

**SAINT FAUSTINA KOWALSKA AND SAINT TERESA OF  
CALCUTTA-TWO AUTHORS OF SPIRITUAL  
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES FROM CATHOLIC SPACE OF THE  
20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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**Abstract:** *Using information provided by the spiritual autobiographies of Saint Faustina Kowalska and Saint Teresa of Calcutta, two exponential personalities of Catholic spirituality, the author tries there to emphasize the way how spiritual autobiography developed in this confessional area during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mystical experience, its forms and role in the transformation of the author is underlined there while the way how the context of life and work contributed to the change of the two personalities it is also presented. The research also tries to show how they defined their selves and their call according to the intrinsic relationship with God, but also to create bridges between spiritualities from different confessional space by bringing into attention the common points of the genre that can be found in the investigated works.*

**Keywords:** Teresa of Calcutta, Faustina Kowalska, poor, God, mystical experience, Catholic space.

Important genre for the theological space, with interdisciplinary values,<sup>1</sup> spiritual autobiography has not been enough investigated until today. Many aspects that could be used both for spiritual and pastoral life, literature, philosophy or history or even to create bridges between spiritualities. These are some subjects that can be found here. Therefore, through the articles like this one and others,<sup>2</sup> we try to bring into

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<sup>1</sup> Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „An interdisciplinary genre in the Theological Literature: the spiritual autobiography and its landmarks for the Orthodox space”, in *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, year VII no. 1, 2018, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> See: Idem, „The spiritual autobiography in the Eastern space in the second half of the XIXth and XXth centuries”, in *Astra Salvensis*, year III, Supplement no. 1-„New Approaches in Contemporary Theology”, 2015, pp. 166-174; Idem, „Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies of the Orthodox space? New potential keys of lecture”, in *Astra Salvensis*, year V, no. 10, 2017, pp. 128-133; Idem, „Aspects of Applied Ethics in the Spiritual Autobiographies from the Orthodox Space in the 19th and 20th Centuries”, in Camelia Ignătescu, Antonio Sandu, Tomița Ciulei (eds.), *Proceedings Volume: Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice*, Iași/London, Lumen Printing Press, 2017, pp. 548-557; Idem, „Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiography of Dag Hammarskjöld”, in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, year LXXIV, no. 4, 2018, pp. 1-5; Idem, „Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiography of Saint John of Kronstadt (1829–1908)”, in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, year 74, no. 4, 2018, pp. 1-5; Idem, „Educational aspects in the spiritual autobiography from the Orthodox space of the 19th and 20th centuries”, in

attention works from this area, coming from different confessional backgrounds and to highlight the important and actual elements that can be found there. Here, we will try to present the spiritual notes of two important Catholic women of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Saint Faustina Kowalska and Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Both of them were important personalities of their times and contributed to the development of spirituality through their lives, fact that explains why even today there are so many works dedicated to their life and activity.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we will try to see how their contribution and experience is reflected inside the texts they wrote.

## Saint Faustina Kowalska and Saint Teresa of Calcutta-two authors of spiritual autobiographies from Catholic space of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

### Faustina Kowalska's diary

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Ion Albulescu, Adriana-Denisa Manea, Iuliu-Marius Morariu (eds.), *Education, Religion, Family in Contemporary Society-Proceedings of the Conference*, Saarbrücken, Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017, pp. 113-123; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, Ștefan Josan, „Elements of spiritual autobiography in the literary works of Virgil Gheorghiu”, in *Research and Science Today*, year 6, no. 1 (11), 2016, pp. 83-88; Maxim Morariu, „Saint Silouanel’Athonite el l’autobiographiespirituelle dans l’EgliseOrthodoxe”, in *Presence d’EnCalcat*, year LV, no. 1, 2016, pp. 35-39; Idem, *Autobiografiaspirituală a lui Dag Hammarskjöld: o abordareteologică*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut Printing Press, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: J. M. Silveyra, „Lo spirito di Madre Teresa mi ha aiutato nella sofferenza”, in *Asia News*, year XXXIII, no. 321 (2), 2019, pp. 20-21; Brian Kolodiejchuk (ed.), *Where there is love, there is God: a path to closer union with God and greater love for others-Mother Teresa*, Waterville, Me., Christian Large Print, 2012; Paul Murray, *Matka Teresa: kochalam Jezusa w ciemnościach*, translated by Stanisława Pelechata, Poznan, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Prowincji Dominikanów „W drodze”, 2010; Gëzim Alpion, *Mother Teresa: saint or celebrity?*, London/New York, Routledge, 2007; Edward Le Joly, *Madre Teresa e le missionarie della carità: lo facciamo per Gesù*, Milano, San Paolo, 2003; Perle Scemla, *Passione ardente: vite parallele di Santa Teresa del Bambino Gesù e Madre Teresa di Calcutta*, Milano, Rusconi, 1998; Teresa di Calcutta, „...Anche quando costa...”: *conversazioni spirituali della Madre alle sue suore*, Leumann/Torino, Elledici, 1992; Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something beautiful for God: mother Teresa of Calcutta*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1976; Georges Gorrée, Jean Barbier, *Madre Teresa di Calcutta: amore senza frontiere*, Roma, Publisher: Roma, Città Nuova, 1973; Ignacy Różycki, *Il culto della divina misericordia: studio teologico del „Diario” di santa Faustina Kowalska sul tema del „Culto”*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002; \*\*\*, *Cracovien. Canonizationis servae Dei Faustinae Kowalskae Institutii Sororum B.V.M. a Misericordia (1905-1938): positio super virtutibus*, Cracow, Congregatio de Causis sanctorum, 1991; Maria Winowska, *L’iconadell’amoremisericordioso: il messaggio di suor Faustina Kowalska*, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, 1987; Franciszek Antoni Cegielka, *Siostra Faustyna: szafarka Miłosierdzia Bożego*, North Tonawanda, New York, Pallottinum, 1954.

