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## The Theological Background of Political Philosophy in Early Christianity – An Essay on Orthodox Political Theology

### Abstract

In this study I aim to indicate the assumptions of an orthodox political theology, more exactly to identify a mentality, which configures an attitude that subsequently is expressed politically. The theological frames that gave expression to this kind of attitude, later assumed in byzantine political science, can be identified in the ground elements of Christianity: the dogmatic-martyric consciousness of the Early Church, the compulsory relation between faith and witness, the mystagogical dimension of Christianity, the Christological context (with an emphasis on the Incarnation and Resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ), the transforming power of prayer, the assertion of the prophetic power of the Church, the apologetic



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view, the Eucharistic site that defines the relation between faith and witness as a revealing space, generating concepts and attitudes.

### Keywords

Orthodox Political Theology, Early Church, Political Philosophy, Apologetics, Contextual Theology

## 1 Introduction

Through the attempt of conceptualization and subsequently of operationalization of the phrase *political theology* we enter the area of discussions caused by the intersection of several areas of research, belonging to different fields, dominated by the history and philosophy of religion, political science, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and psychology.

Therefore, *political theology* takes the form of a subject with multiple approaches, either as a chapter of cultural anthropology, or as one of political philosophy (Spinoza, Hobbes), or as a subdivision of the history of religions in general or history of Christian religion in particular. In the attempt to understand the entire area covered by this term, more exactly the technical meaning rather than the literal one, we realized the polarization of the debate and the variety of approaches: from researchers who claim the existence and independence of the domain (Carl Schmitt, Johann Baptist Metz, Hans Eger, Jürgen Moltmann, Dorothy Sölle), to those who deny its existence altogether (Andreas Marxen, Stanley Hauerwas or, Heinrich Meier).

Taking into consideration this multitude of approaches, from proposals materialized into individual systems to political-theological constructions of wider impact<sup>1</sup>, with different intentions, from radicalism (such as Clayton Crockett) to neo-liberalism, I consider it premature to define a conceptual affiliation to this phrase.

I do not consider myself as one who has any ownership of this term, but I wish through this study to propose an analysis program regarding *the contents* of the concept of *orthodox political theology* using the evolutionist-genetic method, as an echo from the theology of the Church in the first centuries<sup>2</sup>. Although the issue does not hold all its meanings into this chronological segment, it will acquire new cardinal values through its integration into the parallelism between eastern and western European spirituality with their specific political sciences.

Rather than speak of a kind of ownership of the term by the theological world, we do admit in the first place the need for its deliverance from any kind of outside (*ad extra*) pressure. Therefore it is important to make some distinctions and delimitations within the spectrum of what *political theology* means in our understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, Dorothy Sölle, Leo Strauss, Ernst H. Kantorowicz etc.

<sup>2</sup> See other two attempts to introduce the subject of Orthodox political theology: O. Panaite, *The Dogmatic and Martyrly Conscience of the Church in the Political Philosophy of Early Christianity*, in: "European Journal of Science and Theology", vol. 8, Supplement 2, September, 2012, pp. 311-327; Idem, *Perioada constantiniană ca model a relațiilor Stat-Biserică*, in: "Revista Teologică", XVI (88), no. 3, July- September, 2006. The author *identifies* the dogmatic-sacrificial consciousness of the early era of Christianity as an element that substantiates the political attitude of the Church, the dogmatic-sacrificial site of the political attitude.

Some works define *political theology* through its specific method and formal principle, as politics in an extensive meaning<sup>3</sup>, or as the theological-religious view of politics and the political view of religion<sup>4</sup>.

Another group of researchers define *political theology* in regard to its purpose, seeing it as the theological justification of a political system<sup>5</sup>. Another branch of research considers that Christianity has no political theology since the term that best defines the attitude towards the issues of the *polis* is the term *meta-politics*.

At the same time, it is not considered a science in the field of theology having politics as its subject of research, nor a measure of professional therapy for those groups of researchers who desire to create a new conscience, indignant at the corruption of the political act, a political theology of resentment; it means neither the clericalization of politics, nor the politization of religion.

