![ULBS logo](Universitatea "Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu)

ULBS

Universitatea "Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu

Interdisciplinary Doctoral School

Doctoral Domain: **THEOLOGY**

DOCTORAL THESIS

THE APOPHATIC EXPERIENCE
OF THE UNITY IN ANDRÉ SCRIMA'S WRITTINGS

SUMMARY

PhD Student:

MIHAI-IULIAN, DANCĂ

Scientific Coordinator:

Prof. STEFAN ANDREAS, TOBLER, PhD.

SIBIU 2021

Key words : *unity, apophatisme, unicity, experience, universality, pluralism, ospitality, schism, pneumato-centrism, communion, eschatology.*

Introduction

The title of this thesis, „*The Apophatic Experience of the Unity in André Scrima*'s *Writtings*", aims to explore the mistery of the unity from apophatic theology point of view, starting with André Scrima's (1925-2000) writtings. Through the theme we approach, the thesis enrolls in a long list of researches in the theology of the religions domain, and in the one of ecumenical researches, since gives an especial importance to the unity's signification between Catholic and Orthodox Church.

Through the apophatic unity notion in André Scrima's writtings, we want to elaborate a perspective by which to rethink the problematic aspect of the religious pluralism, and the one of the interconfessional dialogue. The necessity to address such a theme, which, to be honest, it isn't new at all in theological studies, consists in the awareness more and more acute of the time that pluralism lasted as an independent reality, and also by the necessity to fundament in a new light the ratio between Christianity and the non-christian religions. From this point of view, the apophatic unity doesn't represent a solution, but a reflection path for thinking the profound meaning of the pluralism, meaning which remains, most often, inapproachable for us. How could we appropriately name what happens as absolute otherness in the specific horizon of the Christian religion, avoiding that this to be immediately evicted, denied, or even combated? Our study tries, on the contrary, to confront one of the biggest challenges of the contemporary era, marked by the emergence of „the other" as identity and ansamble of highlights different from mine. So, although the presence of „the other" it isn't new at all in history, the novelty which it represents nowadays it's about the limit of the paradigms used until now to understand the ultimate signification of this alterity. In the „face to face" confrontation, not only the other's identity becomes problematic to me, but also my own identity, accustomed to consider, as Father Scrima says, to be „enough": „the neighbor is *ma mauvaise conscience*. Why him too? I am *enough*"[1]. Or, just the impossibility to evict the religious alterity of the other, and the necessity to confer a religious meaning to his irreducible difference were two of the aspects that guided us in our research.

---

[1] André SCRIMA, *Duhul Sfînt şi unitatea Bisericii. Jurnal de conciliu*, forword by Olivier Clément, introduction by H.-R. Patapievici, ed. Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban, translation by Măriuca Alexandrescu, Dan Săvinescu, Larisa şi Gabriel Cercel, Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban, Bucureşti, Edit. Anastasia, 2004, p. 215.

This is why to talk about a possible apophatic unity between religions is definitely one of those formulas that deserve to be clarified, because of its multiple signification which it causes in interreligious dialogue. And the first clarification that our study aims to make is as follows: the apophatic unity it isn't only a concept, but also a faith experience. This distinction it isn't undertaken from the usual distinction between theory and praxis, but it's coming from the obligation to access to the actual reality of the apophatic unity, which ultimate meaning reveals only from its own experience, in other words, to reflect on the fact that we are already in unity, before any research assume it as a study theme. Only with this condition does the reflection on apophatic unity avoid transforming in an artificial reflection, or in an endless attempt to „solve" the issue of differences that pluralism raises..

How the actual experience is the main vector to realize the apophatic unity is one of the essential interrogations that our study tries to answer. The study's title itself, „*The Apophatic Experience of the Unity in André Scrima's Writtings"*, express exactly, in apophatic connection, the unfailing proximity between experience and unity that fundament any genuine discussion about unity's signification and religious pluralism. This is the only way to experiment how unity, far from beeing in an opposite report with the pluralism, it behaves „apophatic" through pluralism, as one of its main vectors of manifestation. André Scrima himself, in an interview from *La Croix*, 23rd of September 1964, askes himself if not the acknowledge of the theological pluralism allows us, actually, to reconsider the statute of some theological „issues" in „pseudo-issues", and the possibility itself of pluralism as „a sign of deepening the meaning of unity".

