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**The Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord in the Liturgical
Tradition of the Orthodox East**

Doctoral Thesis

Summary

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Summary

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Keywords: Pascal Mystery, Pascha, Resurrection, cult, ritual, liturgical celebration, mystagogy, sacramental mysticism.

The Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ represents the very foundation of the Christian faith, as categorically affirmed by the Holy Apostle Paul: *"And if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and your faith is in vain"* (1 Corinthians 15:14). The Crucified and Risen Christ constitutes the central content of the apostolic preaching (kerygma) and the essence of the Christian faith, continuously confessed by the Church throughout history (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23). Christ's Resurrection is the undeniable proof of the triumph of life over death and the pledge of the general Resurrection, representing the eschatological gift of God offered to all humankind. Only Christianity offers an eternal meaning to human existence, for through the Resurrection it opens the horizon of eternal life in a communion of love with God.

The Church celebrates the Resurrection of the Lord both liturgically and sacramentally, especially within the great Feast of Holy Pascha. Given its crucial importance for the Christian faith, the Feast of the Resurrection stands as the summit of Orthodox liturgical life. In this regard, Saint John of Damascus, in the canon of the Feast of the Resurrection, defines Pascha as *"the Feast of feasts and the Festivals of festivals, the Queen and Lady of all days"*, a poetic expression that conveys the profound truth that the paschal mystery is the source of the entire liturgical life of the Church, as well as the point toward which it finds its fulfillment and perfection.

To understand why Orthodoxy structures its entire liturgical life around Holy Pascha, it is essential to penetrate the deeper significance of the paschal mystery. This mystery is not limited solely to the event of the Resurrection of the Lord but encompasses the entire economy of salvation accomplished by Christ: The Incarnation, the Passion, the Death, the Descent into Hades, the Resurrection, the Ascension into heaven, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. This succession of salvific events cannot be fragmented but rather constitutes a single and indivisible mystery of divine love—the mystery of Christ. It lies at the very foundation of Orthodox worship and is not only commemorated but also continuously made present through the sacramental

economy of the Church, which becomes the living space of the encounter between humanity and God in history.

In the Orthodox liturgical experience, the Church does not limit itself to a mere commemoration of the Lord's death and Resurrection as historical events of the past, but rather participates in them truly and effectively, living them existentially through the sacramental life. The prayers, hymnography, liturgical gestures, the architecture of the services, the structure of the liturgical year, and even the sacred space itself are all profoundly marked by this paschal dimension—even when the explicit reference to the Resurrection seems absent. The paschal mystery thus becomes the fundamental hermeneutical principle of the entire Orthodox liturgical worship. All the liturgical elements that mediate mystical participation in the mystery of Christ crucified and risen (cf. Romans 6:3–5) are interpreted in the light of this mystery. In this way, liturgy becomes the space in which the believer is introduced into the paschal dynamic in a real and transfiguring manner, as an existential passage from this life toward the Kingdom of Heaven. In this sense, it can be affirmed that the entire Orthodox worship is paschal in its very essence, being structured around the continual actualization of this salvific mystery that lies at the heart of the Church's life.

The actualization of the paschal mystery takes place on all levels of liturgical life. It is actualized in a unique way in Divine Liturgy. It is actualized in Baptism and in all the Holy Mysteries. It is actualized every Sunday, as a weekly celebration of Pascha and Pentecost, thereby constantly renewing Christian hope. It is actualized in the annual celebration of Holy Pascha, which represents the apex of the liturgical year, a time when all creation is invited to taste the joy of the Resurrection. It is actualized in liturgical time and space, which provide spiritual pedagogy and make the believer a participant in the experience which Saint Paul calls “life in Christ.” It is also actualized in the great paschal passage of the Christian from this world to the world beyond the horizon.

In this context, the Feast of Pascha cannot be understood simply as one celebration among others but must be perceived as the central axis around which the entire liturgical life and Christian spirituality are ordered. The entire liturgical existence of the Church is, in essence, paschal and eschatological, and all cultic moments receive their profound meaning in relation to the mystery of the Resurrection. The paschal hymnography, the structure of the services, the liturgical ordinances specific to this period, and the ecclesial joy that accompanies them

constitute concrete expressions of the privileged role that Pascha occupies in the life of the Church. Therefore, considering this theological and liturgical reality, there arises a clear necessity for an in-depth study of the paschal mystery and the way it is actualized and lived within the liturgical celebration and the spiritual life of the Church.