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<sup>3</sup> C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, Leipzig, 1934, *Teologia politică*, transl. L. Stan and L. Turcescu, (București: Universal Dalsi, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> H. Eger, *Die ersten Ansätze zu einer politischen Theologie in der christlichen Kirche*, in: "Deutsche Theologie. Monatschrift für die deutsche evangelische Kirche", no. 2, Stuttgart, 1935, pp. 272-281; Idem, *Kaiser und Kirche in der Geschichts theologie Eusebs von Cäsarea*, in: "Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche", no. 38, Berlin, 1939, pp. 97-115.

<sup>5</sup> E. Peterson, *Kaiser Augustus im Urteil des antiken Christentums. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie*, (Kempen-München, 1933), pp. 289-299; H. von Campenhausen, *Griechische Kirchenväter*, Stuttgart, 1961, transl. M. Angheliescu, *Părinții greci ai Bisericii*, (București, Humanitas, 2005). The theological justification of political projects created one of the premises for heresies in the byzantine emperors's attempts to secure the empire's borders. Such a theological framing of political projects led, for instance, to pressures for dogmatization regarding the assimilation of monophysitism in the context of the 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils.

The analysts also present the risks of the secularization of theology based on a one-sided absorption and approach: our dependence on the currents of secularization creates the prerequisites for the risk to politicize theology and transform it into a secular derivation of religiosity, professor Carl Raschke claims in a study on the rebirth of what he calls global political theology<sup>6</sup>.

As a reaction to the Enlightenment, the *new political theology* will have a program formed around the idea of a public manifestation of the religious act. It is in fact a getaway from the individualist space of religious experience, in favor of its public and social dimension. Political theology presents itself as a critical relation between society and faith, admitting the Church into its dimension of public testimony of the freedom offered by faith<sup>7</sup>.

*Political theology*, in my understanding, is defined as an attitude of the Christian consciousness in front of the political-imperial manifesto of authority and all the connected realities deriving from or largely depending on the reference to this imperial or state authority - in a modern sense, confessing a profound spiritual, Christological and pneumatological-ecclesial uncompromising attitude. The topics brought into discussion are grouped around the theological foundations of the Christian

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<sup>6</sup> C. Raschke, *Agamben and the revival of a global political theology – from an economy of resentment to an economy of glory*, conf. <http://theotherjournal.com/churchandpomo/2012/03/25>. C. Raschke is professor of Religious Studies at the University of Denver and author among other books of *GloboChrist* (Baker Academic, 2008) and *Postmodernism and The Revolution in Religious Theory: A Semiotics of the Event* (University of Virginia Press, Fall, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> K. Füssel, *Teologia politica*, in: J. Bauer (ed.), “Die Heißen Eisen von A bis Z”, (Graz, Italian translation *Dizionario Teologico*, Roma, Cittadela Editrice, 1974), pp. 736-743.

view regarding the emperor's person, his politico-religious practice, but also the political philosophy of the Empire with reference to Christianity in general and the Church in particular (the emperor regarded as *mimisis*, the attributes of a christian emperor, his personal relationship with God, the Church and the emperor, relations with heretics, Judaism and paganism, Christianity and the Empire).

The concept of *political theology* hasn't been developed in detail – *in extenso* – neither by western theology nor by eastern theology, although it is a major concept for both civilizations.

The first work of outstanding maturity in the understanding of the political, religious and cultural dimensions of political theology is Erik Peterson's *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem: Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum*, published in Leipzig in 1935<sup>8</sup>. The work is a critical approach to *political theology*, in Carl Schmitt's meaning, showing the regenerative function of faith. Other contributions will be made six years later by Keneth M. Setton<sup>9</sup>, completed by Hendrikus Berkhof<sup>10</sup> in 1947 and Francis Dvornik<sup>11</sup> in 1966.

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<sup>8</sup> Peterson draws a parallel of the political implications following the parallelism between paganism and Christian monotheism. He makes a positive evaluation of the Empire in biblical terms, Logos, Messia, etc, following the pre-Nicene concepts that would later be a support for the fourth century politology.

<sup>9</sup> K. Setton, *The christian attitude towards the Emperor in the fourth century, especially as shown in addresses to the Emperor*, German translation: *Kirche und Kaiser: Eine Untersuchung der Entstehung der byzantinischen und theokratischen Staatsauffassung im vierten Jahrhundert*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

<sup>10</sup> H. Berkhof, *Kirche und Kaiser. Eine Untersuchung der Entstehung der byzantinischen und der theokratischen Staatsauffassung im vierten Jahrhundert*, (Zürich, 1947).