Born to Glogowiec in Poland on 25<sup>th</sup> of August 1905 and baptised Elena, the future religious will study only three years and will be forced to leave the family when she was only 16, for working as a housekeeper in Alexandrov and Lodz.<sup>4</sup> Since she was very young (at the age of seven), feels the monastic call, but will arrive to do it only on 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1925, when she will be received in a monastery belonging to the Congregation of the Sisters of Happy Virgin Mary from Warsaw.<sup>5</sup> There she will work inside the congregation in Cracow, but also Plock and Vilnius, in the kitchen, gates or garden. After 13 years of monastic life, she will die on 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1933, and is beatified by Pope John Paul III on 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1993.<sup>6</sup> Inside her legacy, the diary that describes her personal and spiritual life is for sure the masterpiece.<sup>7</sup> There she describes the relevant aspects of her biography, presents also elements related to her noviciate or the life inside the convent, but also describes her visions. In some situations, the interference between mystical experience and the practical life are also described. Such an example can be considered the event from 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1934, when she seeks for the painter E. Kazimirovski, accomplishing an order of her spiritual father, and asks him to paint the image of Merciful Christ that she saw in vision. Up to the end of the month, the icon will be painted, but she will be sad because Jesus is not as beautiful as she saw Him.<sup>8</sup>

The notes of Faustina Kowalska alternate the descriptions of contemporary life, program of the congregation with the inside feelings and the presentation of their causes. The work is remarkable both for its stylistic richness that is similar with the one of Dag Hammarskjöld,<sup>9</sup> as for its density of the message. Among the paragraphs, there can be found prayers, descriptions, plans or other texts. Doxological texts are between the most beautiful and make her diary similar with the Orthodox Silouan the Athonite, almost a contemporary monk.<sup>10</sup> Her

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Elizabieta Siepak, „Introduzione”, in Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diario. La misericordia divina nella mia anima*, Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001, p. XV.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XV. Cf. Franciszek Antoni Cegiela, *Siostra Faustyna: szafarka Miłosierdzia Bożego*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Elizabieta Siepak, „Introduzione”, p. XVII.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diario. La misericordia divina nella mia anima*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXVIII.

<sup>9</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, London, Faber and Faber, 1972.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Silouan the Athonite, *Între iadul deznađejdii și iadul smereniei-însemnări dubornicești*, Alba-Iulia, Deisis Publishing House, 1994; Saint Silouan the Athonite, *Ecrits Spirituels-extraits*, traduits par L. A. Lassus, Begrolles-en-Mauges, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1976.

prayers will be related with the state of the heart,<sup>11</sup> name of Jesus or mystical experiences. For example, starting from the mention of the name of Jesus, she will write a text similar with the hesychast<sup>12</sup> texts from the Eastern space: „*The name of Jesus. Oh, what great is Thy name, o Lord! It is the sustainment of my life when the force miss to me and when the darkness infiltrate inside my heart, Thy name is my son, whose' rays illuminates and bathes my soul and it makes it to rise light, getting splendour from Thy Light*”.<sup>13</sup>

