

# **The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology in the 21st Century. A Decade of Inter-Orthodox Dialogue on Dogmatic Issues**

The 20th century represented a period of renewal in Orthodox Dogmatics through the use of Revelation data and of the Church Tradition, method and experience. The point of reference is the Congress in Athens (1936), but also its preliminary moments, such as the Preparatory Meeting in Bucharest (1936) where the issues and requirements of the Congress in Athens were drawn. In addition, during the 20th century, the major contributions of the Russian theologians from the diaspora were added, headed by: George Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Alexander Schmemmann and Paul Evdokimov, the contributions of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae and Fr. Justin Popovici, of Panayotis Nellas, Ioannis Romanides, Ioannis Zizioulas and Nikolaos Matsoukas. We do not discuss here the differences of nuance or those concerning certain conceptions that gave rise to theological debates within Orthodoxy and beyond. We only emphasize that, from various perspectives, these theologians brought a major contribution to the renewal of the Orthodox Theology and to its delimitation from the influences of medieval scholastics. Of course, we may add other names to these famous ones, ie the apprentices of the above-mentioned theologians, who assumed the conclusions of their predecessors and deepened the themes of Orthodox Dogmatics in the pressing context of late modernity up to the present.

In Romania, the Orthodox Dogmatics was connected to the renewal of 20th-century theology, especially through the thinking of Father Dumitru Stăniloae and his disciples, Fr. Ion Bria, Fr. Dumitru Popescu, theologian Daniel Ciobotea, now Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as through the exceptional contributions of Fr. Ioan Ică Sr and Fr. Ioan I Ică jr. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the Orthodox Dogmatic Theology in Romania was deepened in a close relationship with the spirituality and worship of the Church, but also

with the conclusions of the ecumenical dialogues and the challenges of the current world and culture.

In this context, at the initiative and direct involvement of the dogmatists from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Arad, the first International Symposium of Dogmatic Theology was held in 2007 and the International Association of Orthodox Dogmatist Theologians was founded. The works of the International Symposium of Dogmatic Theology took place under the generic title: "Highlights and Perspectives in the Mission of the Church in the Contemporary World". Among the participants at this International Symposium were: a) From the Faculties of Orthodox Theology in Romania we mention the participation of Fathers Professors: Dumitru Popescu, Dumitru Radu, Ștefan Buchiu (Faculty of Theology in Bucharest), Valer Bel (Faculty of Theology in Cluj), Vasile Citirigă, Adrian Niculcea (Faculty of Theology in Constanța), Dumitru Megheșan (Faculty of Theology in Oradea), Nicolae Moșoiu (Faculty of Theology in Sibiu) Ioan Tulcan, Cristinel Ioja (Faculty of Theology in Arad – as organizers); b) From the Faculties of Orthodox Theology from abroad: Bishop Ph.D. Ignatie Midici (Faculty of Theology, University of Belgrade/ Serbia; Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Clapsis (Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology – Brookline/ United States of America), Assaad Elias Kattan, (Theological Institute of Münster University/ Germany), Prof. Dr. Michel Stavrou (Theological Institute *Saint Serge* – Paris/ France), Ph. D. Daniel Munteanu (Faculty of Theology from Erlangen University/ Germany), Ph. D. Dimitrios Tselengidis (Faculty of Theology in Thessaloniki/ Greece), Ph. D. Peter C. Bouteneff (St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary - New York / United States of America), Ph. D Petr Mikhailov (St. Tichon's Orthodox Humanitarian University of Moscow).

Of the many issues raised during the debate, the following comments, accents, proposals and even general and particular perspective were mentioned in *The Final Document* of the Symposium in Arad: 1. Dogmatic Theology is one of the basic subjects of Theology, as a Church service. It has the mission to confess the revealed truths of Jesus Christ's Gospel and to make them accessible to all generations of faithful throughout the ages. The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology has the mission to faithfully study and communicate the Theology of the Orthodox Church to its catholicity and its existential and social importance for the life of the world. The Orthodox Theology serves the mission of the Church; 2. This symposium was an oc-

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casation for reflection on what was accomplished in this area in a period of a century and a reminder of the great syntheses that have been achieved. It was also an occasion of highlighting the theological personalities who honoured the Dogmatic Theology and to catch the accents, directions and perspectives that can be encountered in this theology in the past century;

3. The purpose of our present approach is not simply to make an inventory of what has been done in this area, although this is not irrelevant, but on the contrary to capture those aspects, accents and openings that come to meet the great questions and challenges the modern world addresses to the Church in its current mission and work;