The thesis is structured into four chapters, each containing several sections, in addition to the introduction, conclusions, and bibliography.

The first chapter, entitled *Clarifications on the History, Theology, and Ecclesial Celebration of Holy Pascha*, is organized into three major sections. The first of these is dedicated to *The Theological Meaning of the Paschal Mystery in Orthodox Divine Liturgy* and seeks to explore the profound theological dimension of the Paschal Mystery within the context of Orthodox worship. This section serves as the conceptual and theological foundation of the entire research, offering a rigorous analysis of the central position that the Paschal Mystery occupies in the liturgical structure of the Church and in ecclesial life. It highlights not only the theological significance but also the liturgical relevance of this fundamental salvific reality. A careful examination is proposed of the expression "Paschal Mystery", from theological, linguistic, and hermeneutical perspectives. In this sense, a historical-philological investigation is conducted on the Greek term *μυστήριον*, by presenting its pre-Christian meanings, followed by a definition of the concept in early Christian and patristic thought. This analysis culminates in identifying the Paschal Mystery with the Pauline expression "the Mystery of Christ", organically integrated into the economy of salvation, in which the Incarnation, the Passion, the Death, and the Resurrection of the Lord are seen as constitutive and interdependent moments of the one Mystery of Christ. The chapter then addresses the theological content of the Paschal Mystery by analyzing the great salvific events — the Resurrection, the Cross, the Ascension, Pentecost and the Incarnation — not as separate realities, but as integral parts of the divine economy, in which the Resurrection stands as the apex of the saving work. The historical and typological dimensions of the Paschal Mystery are also brought to the fore, as reflected in its relationship to the history of salvation. The correlation between the Mystery of Christ and the historical unfolding of the divine plan of salvation is emphasized, with a particular focus on the Lord's Pascha as an act of glorification and deliverance, interpreted considering Old Testament typology. A valuable contribution of this section is the integration of the Paschal Mystery within the sphere of liturgical and sacramental mysticism, through which the manner in which Orthodox worship expresses and actualizes this

fundamental theological reality is explored. The Paschal Mystery is thus understood as the theological foundation of the entire cult, being especially reflected in Baptism, the Eucharist, and in the sacred experience of liturgical time and ecclesial space — both bearing the saving presence of Christ. Overall, this first section offers a coherent and profound theological framework essential for a proper understanding of the mystagogical dimension of the Feast of the Resurrection. It builds a solid bridge between dogmatic reflection, liturgical experience, and the spiritual life of the faithful, underlining that the Paschal Mystery is not merely a theological concept, but a living reality that underlies the worship of the Church and through which the entire patrimony of the Orthodox Church must be interpreted.

The second section of this chapter is dedicated to the *biblical foundation of the Paschal liturgical memorial* and offers a theological and exegetical analysis of the scriptural basis of the Paschal feast, viewed through the lens of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. The approach aims to identify the sacred anchoring of the Paschal mystery within the Jewish religious tradition and its full transfiguration in the light of Christ's Passover. A central point of this section is the analysis of the "Pasha" feast in Judaism, from both a semantic and liturgical perspective. The study begins with a clarification of the meaning of the term *pesah*, along with its lexical field. The main literary sources — biblical and extra-biblical — are evaluated, describing the institution and ritual observance of Passover in Israelite tradition. The historical origins of the Jewish Passover and its development throughout the various stages of the religious history of the Jewish people are also explored, including theories regarding potential pre-Exodus forms of the feast, as well as hypotheses concerning its gradual historicization. Special attention is given to the biblical institution of Passover and its first celebration in the context of the Exodus, followed by an analysis of the transformations that occurred during the settlement in Canaan, the exilic and post-exilic periods, and during the time of our Lord Jesus Christ. The theological meanings of the Jewish Paschal celebration are then highlighted, understood as a fundamental act of liberation, covenant renewal, and identity affirmation of the chosen people. Passover is presented as the central axis of Jewish religious worship, around which the entire liturgical life of Israel revolves. The final part of the section is dedicated to the interpretation and fulfillment of the Paschal mystery in the New Testament. The discussion begins with the Pauline writings, in which Christ is explicitly designated as "our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7), emphasizing the significance of the Cross and the Resurrection as the fulfillment of Old

