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**FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**  
**"ISIDOR TODORAN" DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

**ASPAZIA OȚEL PETRESCU- "SAINT OF PRISONS" – A  
FEMALE PROFILE OF CONTEXTUAL CONFESSION IN  
FAITH**

**PHD THESIS SUMMARY**

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**2019**

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## **KEYWORDS:**

social responsibility, Christian woman, confessors, detention, mission, communism, penitentiary, love of nation, loving the country, faith;

## **ABSTRACT**

The PhD thesis entitled "ASPAZIA OȚEL PETRESCU-" The Saint of Prisons (1923-2018) - Female Contextual Confession of Faith ", elaborated under the guidance of Archim. Prof. univ. Dr. Habil. Teofil Cristian Tia, is the result of a long research done with great responsibility.

The paper presents an extensive scientific study of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu's life, pointing to the fact that the active involvement of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu and the confession of Jesus Christ as our Savior helped people, both in detention and post-detention, to be spiritually reintegrated.

Aspazia Oțel Petrescu assumed the role of fighting and preserving the moral-Christian values inherited from the ancestral estates to surrender to the future generation the Orthodox faith intact.

**Motivation of the choice of theme and the research area:** The firm orientation on this scientific research is towards a beautiful perspective of getting to know the Christian confessor Mrs. Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. What is important is how the Romanian people preserved their Christian identity in an atheistic regime. Preserving identity can be done mainly through Christian people. An enlightening example is Ms Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, who, through her confessional support, represents a monument of Christian faith in Christ, love, dedication, voluntary sacrifice. Her attitude and charismatic thinking motivated me to write a work on her life.

The selection of this theme was justified by the desire to awaken a real interest in the life and experience of the honorable lady. The research was based on several judgments and questions that led to the best direction of achieving the expected results.

The motivation to deal with this research theme comes from multiple causes. I appreciated that the distinguished Aspazia Otel Petrescu can be considered a viable example of a woman confessing the Orthodox faith. The study and presentation of her life highlights her not to remain anonymous. We also had the certainty that writings about his consecrated life in Christ are needed. There is only one book written by someone else about her. He wrote five books: "I cry to you, Lord ...", "With Christ in the Cell", "I Remember," "It Was Once", "In memoriam

spice." Apart from the memoirs of his reign, the book "Aspazia Oțel Petrescu-Interviews" was published. A new writing about her memorable life, summing up all the bibliographic data, is welcomed. I felt that such an initiative was needed to enrich the memorial genre with this work.

I studied her memoirs, then those of female and male detention recording everything that refers to her life. I also read the sporadic dialogues that appeared in different publications, continuing with on-line or periodical writings.<sup>1</sup> The metaphysical transformation of Aspazia was so profound in the cartel period that it was a totem model for others. The number of books studied increased. We started from hearing and gathering testimonies representative of the facts of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu at different stages of life. I have discovered a man with a blessed life, lived simply, in dignity, in confession. Thirdly, I have noticed that in many books or collective volumes of confessors there is little evidence of Christian women during communism. And the detention and love of the nation and country of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu was in some books or publications just remembered. I thought to know the long chain of acquaintances of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu: family, colleagues during detention and post-detention for memories, testimonies and testimonies about it. I believe that Aspazia Oțel Petrescu can be one of the main spiritual and cultural promoters of today's society through its patriotism and living faith.

It is a topical theme because research studies the role of women in contemporary times, mirroring the mystical woman with pure conscience. Aspazia Oțel Petrescu has assumed her life-long role of fighting and preserving the moral-Christian values inherited from the ancestral estates. The whole of her good deeds give her the title of confessor and can be a landmark for us all of what is life in Christ. The model of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu's<sup>2</sup> life must be recorded not only as a reminder, but also as an example of living a renewing life desiring salvation. The common man can find in this model the paths for the burning of a vivid cleansing fire in his heart to the perfecting of his own faith. The exemplification of its countless spiritual struggles can become a

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<sup>1</sup> I have watched many interviews of her reign and have read a lot of online writings. I was conscious of having to look in the cuff of the distinguished lady's factual memories. I was hoping to find and bring to light an abundance of eloquent confessions for her belief. I wanted to complete the shadows of behaviors expressing her mentality and mood in a whole that mirrored who was Aspazia Oțel Petrescu.

