

Fr. Mircea Basarab, *Scripture and Tradition – The Importance and Receiving of the Scriptural Text in Church History*, Basilica Publishing House, 2015, Bucharest, 164 p.

At the Publishing House Basilica appeared with the blessing of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the paper *Scripture and Tradition - The Importance and Receiving of the Scriptural Text in Church History*. The book is signed by Fr. Mircea Basarab and is part of the collection "Biblical Library". The volume brings together in its pages the author's concerns and studies on the importance and the receiving of the scriptural text in Church's history, some of which have already been published in German or Romanian, and others are now presented for the first time to the readers. The book is divided into five chapters, preceded by a *Foreword*.

In the first chapter, entitled "The authority of the Holy Scripture" the author explains the origins of the Holy Scripture authority, its nature and also who guarantees the preservation of the biblical text (p. 7). The author first analyzes the concept of authority, which "should not be associated with the notion of blind obedience or coercion, but seen as an act of free and rational knowledge and then as a recognition of the superiority of a person" (pp. 10-11). The issue regarding the authority of the Holy Scripture was under discussion by the Commission *Faith and Order* in Louvain (August, 1971). The Commission had accepted the term *authority* in relation to the Holy Scripture, mentioning that "the notion must be seen as a relationship, as a testimony that must be accepted in freedom, and not as a truth imposed by violence" (pp. 10-11).

Authority implies a dialogue and a loving relationship. From this point of view, the divine authority manifested by Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel, the miracles and His supernatural acts, allowed Jesus to say that He was given all the power, meaning authority, in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28, 18). "If we look at this authority as the loving relation-

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ship between the Father and the Son, then we understand the true meaning that we follow when we talk about the authority of Holy Scripture” (p. 11). The authority of Jesus Christ and the Apostles sent on mission has its origin in God’s authority, and exercise of authority must be a service to fellowmen, motivated by love. The authority of the Holy Scripture and the Church is based on Jesus Christ’s authority (p. 12).

Father Mircea Basarab analyzes the following topics in order to explain the origins of the Holy Scripture’s authority and its forms of manifestation, namely: *Revelation and the Holy Scripture*, *The Holy Scripture contains God’s word*, *Divine Authority of the Old Testament*, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon* and *The Inspiration of the Holy Scripture*. From all these, the following ideas can be resumed: Providence includes revelation and its communication. The expression of the Divine Will is initially oral, and then through inspiration and, finally, it is fixed in writing (p. 13). Revelation took many forms – unwritten in Tradition, written in the Holy Scripture – but this distinction referring to keeping the revealed word does not represent a spiritual difference but a difference in communication (p. 15).

The frequent assertion that the Scripture contains the word of God represents the reason Church itself uses this authority to sustain faith claims (p. 13). The author emphasizes the historical character of the revelation: ”between revelation and its oral or written transmission there is an indissoluble bond, the event revealed being always presented in a context proper to the receiver of the revelation and then transmitted to recipients under specific conditions. Revelation is closely connected with history. This implies a specific interpretation of the biblical authors... the authority of Holy Scripture is based on the discovery of God” (p. 18).

Acknowledging the authority of the Old Testament by Jesus Christ and by the authors of the New Testament (Hebrew 1, 2) show revelation continuity and unity between the Old and New Testament (p. 22).

Regarding the formation of the Biblical canon, the author remembers some moments and some criteria he considers relevant to the authority of the Holy Scripture. He is interested in the authority of the books that form the canon of the Holy Scripture (p. 23). ”In the early days of the Church, the term canon did not have the current meaning, that of listing the books of the Holy Scripture but designated the faith doctrine (*regula fidei*)” (p. 24). This doctrine sense remained valid also after determining the biblical canon, which was based on the faith doctrine, of that *apostolic kerygma*,

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which the Church recognized in the contents of these books (p. 24). During the formation of the biblical canon, the Church considered the following criteria: apostolic, the doctrinal criterion and the age of the books.

Despite all these, inspiration remains the decisive element regarding the authority of a biblical book. The Holy Scripture enjoys a special authority because it contains God's revelation. However, the Bible does not include only revelation, but its written communication. Writing and communicating the revelation had been made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This action of the Holy Spirit gives authority to the Holy Scripture and reinforces the believers's faith that the Holy Scripture truly communicates God's revelation (p. 29). Regarding the inspiration of the Holy Scripture, the author covers the following topics: the nature of the inspiration, the theandric character of the Scripture, the expansion of the inspiration and the post apostolic inspiration. The synergy of the inspiration, namely the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the free participation of the biblical writer to composing the books of Holy Scripture has the basis in Scripture and Tradition (p. 39).

