

**Hilarion Alfeyev, *Taina credinței.*  
*Introducere în teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*  
*(The Mystery of Faith. Introduction in the*  
*Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, trad. Felicia  
Dumas, Doxologia Publishing House, Iași,  
2014, 380 p.**

*The Mystery of Faith. Introduction into the Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* is a masterpiece work of Hilarion Alfeyev, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk. The Romanian version was launched in Iași under blessing of His Holiness Teofan, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina and delivers in 380 pages with a keen accuracy and competence the dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church.

The book is structured in 11 chapters, preceded by an *Introduction* and *Foreword*. In *Introduction*, Michel Evdokimov considers the work „a modern dogmatics not touched by a scholastic spirit and furthermore, a guide in matters of Christian truth” (p. 10). The *Foreword* leverages the importance of the dogmas. „Fighting for its dogmatics centuries of troubled history, the Church followed its line in its salvation of man, making him part of the True life, bringing man in union with God and help him to find the forever hapiness” (p. 16).

First chapter entitled „What is faith?” tells us that faith „is both a mystery and a miracle” (p. 23), but is likewise a crossroad where „man and God take a first step towards their encounter” (p. 23). No one is born a believer. „Faith is a gift obtained through the efforts and bravery of those in search of it” (p. 29).

Man always lusted to discover the truth and the sense of life (p. 30). Overriding Politheism and its main adepts, „the ancient philosophy was getting close to the truth regarding God the One” (p. 31), but despite all this, the ancient world was floating in the dark sea of Politheism with one

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exception: the chosen people (p. 33). God revealed directly and in a personal way to many prophets and righteous ones from the Old Testament (p. 33), but in the New Testament He revealed in His essence and this episode was addressed to Christ only. If philosopher's God is abstract and inert, the God of Revelation is a „living creature, speaking, listening, seeing, thinking and ready to come in our assistance” (p. 34).

Chapter II is the Orthodox teaching about God. The author let us know about the etymology of the word God in several languages, then he drifts us into the Divine Names. Although the Divine Names are abundant in the Holy Scripture, they do not sense God's essence, only His attributes (p. 45). God is named Kyrios, Almighty (Pantokrator), the Saint of all saints, although none of these names can portait Him in details. „All the names used with referrence to God mirror His mystery beyond words” (p. 51-52).

In respect to the divine attributes, the author quotes Saint John of Damascus who sees a „God with no beginning or end, eternal, untouchable, uncircumscribed, infinit, incomprehensible, indefinite, insesizable, good, right, the Creator of all beings, Almighty, Foreseer, carrying for all and Master.” But God is beyond any name or divine attribute (p. 55-56).

Chapter III – *The Holy Trinity* – presents the Orthodox Triadology. „Christians believe in a Trinitarian God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Trinity is not three gods, but one God in three hypostasis, in three different and Personal entities” (p. 65). The Orthodox Triadology considers that Father is the cause of Son's and Holy Spirit's existence. „Father is unborn, Son is born from the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father. All these hypostatical attributes makes the difference in the Holy Trinity. The birth of Son from the Father is eternal, same as the proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the Father: the three Persons in the Trinity are alltogether eternal. Birth and proceeding are different ways of coming into existence, but the essence of this differentiation cannot be understood by human minds, although there is no differentiation of essence and glory in the three Persons” (p. 70). The Holy Trinity is the fulness of love, each Person being guided by love towards the other two Persons (p. 74).

Chapter IV entitled „*Creation*” deals with the Orthodox concept on cosmology, angelology and demonology. „If the Platonic Demiurge is an artisan ordaining all things starting from a primordial matter, the Biblical God is the Creator Who made the universe out of nothing (p. 79). There is nothing that compelled or impeded God to create the universe and the

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cosmos. The reason God created the world lies in His love and kindness. God wanted other creatures to be part of His beautiful world and share His love too” (p. 81-82).

God created the angels time before He created the material universe. „Angels are helping spirits, uncorporeal, endowed with intelligence and free will” (p. 82). Their meaning is to praise God unceasingly (p. 83). „Angels are God’s messengers to people” (p. 83). There are nine armies of angels. „Inside celestial hierarchy the elevated levels receive their light directly from the Creator, and the lower levels capture their light from the superior ones” (p. 84).

