

PÁZMÁNY PÉTER CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

THESES OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

THE THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

Dissertatio ad doctoratum

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The present doctoral dissertation undertakes the historical overview and systematic comprehension of the theology of desire. In its present form, it is a new stage of research that was developed into a defended Licentiate in Sacred Theology thesis. Its starting point is the understanding of the phenomenon of human desire on the theological horizon; however, with the development of the research and the thesis, this theological anthropological viewpoint gradually shifts to purely Christological and theological perspectives. This shift takes place around the chapters on the oeuvres of Augustine of Hippo and his contemporary, Gregory of Nyssa, the two focal characters of the thesis. On the one hand, the historical review of philosophy and theology leads the reader until the chapters on Augustine and Gregory; on the other hand, these are also the chapters where systematic reflections start.

The two authors deserve a central position, because they provided radically different interpretations of desire at the same time, observing the stages of the previous tradition theoretically from the same distance. To put it simply, the radical difference in interpretation means a rather pessimistic conception of desire by Augustine, while Gregory's work reflects a rather optimistic one. Nevertheless, if we further approach the two authors and meticulously read their text, we may conclude that at most only tendencies emerge towards the directions of pessimism or optimism, respectively. The reception of the two authors was responsible for the simplification of the tendencies: Gregory was forgotten, while Augustine was exaggerated in the later discussions on the doctrine of grace or moral theology.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to point out Augustine's and Gregory's views by reading the original texts, and by primarily following the footsteps of the latter author, to try to develop a way characterised by productivity instead of oblivion. Gregory implies the thought that in the archetype of desire belonging to man's God image, that is, in God himself, there is desire. However, the consideration of this possibility is significant in itself in a Christian theological environment proclaiming immutability as an attribute. To put the importance of the issue in another way: if we can really suppose that desire is present in God, how can that be conceived without supposing lack in God, who is known to be the completeness of being? One of the answers of the paper is that desire is not interpreted in a privative way, but as a force providing dynamics in the act of love. The overview of biblical sources is followed by a schematic review of the sacred tradition and the history of ideas and philosophy; then, the first elaboration of a possible theology of desire appears in the constructive theological chapters.

Conferences

International:

1. 6 April 2024. “*What do you Have that you have not Received?*” *Approaches to the Relationship between Faith and Grace in Early Christianity and Early Modern Theology and Philosophy* international conference at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Title of the plenary lecture: *The Theological Correlation between Grace and Desire*.
2. 22 April 2019, University of Oxford, XVIII. International Conference on Patristic Studies. Title of the paper: *Comparative Examination of the Patristic Theology of Desire in the Oeuvres of Saint Augustine of Hippo and Gregory of Nyssa*.
3. 7 December 2018, Union Theological Seminary, New York/NY: Read a paper at the *Fully Human; Theological Anthropology and Human Flourishing in the 21st Century* Conference of the Institute for Studies in Eastern Christianity. Title of the paper: *A Theology of Desire in the Works of Eastern Church Fathers and Today*.
4. 29 October 2016, Harvard University, Cambridge/MA): Read a paper at the *Ways of Knowing. 5th Annual Graduate Conference at HDS* organized Harvard Divinity School. Title of the paper: *Time and Desire in God*.
5. 17 September 2015, Leuven, Belgium: *The Soul of Theology. Conference on the Role of Scriptures in Theology* organized by the European Society for Catholic Theology (ESCT). Title of the paper: *The Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Desire*.

Hungarian:

1. Second Christian Scientific Students’ Associations Conference at Berehove, Ukraine – 1st place in the Section of Theology and Social Sciences – 02/26/2015.
2. 2016. szeptember 27. előadás a European Society for Catholic Theology Magyar szekciója által szervezett *A teremtés értéke – az ember méltósága* című konferencián Pécsen (PPHF). Az előadás címe: *A vágy teológiája Szent Ágostonnál*.
3. 26 April 2018, Budapest: Talk at the Ph.D. Conference of the Divinity School of Pázmány Péter Catholic University. Title of the talk: *A theology of Desire in Augustine’s Enarrationes*.

Publications

Study

The distinguishing features of Gregory of Nyssa's theology of desire in the light of Saint Augustine's thought = "Milyen nyelvet alkottam s beszéltem?" "Lidioma ch'usai e che fei." Nyelvi jelenlét. Tanulmányok Kovács Árpád tiszteletére. „язык, который я использовал и делал.” Языковое присутствие. Сборник научных трудов в честь 80-летия Арпада Ковача, eds. Márton Hoványi - Angelika Molnár, Eötvös Collegium, Budapest, 2024, 53-68.

Forthcoming: *The Theological Correlation between Grace and Desire = Faith, Grace, and Freedom: Explorations in Early Christianity and Early Modern Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Nicholas Vassányi et al., Routledge, 2026.

Awards, scholarships, honors

- Second Christian Scientific Students' Associations Conference at Berehove, Ukraine – First place in the Section of Theology and Social Sciences – 02/26/2015.
- Oxford University, Faculty of Theology and Religion – Academic Visitor. Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Carol Harrison (Christ Church) – August-November 2015.
- Hungarian Section of European Society for Catholic Theology: essay competition in Theology and Religion – First place, 27th September 2017.
- Yale University, Divinity School – Visiting Research Fellow. Academic sponsor: Prof. dr. Miroslav Volf.