

BOOK REVIEWS

Cristinel Ioja, *A History of Dogmatics in Romanian Orthodox Theology: From the Beginnings of the Seminary Theological Education in Romanian to the Establishment of Communism*, volume II, Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2013, 622 p., ISBN 978-606-647-624-9

After a previous book dedicated to the development of Dogmatics in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which he takes an analytical and systematic approach, Professor Cristinel Ioja, from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Ilarion V. Felea” in Arad, comes up with a ground-breaking work: a history of Dogmatics in the Romanian Orthodox Theology. It is the first large treatment of this subject in our theological literature.

This is the second volume of the author’s projected trilogy, meant to survey the whole history of dogmatic instruction in the Romanian Orthodox Church. In the *Foreword* he explains that he begins with the second volume because he considers that “the period from the beginning of the theological education in Romanian to the establishment of communism was less studied from the point of view of theological-dogmatic evolutions and implications. It is a complex period with changes and evolutions in the Romanian theological thinking, with various influences in the missionary and apologetical-cultural field of our Church” (p. 5-6). It is a time of great challenges for the Romanian theology, coming from the sects, secularization, atheism and other philosophical currents. It is also the time of transition from the “fashion” of translations to the proper elaboration of Dogmatics manuals, rejecting the Western influences and returning to the spirit and method of biblical and patristic theology.

It is also in the *Foreword* that the author states his purposes: “I have strived to overcome both historicism and «theological archaeology», I have tried to grasp the contribution of each Romanian dogmatist in its theological core and so to integrate them into the context of the epoch’s confessional theology and cultural movement. (...) I have sought to present

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the various implications of the Orthodox dogma in the philosophical, socio-national and apologetical-missionary thinking, emphasizing the debates about it and the dogmatic reasoning of the theologians involved in the diverse apologetical controversies of the interwar period. I have tried to present most accurately the main coordinates of the translated Dogmatics treaties and of those elaborated by the Romanian dogmatists. (...) In the same time, I have presented the way some Romanian dogmatists criticized the medieval scolasticism while remaining its prisoners in thinking and approaching Dogmatics, in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.” (p. 6).

The book falls into seven chapters. In **Chapter I** (11-43) the author depicts the Orthodox Dogmatics in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. He starts with revival of monasticism under the Abbot Paisie Velicikovsky, who initiated a movement of returning to the Fathers especially by the translation of the *Philokalia*. Unfortunately the chance of renewal of Orthodox Dogmatics offered by the Paisian movement was not valued at that time in the Romanian theology, which was massively penetrated after 1848 by the Enlightenment’s ideas. He then continues with the development of Orthodox Dogmatics in Russia, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. The common denominator of all these Orthodox Churches is the presence of Western influences brought in by the Orthodox theologians who studied in Western universities.

Chapter II (44-194) portrays the Dogmatic theology in the Romanian Orthodox Church in the same period of time. We are told about the teaching of Dogmatics in seminaries and universities in the Romanian countries. One crucial moment in the evolution of Orthodox Dogmatics is the First Congress of the Faculties of Orthodox Theology held in Athens in 1936, in which the appeal to put off the Western ways and return to the spirit and method of the Fathers was launched. Professor Ioja brings interesting proofs that this return to the Fathers was actually discussed and decided beforehand in Bucharest, in the absence of George Florovsky (145-147).

Chapter III (195-331) follows and analyzes the way in which the Romanian dogmatists moved from translating the Russian and Greek catechisms and manuals of Dogmatics to elaborating their own. Each translation and indigenous manual is presented from the standpoint of its reception, importance, method, structure and content. This is a somewhat arid section of the book but very illuminating in respect to the what and how of Dogmatics in our seminaries and faculties.