<sup>2</sup> The people of this past, who steadfastly travel to a holy ideal, which they have served until sacrifice, and who have made us a lasting nation, aspiring to resurrection, a confessor of Orthodoxy, which is not only theology and knowledge, but also deep living in the spirit and truth, namely: a vertical love to God and His heavens, and horizontally, a love for nation and country. (Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, *Cu Hristos în celulă*, Ediția a doua, revăzută, Editura Meditații, București, 2013, p. 6)

real guide to obtaining authentic Christian living. Oțel Petrescu may be considered a traditional symbol of the Christian woman.

This research has a scientific relevance. It will show the socio-theological profile of the distinguished Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, who, in harsh conditions of life, has not lost faith in Christ. From a triple perspective: social, psychological and theological, we will emphasize the edifying aspects of maintaining, even under adverse conditions, a good Christian life.

Structure of the Work: Aspazia Oțel Petrescu's activity can be divided, but not separated, into two major directions: one with a religious character of continuous confession of the Orthodox faith and another with a literary character through its memorialistic writings of great significance. The first direction, the Christian one, was put to good use throughout her life by confessing and promoting a model life in Jesus Christ. In the literary direction, I had in mind the highlighting of her intellectual formation, as well as the cognitive and affective skills. Her acts are eloquent from the years of childhood and continue until the age of passing into the eternal life. We have surprised the bibliographic reference points that make reference to her charitable, missionary, confessional deeds.

We started from the hypothesis: If Communist confessors have an important role in the spiritual evolution of the contemporary man, then the new generations will guide their lives by copying their Christian pattern. In this sense, we studied the defending and confessing woman of Orthodoxy from the time of the atheist communist regime.

The paper aims to conduct a research on the active involvement of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu and the confession of Jesus Christ as our Savior, both in detention and post-detention, permanently helping people in distress to spiritually reintegrate. The development of a human society based on the knowledge of Christian values needs viable models that allow empathizing with them the closeness of Jesus Christ.

The objectives of the thesis are well defined. The bibliographic research had as main objective to identify the way in which Aspazia Oțel Petrescu fulfilled her duty to preserve traditional values as the basis of existentialism. It was supported by the secondary goals: identifying the factors that influenced Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, one of the virtuous contemporary confessional women, in making decisions about the way of life, including the Christian one; identifying directions forwarded by Aspazia Oțel Petrescu for improving the current society, by

considering the woman as its main propulsion for a spiritual society; creating a social, psychological and religious profile of Ms. Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, confessor of Jesus Christ.

This PhD thesis is the result of objectives found in the five chapters, with the specific subchapters, preceded by the introduction and finalized with the conclusions drawn from the deepening of the research. The whole paper is under the edifice of the initially formulated hypothesis that has been confirmed. Comparative studies are revealing through timely analyzes and syntheses that have facilitated a better overall view.

All the components of the structure of the research work have taken into account the scientific relevance, the topicality of the subject and the degree of applicability. The research methods were theoretical, analytical, synthetic, evaluative, strategic, creative. All graphical figures, tables, pictures, bibliography, web sources have brought representative and attractive originality notes. From a structural point of view, the informational content of the PhD thesis is based on a clear, concise and comprehensive presentation in five chapters, plus annexes. Thus, the theoretical foundation of the research allowed me to detail in detail the social life, with emphasis on the theological, of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu in 279 pages with 10 suggestive figures, with 42 pages in Appendices comprising: annex tables (pp.228-238), appendix maps (pp. 239-245), annexes to the matriculation sheets (pp.252-253), annex-links with and about Aspazia Oțel Petrescu (pp.246-251), annexed memorial books of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu (pp .254-256), photos of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu (pp. 257-268). The results of the research were a presentation of the Christian woman, which can be a model for today's generations, including aspects of its social and spiritual achievements with reference to women's empowerment in their confessional and Christian mother role..

**Major Research Coordinates:** The research has been conducted over a period of 4 years, in the years 2015-2019, studying a model of Christian confessional woman in Christ in the globalized and secularized society of today.

