

“Saint Theodore the Studite—Liturgical Hymnographer”

Abstract

The doctoral dissertation titled “Saint Theodore the Studite—Liturgical Hymnographer” aims to recover and highlight a little-studied aspect of the personality and work of one of the most important figures of Byzantium in the late 8th and early 9th centuries. Known primarily as the great abbot of the Studion Monastery, a defender of the veneration of holy icons, a confessor of Orthodoxy, and a reformer of monastic life, Saint Theodore the Studite is, at the same time, the author of a vast literary body of work, within which his hymnography occupies a significant place. Nevertheless, his profile as a hymnographer has often taken a back seat both in Western and Eastern theological scholarship and, especially, in Romanian theological circles.

Based on this observation, this study aims to demonstrate that hymnography is not a marginal aspect of Theodore’s work, but rather one of the primary domains in which Saint Theodore’s theology, ascetic experience, monastic life, and ecclesial consciousness converge and find expression. The main objective of the dissertation is, therefore, to justify his status as a liturgical hymnographer in the full sense of the term, through the reconstruction and critical evaluation of the corpus of texts attributed to him, by situating his work within the context of the Byzantine hymnographic tradition and the environment under study, as well as by highlighting the main theological themes expressed in his work.

The first part of the dissertation aims to outline the general context of the development of Byzantine hymnography up to the period of the authors under study. The contributions of major hymnographers—such as Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Saint Romanos the Melodist, Saint Andrew of Crete, Saint John of Damascus, and Saint Cassian—are analyzed to highlight the evolution of the principal hymnographic forms and genres, as well as the profound theological and ecclesial character of liturgical poetry.

The second chapter is devoted to the biographical and bibliographical profile of Saint Theodore the Studite. His life, intellectual and spiritual formation, monastic experience, exiles, his work as an abbot, and his involvement in the major ecclesial conflicts of the era are analyzed in close connection with his work. The research highlights the fact that Saint Theodore’s literary and hymnographic work cannot be separated from his concrete experience as a confessor, ascetic, and shepherd of a monastic community.

An essential role in understanding Theodore's work is played by the analysis of the Studion Monastery and its contribution to the development of Byzantine liturgical culture. Under the leadership of Saint Theodore, the Studion was not only a rigorously organized monastic community but also an important center for the creation, transmission, and preservation of liturgical tradition. Community life, worship, catechesis, manuscript copying, and hymnographic composition come together here in a particularly fruitful synthesis. In this context, the study analyzes the contribution of the Studion environment to the formation and transmission of important liturgical traditions, as well as the activity of a veritable school of hymnography, to which several ecclesiastical authors belonged.

The core of the research consists of an analysis of the hymnographic works attributed to Saint Theodore the Studite. The various genres of compositions associated with his name—kontakia, canons, trichantaria, tetraodes, stichera, sedelna, and other hymnographic forms—are cataloged and examined, with special attention given to their presence in the Triodion, Pentecostarion, and Menaion. An important aspect of the research is the critical evaluation of attributions, since the manuscript tradition and modern bibliography do not always offer unanimous conclusions. From this perspective, the dissertation aims to delineate as carefully as possible the authentic or likely authentic corpus, without automatically accepting all traditional attributions.

Particular attention is also given to the liturgical-experiential dimension of St. Theodore the Studite's hymnography. The texts analyzed, especially those related to the Triodion period, highlight how ascetic experience is translated into liturgical language. Repentance, fasting, the struggle against the passions, tears, ascetic discipline, and the hope of the Resurrection are not merely theoretical themes, but realities meant to be internalized and embraced by the ecclesial community.

The overall conclusion of this research is that Saint Theodore the Studite should be recognized and valued as a liturgical hymnographer in the fullest sense. The breadth and diversity of the corpus of texts associated with his name, the liturgical function of these compositions, and their theological depth justify his place among the important authors of the Byzantine hymnographic tradition. His originality should not necessarily be sought in a formal break with the preceding tradition, but rather in his ability to embrace it, organize it, and place it at the service of an intensely lived ecclesial and monastic life. From this perspective, this dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding of the personality and work of Saint Theodore the Studite and, at the same time, to the rediscovery of an important dimension of the Byzantine liturgical and hymnographic tradition.