Testament prefigurations. The Synoptic Gospels are then analyzed, presenting the institution of the Eucharist within the context of the Last Supper, highlighting Christ's death as the supreme sacrificial offering of salvation—as the new Exodus. Attention is also given to the *First Catholic Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter*, in which Christ is described as “a lamb without defect or blemish,” an essential symbol of the Paschal sacrifice. The section concludes with a Paschal and eschatological reading of Passover in the *Holy Gospel according to John* and in the *Apocalypse of Saint John the Theologian*, where Christ is revealed as the sacrificed and glorified Lamb, placed at the center of the heavenly liturgy. Thus, this section demonstrates the typological continuity from the Old to the New Testament, showing that the Christian Pascha is the fulfillment of the Jewish Passover through the Sacrifice and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, becoming the foundation of the new liturgical memorial, perpetually actualized in the Holy Eucharist.

The third section of the first chapter is dedicated to exploring the ecclesial dimension of the Paschal Mystery, highlighting the way in which the Church has preserved, transmitted, and lived out this celebration throughout its liturgical history. The primary objective of this section is to emphasize that the Paschal Mystery is not merely a theological concept, but a living, communal, and sacramental experience that lies at the very foundation of Orthodox liturgical life and spirituality. The analysis opens with a presentation of the joy of the Resurrection and the triumph of life in early Christianity, underlining the central importance of the Resurrection in the life of the apostolic Church. The Resurrection was understood not simply as a commemorative event, but as a real anticipation of eternal life, offering a profound eschatological meaning to the experience of faith. A historical overview follows, regarding the antiquity of the Christian feast of Holy Pascha, accompanied by an analysis of the Paschal Controversy of the second century, which reflected divergences between local traditions and efforts to harmonize the date of the Paschal celebration. This topic is further deepened by a reflection on the issue of determining the date of Pascha, approached from historical, liturgical, and ecumenical perspectives, within the context of contemporary challenges and the possibilities for interconfessional consensus. A significant aspect of this section is the analysis of Paschal language in the writings of the Holy Fathers, who interpreted the Resurrection of Christ through a theologically rich register characterized by symbolism, doxology, and a profound Christological dimension. Building upon this foundation, the section presents how Pascha was celebrated in the early centuries of

Christianity. The section continues with a theological-liturgical reflection on the contemporary meaning of the Paschal celebration within the Church, addressing themes such as: – the role of the liturgical community in celebrating, the memorial character of Pascha as a sacramental actualization of Christ's Death and Resurrection, and the spiritual dimension of experiencing the Resurrection in the context of today's challenges. Particular attention is given to the organic connection between Holy Pascha, the Divine Eucharist, and the Kingdom of Heaven, as well as to the crisis of ecclesial consciousness in today's world, where the profound and mystagogical meaning of Pascha risks being overshadowed by forms reduced to pietism. Finally, the section concludes with a theological meditation on the Paschal Mystery as the foundation of Christian existence, emphasizing that life in Christ, lived within the Eucharistic community, is shaped by the Paschal dynamic of dying to sin and rising in grace, being the authentic expression of communion with God and with the Church.

The second chapter of the thesis offers a broad historical and theological presentation of how the Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord has been celebrated within the Orthodox liturgical tradition. The focus is placed on the evolution of the Paschal liturgical rite and the shaping of worship in the major ecclesial centers of the Christian East. The chapter provides a historical overview of the main forms of Paschal celebration, beginning with the Egeria-documented Jerusalem tradition (the so-called "Hagiopolitan" rite), continuing with the development of the Byzantine rite in Constantinople, and culminating in the process of the monasticization of the rite and the impact of this phenomenon on later liturgical practice.

The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the Hagiopolitan liturgical tradition, which was deeply shaped by the veneration of the Holy Places, a factor that decisively influenced the structure and content of the Paschal services. The sources that allow for a reconstruction of these celebrations – especially the *Itinerarium Egeriae* – are analyzed, offering valuable testimonies regarding the organization of worship in Jerusalem. In this context, the Paschal Vigil is described in detail, alongside characteristic rites such as the Lucernarium, which would later be associated with the phenomenon of the Holy Fire. Special attention is given to the Paschal Baptism, celebrated during the Resurrection night services, as well as to the morning offices and the Paschal Octave, within which the mystagogical catechesis was integrated—intended to initiate the newly baptized into the mysteries of the faith and the sacramental life of the Church.