Some of the angels led by Lucifer rebelled against God and denied Him, standing up against anything good or holy (p. 85). So, they became demons. „The devil and demons fell into the darkness by their free will” (p. 86). In challenging the Manicheism, Fathers of the Church tell us that evil is not an ontologic reality, but a lack of goodness (p. 87).

Chapter V named „*The Man*” is the Orthodox anthropology. Man is the crown of creation and the peak of God’s process of creation (p. 101). Holy Fathers tell us that man is an „intermediary” between the visible and invisible world, a synthesis of both. Following the ancient philosophers, they name man „microcosmos”, a small world, a limited universe, unifying inside the whole created world (p. 102). More than that, Saint Gregory of Nyssa calls man a micro-theos. Because after the Incarnation of Logos, he may become god in grace (p. 112).

Man was created in the image of God with possibilities to be in His likeness through virtues (p. 105-106). In Eden, which man received as a gift, he lived in a perfect harmony and union with God and nature. „He understood the language of animals and they all listened to him; all the elements subdued to him, as to a king (p. 114-115). Man had the meaning to be the priest of all the visible creation (p. 116) and to work on his deification and the cosmos (p. 117). His primordial state didn’t last long, the man tempted by the devil did not realize he has been deceived and longed to be become god without a God, not taking Him in his equation (p. 118). „First men’s sin was possible because they were already endowed with a free will” (p. 118). Most of the Holy Fathers assert that Adam fell because of his pride an disobedience (p. 119). Consequences follow: illness, sufferance, sadness, death, impurity and a hostile environment (p. 121).

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Chapter VI named „*Christ*” approaches the Orthodox teaching on Christology and Soteriology. For the man to be deified, it was necessary the Son of God to Incarnate (p. 135). The Orthodox Christology confirms that Jesus Christ the Savior is the God in perfection and the perfected man (p. 137). Christ has two natures, a divine nature and a human nature unified in one Hypostasis two energies and two wills, divine and human (p. 146).

If Origen believed that the ransom price has been already paid to the devil, Anselm of Canterbury asserts that „the ransom price was not paid to the devil, for he was not mastering the man, but to God the Father” (p. 149). The Orthodox theology tells us that „Christ delivered Himself as sacrifice to the Holy Trinity in full, not to God the Father only” (p. 150). Concluding: „God’s love is the cause of Christ’s sacrifice, and not His wrath” (p. 151). Man is renewed in Christ and through Christ, recreated and deified (p. 152-153).

Chapter VII brings beside the Orthodox teaching about Church, Virgin Mary and saints, the icons and the Cross, some other matters of actuality: the position of woman towards the Church, the Church interrelations and the issue of the Orthodox calendar. What is the Church? „The Church is the Kingdom of God obtained at the expense of His blood, a Kingdom receiving those chosen to become His sons and to accept Him as a Father” (p. 159). Saint Gherman of Constantinople says that „the Church is the heaven on earth where God the Divine is living” (p. 163). The words from Nicea-Constantinople Creed „I believe in one holy, synodal and apostolic Church” underlines its attributes as a humanly-divine organ (p. 165). The Church is One because there is One God (p. 165); It is holy because its Head is Holy (p. 166); It is universal because it reunites all Christians scattered around the world, including the saints and the repaused (p. 167) and is Apostolic because it was built on the Holy Apostles (p. 168).

In Church, besides the divine priesthood of all believers (p. 171), there is a hierarchy of sacramental priesthood build on three levels: bishops, priests and deacons (p. 173). The Orthodox Church denies women priesthood considered in the protestant Church, because it leverages a high importance to the paternity of Church (p. 175).

The Virgin Mary is forever virgin and Mother of God (p. 178). She „is leading the celestial hierarchy of the Church” (p. 180). The Orthodox theology makes distinction between the cult of adoration brought to God (latreia) and worship of the saints (proskynesis), who are praised not as

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gods but as persons who reached a high spiritual level and lived in union with God” (p. 180).

Regarding the icons, the dogmatic decision of the VII-th Ecumenic Synod shows that the glory granted to image is abducted to prototype and the one who worships the icon worships the person painted in the icon (p. 188). Referring to the Holy Cross, the Orthodox Church believes that it concentrates all the power and energy of Christ (p. 189). Saint Isaac of Syria believed that the power once dwelled in the Ark of the Covenant is now dwelling in the Holy Cross (p. 190-191).

