

THE PATRISTIC USE IN THE WORKS OF SAINT JUSTIN POPOVICI (1894-1979)

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ABSTRACT:

IN THIS RESEARCH, THE AUTHOR INVESTIGATES THE WORK OF THE SERBIAN THEOLOGIAN JUSTIN POPOVITCH (1894-1979), ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ORTHODOX PERSONALITIES OF THE 20TH CENTURY, AND EMPHASIZES THE WAY HOW THE PATRISTIC OPINIONS ARE VALUED IN HIS WORK. BY SHOWING THAT AUTHORS FROM THE FIRST 4TH CENTURIES, LIKE SAINT MACARIUS FROM EGYPT, SAINT JUSTIN THE PHILOSOPHER, SAINT IGNATIUS, SAINT POLICARP, SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, AND OTHERS, ARE QUOTED IN WORKS LIKE: DOGMATIC ORTHODOX, MAN AND GOD-MAN, TIME IS A FRAGMENT FROM ETERNITY, AND S.O., THE AUTHOR ARGUES THAT, SAINT JUSTIN IS ONE OF THE WRITERS WHICH REDISCOVERED THE PATRISTIC THEOLOGY IN THE ORTHODOX SPACE.

KEY WORDS: MACARIUS FROM EGYPT, *DOGMATIC ORTHODOX*, THEOLOGY OF SERBIAN ORTHODOX, GREGORY OF NYSSA.

INTRODUCTION

About the life, the activity and the writings of the great Serbian theologian Justin Popovici, it has been written until now in more books or articles. However, there are important thinks about him and his taught that can be highlighted by the contemporary research. For example, an interesting approach could emphasize who were the the most important Saints who were quoted by him. This is what we will do in the next pages.

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As a dogmatist and specialist in patristic, he used to support his opinions on the writings of the Saint Parents from the first Christian millennium. But, the wealth of patristic sources forced him to select from all the works about the investigated subject, the most representative

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ideas and authors. In the same way father Dumitru Stăniloae², Bishop Zizioulas or other important theologians had done. So, if in the works like *The Orthodox Dogmatic* of the first one, the reader can see more ideas of Saint Maxim the Confessor, Saint Gregory the Theologian, the Cappadocian fathers or Saint Nicodim the Aghiorite³. In one of Saint Justin, it can be seen more ideas of Saint Macarius the Egyptian, Saint Isaac from Syria, Saint Simeon the New Theologian. After his death, the main researches on the first three authors were anthologized into a book published in Switzerland⁴.

The ideas of the former one from the list of the named Fathers, were investigated by the young hieromonk Justin during his PhD studies from Athene. In 1925-1926, he defended his PhD about *The Problem of Personality and Cognition according to Saint Macarius of Egypt*⁵. In this work, he highlights the ideas of this Saint about the ancestor's sin, the restoration of the Man in Christ, the human soul and Salvation and s. o. Starting from the idea that the decomposition of the man is a directly consequence of the sin⁶. Also, by showing that Adam is losing himself in two ways: in the first one, he lose the purity of his own nature, the beauty of being created after the icon and the image of God, and in the second, he lose the privileges promised in the heavens⁷, he talks about the importance that it has, for Saint Macarius, the missing of the sin from Christ's body⁸, about the ways how he helps the creature to be solved and about the importance of the faith for the entire process of Salvation⁹.

² Who was, in our opinion, unfairly criticised for his predilection for Greek fathers by Cristian Bădăliță. For more information about this subject, see: <http://oglindanet.ro/dumitru-staniloae-intre-patristica-si-ideologie/>, accessed in 24. 04. 2016; <https://theologia.wordpress.com/2007/10/20/badilita-vs-staniloae-occident-vs-orient-stiinta-vs-theologhisire/>, accessed in 24. 04. 2016.

³ See: Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Orthodox Dogmatic*, 3rd edition, 1-3 volumes (Bucharest: Press of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Orthodox Church, 2010).

⁴ See: Justin Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien*, traduit par Jean-Louis Palierne, (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1998).

⁵ Atanasie Jetvitch, "Preface", *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien*, by Justin Popovitch, tradnslated by par Jean-Louis Palierne, (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1998), 7. Cf. Justin Popovic, *Time is a Fragment of Eternity*, (Los Angeles: Sevastian Press, 2014), 6; Bosko Bojovic, *L'Eglise Orthodoxe Serbe. Histoire - Spiritualite – Modernite*, (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2014), 226.

⁶ Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien...*, 17. About that, he says: "After the apparition of the transgration, man fgot far from God for resting in his naked nature. The person has changed his center, the way of life established (by God) is rejected and the image of the sin appears in the soul". Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien...*, 17.

⁷ Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien...*, 18.

⁸ "Saint Macarius accords a big importance to the "body without sin" of Christ. This is the weapon that allowed to him to get the victory against the Diabolo and, thanks of this missing of the sin, has all the salvation power and all the arguments that he use it during the debate where he opposites to Satan". Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien...*, p. 44. Cf. Blagoje Pantelic, "Logos became fish – Theogony, Cosmogony and Redepmtion (Sakharov versus Bulgakov)", *Philotheos – Journal for Philosophy and Theology*, XIV (2014): 46.