<sup>11</sup> *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*, Washington D.C.,

The same issues were investigated by other researchers, whose conclusions were published in specialized journals. One direction of study claimed that *renovatio constantini* was the extension of a monarchic typology of Hellenistic extraction, built on the parallelism between monarchy and monotheism. According to some scientists, Eusebius of Caesarea contributed a great deal to the christianisation of Hellenistic concepts, whereupon the Greek Fathers extended his interpretations to wider conceptual fields.

Michael Azkoul partly agrees with the previous statements<sup>12</sup>. The correction made by Azkoul is the following: the method of a group of modern researchers, a restrictive and positivist one, *does not take into consideration the Christological context of patristical political theology*. In his view, the Christologic dogma is fundamental in establishing the theoretical foundations of the Church, foundations that become a basis for its reference to civil consciousness.

The accusation brought by Azkoul to a historiographical approach is that of having lapsed into a state of ignorance concerning the epistemological and metaphysical evaluation of dogmas. It is precisely this *docta ignorantia* that created the premises for a hermeneutic system which has engendered the idea that *renovatio constantini* is the continuation of a theocratical Hellenism. Indeed, the Greek Fathers did not develop a *stricto sensu* political philosophy, but they converted Judaic theocracy into a Christian concept<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Azkoul, *Sacerdotium et Imperium: the Constantinian Renovatio according to the Greek Fathers*, in: „Theological Studies”, no. 32, 1971, pp. 431-464.

<sup>13</sup> G. Florovsky, *Empire and the Desert: Antinomies of Christian History*, in: “Greek Orthodox Theological Review”, no. 3, 1957, pp. 133-159.

Starting from these prerequisites, A.V. Kartasheff, professor at the *Saint Serge* Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, considers that the possibility to understand the Byzantine Christocratic system lies in understanding the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, more exactly, in accepting the Chalcedon Christologic formula:

*“One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, made known in two natures [which exist] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of the natures having been in no wise taken away by reason of the union.”*<sup>14</sup>

This dogmatic formula would become the foundation for the Byzantine symphony during the time of Justinian, a political excerpt from a dogmatic concept, a norm with a very clear political component:

„maxima quidem in hominibus sunt dona dei a superna collata clementia sacerdotium et imperium, ilud quidem divinis ministrans, hoc autem humanis praesidens ac diligentiam exhibens; ex uno eodemque principio utraque procedentia humanam exornant vitam. Ideoque nihil sic erit studiosum imperatoribus, sicut sacerdotum honestas, cum utique et pro illis ipsis semper deo supplicent. Nam si hoc quidem inculpabile sit undique et apud deum fiducia plenum, imperium autem recte et competenter exornet traditam sibi rempublicam, erit consonantia (symphōnia) quaedam bona, omne quicquid utile est humano conferens generi.”<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the Christian kingdom is manifested through *Imperium* and *Sacerdotium*, for which there are two natures,

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<sup>14</sup> Actio 5 (J.D. Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* 7, Veneția, 1759), 116 f. in: comment by A. V. Kartasheff, *The Restoration of Holy Russia*, 1946, apud Michael Azkoul, *art.cit.*, pp. 432.

<sup>15</sup> *Corpus juris civilis: Novellae* 4 ( R. Schoell; Berlin, 1959), col. 1, tit. 6, apud *Ibidem*, p. 433.



according to the two natures of the unique Hypostasis of Christ Our Savior. After this century, political theology is divided in two branches, one of Byzantine inspiration and the other of Western, Latin influence<sup>16</sup>.

## 2 The Inherent Relationship between Faith and Confession: the Ecclesiality of Faith and Confession

If this type of politico-theological reflection is specific to the period from Constantine to Justinian, this already presumes the preexistence of a dogmatic basis which had been used as a source of inspiration previous to the time of Constantine or Justinian. Before legitimizing the pertinence of the observation that we are dealing with political excerpts from dogmatic concepts, we must identify the dogmatic fund and its main features. In another study we have identified the typology of the dogmatic-sacrificial consciousness articulated on the early ecclesiological basis of the first Christian centuries<sup>17</sup>.