The challenge to adhere to this kind of affirmations, apparently in contradiction, also comes from the association between the notions of unity and pluralism with numerical notions of one and multiple, in other words, the permanent confusion between ontological signification and the logical one of those two notions, the ontological multiplicity not being able to be thought the same as a simple operation of addition or subtraction. The apophatic unity designates the ontological reality, against which a logigal-mathematic perception it's only one of the ways of possible intelligibility. This is the reason why the divine „One" it isn't a figure, but an incomparable otherness, the unity being able to be, from this point of view, experimented even there where we don't see it realized under a defined institutional form (as it is for Eastern and Western Churches). A Christian can live *in* or *from* the unity's mystery even there where the reality in which this unity lives manifests itself in an opposite way to his expectations. Consequently, the unity between religions and the unity between separated

Churches is based only on apophatic unity, and its „update"[2] through experience it is the one which allows it to actually become a reality, in historic time.

Thesis Structure

Our research is structured in 5 chapters, each one enhancing progressively the theme of apophatic unity and its experience, first from the interreligious concerns point of view, then from the one specific to Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

The first chapter is dedicated to the apophatic theology signification in André Scrima's thinking and how this theology is defined within the unity's theology and within that of its experience possibilities. To this end, we defined the main features of negative knowledge (theological and philosophical), and then we looked into the consequences of apophatic discourse in Christian theology, using negative thinking (or what André Scrima calls the „apophatic fundament" in theology). Avoiding any kind of relative discourse, we tried to examine how the negative knowledge, through the distance that it establishes against the affirmative theological discourses, gives us the possibility of more authentic knowledge of God, the supreme principle of unity.

The challenge we often meet within interreligious and interconfessional dialogue comes overall from the rejection to acknowledge this „apophatic fundament"[3] too, a principle which, in André Scrima's thinking, involves the recognition of at least 3 requirements:

- the apophatic fundament works as a „principle and a critical operator of any affirmation about God"[4];

- it is „the *sine qua non* condition of a theological itinerary threatened by ideological closure"[5];

-it is „the only possible way to communicate with other spiritual or *religious* doctrines focused on seeking and receiving God"[6].

Thus, it was impossible avoiding in this chapter to question ourselves if the religions, from their apophatic point of view, couldn't represent actually an ensemble of authentic expressions of an apophatic content assumed, in this situation, as their common content?

---

[2] *Cf. ibidem*, p. 95: „*unitatea dintre cele două Biserici nu trebuie atât elaborată, cât mai degrabă actualizată*" (the unity between those two Churches doesn't have to be elaborated, more updated).

[3] *Idem*, *Teme ecumenice*, ed. and introduction by Anca Manolescu, translated from French by Anca Manolescu, translated from English by Irina Vainovski-Mihai, Bucureşti, Edit. Humanitas, 2004, p. 93.

[4] *Ibidem.*

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] *Ibidem.*

In *the second chapter* we tried to see if this way of understanding the unity from the apophatic theology point of view might work when it is confronted with the unicity and universality claims of religions in general, and those three monotheisms particularly.

Given the fact that in our research we noticed that the unicity and universality notions were elaborated mostly in an exclusive meaning, without considering the pluralist context in which these appeared, one of the first tasks of this chapter it is to return to a comprehension much more inclusive of those two notions. We managed to do this starting with Jerusalem's evocation as a symbol of unique *polis* through its axial orientation that it offers to all religions, and also as a symbol of universal *polis* through the project to accomplish similar expectations. To confirm this model, the other example about Abraham had an essential role, because Abraham embodies the universality of faith and the unicity of the relationship between man and God. This is why, in Islam, Abraham is named „*hanif*", which means „true believer", because he „wasn't a Jewish, nor a Christian, but *hanif*"[7], *i.e.* the father of a universal[8] community of believers.

Not only Jerusalem's *polis*, but also Abraham contradict the exclusive models based mostly on reasons that we preferred to consider as circumstantials, *e.g.* historical, social, cultural or psychological reasons. Instead, we proposed, from an apophatic point of view, an inclusive model that takes into account the pluralist reality which surrounds us. Two arguments mainly supported us in this endeavor: the universality of revelation and the destiny's solidarity of all religions. So we could approach the most difficult aspects of this chapter about the religions' claims that they hold the truth in an exclusive manner, the impossibility to assume other mediators, the claiming of a monopoly of salvation, the affirmation of superiority, the recognition of coherence despite the differences, etc. The answer to these problems is unseparaple of the one of an interriligious ospitality, which, in this case, it is more than an ordinary tolerrance. The ospitality, far from standardizing or relativing, knows how to recognize the other's truth even when it is inaccessible for me. In the spirit of an itinerant faith, the ospitality presents itself as a first step made to accept the other's alterity, including in faith matter. Therefore, in this chapter end, we underline the necessity to

---

[7] Koran, 3, 67 *apud* André SCRIMA, *Duhul Sfînt şi unitatea Bisericii…*, p. 37.