⁹ "The faith is the sin from which the soul can contemplate his poverty, from which he can see that, from the fault of his sins, he rests naked and far away from the communion with the Holy Spirit". Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien...*, 49.

But, Holy Macarius was not the only and nor the most important used by the Theologian considered one of the most important representatives of the "neo patristic synthesis"¹⁰ as the exegetes of his works show: "preferred to study specially three from the most important neptiks and ascetics fathers from the Orthodox Eastern (Macarius, Isaac the Syrian and Symeon the new Theologian)"¹¹, but also, other Greek and Latin fathers from the first millennium of Christianity or newer exponents of the hagiography, like Saint John of Kronstandt¹².

By using the ideas from his works, analysing his ideas, and offering an interesting synthesis of it, Saint Justin from Celie contributed not only to the re-discovering of the patristic theology in the Serbian space, and in other areas, where his works were translated and are considered important to the dissemination of their ideas, but also to the great process of rediscovering the patristic Theology in the Orthodox space and of the re-discovering of the Church from the first centuries. By comparing, or using together ideas of neptik Saints from the 3th and 4th century¹³, or even faster, like Saint Macarius from Egypt¹⁴, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrisostom¹⁵ and s. o., with voices from the 18th and 19th centuries, like Saint John of Kronstadt, Saint Filaret of Moscow, or others, he creates links between the centuries and shows that "the ways of the heart" where the same in all the times in Church¹⁶, because the Christ stickled together his community.

By investigating the life and the work of Saint Justin, the reader can find that, despite of the fact that he studied both in an Oriental and in an Occidental environment, in Greece and in Germany, he didn't lose his faith. Despite of his PhD in the German space, he rested orthodox in his way of thinking, and he wasn't impressed and moved by the Catholicism or Protestantism. In addition, he always kept his appetite for the patristic theology. Perhaps, this was the reason that kept him into the Church and transformed him in an apologetic of the Orthodox faith in the Communist and atheist Yugoslavia.

Highlighting this fact, a contemporary theologian sad, in one analyse dedicated to the relation of continuity between Saint Nicolas Velimirovic and Saint Justin, comparing their taught:

"Also, one of the basic differences between St. Nikolaj and St. Justin's neo patristic theology is that St. Nikolaj rediscovered the ancient Fathers progressively while Fr. Justin from his very beginnings to the end of this earthly life was extremely patristic author. His life of the saints, in twelve extensive volumes (one for each month) represent entire library of patristic

¹⁰ "Today, we can without any doubt say that Fr. Justin is one of the most important and influential theologians of the 20th century, that his thought might be compared only to such theological authorities as Fr. Georges Florosky, Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, and, to some extent, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. Popovic's work remain one of the classics of neo patristic theology: I think you could not call yourself decently educated Orthodox theologian unless you have read at least something written by Fr. Justin". Darko Djogo, „Serbian Neopatristic Theology (Some Aspects of History, Reception and Currents)", *Teologia*, 4 (2012): 18.

¹¹ Jetvitch, "Preface...", 5.

¹² Cf. Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu – Macaire d'Egypte, Isaac le Syrien, Symeon le Nouveau Theologien...*, 160.

¹³ Cf. Irinej Bulovich, Atanasie Jetvich, „Foreword", to *Commentary on the Epistles of St. John the Theologian*, by Justin Popovitch, translated by Radomir M. Plavsic, (Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2009), 7-9.

¹⁴ Popovic, *Time is a Fragment of Eternity...*, 6.

¹⁵ Justin Popović, *Omul și Dumnezeu-om. Abisurile și culmile filosofiei*, translated in Romanian language by Ioan Ică și Ioan Iă jr., (Bucharest: Sophia, 2010), 82.

¹⁶ Placide Deseille, *Les Chemins du cœur. L'enseignement spirituel des pères de l'Eglise*, (Solon: The Monastery of Saint Anthony the Great, 2012), 7.

lives and writings. At the time of their appearance, these books were almost only existing Serbian translations not just of Christian hagiographies and martyriologies, but also of the most important early Christian writings"¹⁷.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we can say that, given all the above, we can say without fear of being wrong, that Saint Justin was a great re-discoverer of patristic theology and ideas. Through his writings, he brought attention to the views of important Fathers from early centuries of Christianity on certain important issues of ecclesiology, Christology or soteriology, providing valid and well-structured arguments on certain issues agitating Orthodoxy. Clearly, we cannot talk about his preference only for some holy fathers, but for his preference for patristic theology. Some authors are, indeed, used more often in his writings, but this is explained by the fact that they were understood more in his doctoral thesis or other research, or in some problems, where they had major contributions. This is the real reason of their recurrent use, but not some arbitrary sympathy.

¹⁷ Djogo, „Serbian Neopatristic Theology (Some Aspects of History, Reception and Currents)...", p. 28.

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