

BOOK REVIEWS

Avva Iosif HAZZAYA, văzătorul de Dumnezeu, *Scrieri duhovnicești*, Traducere, studiu introductiv și note de Ierom. Agapie Corbu (Abba Joseph HAZZAYA, seer of God, *Spiritual Writings*, Translation, Introductory Study and Notes by Hieromonk Agapie Corbu), Editura Sf. Nectarie, Arad, 2019, XCV+214 pp.

Earlier this year, *St. Nectarie* Publishing House of Arad published an exceptional work: Abba Joseph Hazzaya's writings translated by the scholar, hieromonk and abbot Protosyngellos Dr. Agapie Corbu. The book opens a series entitled "Syriac Philokalia", dedicated to the Philokalic writings by the Syriac Fathers. Both the series of writings and the writings of the scholar Joseph Hazzaya constitute an absolute novelty in the area of the Romanian spirituality and theology. Ignored for decades, the writings of the Syriac mystics come to refresh the Romanian theology, both as a language, but especially as approach. That is why we consider Father Agapie Corbu's approach salutary and refreshing.

The lack of dogmatic and historical information about this author and the authors from the Syriac area in general has led the Romanian theologians to show a certain reserve regarding a possible approach of their life, works and theology. The opening of the West to this fascinating tradition has provoked reactions and interest among the Orthodox theologians. In the Romanian theology, the one that opened the way to knowing this tradition is Rev. Ioan I. Ică jr., well known to our theology through the multiple horizons approached. This work comes in addition to the efforts of the professor and theologian from Sibiu.

Abba Joseph Hazzaya's writings appear for the first time in Romanian. Together with his writings, there are also data about the life and activity of this Syriac father, a representative mystical and Philokalic author from the 8th century. Unfairly characterized as Messalian and, consequently, condemned by the Synod of 786/787, led by the Patriarch Timothy I, abba

Joseph Hazzaya remained unknown for a long time to the Greek and Latin theological circles. The present work has the great merit of replacing this important Philokalic author from the Aramaic space in the tradition and line of the mystical theology, a theology of spiritual experience.

His work is an admirable synthesis between the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite. At the same time, it is an authentic testimony of God's vision, similar to Saint Symeon the New Theologian and Saint Gregory Palamas' writings from the Byzantine space. His entire work reflects a rich culture used to express his hermit and contemplative experiences. Through Joseph Hazzaya's work, the contemplative theology specific to the Syriac theological environment, achieves one of the most refined and expressive presentations.

The book opens with an *Argument* (pp. IX-XI) on the translation of Joseph Hazzaya's writings and continues with a large and documented *Introductory Study* (pp. XII-LXXXIV), both signed by the translator. The *Introductory Study* correctly places the author, his work, as well as the Syriac theological environment, both historically and theologically. Having an exact theological-historical expression, the author of the study calls for a large and updated bibliography from the western area that manifested interest on the Syriac Christianity. The great merit of this introductory study is to shed light on the dark and complex history of the Syriac Church and her theology, to systematize the dogmatic, organizational and spiritual events and expressions of what we call the Syriac-Oriental Church today. To these a penetrating synthesis is added on the spiritual teaching of Abba Joseph Hazzaya's writings.

Meeting the scientific and academical requirements, the present work also has an almost exhaustive *Bibliography* (pp. LXXXV-XCIV), the author used to translate Joseph Hazzaya's writing, in the introductory study, as well as in the footnotes. Of course, there follows a *Note on the edition* that clarifies the technical aspects of the translation.

The book continues with the spiritual writings of Abba Joseph Hazzaya (pp. 1-199). There are ten writings, some shorter - epistles or prayers -, others larger, or fragments from his writings or whole writings. All these writings are accompanied by consistent and academic explanatory notes, which could constitute a separate study necessary to clarify the theological and spiritual-practical aspects of this Syriac father's works.

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In order to keep the academic note and the scientific rigor, this work ends with several indexes meant to facilitate the reading and understanding of the content: *Scripturistic index* (pp. 201-204); *Index of patristic and classical citations* (p. 205); *Thematic index* (pp. 206-213) and *Index of Syriac terms* (pp. 214-215).

The present translation is part of an extremely balanced, current and accessible philological line, but with the corresponding theological accents, which opens it to the profane readers who love spiritual literature, as well as to specialists and theologians.

The writings of Joseph Hazzaya have given Romanian theology a fascinating theological and spiritual universe that is waiting to be explored both intellectually and especially experimentally, in the most authentic spirit of the Church Tradition.

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