A first dimension of political theology comes out of the inherent relationship between faith and its domain of visibility, its confession. This type of relation became compulsory in the context in which the biblical conscience of the New and Old

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<sup>16</sup> *The political augustinianism* proposed in 1934, H.-X. Arquillière, *L'augustinisme politique: essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen Âge*, (Paris: Vrin, 1934), is evaluated by some researchers as an imprecise and ambiguous term. Henry de Lubac challenged *Augustinisme politique?*, in: "Théologies d'occasion", (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1984), pp. 255-308, the historical pertinence of this concept. See interpretations of Y. Congar written in the 1980s [*Le monothéisme politique de l'Antiquité et le Dieu-Trinité*, in "Concilium" no. 163, 1981, pp. 51-58].

<sup>17</sup> O. Panaite, *The dogmatic and martyrical conscience..., passim*.

Testament began to structure the unity between faith and its confession in formulas such as: *I believed, therefore I spoke* (*Psalm* 115: 1), or later the Eucharistic formula: *I believe, Lord, and I confess*.

Another understanding, not contradictory but complementary to the biblical one, is derived by analyzing the faith formulas (“*Oros*”) of the Ecumenical Councils, seen as the expression of personal but also community faith. For example, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formula does not begin with the singular of the verb *pisteuo*, but the plural *pisteuomen*, *we believe*.

At first sight it may seem a mere philological observation, but the far richer meanings of the verb *pisteuomen* refer to the ecclesiology of the act of *faith*, building a sacred space that goes far beyond a strict cognitivism. In his Epistle to the Romans, Saint Apostle Paul uses the classical chiasmus applied to the ordering of these two terms: faith and confession, in order to strengthen the organic, logical and determinant relation between the two dimensions of spirituality:

*“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation”* (Romans 10, 9-10).

Interpreters show, using these words from Saint Paul Epistles Epistle, the compulsory relation that exists between faith and giving witness. Here, witness and faith are understood beyond the simple assertion that a thing is true. Faith refers to confessing the truth of Christ's Resurrection and following this faith<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Orthodox Study Bible*, California, St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008, p. 1541.

Blessed Augustin continues this type of stipulations showing them as ways to redemption: “we cannot assure our redemption unless (...) we make ourselves witnesses of the faith we bear in our hearts”<sup>19</sup>.

At this point the Augustinian trilogy redemption-confession-faith is built. Although it is not the topic of this study, we propose as a subject for reflection the self-revealing function of what we call the elements of faith: God’s Resurrection has power in and by itself.

### 3 The Universality of Orthodox Political Theology

The space dedicated to this work does not allow me to make an inventory of all writers, apologists or elements that have generated Christian political theology, for which reason I have used the selection method to illustrate my working principle<sup>20</sup>. In the mixture of religion and politics of the first centuries, Christians continued to exist and organize.

This mixture prompted the Church to issue clearer formulations, to shape and define certain elements of political philosophy of Christian expression. The environment in which these concepts were formulated bore the imprint of the tension

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<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *On Faith and the Creed* 1 (NPNF-I 3: 321), apud J. Pelikan, *Credo. Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, (Yale: University Press, 2003), translated by M. S. Chirilă, *Ghid istoric și teologic al crezurilor și mărturisirilor de credință în tradiția creștină*, (Iași: Polirom, 2010), pp. 62-63.

<sup>20</sup> Of major importance are the contributions of Origen (strong ideas for the political theology: Resurrection of God and Christian freedom), Tertullian (the reality of Christ’s Incarnation), Clement the Roman (builds up the oldest prayer of Church for leaders that has ever been kept) that will be the topic for a different study.

(which generated apologetic literature) between the pagan and the Christian conscience. What inspired the Christians? *The dogmatic and sacrificial consciousness of the martyrs of the Church in the first centuries*. Exegetic and apologetic literature will lay the foundation for an autonomous Christian political consciousness, as shown by the entire age of the martyrs<sup>21</sup>.

This attitude requires a number of clarifications: if this reaction is regarded only as a late echo of a long period of waiting by the early Christians, a reaction determined by the political crises of the early third century, in the time of the Syrian emperors<sup>22</sup>, we would discover here the first sign of Christian boldness to assume state responsibilities (a fact which would change the meaning of Christianity and the calling of the Church); or, secondly, it could be seen as a means of structuring the sacrificial consciousness of the martyrs.