[8] In Arabic,*῾umma*, „is a social matrix of persons who have same believes and same roots" (André SCRIMA, *Comentariu integral la Evanghelia după Ioan*, translated from Arabic by Monica Broşteanu, translated from French by Anca Manolescu, Bucureşti, Edit. Humanitas, 2008, p. 371). In Koran, this word appears 64th times with different meanings: an ethnic group (Arabians, French or Slavs), a religious group (muslims, chriastians or zoroastrians), a moral community, the followers of the prophet (Abraham or Muhammad). (*Cf.* Tomasz Dominik KAMUSELLA, „Umma", In *Value Inquiry Book Series*, 276/2014, p. 470)

put in practice a theological imagination through which the experience of meeting the other to be able to be translated in an adequate theological vocabulary.

The third chapter continue the subject of chapter 2, analyzing it mainly from the individual perspective of Christian theology and aiming to elaborate this way a new foundament to affirme the Christian uniqueness in relation to the inherent uniqueness of the non-Christian religions. The historical evolution but also the globalization made even more urgent the clarrification of this relation in a pluralism' context. The old methods of religious conversion or of Christian supremacy merit not only that they are scriptural unfounded, but they contradict Jesus Christ's urge to realize the religion of those who worship the Father „in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4,23). In an inevitable way, the research from this chapter should go beyond the objective structure of religions in general, focusing on their apophatic content, the content through that the religions dialogue and are in communion to the same transcendent. Our reflection on the Christian uniqueness it is, from this point of view, a Christian reflection which doesn't exclude, in the same time, the possibility that what we evoqued in terms of unity and uniqueness to be elaborate starting from different terminological bases, specific to each religion Therefore, any reflection on religions can be only contextualized and mediate based on the preliminary, through which the reality offers itself as signification. For our theme, the preliminary was constituted by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We tried that through a pneumatic Christology to put the bases of the relation between Christian uniqueness and apophatic unity of religions, using some fundamental notions, like the ones about the cosmic presence of Christ, the notion of inclusive and universal presence, the notion of eschatological presence. With no intent to diminish the historic reality of Incarnation, we insisted on the pneumatic character of any affirmation about God and on the fact that, in the person of Spirit, the universal presence of Jesus Christ it isn't in conflict with the diversity of His mysterious manifestations.

The forth chapter explores the signification of apophatic unity between The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, a unity that resists despite the division between them. There where the schism problem should be a special concern to us, the André Scrima ideas headed us to a different perspective that one of the most interesting of his expressions resumes it: to pass from the „suspended unity" to the „updated unity". What was obvious necessary despite the almost „normative" character of the word schism for the identity through opposition of those two churches was, on the contrary, their fundamental unity as a sacramental reality of One Church, the mystic Body of Christ (because for Scrima it does exist an aprioristic inferential of the unity's sacrament in relation with the historic reality of

division). The statement: „Those two Churches aren't two"[9] isn't a stylistic statement, but the expression that justifies all Father Scrima's statements about the fundamental unity between those two Churches before and after the schism from 1054.

To assert the fundamental unity between those two Churches it is a way to separate in themselves their contingency part from the common reality of One Church. In another statement Father Scrima will say that not the division, but „their proximity to identity"[10] is the true paradox of their division and their essential unity. So, the few constitutive aspects of the unity of Eastern Church that we study in this chapter (the eccleziology of communion, the pneumato-centrism, the mystic and apophatic character of its theology, the mystery of the Resurrection, the liturgy) don't want only to prove, but also to highlight the realities which define the mysterious content of the unity behind the contingent aspect of the Church as an institutional structure. These aspects underline the fact that any unity it is first a celebrated, experienced and structuring reality for each community of Christians: „for where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Mt 18,20). Therefore does exist a mysterious dimension of the unity that Churches don't define, but they get it from God through Holy Spirit. The unity doesn't belong to a specific community as an exclusive property, but it manifests itself through those who gather in His name. This could be the first step to an ospitality of communion as a dimension of the unity we get and give to those who form from the begginings the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The update of the unity involves an awareness of its recognition everywhere this one manifests itself and lives as an essential reality of faith. And to insist on pneumatic and eschatological dimensions of the unity aims only to prove that, avoiding its own contingencies, the unity stays always the same dimension of faith that can be updated and invoked by both Churches whenever they find together, not to decree the unity, but to start from it and found themselves in it. The unity it isn't the exclusive property of one Church, but especially the experience of love and communion between those two Churches, following the model of the Holy Trinity. From this point of view, these two Churches have to celebrate the mystery of unity, which doesn't have anything to do with the uniformity, being mainly the experience of a call and an itinerance to God. This is what Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, two of the most representative personalities of the ecumenical dialogue, did when they meet for the first time at Jerusalem, city of those three monotheisms: not to find

