

## GERARD OF CSANAD (980–1046) – THE THEOLOGIAN

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The Venetian Gerardo, also called Gerard of Csanad, born around 980, was an outstanding personality of the European society around the year One Thousand. Educated in the atmosphere of Venice, hotbed of culture in the Middle Ages, he had led a monk's ascetic life in the Venetian laguna, but he was also drawn to pilgrimage. Thus he ended up in Hungary, where king Stephen I and the elites around him had just introduced Christianity, and where he settled due to the circumstances and the offers he had received. After the Hungarian king had conquered Ohtum's duchy following the conflict in 1028, Gerard settled in Csanad (Cenad) on the Lower Mureș as bishop of the Christian diocese established in 1030. He played a crucial part in the political events and religious life in the next years, and he died in September 1046 near Buda during the struggle against the heathen rebels.

Consequently, he was sanctified together with king Stephen in 1083 and became a saintly character worshiped by the Christians of his diocese as well as throughout the Hungarian kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

In the following pages we shall approach only one aspect of his manifold activity, namely his contribution to theology.



There is a single direct testimony of Gerard of Csanad's theological or cultural activity<sup>2</sup> in general, *Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum*,<sup>3</sup> a commentary on

<sup>1</sup> See in extenso Șerban Turcuș, *Sfântul Gerard de Cenad sau despre destinul unui venețian în jurul Anului O Mie*, Carom, București, 2004, 193 p.

<sup>2</sup> Germain Morin, *Un théologien ignoré du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle: L'évêque martyr Gérard de Csanad*, OSB, in "Revue Bénédictine", 27, 1910, pp. 516–521.

<sup>3</sup> "Among all Gerard's writings, the only one that has been preserved is a commentary on several verses from the biblical book of Daniel and entitled with a word, impossible to translate, taken from the jurists' jargon, *deliberatio*; but it is not a title proper, it is more a clue on the content offered by the secretary and the copyist: "*Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum*". The other writings, mentioned either in the "Great Legend" or in the "Deliberatio" are: a collection of speeches delivered by Gerard on the occasion of public gatherings; several brief pious works, which could be reconstructed and ascribed to him due to anonymous fragments and paraphrases or pseudo-epigraph from manuscripts; a commentary on John's first Epistle and another on the first chapter of the Epistle to the Jews, lost or still not identified; a brief treatise on the symbolic character of numbers, seemingly after Eucherius's excerpts (the 5th century)

the episode of the three children thrown into the oven – as narrated in the Book of Daniel, chapter 3, verses 57–65,<sup>4</sup> written in the time when Gerard was confronted with the dilemmas stirred by the usurper Aba Samuel. Specialists believe that the respective text was elaborated under the circumstances in which the missionary diocese of Csanad witnessed the presence of a population of Bulgarian source, with marked characteristics of dualist sect, identified with the Bogomils.<sup>5</sup>

The text was first edited by Ignaz Batthyány in the volume entitled *Sancti Gerhardi episcopi Chanadiensis scripta et acta hactenus inedita*, Alba-Carolinae, 1790.<sup>6</sup> The work was translated into Romanian almost two hundred years later by

*from Augustine's writings; at last, a book of scholastic doctrine, written in 1045 in Cenad for a certain Andrew, and entitled "De divino patrimonio", that is "On the Divine Scope"; written on tablets of wood or clay, it seems that it was not copied on parchment as happened with "Deliberatio". Radu Constantinescu in Gerard of Csanad, op. cit., p. 156.*

<sup>4</sup> The verses are the following:

*Benedicite, omnia Opera Domini, Domino:*

*Laudate et supraexaltate Eum in saecula.*

*Benedicite, Angeli Domini, Domino*

*Benedicite, Caeli, Domino*

*Benedicite, Aquae omnes, quae super caelos sunt*

*Benedicite, omnes Virtutes Domini, Domino*

*Benedicite, Sol et Luna, Domino*

*Benedicite, Stellae caeli, Domino*

*Benedicite, omnis Imber et Ros, Domino*

*Benedicite, omnes Spiritus Dei, Domino.*

<sup>5</sup> "Dopo la caduta della Bulgaria indipendente (1018), i perseguitati eretici bogomili si rifugiarono in gran numero nel territorio del capo tribu Ahtum propagando i loro insegnamenti anticlericali ed antif feudali. Gerardo ritenne che il suo compito principale fosse di convertire questi eretici alla fede; ritenendo di servire in tal modo gli interessi dell'intero mondo cristiano." *Ibidem*, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Among the rich literature in Hungarian historical writing dedicated to this work we should mention: Ernő Mátrai Ompolyi, *Gellért az első magyar scolasticus*, in "Figyelő", 4, 1878, pp. 209–223; Tibor Hajdu, *Szent Gellért "Deliberatio" cz. Művének méltatása, in A pannonthalmi Szent-Benedek-Rend történetében*, Budapest, 1902, pp. 381–397; István Ferenczik, *Szent Gellért helye a filozófia történetében*, Budapest, 1918; Ferenc Ibrányi, *Szent Gellért teológiája*, in *Emlékkönyv Szent István királyi halálának kilencszázadik évfordulóján*, Budapest, 1938, vol. I, pp. 494–556; Endre von Ivánka, *Szent Gellért görög műveltségének problémája*, in "Akadémia Ertekezések a Nyelv – és Széptudományi Osztály Köréből", 26, 1942; Idem, *Szent Gellért Deliberatio-ja*, in "Századok", 76, 1942, pp. 497–500; Idem, *Gerardus Moresanus, der Erzengel Uriel und die Bogomilen*, in *Miscellanea Georg Hoffmann SJ*, in "Orientalia Christiana Periodica", 21, 1954, nos. 1–2, pp. 143–146; Idem, *Das "Corpus Areopagiticum" bei Gerhard von Csanád (=1046)*, in "Traditio", 15, 1959, pp. 205–222; András Bodor, *Szent Gellért Deliberatio-jának főforrása*, in "Századok", 77, 1943, pp. 173–227; G. Rónay, *Bogumilizmus Magyarországon a XI. Század elején, Gellért püspök Deliberatio-Jának tükrében*, in "Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények", 60, 1956, pp. 471–474; Károly Redl, *Problémák Gellért püspök Deliberatiójában*, in "Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények", 69, 1965, pp. 211–217; G. Silagi, *Untersuchungen zur "Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum" des Gerhard von Csanád*, München, 1967 (Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, 1); E. Nemerkenyi, *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Deliberatio of Bishop Gerard of Csanad*, in "Studi Veneziani", 42, 2001.

Radu Constantinescu under the title *Armonia lumii sau t lm cirea a c nt rii celor trei coconi c tre Isingrim Dasc lul* [World Harmony or Translation of the Song of the Three Children to Isingrim the Teacher] (Meridiane, Bucure ti, 1944). The text was the object of thorough studies<sup>7</sup> aimed at identifying the author's sources. The stressed interest was due to the fact that the author was deemed to possess a wide knowledge and master the Greek language through an extensive reading. In the last decades, critical studies have proved that he was not familiar with the original Greek texts of Epiphanius or Eusebius, but with the excerpts translated into Latin by Isidor of Seville. Nevertheless, it is certain that he was somehow indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius, perhaps because the movement of ideas in central Europe<sup>8</sup> cultivated the respective author in the epoch. Most intriguing are several biblical quotations different from the *Vulgate* version.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Jean Leclercq concludes that “*Deliberatio is most of all, if not a compilation, an elaborate of traditional elements, known through other sources. Anyway, it remains an illustrative source for Gerard's mentality and, anyway, if we wish to know it, we have no other choice; this is his only work that we have knowledge of*”.<sup>10</sup>

A characteristic and at the same time a surprising element is Gerard's mixed style and exuberantly rich vocabulary that reminds us of the Latin used by Saint Peter Damian in his writings: “*Le style est des plus  tranges, je ne connais presque rien qui s'en approche, dans toute la litt rature du Moyen- ge. Les n ologismes y abondent, hors de toute proportion: les phrases sont entortill es, la pens e noy e dans un mysticisme   outrance.*”<sup>11</sup> The fact that both Gerard and Peter Damian used abundantly words rare in the epoch leads to the idea that they studied the vocabularies circulating in northern Italy in the 9th century, strongly influenced by old Latin grammars. Leclercq asserts that Gerard's phrases are highly complicated and deliberately refined so that even a third reading does not make you certain that you have truly managed to understand its meaning. Anyway, this characteristic proves the fact that Gerard was highly proficient in the Latin language.

His vocabulary is focused on several phrases (*contemplationes, theologia, theologicus, theologus, theosophus*), elements that betray a dependence on the spiritual tradition of the patristic age preserved in the monastic environment.

<sup>7</sup> K. Redl, *Probleme der “Deliberatio” des Bischofs Gerhard*, in *Neue Beitr ge zur Geschichte der alten Welt*, tome II, *R misches Reich*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 349–366; G. Silagi, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> E. von Iv nka, *Das “Corpus Areopagiticum”*, pp. 205–222; Idem, *Gerardus Moresanus*, pp. 143–146.

<sup>9</sup> “*Non c' e alcun dubbio che Gerardo abbia potuto conoscere la Volgata, e che l'abbia realmente conosciuta; anche prima che, pe l'influsso della riforma gregoriana, nella seconda met  del XI secolo, si moltiplicino le grandi Bibbie manoscritte delle quali abbiamo manoscritti in diverse regioni dell'Italia del Nord, ivi compresa Venezia. Ma era tradizionale citare la Bibbia a memoria, ad un tempo secondo la Volgata e le versioni diffuse dai Padri e dalla liturgia*”, J. Leclercq, *San Gerardo di Csanad*, p. 14, note. 58.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, *Deliberatio* includes 855 quotations: 439 are from the Old and 446 from the New Testament.