Martyrs are those Christians who have accepted their existence as a cross, living this life by confessing the creed of the Universal Church: the uniqueness of the living God, His crucifixion, death and resurrection for the salvation of mankind.

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<sup>21</sup> R. M. Grant, *The Chronology of the Greek Apologists*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 9, no. 1, 1955, pp. 25-33; D. W. Palmer, *Atheism, Apologetic, and Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 37, no. 3, 1983, pp. 234-259; G. C. O'Ceallaigh, "Marcianus" Aristides, *on the Worship of God*, in: "The Harvard Theological Review", vol. 51, no. 4, 1958, pp. 227-254; P. Keresztes, *Law and Arbitrariness in the Persecution of the Christians and Justin's First Apology*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 18, no. 4, 1964, pp. 204-214; M. S. Burrows, *Christianity in the Roman Forum: Tertullian and the Apologetic Use of History*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 42, no. 3, 1988, pp. 209-235; W. H. C. Frend, *Early Christianity and Society: A Jewish Legacy in the Pre-Constantinian Era*, in: "The Harvard Theological Review", vol. 76, no. 1, 1983, pp. 53-71; P. Keresztes, *The Literary Genre of Justin's First Apology*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 19, no. 2, 1965, pp. 99-110.

<sup>22</sup> R. M. Grant, *The Chronology of the Greek...*, p. 31.

The term 'hostility' is not the one which best defines the meaning of the martyrs' experience, or their reasoning. The Christian does not die only to manifest his hostility, or out of pure hostility, but he takes into consideration something deeper, a confession which regards his profound experience of the Living God.

The death of a martyr is regarded by the Church as a new birth, a baptism unto winning eternal life, a washing away of sins, a suffering through which man is being matured as bread in the oven: "*because he (the martyr) stood in the middle of fire not like a burning body, but as bread being baked.*"<sup>23</sup>

In this respect, Saint Gregory the Theologian speaks, in his work *To Vitillian from his sons*, of three types of birth:

"coming in flesh and blood, of whose impurity man is built, shortly comes to an end; this is the first birth; then comes the birth of the Holy Spirit, when illumination descends upon those cleansed by water through baptism. And the third birth, through our tears and pain, purifies the divine face that has been blackened by evil through the wretchedness of sin. Of these births, the first is acquired by man from his parents, the second comes from God, and the third is its own parent, appearing to the world as beneficial light."<sup>24</sup>

In the works of the oldest Christian apologist, called Quadratus, we find an antithetically organized stylistics of defense<sup>25</sup>. We

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<sup>23</sup> *Martiriul Sfântului Policarp, in Actele Martirice* (Panaiot C. Hristu, *Tá μαρτύρζια τώνάρχαίων χριστιανών...*, Tesalonic, 1978), (București: EIBMBOR, 1997), p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Grigorie de Nazianz, *Πρός Βιτιλιανον παράτώννιών*, carm. 2, 2 (poem), 3.260-268, in Migne P.G., 37, 1498 A-1499 A, *apud* Arh. Sofronie, *Despre temeiurile nevoinței ortodoxe*, transl. Ierom. R. Noica, (Alba Iulia: Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române Alba Iulia, 1994), p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> R. M. Grant, *The Future of the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, in: "The Journal of Religion", vol. 30, no. 2, 1950, pp. 109-116; D. W. Palmer, *art. cit.*, pp.

find the clear opposition between the *mystagogical features* of *Christianity* and the Eleusinian hermetism, the first of which offers the real virtues required to achieve redemption, while the second one supports ignorance and depravity at the level of some magical components.

To the same side subscribes Aristide of Athens<sup>26</sup>. For a long time considered extinct, the work, also cited by Eusebius of Caesarea in the same context as the first apology<sup>27</sup>, was recomposed out of partial translations from the Syriac and Armenian versions, until eventually J. A. Robinson identified a copy in Greek attached to the hagiographical work *Barlaam and Josaphat*. The text was published for the first time in 1891 at Cambridge. The Greek text suffered some abridgments because of a free translation, which is why the comparative method was applied, taking as the element of comparison a fragment kept in codex Oxirincus<sup>28</sup>.