---

[9] André Scrima, „Situation singulière des Églises orthodoxes et catholiques à l'intérieur du dialogue oecuménique", conference, 9th of March 1966, André Scrima's Archive, Colegiul Noua Europă – Institut de Studii Avansate, Bucureşti, TND 13, p. 11.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 2.

themselves, but to be around the One who is the source and the gift of a full unity. For André Scrima, their fndings are just as many „signs" of the „updated"[11] unity, beyond any other kind of subordinate concern.

The last chapter focuses on exposing some realities in which the apophatic unity between those two divided Churches express itself: monastycism, hesychastic spirituality, the figure of the spiritual father, the Burning Bush and the liturgy. Although these examples express the various topoi of the unity between Churches, they weren't chosed for themselves (as if unity were inherently dependent of them), but for how they are set up by their originar unity that they express it in updated manner. The subtle distinction has here its own importance, because a reflection on unity it isn't just a series of examples that, the more numerous they are, the more convincing should be. The unity doesn't „prove" itself, nor illustrates, being, due to its apophatic character, an experience without a common measure with the theoretical discourses about unity in general. This is the reason why we didn't want to study only the examples themselves, but especially how these examples allow us to experience something from the unity's mystery. To mention only the one of monachism, the interest for the study of monastic status in André Scrima's life didn't focus on exposing some biographic aspects, but especially on the experience with the unity's mystery that the monachism allows. Talking about monachism in André Scrima's life without considering its profound finality, where it authentically delivers its meaning, it is an assumed risk to miss the special meeting between the reality that monachism bears itself and the individual aspirations of the monk Scrima. This perspective should be itself a sufficiently convincing argument to get rid of a whole arsenal of secondary aspects, but also to put properly the only question which matters: How the monachism allows an actual experience of unity in André Scrima's life? Because what is decided, as we can easily notice, it isn't the fate of example itself, but mainly the fate of unity: „The ecumenism it is, first, a matter of spiritual life,"[12] said André Scrima, because to become the other means actually to die for the other, and this represents, no doubts about, the most difficult cross[13].

---

[11] *Cf. idem*, „Il y a un mois, Paul VI et Athénagoras 1er se rencontraient à Jérusalem", interviw with Pierre Gallay, in *La Croix*, 6th of Fevr. 1964, p. 4.

[12] *Idem*, *Duhul Sfînt şi unitatea Bisericii...*, p. 224.

[13] *Cf. ibidem*, pp. 214-215.

Conclusion

Starting from apophatic theology, we chosed in our research a special manner to introduce ourselves in André Scrima's thinking. Not historical, nor criticizing, but apophatic. The word „apophatic" is, from this point of view, a key word of our research, because it is the word that allowed us to build the whole reflection on unity. The apophatism introduces, in fact, another possibility to talk about unity, much more adapted, as we think, to the proximity between divided Christians, but also to the dialogue between Christianity and non-Christian religions.

Through apophatic unity notion, we tried to rediscover another signification of the unity which no longer presupposes that proselytism of Christianity, a signification much more original and, as possible, in line with the mysterious reality of unity. This is why the main question was from the beginning very simple: Which is the actual signification of unity when we are in front of a non-Christian? The apophatism allowed us to understand that the true unity between religions was often veiled, being understood mainly from the perspective of „integration" and not from the perspective of a sincere „communion" with the other's reality through its own differences. From this point of view, we are convinced that the apophatic reality is the „fundament" on which the true unity between religions is sustained, and this despite its actual visibility (it is no longer necessary to prove that this visibility is difficult to observe in the imanent reality of religions that continue to claim unilaterally their unicity and universality). Therefore, to strive to recognize the apophatic unity, do we have to insist?, it is not at all an exercise animated by the idea of elaborating a super-religion or by the relativisation of the truths of faith, but it is animated by the wish to postulate as a starting point the fundamental unity of religions by virtue of their equidistant position from the same pole of transcendence. The reality of apophatic unity can't be measured in a global super-unit, but in the quality of experiencing the Church mystery as a fundamental note, and in the religions' capacity to recognize each other, starting from unity, in an absolute otherness. This is also the main idea of André Scrima's theological project when he says that the unity isn't to be „created" but to be „updated".

More than a definitive solution, the apophatic unity represents a fundamental experience of faith. Therefore, it is carried out whenever such an experience is allowed, regardless of its visible perception or the actual stage of its accomplishment.