In the second chapter, Father Mircea Basarab presents the apostolic tradition and its relationship to the New Testament. First, the author gives an overview of God's manifestation in the history of the Old Testament, followed by the revelation of the New Testament (p. 56-59). Secondly, the author deals with the apostolic tradition, which he perceives as being "what Christ taught the Apostles and the Apostles sent to his descendants" (p. 59). The Apostolic tradition circulated largely and primarily orally. The New Testament testifies about the existence of such traditions (Jude 3; 2 Peter 2, 21) (p. 59). The apostolic preaching, or *kerygma* was devoted to Jesus Christ. It led to the formation of Christian communities which lived and interpreted the word of God (p. 61). The idea of using by the evangelists of oral or written tradition, for the Gospels drafting is today unanimously accepted (p. 63). In the canon formation of the New Testament, the apostolic tradition played a dominant role. This served as the criterion by which the Church selected the books where it recognized God's revelation (p. 64). Therefore, part of the apostolic tradition was fixed in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. On the other hand, in the ecumenical dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the other Reformed Churches, the problem of tradition is one of the most delicate. Some of them accept the apostolic tradition because it is possible to find evidence of it in the New Testament (pp. 65-70). Then, the author presents the patristic testimony of the existence and importance of the this tradition,

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as well as the way Scripture and Tradition had been defined in the documents of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical dialogue.

Chapter III is entitled "Saint Basil the Great and call for the Church Fathers Tradition". St. Basil the Great comes with undeniably and important clarifications regarding this subject. The author of the *De Spiritu Sancto* treaty makes a clear distinction between Tradition, the unwritten teaching of the Church Fathers (δόγματα), and the Announcements (κηρύγματα) which are transmitted in writing and are communicated publicly (p. 86). St. Basil's statement about receiving "the Apostolic Tradition through Mysteries" (έν μυστηρίω) does not imply a secret transmission of the teachings. By μυστήριον, St. Basil understands the Christian teaching transmitted through the Sacraments and liturgical experience of God's word, *kerygma* (pp. 90-91). The call of St. Basil to the previous Church Fathers sought to prove the age, the authenticity and the continuity of faith, received from generation to generation (p. 97).

In Chapter IV, entitled "In the spirit of teaching of the God-bearers Church Fathers" Father Mircea Basarab highlights first the authority of the Church Fathers. The recourse of the ancestors teachings has marked, from the beginning, both the interpretation of the Holy Scripture as well as defining teachings through faith. This call proved the continuity and the fidelity with the origins. If until the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325), ecclesiastical writers sought the consensus of their statements with the apostolic tradition (p. 109), with the Ecumenical Councils, the formula *Church Fathers* receives a special status and a unquestionable authority (p. 112). After the First Ecumenical Council, the two aspects of the apostolic succession, pastoral and didactic are often embodied by the same person (p. 117). The criteria according to which the ecclesiastical writers had been selected and declared Church Fathers are: *doctrina orthodoxa, sanctitas vitae, approbatio ecclesiae* and *aniquitas* (p. 118). As for the active period of the Church Fathers, the author, following Father G. Florovsky, argues that it is best to leave open the period of selection of the Church Fathers (p. 119).

In the subchapter "Church Fathers and time spiritual environment", Father Mircea Basarab describes the influence of various philosophical Greek systems on patristic theology, and in the subchapter "Back to the Church Fathers", the author does not intend to cover a complete history of this movement, but resumes only to the sense of the call "back to the Fathers" (p. 129). This implies a return to the Fathers' ways of practising theology who have not disregarded their time. What is expected from to-

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day's theologians is to take the critical and the innovative spirit of the Fathers, the courage with which they faced the most important issues of their times, the creative art in which they include time science in order to give Christian answers, providing contemporaries with solutions that guided the Church's teaching and spiritual life (p. 131).

In the final of the chapter, Father Mircea Basarab refers to the historical-critical method that does not recognize the revealed or the inspired character of the biblical text. For the Orthodox theology, and not only, the historical-critical method can not be the only research method of the biblical text. It is necessary for the research also the historical appearance of the revealed text. However, the theological aspect must be interpreted using theological methods, provided by church canonical exegesis. In the theological-canonical exegesis, the starting point is represented by the belief that the Bible should be seen as a whole, biblical texts being interpreted in the light of the Holy Scripture canon. In this sense, there is a rapprochement between the followers of this type of interpretation and the Orthodox exegesis which inherited from the Church Fathers the fact to discover in particular the spirit of the whole, and the ability to see the individual through the whole (pp. 133-135). The Bible should be seen as a whole, and the exegesis of a biblical text should be made in relation to the whole.

In the last chapter, entitled "Canonical exegesis", Father Mircea Basarab shows that limiting biblical exegesis only to the historical-critical method has prompted the search for other ways to get closer to the theological aspect of the biblical text. Church Fathers believed that the Scripture as a whole that should be the reference point for the exegesis of the biblical text. Also, they considered the Scripture as the word of God addressed to a synagogue or ecclesiastical community, community which kept it and took care of its passing in time (pp. 138-139). The current canonical exegesis often uses aspects that can already be found in the patristic exegesis. Finally, the author attempts a rapprochement of the two types of exegesis, referring in particular to the *Psalms*.

In conclusion, through his book Father Mircea Basarab makes an important contribution to Romanian biblical theology. Certainly the book will be a reference point also in the dogmatic theology because it facilitates the understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

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