Aristide organizes his entire speech on the topic of faith in God, often using references to natural philosophy. This is why some critics saw in his work a collection of theses on stoic

240-245; L. L. Thompson, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp: Death in the Roman Games*, in: "The Journal of Religion", vol. 82, no. 1, 2002, pp. 27-52; R. M. Grant, *The Chronology ...*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 9, no. 1, 1955, pp. 27-28.

<sup>26</sup> R. M. Grant, *The Future of the Ante-Nicene...*, pp. 110-116; D. W. Palmer, *art. cit.*, pp. 255-259; L. L. Thompson, *art. cit.*, pp. 27-52; R. M. Grant, *The Chronology...*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>27</sup> Eusebiu de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească*, vol. IV, III, 3, in: col. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, vol. 13, (București: EIBMBOR, 1987), p. 146. Parallel text: Eusèbe de Césarée, *Histoire Ecclésiastique* IV, III, 1-2, in: col. Sources Chrétiennes, no. 31, texte grec, traduction et annotation par G. Bardy, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1952), *Hist. Eccl.*, IV, III, 3, pp. 162-163).

<sup>28</sup> G. Lebreton, *L'apologetica cristiana nel II secolo*, in: Fliche August-M. Victor (coord.), *Storia della Chiesa*, Torino, SAIE, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. of Italian version, 1976, p. 541.

philosophy, or direct determinations from Philon, rather than biblical arguments. From Aristide's point of view, the world is separated in four categories: Greeks, Barbarians, Hebrews and Christians. For him, Christians are different from the other categories through their superior vision of life, their high morals and doctrine:

“Christians are closer to the truth than other people, because they know God and believe in Him, The Creator of heaven and earth, in Whom all things exist and from Whom all things are, Who has no other god to attend Him, from Whom they received the commands which have been placed in their spirit and whose fulfillment takes them to the hope of future life (...) they do good to their enemies, they call themselves brothers (...). When a poor man dies they all contribute according to their resources to the funeral (...). These are, oh king, their rules. They are grateful to God, because they are the reason why the entire universe and the entire creation was made.”<sup>29</sup>

From this entire text of the apology, what emerges is the first Christians' *modest theology* that is based on the faith in God. It is the one that denies *the decayed world of the pagans*, opposing to it a holy life. Christians admit that the entire world is a gift from God and they are grateful for it.

Aristide succeeds to individualize the community of Christians, separating it from the rest of the world through its proper calling. In this respect, Christians configure a space, a time and a way of being which is derived from their characteristic feature as *citizens of haven*.

Therefore, they belong to a different order than the terrestrial one, a divine order that has put to their reach the entire universe for the purpose of their redemption. The expression

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<sup>29</sup> Aristide, *Apologia*, in: “Journal of Theological Studies”, XXV, 1923, pp. 73-77, *apud Ibidem*, pp. 542-543.

*for them the universe was made* has primarily the role of underlining the *singularity of the Christian experience* in relation to other types of spirituality, and secondly to present it as the unique reason of the world's existence. For the pagans this was a rather tough expression.

The existence of this community, which claimed to be the very reason why the world had been made, stirred even more the intolerance of the Romans, who were beginning to gather in groups around the concepts establishing the Christian's guilt. In such conditions, in their quality of a *new people* and with the calling of its universality, Christians introduce a *mystical political concept* in their relations with the Roman Empire.

#### **4 The Christological and Eucharistic context of political theology with Saint Justin the Martyr and Philosopher and Saint Ignatius of Antioch**

Parallel to the crystallization of the elements of church organization, a Christian political conception grows ever more distinct and clear. *We, Christians, do not pray to the emperor as if he were a God*, and *We, Christians, do not make vows on the emperor's genius*, are two statements highlighting a number of differences, more clearly understood in the confessions of Donata of Scylium and senator Apolonius: "I honor the emperor because he is the emperor; but adoration is addressed only to God"<sup>30</sup>, and "Jesus Christ taught us to obey the law given by

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<sup>30</sup> *Acta Scilitanorum*, 9 (Knopf-Kruger, p. 29), *apud* H. Rahner, *Kirche und Staat im fruhen Christentum* (Documente aus acht Jahrhunderten und ihre Deutung, München: Kosel-Verlag, 1961), Italian version: *Chiesa e struttura politica nel cristianesimo primitivo*, Milano, Jaca- Book, 1970, *op. cit.*, p. 44.



