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**“Priceasna” in the Architectonics of the Ecclesiastical Cult
– Pastoral–Spiritual–Missionary Approach –**

PhD Thesis

Abstract

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Key words: priceasna, cult, missionary, pastoral, spiritual, religious music, chant, communion hymn, tradition, spiritual experience

If we look into history we may find that there is no nation in the world that didn't use music and didn't practice chanting. The feeling of beauty always manifested through music as well as through the other arts in agreement with the place, time and characteristics of each people. In the Christian cult, the ecclesiastical music has had an important place from the very beginning, as a natural disposition of man and as a special gift for some. The Orthodox Church continued, preserved and developed chanting and excluded instruments. Hence, the voice is the organ through which the man expresses through word, through chanting or other forms of manifestation of joy, content or pain.

The human being participates directly, not through some foreign instrument to the praise of God. This is how the Saint Apostles decided, as we see in the numerous advices of Saint Apostle Paul who addresses the faithful from the communities he founded: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord" (*Ephesians* 5:19); or "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (*Colossians* 3:16).

In the Orthodox theological practice, in a narrow sense, the communion hymn, *priceasna* is a religious song, a hymn which covers the duration of a certain moment within the Holy Liturgy (in which the priest and the faithful receive the Holy Eucharist), but it is sung not only during this consecrated moment of the Holy Liturgy, but also in many other moments, apart from this capital service.

In Romanian, from an etymological point of view, the word "priceasna" comes from the Slavonic term "прѣчїстїна", "prěčїstїna" which means "most pure" and designates a symn dedicated to the Holy Virgin Mary.

However, the semantic aura of the *priceasna* is, from our point of view, much more generous, allowing certain nuances: *priceasna* is that religious song, of folkloric tradition, with biblical roots, relevant from a religious point of view, with an obvious theological message, with a powerful emotional content; one may often find in these songs verses from Psalms.

Any thesis starts from a “hypothesis”, an investigative approach of content and research and a final conclusion, as a result of the work. Our conclusion is that – in the general prospect of the religious cult – *priceasna* has its legitimate place, with an undeniable positive function. Its positive effects are far more numerous and important than the hypothetical negative consequences – reading the general situation, compendious, essentializing.

The theological and liturgical message of the contemporary Orthodox Church is very profound and has an important inner poise, but not all the faithful succeed in tasting it and using its positive effects, because their spiritual and cultural level is diverse. Also, their emotional sensitiveness is very different from one to the other. Until all of them reach the full maturity, the state of *adulthood in faith*, each faithful needs nourishment adequate for his spiritual age. The Church noticed that *priceasna* has – in this part – a very important role: it is an exceptional catechetical factor of formation, an instrument with a great shaping potential.

Our secularized epoch alienates more and more the common faithful from the **mystical richness of the liturgical thesaurus inherited for thousands of years by the ancient Orthodoxy**, and in order to help these faithful – victims of the mass postmodern culture and of the universal superficiality often promoted through mass-media, it is necessary to have a diverse pastoral approach, attentive to the profile of each faithful, to the helplessness of each of them and to the personal spiritual and cultural level. In each stage of the long way of spiritual formation and growth the Church must be close to each individual, in the manner which seems to be most productive.

Also a feature of the postmodern culture is pragmatism that is the favoring of the concrete, of the material, of the terrestrial and the exclusion, ignorance and disregard of the abstract. The Christian doctrine is however very complex, multistage, according to various levels of understanding and approach. *Priceasna* manages to dilute and communicate truths of profound faith that everybody can understand without a serious dogmatic training. Its role must not be underestimated. Most often it is simple, penetrating, with a direct message and with an emotional coefficient with a great impact force. Comparatively, some of the consecrated liturgical chants from the cult of the Church seem rather encrypted, excessively “deep” and irrelevant for a man without a serious theological training.

We made this ample journey through the religious cult and through the fascinating universe of the religious music in order to try to find arguments *pro* and *against* the presence within the

public cult (religious Orthodox) of the *priceasna*. We did not subject to analysis the practice of becoming an autonomous element, separate from the religious cult, respectively from the public cult composed only of *pricesne* as we find in the Neo-Protestant universe; we consider this missionary strategy to be a blockage on a certain level of culture and spiritual experience. Orthodoxy proposes an unlimited growth of man, an infinite dilatation, and the missionary offer from the Neo-Protestant proves to be totalitarianism and with exigencies only at a mediocre and sub-mediocre level. Such type of a public cult is a cult in which *priceasna* encounters a dangerous hypertrophy, amputating it, isolating it, antagonizing the present and the past.

The entire thesis wishes to maintain and fixate *priceasna* in the complex context, well vertebrated and correctly oxygenated from a doctrinarian point of view of the religious cult consecrated for 2000 years, delimitating its place and positive effects. It is a gentle hand reaching for the secularized man of the 21st century, a man stalked by mediocrity, consumed by superficial, devoured by ephemeral and superficialities. However, it is not just a superficial slipslop because if we look with a selective and critical eye, we observe and identify in it profound and grandiose doctrinary truths dripping constantly.

It is a great pastoral opportunity offered to the postmodern man, an instrument for introduction and maintaining the path of faith, a form of tasting the faith in its initial stages, a factor of consolidation of the faith at the beginning of the way. After the faithful reaches the spiritual and psycho-affective maturity it remains an element which offers savor and joy to the spiritual life, but achieves a secondary value, declining the primary place to other liturgical realities, with a higher mystical coefficient, of great sacramental profoundness, that are not subjected to the inherent fluctuations of the human emotional factor.