The second part of the chapter explores the celebration of Pascha within the “Great Church” of Constantinople, where a cathedral rite developed, characterized by imperial solemnity and complex liturgical structure. The origins, development and influence of this rite are presented, as it gradually became the normative model for the entire Orthodox Church. Liturgical sources that allow for the reconstruction of these celebrations are analyzed, and the structure of the Constantinopolitan Paschal Vigil is described in detail, highlighting the particularities of this grand and expressive liturgical setting. The chapter concludes by focusing on the monasticization process of the Byzantine rite, a phenomenon that deeply shaped the form and spirituality of Paschal worship. Through the assimilation of monastic rubrics – especially from the Studite tradition – into official worship, significant changes occurred in the emphasis and dynamics of the services, also influencing the ascetical and theological dimension of the celebration of the Resurrection in Orthodox liturgical life. Overall, the chapter offers a comprehensive perspective on the historical-liturgical development of the Feast of Pascha in Orthodoxy, emphasizing the theological continuity, dogmatic coherence, and, at the same time, the ritual adaptability of the Church in relation to historical, geographical, and cultural contexts – without compromising the essential content of the Paschal Mystery.

The final section of this chapter aims to provide a systematic analysis and a theological-mystagogical interpretation of the Paschal liturgical order as it is celebrated within the contemporary Orthodox tradition. The focus is both on the external structure of the celebrations and on the symbolic and theological depth of each liturgical moment, as revealed through the progression of rites that form the Paschal cycle. The general structure and constituent elements of the celebration are outlined, highlighting the internal coherence of the Paschal liturgical ensemble, which begins with the services of Holy Saturday and culminates in the Festal Divine Liturgy and the specific services of Bright Week. Each stage is examined in relation to the mystery of the Resurrection, toward which the entire liturgical structure converges, following an ascending path of participation and interiorization of the Paschal reality. A detailed description of the Paschal ritual is then presented, structured according to its distinct liturgical moments. Thus, the Vespers of Holy Saturday, united with the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, is analyzed as it anticipates the joy of the Resurrection through a rich prophetic lectionary and is often considered the “first Paschal Liturgy.” The preparatory moments leading up to the Paschal Matins are also described: the blessing of the loaves, the Paschal meal, the reading from the *Acts*

of the *Apostles*, and the traditional singing of the *Pannychis*, all contributing to an atmosphere of liturgical expectancy and communal vigil. A structural and theological analysis is offered of the Paschal Matins, regarded as the high point of the Paschal celebration. This service includes the night-time procession, the solemn proclamation of the Resurrection, and the chanting of the *Paschal Canon*, one of the most theologically and poetically profound compositions of Byzantine hymnography. Following this, the *Paschal Hours* are explored as special compositions that replace the usual liturgical hours and focus the Church's prayer entirely on the radiant mystery of the Resurrection. Then, the particular features of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, celebrated on Pascha, are presented. This Eucharistic apex of the feast gathers the entire community into communion with the Risen Christ. The Vespers of Pascha, known as the "*Vespers of Love*", is also examined. During this service, the Gospel is read in multiple languages, expressing the universal dimension of the Resurrection's proclamation. Finally, the liturgical particularities of Bright Week are presented and analyzed. These continue the atmosphere of the feast and extend the Paschal experience into the rhythmic structure of the Church's daily worship, expressing the enduring joy of the Resurrection in the life of the Church. Overall, this section emphasizes that the Paschal services, through their theological, symbolic, and ritual complexity, constitute a true mystagogical journey, intended to lead the faithful toward a real, communal, and transformative encounter with the Paschal Mystery. They synthesize the entire theology of salvation and offer a profound liturgical experience that transcends historical time and anticipates the eschatological fullness of the Kingdom of God.

