

BOOK REVIEWS

Pr. Sorin ȘELARU (coordonator), Viorel COMAN, George GHERGA, *Hotărârile Dogmatice ale celor șapte Sinoade Ecumenice [The Dogmatic Decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils]*, Editura Basilica, București, 2018, 573 p.

The 20th century signified for the whole of Orthodox theology a return to the biblical and patristic sources, a re-centering of theological reflection on the method and the spirit of the Fathers and on the experience and the communion of the Church. Dogmatic Theology was not overlooked in this dynamic of recourse to the biblical and patristic sources of theology. It rather recorded a considerable renewal through the exceptional contribution of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993). But the renewal of Orthodox Dogmatics, as a demarcation from the influences of Western scholastics and a creative undertaking within the Church's Tradition of the method and of the spirit of the Fathers, represents an on-going process that is far from being complete. Romanian dogmatists recently invested considerable effort in closely studying and explaining the Orthodox Dogmatic Tradition, and in understanding and capitalizing the depths of life and experience of the dogma in unity with the Church's spirituality and cult. They further sought to creatively respond to the diverse issues registered on the agenda of today's globalized and secularized world. All of their endeavors represent the sign of a constant preoccupation for the ecclesial and experiential affirmation of Christian dogma and life. In this effort of renewing Orthodox Dogmatics the appeal to the sources is essential and guiding in elaborating an authentic theology, delimited from the different nuances and subtle interferences of modern and post-modern ideologies. On the other hand, only using the sources as a starting-point will we be able to dynamically stabilize the dialogue with other Christians and with non-Christians within the context of Europe and today's world. This is a method found beyond the handbooks clichés, which are most often based on confessional disputes of centuries past and based on a borrowed methodology and terminology.

Within this theological dynamic we can record *The Dogmatic Decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils*, signed by Fr. Sorin Șelaru, associate professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Justinian the Patriarch” (Bucharest) as coordinator, together with the theologians Viorel Coman and George Ghergha, former students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest, who are currently undertaking postgraduate studies at KU Leuven, Belgium. The final proofreading of the translated text was made by Protos. Dr. Policarp Pîrvuloiu.

This writing - the fruit of a good collaboration between those who worked towards its completion - which contains the most authoritative texts in the Orthodox Church, after the Holy Scriptures, is unique in the history of Romanian Dogmatics and theology, although there were indeed a few other attempts to this end, over the last century. This work has three major aims: a) bringing together all the dogmatic decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, in their entirety; b) rendering a translation that is faithful to the literal and dogmatic meaning of the terms; c) offering direct access to the source-text, which belongs to the best critical edition that we have. Thus, the concept of the volume is unique both in virtue of its content, as well as in its shape, being an exceptional editorial and theological landmark.

The Dogmatic Decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Orthodox Church translated in Romanian are accompanied by the mirrored Greek and Latin source-text and by the Patristic texts received and approved by some of these Councils: *The Second Letter of Saint Cyril to Nestorius* (430), *The Third Letter of Saint Cyril to Nestorius*, containing the *Anathemas* (430), *The Letter of Reconciliation sent by Cyril to John of Antioch* (430), *Leo's Tome to Flavian of Constantinople* (382). They are also accompanied by concise introductions, an extended and well-articulated bibliography in constructing and understanding the issue at hand, by footnotes that explain the texts and the theological terms and the context, dogmatic, linguistic, historical and theological implications of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. The translation of the texts faithfully follows the Greek and Latin original (where the Greek text is missing) as it is edited in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* (G. Alberigo et alii, 1973), with a few exceptions: a) the introductory section from *The Third Letter of Saint Cyril to Nestorius* is not included in the 1973 edition and was taken from E. Schwartz (ed.), *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, I/I, 1, 33-34 (Greek text) și *Patrologia Graeca* (PG) 77, 106-110 (Latin text);

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b) the Greek and Latin text of the introductory section of the *Letter of Reconciliation* was taken from PG 77, 173-178; c) the first paragraph of the dogmatic definition of the Fourth Ecumenical Council is added from the critical edition Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.) *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta* of 2006.

The book *The Dogmatic Decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils* does not only offer an exceptional theological and dogmatic toolkit methodologically completing and deepening Romanian dogmatic thinking, but it also offers precious data concerning the exercise of the conciliarity and sobornicity of the Church. It was edited in the context in which, after the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016), we need to theologially and practically reflect on the “functionality” of Orthodoxy at a global level in a secularized and globalized world. The brief introductions to the texts of the Councils and their translations highlight a few defining aspects of the conciliar way of thinking of the Fathers: a) the main purpose of the Councils was affirming the Orthodox unity of faith, inscribing the boundaries of the truth of faith against heresies; b) the Fathers of the Church reunited in Ecumenical Councils were aware that they are successors of the Apostles and express the living Tradition of the Church; this dogmatic conscience has a synchronic and diachronic character; c) the Ecumenical Synods do not dogmatically innovate, as the methodology of the Fathers is exercised in conformity and creative fidelity to the Holy Scriptures and the Church’s Tradition up to them, and is at the same time the expression of the Church’s conciliarity and sobornicity. In this context patristic florilegia occupy an important place; d) Conciliar dogmatization was closely bound to confession, to the quality of *shepherds* amongst the communities, a quality which the Fathers expressed in a unitary vision on the Church’s life, experience and theology from inside the tradition; e) the faith formulated and confessed by the Ecumenical Councils, while offering a contextual answer to the challenges that arose in the Church through the virulent propagation of heresies, surpasses the given historical context, becoming, through the exercise of sobornicity, the conciliar faith of the Church; f) the faith formulated and conciliarly confessed does not represent a simple theoretical exercise, separated from the Church’s life, experience and Tradition, but rather has an ecclesial, experiential and soteriological character; g) the dogmatic decrees of the Ecumenical Councils express and structure the dogmatic conscience of the Church.

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They are normative for the Church, for theological reflection and for the confessing and redeeming dimension of Christian life.

Presented in an academic and very clear style, without conceptual and terminological constraints, explaining the terms in the translation and with the honest knowledge of a translation's limits, with sufficient theological nuances that complete the painting of the tackled issue and with a creative elasticity in outlining the text, this work can, without a doubt, be listed amongst the significant accomplishments of Romanian Orthodox dogmatists in the *post-Stăniloae* age. It comes to fill a gap of contents and method in Romanian Dogmatics, offering an indispensable theological and dogmatic toolkit for research. At the same time, it reminds each one of us about the fundamental importance of sources, in a creative overcoming of the old handbooks and methods in the field of Orthodox Dogmatics of the last centuries. Such a work was awaited in Romanian Orthodox theology and we believe, considering the competence of the authors, that its editing represents a fruitful and promising beginning in recovering the sources, ecclesial deepening of the dogmas by means of a lively and creative theology, in a confessing continuation of the Church's Tradition, through the method and spirit of the Fathers.

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