I intended to address this research theme from different perspectives from a social, psychologically theological and cultural point of view. The writing style had to do according to the truth of the facts and their chronology. Thinking in the perspective of treating this research topic, it was not very easy to reach the people close to Mrs Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, the witnesses, as well as archive documents, publications, interviews, memoirs, literary sources, photographs, press articles.



Written as a memorial essay, the research is addressed to both the specialists and the simple reader. It constitutes an important historical documentation from the book of political imprisonment of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu and her colleagues of detention, as well as the literary period.

Presenting the destiny of the memorable lady emphasizes ambivalent love, generation and faith, which can be an example and encouragement for today's youth to live in need for God. I have respected her major contribution to stabilizing Christian tradition, especially in an atheistic regime. The research carried out was a complex presentation of various documented life periods, with particular emphasis on detention and post-detention. I've gathered the information from different sources to avoid distorted data.

I have highlighted through a set of argumentative units the ideals, affections, interests, intentions of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. Through the rigor of the theoretical construction we emphasized her belief. We have noticed the perception of a postmodern Nihilist society in which Aspazia Oțel Petrescu offers us an exceptional model for how to be a good Christian in all the trials of life. This Christian woman was ethical in all fields congratulating with the right faith. With a developed self-esteem and humility, Aspazia Oțel Petrescu is perfectly compatible with today's youngster who is seeking spiritual health patterns. We believe that we can empathize with the high, professional and homemade standards of this honorable confessor of ancient faith, who has invested in the community all its intellectual, cultural, and spiritual potential by appealing to a sense of responsibility towards society. Thus, we see an individual style with notable influence for the peers. Aspazia Oțel Petrescu is among the contemporary women who can inspire future generations through their lives.

**The content of the research:** The introductory part presents the context of the research theme and the importance of the field. It is also broadly represented the importance of the field for the social environment. Also here is the purpose and objectives of the research, the applied methodology and the main results obtained.

**Chapter I**, entitled "*The Context in which Aspazia Oțel Petrescu confessed her faith in Christ*", gives a contextualization of the life, activity and testimony of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. There is a balance between tradition and modernity, more precisely aspects where unsuccessful modernity or communism of the twentieth century influenced cultural, social and economic life in Romania.

In **Chapter II**, called "*Family Genealogy. School Preparation of Aspazia Oțel*", we considered it absolutely necessary to present some aspects related to the genealogy of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu and the beautiful period of childhood with all the implications. The educational initiative pathway in the school and the environment was highlighted during the primary, high school and university studies, in Ghizdița, Balti, Cernăuți and Cluj. The beautiful educational achievements underlined the importance of school, as a source of applied knowledge, in forming the personality of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. Their remarkable conduct has seen the concentration of many values that have transformed over time into their own Christian virtues.

In **Chapter III**, which is called "*The Period of Arrest and Detention. The Romanian-Secret Caliphate and Sacrifice*" provides information about her activity during detention and post-detention. The arrest and detention of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu in Mislea, Dumbrăveni, Miercurea-Ciuc, Jilava, Botosani, Arad prisons are followed by the release from detention including the way of reintegration and the challenges of the world. It is a comparative study of the prisons in which she was detained, emphasizing her resistance to the vicissitudes of times by her unshakable faith which gave her the title of confessor. It can be seen how to perceive her as a worthy model of guidance for Christian life in detention. I was looking to capture how Aspazia has made a great deal of wisdom to turn her suffering into Christian victory. I have inscribed the periplus of her movements in communist prisons as a method of depersonalization and isolation from acquaintances.

**Chapter IV**, titled "*The Psychological, Social and Religious Profile of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. Prayer*" presents a study on the role of prayer in an exceptional initiative path in the ascetic faith of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, the man of God. It is the Christian emblematic figure by defending and confessing Orthodoxy, which gives her the title of "Saint of Prisons". A study is made on the psychological model of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu in detention about the social psychology of the group. The Aspazia Petrescu model, pointed by her out-of-common skills, and that of women in communist prisons, is highlighted. It introduces a historical and analytical presentation of the activities of some personalities who have contributed to raising the respect for women today. The researched phenomena has been analyzed not only at national level. The analysis of the way of manifesting the confessing power regarding the social responsibility of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu woman was discussed.

