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**A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SELF-DEVELOPMENT IN THE
20TH AND 21TH CENTURIES**

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Abstract: Review of Ioan Chirilă, Israel. Întoarcerea acasă [Israel. The return at home], Cluj-Napoca: Editura Bybliotek, 2017.

Key words: Israel, Biblical theology, Semitic history, Sinai, Holy land, self-development, Ioan Chirilă

In the last two centuries, memorial writings, which have an important role in the process of self-development (as it can be seen especially in the last two centuries), have become an important genre of the Orthodox space. There, it starts from spiritual autobiographies (Morariu 2018, 145-50) and continue with diaries, memories, and other essays about their own biographies, important personalities from this area who have written interesting books about their lives and self-development, useful not only for religious sphere, but also for the psychological one. Despite of the fact that the Romanian space knew only works that have passages of spiritual autobiography (like: Steinhardt 1992), the memorials written by famous clergymen like Gala Galaction (Galaction 1973-1980; Galaction 2007), Valeriu Anania (Anania 2008), Gheorghe Calciu (Diaconești 2007), that present the biographical road of the author and, in many situation, his sufferance from Communist period, have been enthusiastically appreciated and generated a real appetite for this kind of publications.

Although it is not so aged to write his memories and it has been known rather as a biblical researcher (through works like: Chirilă 2009; Chirilă 2002; Chirilă 2003; Chirilă 2001; Chirilă 2010; Chirilă 2000; Chirilă 1999a; Chirilă 1997; Chirilă 2000; Chirilă 1999), preacher (Chirilă 2017a), or poet (Chirilă 2014; Chirilă 2016), essayist (Chirilă 2017), or, recently, through his iconographical approaches (Chirilă, Pașca-Tușa, Popa-Bota, Trif 2018, 96-108), Ioan Chirilă, Orthodox priest who teaches at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology from “Babeș-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca, accepts the challenge of Diana Suci and speaks about himself and his experience as student, professor and pilgrim in Israel. His book, already warmly received by the cultural space (Frunză 2017), can surely be circumscribed to the autobiographical genre. There, he presents a history of his personal development as a Bible scholar, offering a model also for other people who want to become like him. Questioned by the editor of the book, he speaks about how he got in touch with theological research generally and particularly with the biblical one. Both theologian and historian, he came to the Old Testament studies with an inter-disciplinary background and a big luggage of knowledge about it, although he wanted to focus rather on Dogmatic than on the aforementioned area of Theology. He shows there about this topic that: “I have started the applied effective research on Judaic studies as autodidact. Therefore, somewhere in 1992, I have initiated the teaching of a Judaic classical language at the Centre of Judaic Studies from Cluj, after a short three-month stage at the University of Budapest, at the Department of Babylonistic and Assyrology. I have met there some exceptional people and I have filled my documentary basis and founded a support for learning and teaching Hebrew language. In 1994-1995, I went in Israel for studies. Then it was the time and I have marked and deepened the lines of research on different domains, in what concerns

the Judaism and my relationships with Judaic world, not only in Israel, but everywhere” (Chirilă 2017b, 19).

Some readers can be shocked when they see as a title of an autobiographical work the words: *Israel. The return at home*. When they know that the author is a Romanian theologian from Cluj county, they will ask themselves for sure: how it is possible for somebody from this space to speak about Israel as about his house? The answer is simple. Ioan Chirilă thinks and speaks as a Biblical scholar and as a Christian. Both for the last ones, like for mozaic faithful, the rediscovering of self means knowing and understanding Israel, which represents the departure point of the two important religions. Knowing Israel means therefore, for him to go home, to discover his roots and to get closer with the fountains of his spirituality. This discovering process helps him to come closer to his passion, which is the Bible, but also to understand in a special way his religion and spirituality. It contributes to his self-development. And this can be seen in his dialogues, where he evocates with love and passion the years spent there.

But the author not only speaks about his research field and about the way how this place contributed to his personal development and formation as an intellectual. While he was here, he visited different places, he celebrated in Orthodox Christian Churches from this area and he discovered places and people. He therefore understands, better than others, their way of acting and thinking and acting, their culture and mentality. He proofs this in some descriptions offered. For example, he shows that:

“If we go to Israel, we see that they are not quite happy and quietly. I have analysed them from different points of view, starting from the way how they eat, up to the way how they dress themselves or they take their shoes. I have observed that they wear light clothing, for being able to walk as much as possible. It's an effect, a consequence of the fact that they were taken in cohorts and brought in different places. They it fast, for avoiding to lose the food. These behaviour elements are not defining a calm psychic, but still, they are not pessimistic and they have the exuberance of feasts. But, in Israel, there is always possible to have an attempt. They have this taught in their minds. Many of them have lost close friends and are burdened by the sufferance of their neighbours. Past cannot be deleted, but it must be integrated into the present through its positive aspects, so that the future become one of the hope.” (Chirilă 2017b, 54-55).

The feasts of the people, but also some aspects from the history of Romanian Jews established there are also presented in the book. Ioan Chirilă describes the first ones showing that he have met people who received him at their religious solemnities and even helped him to understand what was happening during those moments: “I participated to many events, all kind of them, at their national feast, Army day, Roch Hachana, Yom Kippour, everywhere where it was possible. No, they do not

had any reserve about me, because I knew wher to ask. I was curious to see how this kind of events are taking place. I hade Jews friends who were not very religious people, but they were still respecting the feasts. The religiosity is not manifested as strictly as we imagine. Of course, I did not went to ultra-religious families, I went there where it was possible.” (Chirilă 2017b, 85-86).

As pilgrim and traveller, he is impressed by the fact that some of the Jewish people who lived in Romania in the first decades of communism have not forgotten their roots and keep even names for children, places or streets from there. He says to Diana Suciu about this: “I was delighted to hear that they have baptised the institutions with the name of the places where they came from. For example, a hospital from Bersheba is called Soroca” (Chirilă 2017b, 63).

Written in a pleasant style, easy to read and attractive both because of the information offered, design and the pictures that accompanies it, the book of Ioan Chirilă is a work where the reader can find both information about the life of the author and the elements that contributed to his formation as a Bible scholar, but also interesting descriptions of the places from Israel, especially the religious ones. Therefore, it can be placed also between the memorial works, because of its status of interview, and between the touristic guides, due to the information offered. From both sides, the book is a valuable research, that helps the reader to discover not only the author, but also his passions and bellowed places that have influenced his evolution as intellectual, researcher and priest.

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