cataphatic and apophatic expression (what we call *Natural Theology*) utters and communicates the truth of faith.

But this science, accessible only to the wise men of this world, remains limited; it represents merely the „threshold of philosophy and of profane culture”. The cautious theologian knows there is a superior cognitive stage, spiritual knowledge or „the naos of Theology”. At this level, the reason is doubled by the heart, as core of spiritual life, and assisted by the divine grace. Saint Gregory Palamas describes this stage as „intellectual and divine sense”⁷, *sense* referring to the heart (*kardia*), while *intellectual*, to the mind (*nous*), and *divine* indicates the primacy of God’s grace intervention. Therefore, in response to the contemporary humanists, Saint Symeon the New Theologian will say the following: „it is not knowledge that represents light, but it is light that is knowledge”⁸.

Saint Isaac of Syria, upon proposing a gnoseological itinerary, inspired by Saint Basil the Great, explicitly talks of knowledge of the philosophers (rational), in a first stage, and knowledge of the saints, successive. The difference is essential. We shall quote a short excerpt: „There is a pursuit that opens the door so that we may see those below and know the creatures⁹, but not those above, which are holy mysteries”¹⁰. *The philosophers’ knowledge is named here „knowledge of those*

⁶ *Sermons and Addresses of Metropolitan Philaret*, Moscow, 1844, part. II, p. 87, cf. Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, București, Anastasia, 1993, p. 36.

⁷ *Triade I, 3, 19* in Grégoire Palamas, *Défence des saints hésychastes*, Louvain, 1959, p. 150-151.

⁸ *Cateheze. Scrieri II*, Sibiu, Deisis, 20013, Cateheza 28, p. 228-229.

⁹ Evagrian terminology (*Kephalaya Gnostica*, I, 32, 71; V, 76).

¹⁰ Quotation identified only in the Syrian mystics – Dadisho Qatraya și Simon Taibuteh; *Le Gnostique ou à celui qui est devenu digne de la science 45*, par Antoine et Claire Guillaumont, Paris, Cerf, 1989, p. 179.

Arhim. Assist. Prof. Benedict Valentin Vesa

below”, which can be disclosed also to those who suffer from passions, but the sense they get in their minds from grace is called by the saints „knowledge of the mysteries above”¹¹.

If the former is exclusively based on its own forces, on reason, the latter is generated by the discovery of grace and the experience of humility. Saint Isaac claims that the actors of the first type of knowledge, the scholarly, who believe and step into a knowledge that is more and more advanced, but without being supported by a practice of the commandments, „instead of the truth”, they reach „a copy” of it, as the truth makes itself known and „lives in the movements [of the soul] of those who crucified their lives and grasped the inside of death towards life”¹². One may only reach truth through deeds. That is why, the Syriac theologian names the former type of knowledge „against nature”, and the latter „natural/ innate”. The former refers to an a-theist knowledge, based on study and prolonged experience, but one that does not necessarily lead man immediately to God. The latter, on the other hand, though it remains within the limits of the natural and is accomplished at the level of the senses, leads the „researcher” to God. In addition to these two, he also evokes a third gnoseological type, „supernatural”, named in technical terminology „mystical knowledge”¹³.

The logical question that arises in the context of those mentioned above may be asked as follows: to what extent is the theological study compatible to the patristic vision of Theology as direct experience of God? In our endeavour so far, we have tried to argue an extremely important idea, when it comes to academic Theology – the scientific study of Theology is a premise of the process of knowledge of the saints, the spiritual knowledge. The saints, having the plenitude of spiritual knowledge, are the best theologians. But, according to Saint Gregory Palamas, those who commit themselves to and follow them, may also be good theologians, at least at an inferior level¹⁴. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, a professor of Theology at Oxford, encouraged by Saint Gregory’s words, will say the following: *„I know to what extent I am away from sainthood. But, at least I am trying to be a theologian from the second group: I commit myself to the saints and look to render an accurate testimony of what the saints said and lived. At this secondary level,*

¹¹ Sfântul Isaac Sirul, Cuvinte către singuratici, Partea II recent descoperită (II), transl. Ioan I. Ică jr., Sibiu, Deisis, 2003, 35, 7-8; terminology found in several authors : Evagrie, *Kephalaia*, IV,2; IV, 66; Teodor de Mopsuestia, in Alphonse Mingana, *Commentary on Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Niceene Creed*, 1932, p. 118; Ioan Solitarul, *Dialogues sur l’âme et les passions des hommes*, par Irenée Hausher, Roma, Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1939, 64, p. 80-81.

¹² II, 1,26.

¹³ Sfântul Isaac Sirul, Cuvinte pentru nevoiță, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea, 2010, p. 400.

¹⁴ According to Bishop Kallistos Ware, „Formarea teologică în Scripturi și la Părinți”, in *Credința străbună*, 2 (2000), p. 4.

The theological education in Kiev and Cluj-Napoca. Between history and perspectives

*Theology is not impossible, even in a modern and secularised university: with a complete academic precision, we send forward the message of the saints*¹⁵.

Without the experience of life and devotion to the Church saints, Theology hardens one's heart and is liable for false. The studious who believe in and step into a more advanced rational knowledge, but without being supported by a practice of the commandments, reach a „copy” instead „of the truth”. This is also emphasised by Saint Isaac the Syrian: „Those who take away and master knowledge through their own efforts are, in their turns, taken and mastered by pride, and, the more they study, the darker they become. But those in whom knowledge enters and rests in the movements of their [souls], they descend in the depth of humility and receive the joy-giving certainty as a light in themselves [cf. Col. 2, 2]”¹⁶. As the patristic methodological lecture is founded on the continuity and unity of spirit and theological ethos, on the identity of spiritual experiences, Saint Gregory of Sinai, as well as the Bishop of Niniveh, emphasise the fact that that who seeks the truth „without commandments, wishing to reach it through study and reading, is similar to he who pictures the shadow as truth. For the meanings of truth are given to those who partake truth. And those who are not partaken by truth and not initiated in it, upon seeking its meanings, they discover the meanings of frantic wisdom”¹⁷.

We shall conclude this paper with a short excerpt from a contemporary theologian who deeply insisted in the practical dimension of the theological study – Christos Yannaras: „Theology is not a theoretical development of some axioms and ideas, but the expression and enunciation of an experience. Prior to being a doctrine, the good news of Church is an event. Knowledge of this event means participation and living of the event as a way of living... A faithful Theology is a mystagogy in a bipolar and yet inseparable unity”¹⁸.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ II, 1,25.

¹⁷ Sfântul Grigorie Sinaitul, *Capete foarte folositoare în acrostih*, in „Filocalia VII”, București, EIBMBOR, 1977, p. 98.

¹⁸ According to Karl Christian Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței ecleziale. Înnoirea teologiei ortodoxe contemporane*, Sibiu, Deisis, 1999, p. 57.