Him, to honor the emperor, to worship only the immortal God, to believe that the soul is immortal.”<sup>31</sup>

Christianity regarded the gods as a demonic manifestation, a spirit opposed to God, and in the genius of the emperor – a dangerous demon: “*What is wrong in saying that the Emperor is the Lord, and by these words saving your life?*”, an imperial officer asks Polycarp of Smyrna.

The same Policarp prudently differentiates between the reign of a tyrant and the ruling planned by God: “I deemed you worthy of knowledge, for we were taught to give proper honor to the authorities and governance ordained by God, and that brings us no harm.”<sup>32</sup> The Christian Speratus, together with five other witnesses, refuse to obey the judge who tried to make them swear on the genius of the Cesar: “I could never give witness to a divine empire on this earth; I serve my God Whom human eyes have never been able to see.”<sup>33</sup>

Parallel to the Christian martyrs, new creations of apologetic literature appear, having as their purpose to underline the mentioned differences. The first such attempt is attributed to Justin the Martyr and Philosopher<sup>34</sup> who, around the year 150, writes a letter, in defense of Christians, to the emperor Antonin the Pious and his son, Marcus Aurelius.

Historiography has known three works of Justin, whose authenticity has not been denied. They are two apologetic works and a dialog with the Judean Tryphon. On account of the presence of the Logos into the world, Justin makes the

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<sup>31</sup> Martiriul Sfântului Apollonius, in: *Actele Martirice...*, p. 101.

<sup>32</sup> Martiriul Sfântului Policarp, cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>33</sup> Martiriul Sfinților Scilitani, cf. *Ibidem*, p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> J. Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité*, vol. II, pp. 405-484; I. Giordani, *Le Apologie e braniscelti del dialogo con Trifone*, (Florența, 1929); I. G. Coman, *Patrologia*, vol. III, (București: EIBMBOR, 1998).

difference between Christianity and the philosophical systems. Any resemblance between the Christian dogma and the pagan mysteries is the work of demons.

The second apology is addressed to Lollius Urbicus, a roman prefect between the years of 146-160. The reason for writing this apology was the sentence to death given to a group of Christians by Urbicus. Justin used this moment to speak about the presence of evil in the world and why God allows evil<sup>35</sup>. The entire speech of Justin is organized around the subject of Christ's Incarnation, regarded in some situations, when the context implied, as a seminal logos.

What differentiates the work of Justin from the writings of Quadratus and Aristide is the use of the *Christological background*, which he arranges in a particular way. The apology of Justin is the first document of this kind in the Christian literature that brings as a main argument the words of Christ: *Give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar and give to God what belongs to God*. After using words of defense through which the Christians' loyalty to the empire and its leader is shown, the author uses *apocalyptic images* to invoke the final justice, the supreme justice which punishes sin and rewards virtue<sup>36</sup>. The political theology of Justin states the *power of prayer* as a means of discovering *the wise judgment* of the emperor.

In Justin's speeches we find a political theology structured along at least three great lines, three guiding concepts of which derives the power of the martyr's sacrifice and the transformation of this experience in into act of ecclesial consciousness: we find an important *Christological component*

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<sup>35</sup> R. M. Grant, *The Chronology of the Greek...*, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> J. C. Otto, *Corpus Apologetarum christianorum* I/1, Jena, 1876, 54 sq., *apud* H. Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

(Justin sees the work of the unique God in Trinity through His Unique Son, the Logos full of power and truth, through Whom all was made. If God is one, the Christian experience becomes unique in comparison with polytheistic pagan cults, whence the impossibility to sacrifice to the gods.

The commitment of humanity towards the Logos-Son is an ontological one, complete and motivated by the inner presence of the Son in His creation.); secondly, Justin speaks about the *transfiguring power of prayer* (prayer is an active state in which man communes in the enlightening power of the Word. This prayer may have effects on others, in order to discover to them the *discernment of wisdom* or the *wisdom of discernment*); the third component revealed by Saint Justin's theology is the assertion of the *prophetic power of the Church* (the Prophets of the Old Testament announced future events, which were fulfilled. The Old Testament is continued through prophecies in the New Testament, and the Church, by sharing in this internal memory of its prophetic side, is already anchored into the future, seeing the future as something already accomplished, according to the will of God).