The desire to see The Lord is very strong and it is often expressed inside the pages of her notes. It motivates here to leave faithfully, to meditate, be always ready to die and to have a ceaseless dialogue with Him. Sometimes, their relationship it can be compared with the one of love between two lovers because of the sweetness of the words. The reinforcement of this love is almost always brought by Eucharist. Therefore, in 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1938, shortly before her departure from this world, she will declare very strong her love for God: „*Oh, my Jesus, life of my heart, my Saviour, my sweet husband, and in the same time, my judger, You know that in my last moments I will not trust in one of my merits, but only in your mercy. Starting from this moment, I entrust myself to the chasm of your mercy, which is always open for any soul. Oh, my Jesus, I have only one mission in my life, in my death for all the eternity, and this is the one to adore you and your uncountable Mercy. Nobody, not even between the angels, nor between people will succeed to praise the mystery of your Mercy*”.<sup>14</sup>

The increase of the intensity of her love for Christ can be seen in the days before her departure. Without intending to use metaphoric formulas or be poetic as the aforementioned Swedish author,<sup>15</sup> but just trying to express the deep feelings that she has for God and Eucharist, which is seen as a wedding dinner. This is what she will write in the penultimate note, while in the last one she will declare herself ready to start the road to sky: „*Today my heart prepares for the Holy Communion like for a nuptial banquet, where all the ones who participate shine an unbelievable beauty. I*

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<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, the wish for being as soon as possible for ever with God even creates her sadness, like in the case of the aforementioned monk. For example she says: „*My heart is filled with a continuous sadness because I want to come to you, Lord, in the plenitude of Thy like. O, Jesus, what a horrible desert seems to me this life; on this earth, there is not an aliment for my heart and my soul. I suffer of nostalgia for you, O God. You had left me, oh Lord, the Holy Ostia, but these wake up even more the nostalgia of my heart for Thee*”. Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diario. La misericordia divinanellamia anima*, p. 316.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Iuvenalie Ionașcu, *L'esperienza della preghiera di Gesunella spiritualita Romena*, Citta del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002, p. 154.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diario. La misericordia divinanellamia anima*, p. 314.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 511.

<sup>15</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*.

*am also invited to this banquet, but I do not see myself in this beauty, but in an abyss of dirtiness. And because I do not feel worthy to sit at the table, I infiltrate myself at the legs of Jesus and eat the crumbs that fall under the table. Because I know your Mercy, for this I come to Thee, oh Jesus, because I want to leave my dirtiness before it will run out the piety of Your Heart...16. Today, the Majesty of God wraps me. I do not succeed in any way to react in order to prepare me better. I am taken and totally surrounded by God. My heart burns of his love. I have the total confirmation of the fact that I love and I am loved. And this is enough for me. I will endeavour during the day to be faithful to the Holy Spirit and to correspond to His expectancies. I try to have the interior silence, for being able to hear His voice”<sup>16</sup>*

Full of prayers and doxologies, describing the road of unquiet heart<sup>17</sup> that wants to arrive as soon as possible in the house of her beloved, and written in order to motorize the interior evolution (therefore without any tendency of the notes of censorship or cosmetisation), the notes of Saint Faustina are veritable pages of mystical texts. Compared with other works of the same genre, but coming from different confessional backgrounds, they will surely reveal the fact that there are the same elements that define the spiritual inquiry and define the intrinsic seeking for God.

### **Saint Teresa of Calcutta**

Together with the aforementioned one and the notes of Saint John Paul II,<sup>18</sup> the spiritual autobiography of Saint Teresa of Calcutta<sup>19</sup> is for sure one of the most important texts of the genre from the contemporary Catholic space and the Christian one too. Influenced by Saint Teresa of Avila,<sup>20</sup> whose name will also receive, she will leave also some notes that define her vocation, the purpose of the congregation, but also the intrinsic call that she heard when decided to found a new congregation. While for Faustina, the mercy of God provides mystical ecstasy, contemplation and desire to arrive faster at the end of the human life for enjoying the eternal one, for Teresa the aspects are a little bit different. Of course, it does not miss the contemplation, visions

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<sup>16</sup> Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diario. La misericordia divinanelamia anima*, pp. 598-599.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Garry Wills, „The trials of an unquiet heart”, in *New Statesman*, year CXL, no. 5049, 2011, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Saint John Paul II, *In God's hands*, San Francisco, Harper One Press, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Its latest edition is: Teresa of Calcutta, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, New York, Doubleday, 2007. We will use there: Teresa di Calcutta, *La mia vita*, Milano, Rusconi, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Thérèsed'Avila, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 1948.

and desire to be forever with the Lord, but her vision is rather a pragmatic one. Inspired by the Sermon of the Mountain that represents one of the landmarks of moral and spiritual Christian life,<sup>21</sup> she will find Jesus in the poorest people on the earth. Decided to become missionary she will join Loreto Congregation and will depart for India, where, in 1948, after twenty years, will decide to follow the call.<sup>22</sup> One could read that, burdened with daily apostleship dedicated to the assisted pours, Teresa will lose little by little her mystical vocation, becoming a religious that has no time to read or write anymore. In fact, her vocation, her concern for interior life as the custom to write not only correspondence but also a diary will not leave her for the entire life.