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In **Chapter IV** (332-381) we are told about the signs of renewal in the Romanian Orthodox Dogmatics. Four theologians are of major import in this regard: Nichifor Crainic, Dumitru Stăniloae, Nicolae Chițescu and Ilarion Felea. Crainic was the first to recentre the dogmatic themes on the patristic tradition; Chițescu contributed to the renewal of Romanian Orthodox Dogmatics within the context of the interconfessional dialogue, and Felea attempted an all-encompassing approach to theology, binding together the dogma, the cult and the spirituality. But the most significant figure of all is Dumitru Stăniloae, to whom the bulk of the chapter is dedicated. He is credited with the highest contribution in rediscovering the Fathers and assuming St. Gregory Palamas' theology in deepening the dogmas.

Chapter V (382-529) portrays the Orthodox Dogmatics in the context of the Romanian confessional, apologetical and cultural context. This chapter, along with the next one, is the most vivid and readable part of the book, since it depicts the involvement of Romanian dogmatists in the religious and cultural debates of their time. First, the author presents the achievements of dogmatists in the field of Apologetics. In the Romanian theological institutes of the first half of the twentieth century Dogmatics and Apologetics were very closely connected. With very few exceptions, the dogmatists also treated apologetical topics. This unity of the two disciplines was dictated by the historical, religious and cultural interwar Romanian context, although some professors of Apologetics, like Ioan G. Savin, tried a strict separation between Dogmatics and Apologetics. This unity in distinction between Dogmatics and Apologetics remains unique in the Romanian Orthodox theology due to the specificity of interwar context, of method and vision on the challenges coming from modern philosophy and science. In the second part of the fifth chapter Professor Ioja presents the answers given by the Romanian dogmatists to the philosophical ideas circulating in the Romanian interwar society.

In **Chapter VI** (499-529) the author ushers us into the context of inner Orthodox debates and confessional controversies, pointing out the positions took by the dogmatists therein. In the period following the World War I the Church faced a multitude of situations to which an answer had to be given. It is about doctrinal debates, new religious movements which arose inside the Orthodox Church and the disputes with the neoprotestant sects and the Greek-Catholic Church.

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In *the last chapter* of his work (530-449) Cristinel Ioja describes the dramatic changes occurred in the Romanian society and theology after the establishment of communism. The freedom of theology to express itself was severely restricted. A new orientation was being imposed upon the Church and the theological institutes, together with the discrediting of the previous theological education. In these dark circumstances the author sees the translation of the *Philokalia* into Romanian started by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae in that period as an act of crucial importance and unwavering hope for the future our theology.

The *Conclusions* (550-567), delivered in Romanian, English and French, contain all the results of the author's research in a systematic presentation. One can get a quite clear image of the topic just by reading these conclusions.

This is a massive work, obviously the outcome of years of hard labour. It is not just a book on theological or Church matters; it is somehow the history of a piece of the Romanian past looked at from the standpoint of development of Dogmatics. And, as noted at the beginning of this review, it is the first of its kind. The author's documentation is impressive. Professor Ioja unpacked an amazing number of old manuals, journals, articles, etc., which laid buried into the dust of oblivion, in order to bring out to light an epoque of great changes and search for identity, which can help us understand where we stand today and why.

Significantly for the author's stance towards the way of doing theology, his work begins and ends with the *Philokalia*. For Professor Ioja the philokalical spirituality seems to represent a great chance for saving Dogmatics from being just an abstract talking about God, and becoming a confessing discourse stemming from an inward and ecclesial experience of God.

I must also mention the author's reasonable handling of sources. He doesn't adventure into hazardous speculations on the texts, but lets them talk for themselves. Thus, the quotations he uses are well chosen, balanced and significant for the points he tries to make.

Of course, as the author himself frankly admits right from the beginning, this work is not meant to be the ultimate treatment of the topic. Other perspectives, emphases and additions are expected to appear in the future. Nevertheless, for anyone interested in the history of Ortodox Dogmatics this book is a must. Therefore I warmly commend it, looking forward for the other two volumes.

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