Chapter Three of the study is dedicated to a theological analysis of Paschal hymnography, aiming to identify and interpret the fundamental themes expressed in the liturgical compositions dedicated to the Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord. The proposed approach considers both the literary-poetic dimension of these hymnographic works and their doctrinal content, highlighting their value as authentic expressions of Orthodox faith and theology. The first part of the chapter presents the hymnographic structure of the Feast of the Resurrection, as well as the principal hymnographers who contributed to the articulation of this liturgical corpus. The stylistic features and theological particularities of the hymns are analyzed, emphasizing how they configure a coherent Paschal theology, deeply rooted in the patristic and liturgical tradition of the Church. A central theme of this section is the Harrowing of Hell, interpreted as a

manifestation of Christ's perfect kenosis and, simultaneously, as the beginning of His glorification through the Resurrection. This Christological theme is treated from both the hymnographic and Paschal iconographic perspectives, being visually represented through the icon of the Harrowing of Hell, an essential image of Orthodox Paschal iconography, which depicts the liberation of Adam from the bondage of death – a symbol of the salvation of all humanity. Subsequently, the theological dimension of the Resurrection is deepened, as reflected in the hymnography and iconography of the Church. Other essential themes are highlighted, such as: the tomb as a source of life, a paradoxical symbol of death overcome by life; the Myrrh-bearing Women, the first witnesses and proclaimers of the Resurrection, models of faith and courage; and the Virgin Mary, discreetly present in the hymnography but holding a secret and profound role in the economy of the feast. This section also includes a theological analysis of the icon of the Myrrh bearing Women at the tomb, where the visual expression complements the hymnographic message, offering a unified perspective on the mystery of the Resurrection. Thus, Chapter Three demonstrates that Orthodox Paschal hymnography is not merely a poetic manifestation of liturgical joy but constitutes a genuine mystagogical and theological instrument intended to lead the faithful to a profound understanding of the mystery of Christ's Resurrection as a saving event and a reality present in the life of the Church. Furthermore, the interdependence between the liturgical text and its iconographic representation is emphasized, which, in a symbolic and doctrinal synthesis, fully expresses the Orthodox theology of the Resurrection.

Chapter Four of the study is devoted to the analysis of the musical dimension of the Paschal celebration within the Byzantine tradition as cultivated in the Romanian Orthodox context. The research focuses on how this musical-liturgical tradition was received, adapted, and transmitted within ecclesial life, highlighting both the historical development of the Paschal repertoire and its interpretative and compositional particularities, as reflected in the works of notable Romanian chief chanters and composers.

The first part of the chapter provides a historical and musicological overview of the development of Paschal chant, emphasizing the major influence of the "Chrysanthine Reform" in Constantinople on Orthodox church music, including its impact in Romania. Within this context, the contributions of emblematic figures such as Hieromonk Macarie, Anton Pann, Ștefanache Popescu, Ion Popescu-Pasărea, Nicolae Lungu, Nicu Moldoveanu, and Sebastian Barbu-Bucur are highlighted, all of whom played a decisive role in preserving, developing, and

contextualizing Byzantine music within Romanian Orthodoxy, according to the local cultural specificity and sensibility. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the main Paschal musical compositions as reflected in manuscripts, collections, and singing practices in the Romanian milieu. Special attention is given to the Troparion, Kontakion, and Exaposteilaria, from the perspective of melodic-textual structure and doxological expressiveness; the Paschal Katabasiae, analyzed according to specific musical formulas and local influences; the Axion of the Resurrection, regarded as an especially refined melodic-liturgical work deeply integrated into the ethos of the Paschal feast; and the Paschal Sticheron, presented in the Transylvanian version, transcribed by Father Professor Vasile Stanciu. The chapter also emphasizes the role of local traditions in the transmission and preservation of this Paschal repertoire, highlighting the contributions of the regions of Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, Bucovina, and Maramureș. The importance of activities carried out within ecclesial institutions, as well as the involvement of church music educators in theological seminaries and faculties of theology, is underscored, as these have ensured the living continuity of traditional choral singing, faithful to the Byzantine spirit and deeply rooted in Romanian Orthodox identity. Thus, the Paschal repertoire, through its richness and profundity, constitutes a musical and theological treasury that transmits, across time, through sound, chant, and tradition, the living testimony of faith in the Resurrection of Christ.

The study's conclusions recap the main ideas of the doctoral thesis, proposing several avenues for further research in the field of Liturgical Theology.