The **fifth chapter**, surnamed "*Confession through literary creation. Testimonies. Evocation*" emphasizes a study on the socio-cultural model of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, which is distinguished by high creativity at high odds. Analytical aspects of the literary creation of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu before detention, during detention, after the period of detention are presented. It's a study of the memories of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu and the reviews of them. We are considering finalizing the presentation of the life and actions of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu through testimonies and evocations in the perspective of two directions: one from Aspazia Oțel Petrescu about his fellow citizens, and the other from other personalities to his reign. It includes occasional discourses, commemorations, anniversaries. He plays the recent Aspazia Petrescu's testimony of Christ.

The PhD thesis has at the end of the research a set of conclusions confirming the validation of the hypothesis. Achieving the objectives as a whole, referring to the results of the studies, confirms the relevance of the topic, the studied field, but especially its applicability. There are a number of directions in which research can be done thoroughly, in detail and continuously. We have expressed the steps taken in the scientific research undertaken and confirmed the hypothesis from which we left: Aspazia Oțel Petrescu is an emblematic figure known by current generations, becoming a viable model of Christian living and devotion to Jesus Christ.

**General theoretical considerations** The work is original by exposing, in a personal, unique, attractive way all the scientific information found, read, analyzed, synthesized, exposed. Their comment and interpretation of the concepts has been made clear, concise, simple, for everyone's sake. It is the product of your own efforts to seek to respect intellectual honesty.

**Our own contribution to the development of the knowledge in the field:** Through this research we have been aiming to highlight the life of Apesia Oțel Petrescu, a possible model of influencing the spiritual life of Romanian women in a modern world in constant transformation<sup>3</sup>.. The subject was approached both theoretically and practically, referring to Mrs. Apazia Oțel Petrescu as a confessor of the national patriotism, but also of the ancestral faith. The studies and researches carried out are have found comparative analyses on the role and state of the Christian

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<sup>3</sup> Our generation was called for prisons. I think that the generation that follows us will have to make our sacrifice in the prisons fruitful. As far as possible, because first of all the generation to which you are addressing will be more endeavored than we are. Traps, so to call them, are multiple and much more perfidious, and it's much harder to deal with. (Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, *With Christ in the Cell*, Second Edition, Rev., Meditații Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, p.21)

woman in a society in which everything seems derisory, relatively, especially of the Christian model of living of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. The stated researches will be an opportunity to create viable solutions for highlighting the Christian woman in the family and the contemporary society through the emblematic figure of Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. The studies will also enrich the ways of promoting and spreading Christian values in limit situations. It will be studied from several perspectives: social, cultural, historical, theological, and psychological. I dare to believe that the present work will mean something for the future generations, as a source of information about how life can be marked and extended by a pure Christian and a true nationalist taken to the ultimate sacrifice.

Through this research, I sought to emphasize the danger of Christian indifference in the conditions of current globalization, led to nihilism, and the role of confessing woman model Aspazia Oțel Petrescu. The danger of nihilism must be diminished because the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14: 6). He showed us the principles of a balanced life, being the model of life for each individual. The face of obedience can be taken from the humble Holy Mother of God who said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." (Luke 1:38).

Thus, we have achieved the objectives proposed in the research we have made and confirmed the hypothesis from which we started off: Aspazia Oțel Petrescu is an iconic figure known by present generations, even a model of Christian living and devotion to Jesus Christ.

The research has highlighted the fact that an appreciable number of believers around the honorable Aspazia Oțel Petrescu lady, especially during the post-detention period, can confirm its potential for confessions.

Her involvement in the religious field with volunteer actions attests to her value. Her actions have a missionary character accompanied by a strong impact on the increase in the number of practitioners of individual prayer or in common.

She can be categorized as a holy life-person who constantly interfered with her fellow men, but especially with God, assuming her cross of suffering.

The increasing flow of young people who visited her during the last years of her life gave her the status of a confessor, whose the serving thy neighbour leads to the ultimate sacrifice.

Thus we have achieved the objectives proposed in the research we have made and confirmed the hypothesis from which we left off: Aspazia Oțel Petrescu is a known emblematic figure of present generations, even a model of Christian living and devotion to Jesus Christ