Chapter VIII presents the Orthodox concept about Holy Mysteries. During Eucharist, the bread and wine transfigures into the Body and Blood of Christ Himself. They are not only symbols or imaginations (p. 226). For this reason „the unification of the believer with Christ during the Mystery of Eucharist is not symbolic or figurative, but reality” (p. 228). If through the Mystery of Repentance God follows the healing of one’s soul (p. 234), through the Mystery of Holy Unction He follows the „ease of sufferance for the sick ones” (p. 238). In the Orthodox concept, „the reason of marriage is man and woman to be one, using the model of the Holy Trinity, where the three Persons are unified in love” (p. 242). All the above enumerated mysteries are carried out through the Church’s servants, who are consecrated through the Mystery of Ordination (p. 249). The ultimate goal of any Mystery is „the deification of human nature and the unification in Christ” (p. 245).

Chapter IX presents the Orthodox concept on prayer. Prayer is not only a request, but a communion and encounter of man with God (p. 271). Holy Fathers called the prayer „the true theology” (p. 286). Evagrius Ponticus said: „ If you are a theologian, truly pray; if you truly pray, you are a theologian” (p. 286). Concluding, „the real theology is not a preach about God, but within God, it does not consider God as an alien object but talks to Him as with a Personal being” (p. 286). In Christianity the ideal about life is „to live in such a way our whole life to become a prayer, all our deeds and thoughts to be flooded by prayer” (p. 285). In this sense, the Orthodox Christian use the Heart’s Prayer or the Prayer of Christ (p. 280). „According to tradition, the energy and power of God are in the holy name of Christ” (p. 281). Those practicing this prayer are enjoying many spiritual benefits: soul tranquility, attention, spiritual joy and the sentiment of God’s presence (p. 289-297).

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Chapter X reaches the Orthodox teaching about deification. The deification (theosis) idea is the core of spiritual life in the Orthodox Church, which magnetize „all the aspects regarding dogmatics, ethics or mystics. Confession of the true belief, obeying commandments, prayers, participating at the Church's Mysteries, all are indispensable in the way to deification, which includes man's salvation” (p. 314). Deification is the highest level man can ever reach (p. 314). If Plotin considered that deification resides in diluting, absorbing and losing man's individuality in God, the patristic tradition considers that theosis is the highest unification with the divine light and a sharing process of the divine energy without losing man's personality or his human quality (p. 315-316).

Chapter XI is the Orthodox concept on Eshatology. For Christians „death is a high mystery”, because it represents „the birth of the human person in the eternal life, passing from the earthly life” (p. 330). „Christianity does not consider death a final act, but the beginning of a new life. The earthly life is only a prologue” (p. 330). Until the universal Judgment, the righteous souls enjoy only a small section of heaven and sinners's souls receive a partial punishment (p. 331). The Orthodox practice considers that the prayers for those reposed, as the soul fate is not yet decided before the Final Judgment, may improve their soul's condition (p. 336).

History and world will finally reach Parusia of Lord. Holy Scripture teaches us that „the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night; at dawn world will face times of social unrests, natural disasters, wars and persecutions of the Christians and an army of lying profets will enter the scene, deceiving many people” (p. 327). Finally, Antichrist will make his appearance enjoying high influence and power, but in the end he will be defeated by Christ (p. 327).

The consequences of Lord's Parusia will be: resurrection of the dead, universal Judgment and transfiguration of the cosmos. According to Savior's words, resurrection will be universal and for those who did good things, it will be a „resurrection of life” (John 5, 29). For those who excelled in evil deeds, it will be the „resurrection of damnation” (John 5, 29) (p. 334). After Resurrection „all the people will face Doomsday, even those who did not know Christ in their earthly life” (p. 341). The main selection criteria will be the mercifull deeds of men during the earthly life (p. 341).

After Doomsday all the people will enjoy the eternal life, righteous in Heaven and sinners in hell. If Heaven is the joy of love in God, hell „is the

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sufferance of losing love” (p. 345). Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev closes this chapter with the theory of apokatastasis. According to this theory, „all sinners, including demons and the devil in person will be saved after being exposed a shorter or a longer time to the purifying fire of hell” (p. 353). The Church rejected this teaching considering it an heresy, because it is in dissonance with the divine Revelation.

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