

BOOK REVIEWS

Vasile Rojneac, *Sfântul Niceta de Remesiana. Viața și activitatea (Saint Nicetas of Remesiana. His life and activity)*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 2017, 330 pp.

At a first reading of the title, any reader would presuppose that this book is just a simple monograph of a Saint of the Orthodox Church, written by compiling ancient sources and on the ground of countless academic papers, a book only for scholars interested in the life of a Saint of the fourth and fifth centuries. Fortunately, this presupposition is totally wrong. The book published by Vasile Rojneac and presented as a doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Cluj-Napoca, is a work of great importance that deals with the detailed analysis of the life, activity, works, theological conceptions of a Saint, who was unfortunately overlooked by Orthodox theological research despite the fact that the Orthodox Theology of the 20th century was influenced by the so-called neo-patristic synthesis promoting a “return to the Fathers”. This kind of synthesis was focused mostly on the Cappadocian Fathers or on the Greek Fathers from the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The book analyses the vast pastoral and missionary activity and the theological and dogmatic works of Saint Nicetas, bishop of Remesiana, a city in the Roman province of Dacia Mediterranea.

The book published by Vasile Rojneac is important for the following reasons. Any attempt of describing the life, personality and activity of Saint Nicetas, bishop, theologian, and composer of liturgical verse, represents a difficult approach due to the small amount of ancient sources regarding details from his biography. This fact is well emphasised by the author in the first chapter of the book, entitled “Reception of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana in (contemporary) historiography”, dedicated to the *status quo* of the academic research on the life, personality, and activity of Saint Nicetas. The chapter is divided in two subchapters dedicated to foreign and Romanian academic literature regarding Saint Nicetas of Remesiana.

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This method of approaching the theme is very important for the author because it gives him the possibility to identify several issues that were not debated or that did not draw the attention of the scholars until now. This approach is very important as well for the identification of several subjective interpretations that can be found in the academic literature regarding the life and activity of St. Nicetas on the ground of confessional predeterminations. For example, the author emphasised the position of several Greek-Catholic theologians who, by studying the activity of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana, were giving arguments for an extended jurisdiction of the pope in the Roman Empire, or the position of some Romanian historians and theologians who were using the activity of Saint Nicetas as an argument for the Christianisation of the Daco-Roman population of the upper Danube valley, being considered the “Apostle of Daco-Romans”. This is the reason why the author affirms that: “*Bishop Nicetas was not more Western and less Oriental or more «Catholic» and less «Orthodox» in the sense that these words are understood today, because he lived in a period when both the West and the East was «One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic» the Church, he himself understanding and defining it as «communion of saints».*”

The second chapter of the book, entitled “Life and activity of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana” analyses the ancient sources regarding the youth, education, ecclesiastical and political context in which Nicetas was elected bishop of the city of Remesiana, as well as his friendship with the bishop Paulinus of Nola. The author describes this friendship as a true example of episcopal collegiality that can be applied today as well in our Orthodox Church. At the same time, the chapter is dedicated to the missionary area of St. Nicetas. Was the jurisdiction of the see of Remesiana including the population of the upper Danube valley? Taking into account many opinions of the scholars and based on the ancient sources, the author came to the conclusion that the missionary area of Saint Nicetas must be limited only to the jurisdiction of his bishopric and not exceeding the jurisdictional territories of the see of Remesiana. This conclusion of the author is based on the limits of canonical jurisdiction imposed by the 2nd Canon of the Second Ecumenical Council (381) and on the 3rd canon of the Council of Serdica (343), the existence of several bishoprics in the lower Danube valley which made impossible a canonical missionary activity of Saint Nicetas in the upper Danube valley without an immixture in the canonical

jurisdiction of other bishops, and the political, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal context of the times imposed a permanent presence of the bishop in his eparchy. According to these arguments it would be very difficult to consider Saint Nicetas of Remesiana the “Apostle of Daco-Romans” or the “Apostle of the ancestors of Romanians”, as some of the Romanian academic scholars believed and argued. Despite this, the author is not excluding the possibility that the Dacians from the upper Danube valley listened the sermons of the bishop of Remesiana, but they sure did this in the jurisdiction of his bishopric.

The third chapter of the book, entitled “The works of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana”, analyses the authenticity of the works of St. Nicetas preserved in manuscript or of the works attributed to him during history as well as the transmission of the text of this works before the first printed editions. The author is taking into account all the published editions of the texts attributed to St. Nicetas. The works of St. Nicetas are divided by the author in “Dogmatic works” (*Libelli instructioni, De diversis appellationibus D. N. Iesu Christo convenientibus*), “Liturgical works” (*De vigiliis servorum Dei, De psalmodiae bono, Te Deum laudamus*), and “Moral works” (*Ad virginem lapsam, Epistle from the Corbeiense manuscript*). During this chapter, the author is critically analysing the transmission of the texts and describing these works according to the cultural, political, and religious context of the fourth and fifth century. The author tried to determine for every work the sources and the influences from other Church Fathers, both from East and West, such as: Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan or Augustine, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint John Chrysostom, or Augustine.

The last chapter of the book is called “The theology of Saint Nicetas”. Based on the division of the works found in the previous chapter, the author is analysing the possibility of a theological system in the works of St. Nicetas of Remesiana. Accordingly, the author gives arguments for a division of the theology of Saint Nicetas in: “Liturgical Theology”, “Dogmatic Theology”, and “Moral Theology”. The first subchapter is dealing with the way in which St. Nicetas developed for his pastoral and missionary activity a precise theology regarding the institution of Catechumenate and the stages in the Rite of Christian Initiations. One of the most important approaches of this book is represented by the theological analysis of the

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work *Libelli instructionis*, which had a major role in the Christianization of the barbarians in the lower Danube valley as well as in the developing of a Latin culture among them, and of the dogmatic reflections presented by the author in the treatises *De ratione fidei*, *De Spiritus Sancti potentia* and *De Symbolo*. The author analyses as well the dogmatic theology of St. Nicetas regarding triadology, mariology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. The book ends with an important subchapter in which the author is bringing arguments for a moral theology of St. Nicetas. Based on the work “*Ad virginem lapsam*”, the author is analysing the theological understanding of monachism, spiritual struggles and challenges of monastic life, and the moral value of repentance.

Taking into consideration all the aspects presented by the author, I find this book to be both historically informative as well as contemporarily relevant for the academic research regarding the life, activity and works of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana.

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