<sup>11</sup> G. Morin, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

Among the authors of holy texts, according to the tradition, Gerard chooses Saint John, deemed to be more elevated than the heaven itself “*omni caelo altio*”, a celestial dialect “*caelestis dialecticus*”. His first epistle was appreciated as being *theologia* proper, while on the second they said *Iohannes in secunda sua inluminacione*.

Relating to philosophy from the viewpoint of a theologian, Gerard endows the word *philosophia* with the meaning of that kind of knowledge man cannot reach by himself, illustrated by Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Macrobius. Gerard acknowledges the value of “*human inventions*”, which can be useful to the Christian contemplator. But they are not enough to render the truth, being either erroneous or incomplete. He also firmly rejects the “*philosophy of the age*”, asserting that, as compared to a word of the Gospel, “*Plato philosophus comparatur stultissimus*”. At the same time, he is against the so-called “*philosophy of the world*” because, he notes, it is infinitely exceeded by the true philosophy that comes from God. Consequently, for him all those who had embraced the word of God were philosophers: “*Igitur omnes voluit (Creator) reddere philosophos ex optima et admirabili, quantum possibile est, notitia... Nullus tam habes, et de Evangelio incipit disputare, qui statim non reddatur philosophus... Talis aiquidem Evangelii philosophia est, ut plebeios et rusticos concite faciat oratores.*”

According to Gerard, there is a constant contradiction between the naive stories of the philosophers of this world – *mundi philosophorum nenias* –, the so-called philosophers of the past, who all erred – *omnes erraverunt* –, between the mortals’ empty and uncertain philosophy – *inanis et instabilis mortalium philosophia* – and the faith that comes from Heavens – *caelestis sapientia*.

Another method employed by Gerard to demonstrate the superiority of the faith of the Gospels over any other human knowledge is the reference to the classification of disciplines made by Plato: Physics, Arithmetics, Geometry, Music, Astronomy, or to the classification of virtues as made by Socrates: Prudence, Justice, Strength, Temperance, to which he adds Logic, Dialectics and Rhetoric. Gerard praises the intentions of those who have somehow tried to put in order the human knowledge. But, he reminds us, “*Jeremiah, a truly holy man, has refused Plato*”, and “*God has turned a donkey – Balaam’s – into a rhetor*”. Then Gerard applies these philosophical categories to the various meanings of the Gospels: the literal meaning corresponds to Physics, the moral meaning to Ethics and the tropological meaning to Logic. But for him Theology has as unique and sufficient object “*the divinity, namely the Thearchia of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost*”. Mystery is for us – notes the bishop of Csanad – like the sky, clouded, made up of the allegories and enigmas of the holy writ. So, he concludes, we must go beyond shadows into the light, contemplating God in the light of the writings of all who have spoken about Him in the Scriptures and in the Church tradition.

Left alone, “*naked and without the garment of immortal philosophy – philosophi autem nudi et sine tegmine immortalissimae philosophiae*”, the ancient philosophers

“*had not known the true Physics, the admirable Ethics, the inestimable Logic*”. In Gerard’s thought, Physics is the Father, Ethics is the Son and Logic is the Holy Ghost.

Gerard’s philosophy is rather poetic than speculative in essence. He is able to write hundreds of pages dedicated to verses from the *Song of the Three Children*, and, in the end, when he stops, he does it only because he has run out of scribes or parchment. He himself asserts that he could have added more other things: “*Multa dici possunt; sed penuria scriptorum atque membranarum non patitur*”. He spends his time questioning the Scriptures, he examines its mysteries with joy. For him this is a means to practice the “*contemplative life*” he praises so much, at the very cost of the mortification of his body.

What he writes is of immediate use, exalting the Holy Trinity and the Church. The earthly Church, as seen by Gerard, is put into motion by two winds: *aura*, which represents the contemplative life, and *altanus*, which embodies the active life; the former is sweet and silent, while the latter, violent and noisy, is the one that makes things move in this world. Both come from the Holy Ghost; both are strong and necessary. But in *Deliberatio* Gerard chooses to let himself be carried away mostly by the contemplative breeze.

Starting with the Romantic age, but chiefly in the 20th century, Gerard’s theological work, the only one that has come down to us after centuries of oblivion, has become a privileged source, which kindled the national pride of both the Hungarians, who claimed that it was the first original theological work in the Hungarian culture, and the Romanians, who wished to see in *Deliberatio*, by virtue of a protochronistic drive, an example of “Romanian literature of Latin language”.<sup>12</sup>

It is not the case, as Jean Leclercq believes, that Gerard’s writing has been confiscated by one or the other of the participants in the history of this part of the continent because “*Gerard of Csanad’s true glory lies in the fact that he was a witness of his age’s culture and spirituality, in a Hungary that was a bridge between the Byzantine Orient and the West. And the work written by Gerard bears witness to the fact that that was Hungary’s role at that time. That would be her part in the 12th century too, when the translations of Greek texts initiated by the abbot of Pannonhalma made way to Paris and kindled the religious meditation in monasteries and schools.*”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Gerard of Csanad, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> J. Leclercq, *op. cit.*, p. 22; Idem, *Origène au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in “*Irénikon*”, 24, 1951, pp. 438–439.