Along the same lines goes Saint *Ignatius of Antioch's*<sup>37</sup> thinking. In his acts of martyrdom we distinguish the soul of a man who

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<sup>37</sup> A. Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Imperial Cult*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 52, no. 1, 1998, pp. 30-58; Ch. Mohrmann, *A propos de deux mots controversés de la latinité chrétienne: tropaeum. nomen*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 8, no. 3, 1954, pp. 154-173; C. I. K. Story, *Ignatius to the Romans 2:1c*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 47, no. 3, 1993, pp. 226-233; R. F. Stoops Jr., *If I Suffer... Epistolary Authority in Ignatius of Antioch*, in: "The Harvard Theological Review", vol. 80, no. 2, 1987, pp. 161-178; R. A. Bower, *The Meaning of ΕΠΙΤΥΧΑΝΩ in the Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 28, no. 1, 1974, pp. 1-14; S. Zañartu, *Les concepts de vie et de mort chez ignace d'Antioche*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", vol. 33, no. 4, 1979, pp. 324-341.

eagerly waits to leave this world in order to receive the Body and the Blood of Christ. *Grant us to partake of Thee more fully in the unweaning day of Thy kingdom* is at the center of Ignatius' theological thinking. Throughout his entire creation he deepened his Christian belief as a life experience. Thus, he formulated the consciousness of the integration of a local Church into the wider experience of the Universal Church, laying the ground for an ecclesiology that would count in the years to come. In his last words, amounting to a testament, he strongly asserts the fundamental function of the Eucharist.

The consciousness of the early Christian was determined by the experience of the Eucharist as a real presence of Jesus Christ in the world and within the people: Eucharist manifests the Incarnation and the Resurrection, as an ontological change of humanity. The experience of life and death of Christians is built on the immediate presence of the person of Christ. The importance of this concept helps to differentiate the Christian God from the gods of the Gnostics, which are rather represented at the impersonal level of *summus Deus*.

For Ignatius, God is not a chasm in which men get lost, but the Father Who calls him through His Son and awaits him<sup>38</sup>. The Christian community defines itself through a continuous reference to the Eucharist. Only such a Eucharistic community could possess such a strong spirit that could defeat death. The Eucharistic consciousness confessed at the same time the universality of the church. Thus, the basis of Ignatius' political theology is profoundly Eucharistic. The Eucharist expresses the singularity of Christianity: *I long for the bread of the Lord that is the Body of Christ, Son of David, and I long for His blood to drink*. We find these arguments of Ignatius confessed in the symbols

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<sup>38</sup> A. D. Nock, *Cremation and Burial in the Roman Empire...*, pp. 323-330.

of faith of the early church. Later, in the Arian context, the holy fathers will turn to the Christian tradition as expressed in the Eucharist. They will resume a truth of faith, *i.e.* that the Christian community has a profoundly Eucharistic basis and reason of being. This can be accomplished only through Eucharistic celebration, which thus becomes the living consciousness of the Church.

## **5 Conclusions**

In this study I have not aimed at an exhaustive treatment of political theology substantiations, but only at identifying a mental pattern that already configures a politically expressed attitude.

The theological frames which gave expression to this kind of attitude, subsequently assumed in Byzantine politology, have been identified in the basic elements of Christianity: the dogmatic-sacrificial consciousness of the early Church, the obligatory relation between faith and witnessing, the mystagogical dimension of Christianity, the Christological context (with an emphasis on the Incarnation and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ), the transfiguring power of prayer, the assertion of the prophetic power of the Church, the apocalyptic vision, the Eucharistic site of defining the relation between faith and confession as a revealing space, generating both concept and attitude.

On the other side we are also witnessing the absorption of heresies in order to justify types of politologies. For instance, the Christological subordination concept was taken over in order to lay the ground for political Arianism, a system in which the Church lost her independence in favor of a strict control exerted by the emperor. Only in such a context can we

understand the assertion made by the arian emperor Constant at the local council in Milan: *my will has canonical power*, or that he was *the bishop of all bishops*.

These are, at a level of a micro-synthesis, the strong ideas that modulate the political expression of Christianity, an expression which is finalized in political excerpts from dogmatic concepts.

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