

Remus Rus, *Sfânta Fecioară Maria în tradiția pioasă a creștinilor primelor veacuri (The Holy Virgin Mary in the Pious Tradition of the First Centuries' Christians)*, Meteor Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, 320p, ISBN 978-606-8653-40-2

Remus Rus is a non-ordained university professor who teaches at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology from Bucharest, with the basic specialty of the History of Religions. He was born on January 1st, 1942, in Brașov, but was originally from Joia Mare, a village in Arad County. He graduated Theological Seminary in Caransebeș, in 1960, and, four years later, the Theological Institute from Sibiu. During 1965-1969, he attended the doctorate in the History of Religions at the Theological Institute from Bucharest with a specialization at the Oxford University, receiving his PhD in 1978. He began his teaching career in 1976 as an assistant professor at the Department of Systematic Theology at the Theological Institute from Bucharest, functioning after that, in turn, as a reader, then, as a lecturer, and, since 1991, as a professor of the History and Philosophy of Religions. He is the author of a great number of theological works and of some important translations into and from English language.

One of his recent works is entitled *The Holy Virgin Mary in the pious tradition of the first centuries' Christians*, a book printed at Meteor Publishing, from Bucharest, in the year 2015. This book contains, at the expanse of 320 pages, a series of apocryphal texts, preserved in the Ethiopian tradition, referring to the Holy Virgin Mary. From the outset, the author announces that the volume presents “the history of the birth, the spending into the world, the Assumption and wonders of our Holy Lady, ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of God.” The book includes an introductory part, a description of the Holy Virgin’s image made by the Saint Epiphanius of Salamina, a series of “salutes” attributed to Demetrius, the Archbishop of Antioch, followed by thirteen chapters that depict the biography of the Holy Virgin

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Mary. Throughout the book, the reader is given the opportunity to discover some aspects more or less known about Joachim and Anne, the parents of Our Lady, about the birth and the bringing to the temple of the Holy Virgin, about the proclamation of the angel Gabriel, about the incarnation and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, about the Herod's attempt to kill the divine child, then about the holy family's flight to Lebanon and Egypt. The paper continues with the presentation of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, and finally, as a worthy culmination of her extraordinary life, captures a small portion of the miracles that were performed by her or, through her personal intervention, by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remus Rus stresses that the intention of the present volume is centered on the orthodox teachings about the Virgin Mary as Theotokos. If, on the one hand, the Mother of God "is the human archetype of perfection", being, in this sense, the moral model of all the people, She is, on the other hand, "the historical concretization of deification." From the body and through the free will of the Virgin Mary, our Lord Jesus Christ has been incarnated, giving the man the possibility to become God. The first human being who has reached the maximum state of deification, still from the earthly life, was the Mother of God. After the *fiat* that She gave to the proclamation of the angel and through the sanctifying and creative act of Jesus Christ, in the womb of the Virgin "appears an unique life, the life of Jesus," which is nothing more than "the eternal life of God in the human form."

The volume is preceded by an **Introduction** in which the author talks about the importance of the apocryphal writings, explaining at first the concept which covers them. The term "apocryphal" comes from the Greek *apokryphos*, which in translation means "hidden", "secret". This concept was used to refer to the books hidden to the general public since they belonged to some sects that considered them "sacred" and thus "hidden" to uninitiated persons from outside of them. Yet, the texts in question had a real intrinsic value, which is why they were preserved and subsequently propagated among the Christian communities. Although the church had certain reservations about them, the apocryphal writings have enjoyed a strong circulation and of a particular interest over time. As witness, stand the Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic and Slavonic translations from the Greek language, in which they were written.

In terms of the doctrine, apocrypha have anticipated the dogmatic formulations developed later on during the ecumenical Councils. Even with-

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out a proper theological argumentation, but in a literary form, beautifully stylistically adorned, they have firmly promoted the faith in the righteousness of Mary, in the virginal conception and birth of Jesus Christ and in the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, as *Theotokos*.

Arisen out of the piety and faith of anonymous Christians, apocryphal writings are narratives depicting the history of sacred events. Being adorned with miraculous moments and noble heroes, these narratives have served to strengthen or to give more certainty and authority to the faith.