It should be for sure mentioned that, in comparison with the notes of the aforementioned Polish religious, her notes are not as rich in mystical content and they do not have such a stylistically diversity. But the context and purpose are also diverse. While Faustina wrote for having a detailed presentation of her spiritual life, Teresa will also think that her notes can be latter used by other for understanding the reasons of her foundation and her spirituality. Therefore, without being so poetic, the religious from Calcutta will present her spiritual life inside her notes. She will underline from the beginning that „*my vocation was nothing than a prolongation of the belonging to Christ and of my way of being totally His*”.<sup>23</sup>

Almost always linked with practical life and aspects like poverty,<sup>24</sup> her notes are a testimony of the relevance of love for the Christianlife and action. Using a beautiful chiasitic structure that reminds by Davids' psalms, she will note about this virtue and its relevance the following words: „*Our mission is a mission of love. The purpose of our existence consists in bringing Christ in houses and bringing people to Christ*”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Valadier, *Lo spirituale e la politica*, Torino, Lindau, 2011; Hannah Arendt, *Che cos'è la politica*, Milano, Edizioni di Comunita, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Teresa di Calcutta, *La mia vita*, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25. Cf. Edward Le Joly, *Madre Teresa e le missionariedellacarità: lo facciamo per Gesù*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> That will not scare her as it often happens with other people. For example, she notes about the way how poverty made her feel in the moment when she left the congregation and decided to dedicate her life to the pours: „*I had in my pocket 50<sup>th</sup> rupiabs. In that moment I had the feeling that God started to bless the work and now I was not anymore abandoned*”. Teresa di Calcutta, *La mia vita*, p. 27. Cf. Brian Kolodiejchuk (ed.), *Where there is love, there is God: a path to closer union with God and greater love for others-Mother Teresa*.

<sup>25</sup> Teresa di Calcutta, *La mia vita*, p. 35.

As it often happens in spiritual autobiographies from the Eastern Orthodox space,<sup>26</sup> Teresa also prefers to speak about some of her experiences as if they belong to others. Sometimes she describes the activity of the congregation, speaking in a hidden way about her conception and experience<sup>27</sup> and in other situation she just expresses what she thinks, but it is easier for the reader to understand that she experienced what she says. Such an example can be considered the comparison that she makes between her congregation and the Jesuits: „*Together with the other three traditional votes, of poverty, chastity and obedience, the Jesuits make also a fourth one of obedience to the Holy Father in questions of mission. From the very first moment of our congregation, we had a fourth vote: the one to serve, from all our heart and totally for free, the poorest from the poor*”.<sup>28</sup>

Anticipating a concept that later, through the work of thinkers like Anastasios Yannoulatos or father Ioan Bria will become a keyword in the ecumenical space, namely the „*liturgy after liturgy*”;<sup>29</sup> she will consider equal the Eucharist and love for the neighbour manifested in the assistance provided to him.

The deepness of her faith and the true living of her vocation, makes Mother Teresa congregation to grow up in a short time. Her sincere attitude towards the poor is blessed even by conversion. She even describes such a moment inside the diary: „*I cannot forget it anymore: once arrived to our house of moribund from Calcutta an atheist. A few moments before his arrival, diverse people have brought inside a man collected from the street (maybe they had collected him in a sewer or in a garbage dump, since it was covered with worms). Here there was a sister that was sitting nearby him, without seeing that one*

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<sup>26</sup> Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „The spiritual autobiography in the Eastern space in the second half of the XIXth and XXth centuries”, p. 168.