4. With all its complexity, the time we live in requires the need for a closer relationship between Dogmatic Theology and other theological disciplines, especially Biblical and Practical Theology. But it is no less necessary to open the Dogmatic Theology to the cultural trends of the secularized world, which it must bring answers or even credible solutions to. The dialogue between Science and Theology, Theology and Culture should be encouraged;

5. The theological progress up to the present has highlighted the fact that both in its didactic and pastoral missionary implications, Dogmatic Theology must show a closer connection between the study and the in-depth presentation of the truths of faith, with the very life and spirituality of the ecclesial community;

6. Orthodox dogmatic theology must be thoroughly studied unceasingly. An in-depth evaluation and analysis is required to be made by a team of famous professors who should identify and highlight both the positive and the insufficient aspects of the development of this theological subject; it should not be omitted the cultural, social and inter-confessional factors that have influenced it, as well as the ideas, currents, philosophical systems and scientific developments which came into contact and dialogue with it during this period;

7. Taking into account the above problems, we believe that it is necessary an institutionalized update of this form of theological meetings at least every two years. In this regard we propose the foundation of an International Association of Orthodox Dogmatists necessary to an even closer connection between them. The participants took the decision to establish an Association of Orthodox Dogmatist Theologians, voting on a Statute of this Association and a provisional board consisting of: Ioan Tulcan - president (Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Arad/ Romania); Peter Bouteneff (St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary - New York / United States of America) and Michel Stavrou (Theological Institute *Saint*

*Serge* – Paris/ France) – vicepresidents; Daniel Munteanu (Faculty of Theology from Erlangen University/ Germany) - secretary.

The Association of Orthodox Dogmatist Theologians (A.I.D.O) is a working community of professors and researchers from the Schools of Orthodox Theology with university degree that wants to promote the research of Dogmatic Theology at international level. The purpose of the Association is to regularly organize consultations, symposia, colloquia and international conferences, where all AIDO members will be invited, to transmit the scientific information related to the results of the research undertaken, as well as those related to future research projects (dissertations, documentation, etc.) on specific themes of Dogmatic Theology, and the exchange of experience, consultations and cooperation on research and professors' training as well as on current dogmatic issues; 3) AIDO members are the titular heads of Dogmatic Theology subjects from the Faculties of Orthodox Theology, respectively from the Theological Institutes, as well as from the local Orthodox Churches: dioceses, metropolises, monasteries that stimulate scientific research in Dogmatics, as well as other Dogmatics scholars. In addition to these memberships, associate members of AIDO can also be institutions and individuals of the Church and from theological institutions which promote the theological-dogmatic research.

The next meetings were held in Arad (2009), entitled "Tradition and Dogma: What kind of Dogmatic Theology we propose for our time?"; in Thessaloniki (2011), with the theme: "The role and limits of reason in Dogmatic Theology"; in Sophia (2013), entitled "Dogma and Terminology in the Orthodox Tradition and its Relevance Today", in Bucharest-Caraiman (2016), with the theme: "Primacy and primacies in the Church". At these meetings there were also present other Orthodox dogmatists from university centres in Romania, Europe and the United States of America: Despina Prassas (Providence College, Rhode Island/USA); Alexey Fokin (The Institute of Philosophy in Moscow/Russia); Stavros Yangazoglou (Hellenic University in Patras/Greece); Christoph Schneider (The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge/UK); Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Academy for Theological Studies in Volos/Greece); Nikolaos Loudovikos (Ecclesiastical Academy in Thessaloniki/ Greece); Georgios Martzelos (Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Thessaloniki/ Greece); Aristotle Papanikolaou (Lincoln Theological Centre from Fordham University, New York/USA); Svetoslav Ribolov (Faculty of Theology in Sophia – Bulgaria); Fadi George (Faculty of Theology in Balamand – Liban).

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The next meeting will take place in 2018 at the Faculty of Theology in Balamand, Professor Michel Stavrou being the new President of the Association.

The initiators of this project aimed to intensify the relations between the Faculties of Orthodox Theology around the world, and especially the relations between the professors of Dogmatic Theology in order to approach and deepen the great themes of the Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, both for their better clarification in the life of the Church, and particularly for their expression in the present world as an answer to man's spiritual quests. That is why, ten years after the initiation of this project in Arad, that has been successful in several theological centres, through meetings, debates, documents and volumes of studies, we want to emphasize its importance for the current theology and for the mission and life of the Orthodox Church. At the same time, we consider that this project represents not only the opening to a dialogical stability of Tradition in the context of a fragmented world, but also the sign of Orthodox theologians' maturity and, implicitly, the renewal of Orthodox Dogmatics in the 21st century.

**Rev. Prof. PhD. Cristinel Ioja**