The value of apocryphal books is unquestionable, considering that Saint Maximus the Confessor himself has made use of them saying, in his *Life of the Virgin*, that “these things are true and without error.” However, their true value is given by the central and emblematic figure of Our Lady, around which weaves the whole preceding history of salvation and perfecting the human nature. The purpose of writing the apocryphal books was the simple believers’ effort to translate in an easily understandable language the history of the divine plan of mankind’s salvation.

If the “apocryphal wisdom” has struggled to remain within the boundaries imposed by the Church’s teaching, in turn, the Church has undergone it to a thorough analysis with the aim of cleansing it of those “doctrinal impurities” that could lead it to heresy.

After the introductory part, the work continues with a short chapter entitled **The Holy Virgin Mary’s Image Portrayed by St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus**, which describes the physical portrait of the Virgin Mary, according to the bishop of Salamina.

Then follows a series of “salutes” to the Theotokos, which entitles **Hail, Mary!** The text belongs to Demetrius of Antioch’s homily dedicated to the Nativity of Jesus Christ and to the Virgin Mary. This homily is called “About the birth after the flesh of the Word of God and about the Virgin Mary.” Interestingly, the author of the homily – Demetrios, the Archbishop of Antioch – was a fictional character. His name was created by various anonymous writers from the late Coptic literature, in order to give consistency and validity to the way in which they expressed their faith. The full text of the homily is found in *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, edited with English Translation by E.A. Wallis Budge, Oxford University Press, London, 1915, pp. 652-698. The text of the “salutes” is found at the pages 622-625.

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After this brief series of “salutes”, Remus Rus performs the translation of other apocryphal texts that refer to the life story of Mary, based on a monumental collection of Ethiopian texts with English translation, entitled: *Legends of Our Lady Mary the Perpetual Virgin Hanna and Her Mother, translated from the Ethiopic Manuscripts Collected by King Theodore of Makdala and now in the British Museum, by Sir E.A. Budge...*, Published by the Medici Society Ltd., London, Liverpool and Boston, Mass., MCMXXII.

The narrative thread follows chronologically the story of the main biographical events in the life of Mary. The chapters’ structure of the book follows this temporal sequence of events in the holy history of the Mother of God, accompanying the reader on the meridians of time, from her birth to her Assumption. Thus, the chronological thread of the story unfolds after the following route: **I. The History of Hannah, the Mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary; II. Salute to the Members of the Body of Hannah, the Mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary; III. Christ’s Covenant with the Blessed Virgin Mary Commonly Called “The Covenant of Mercy”; IV. The History of the Virgin Mary, As She Told It to Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria; V. The Story of the Virgin Mary, As She Herself Said It to Timothy, the Patriarch of Alexandria; VI. The Proclamation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary; VII. The Conception and Birth of Our Lady Mary, the Mother of God; VIII. Treaty Which Describes How It Was Discovered the History of Mary; IX. The History of the Virgin Mary’s Repose, As It Was Told by St. John; X. The History of the Holy and Pure Mary, Mother of Christ, Our God, and Her Departure from This Transient World to Life; XI. The History of Mary’s Flight in Mount Lebanon and the Acts of Gigar, the Governor of Syria, and of Domitian’s; XII. The Vision of Mary. Homily Delivered by John, the Son of Zebedee.**

The book concludes with the narration of a series of 30 miracles of the Virgin Mary, out of 143 miracles recorded and preserved in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. These stories are presented in chapter **XIII. The Miracles of Mary**. The chapter is a translation after the vast collection of Ethiopian texts translated into English, entitled: *Lady Meux Nos Manuscripts.2-5. The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Life of Hanna (Saint Anne), and the Magical Prayers of Aheta Mikael*, the Ethiopic Texts edited with English Translations by E.A. Wallis Budge,

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with one hundred and eleven colored plates, W. Grigor, London, 1900, pp. 20-158.

The text of apocryphal writings contained in this volume is characterized by a chosen literary expression, given by the natural, fluid and convincing style used by the anonymous Christian authors for transmitting, as accurate, accessible and captivating as possible, the teaching about the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The apocryphal books related to the history of Mary, maintaining unaltered the revealed truth of the Christian faith, as it is recorded in the Scriptures, emphasizes the solidity of the theotokological teaching and its vital need for the faith, spirituality and life of the Christians.

The content of these texts springs from a genuine Christian living, calling for a careful reading. The author of this paper gives the readers the opportunity to enrich themselves spiritually as they try to discover and personally experience the useful teachings transmitted throughout its pages.

Laurențiu-Victor CHILIBARU