<sup>27</sup> For example, she says: „*From the very first moment, we try to teach all the young girls that want to become part of our congregation to transform the work in labour, understand Jesus and do it for Him. This wakes up inside them the love for Jesus and the possibility to discover him under the face destroyed by pain of the poorest from the poor, as we can meet Him under the image of Eucharistic bread*”. Teresa di Calcutta, *La mia vita*, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1996; Idem, „Liturgy after the liturgy”, in *International Review of Mission*, year LXXXVII, no. 265 (1), 1978, pp. 86-90. Cf. JooseopKeum, *Together towards Life Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes with a Practical Guide*, Geneva, World Council of Churches Publications, 2013, p. 9; J. C. van der Merwe, „Bria, Ion 1996-The liturgy after the liturgy, mission and witness from an orthodox perspective”, in *HTS Teologiese Studies/HTS Theological Studies*, year LIII, no. 4, 1997, p. 1452; Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Misiune pe urmele lui Hristos: studii teologice si omilii*, Sibiu, Andreiana Printing Press, 2013, p. 67.

*was watching how she was touching the inferno, was watching her, was smiling and all the rest. By chance, I also was there in this moment. The atheist was sitting and observing the sister. In one moment, he came nearby me and told me: I have arrived there without God. I could see the love of God in action.<sup>30</sup> I saw Him in the hands of that sister, in her face, in her youth attitude, in her love for this sick people. Yes, Mother, now I believe!"<sup>31</sup>*

What is important there is the fact that the conversion takes place suddenly, without any theological dialogue, preparation or intellectual inquiry. The example and the vocation lived with honesty reveals God. In fact, the accent of the entire work of Missionaries of Charity has as its own purpose to show the love of God in action.<sup>32</sup> But in order to be able to do this and to have a clear message, each sister needs a good instruction. This explains why so often in her notes can be found so many descriptive notes, with pedagogical value and why, in many parts, the diary seems to be so different by the one of Kowalska and other authors of spiritual autobiography and so focused on current problems like the foundation of new houses, activities, travels, the reception of the message, preparation of sisters and their spiritual guidance.

In the same time, the presence of those aspects is relevant because it makes them useful also for the research of topics like political theology.<sup>33</sup> Conscious about the power and greatness of the pour that is the image of God,<sup>34</sup> she will use her knowledge and relationship to create better life conditions for them. This will create bridges between people and culture and in the same time will transmit the message of Christianity. In the same time, will not neglect the spiritual life and will be rewarded for her work with great mystical experiences.

Filled with information related with the way how her soul developed once that she decided to answer to the call of Christ, the autobiography of Mother Teresa of Calcutta is both an important historical source, a complementary document of the constitution of her

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<sup>30</sup> Like for Mother Teresa, love of God in action is a leitmotiv of the entire spiritual autobiography. Cf. Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „The spiritual autobiography in the Eastern space in the second half of the XIXth and XXth centuries”, p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> Teresa di Calcutta, *La mia vita*, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Mary Poplin, „Finding Calcutta: What Mother Teresa Taught Me About Meaningful Work and Service”, in *The Christian Century*, year 126, no. 20, 2009, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies of the Orthodox space?”, p. 128.

<sup>34</sup> „I cannot stop to repeat: the pours are big! We must love them, but with the love of compassion. We must love them because is Jesus who hides under the appearance of the pain. The pain of pours!”. Teresa di Calcutta, *La mia vita*, p. 146.



congregation and a beautiful spiritual writing that can be used by the ones who want to develop their mystical life.

### **Conclusion**

Like the Protestant space,<sup>35</sup> the Catholic one knows also a huge diversity of spiritual autobiographies during the history. The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine<sup>36</sup> constitute a real template for future works like the one of Saint Patrick,<sup>37</sup> Teresa of Avila, Faustina Kowalska, Pope John Paul the Second or mother Teresa of Calcutta. Among them, important ones are the two investigated one. Different as style and content, they reflect the richness of Christian spirituality, its diversity the actuality of its message and the beauty of its literary production. Religious can find there texts that help them to develop their vocation, the Church important elements that can be used in pastoral life and offered as examples to its enemies, while the simple reader can use them to find answers to the questions that concern him. Written with spiritual and not editorial purposes, these works not only reflect the real image of their authors and are not censored or cosmetised in one way or other, but they are also sincere and direct and this makes them easy to read. In the same time, they are a huge and important testimony about the life, work and vocation of their authors.

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<sup>35</sup> Not like the Orthodox one, where the amount of works is rather pour, but despite of this fact, there can be found a huge diversity of topics approached in the three most representative works of it and many memorial writings that also contain passages of spiritual autobiography. Cf. Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „The spiritual autobiography in the Eastern space in the second half of the XIXth and XXth centuries”, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> Saint Augustin, *Confesiuni*, 2nd edition, Bucharest, Nemira Printing Press, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> \*\*\*, „Select cronology”, in Liam Harte (ed.), *A history of Irish autobiography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. XV.