

The Man and the Servant; II. Family; III. Service) and, like the documents, are presented in chronological order.

How did Father Ioan Lazăr manage this fortunate symbiosis? His consistency and tenacity, his close connection with Father Demian Tudor's family, his reliance on documents, his constant reference to books and specialized studies, and his regular consultations with the faculty's deanship have led to this successful outcome: scientific, historical, theological, and spiritual, all at once imbued with the spirit of Father Demian Tudor and complemented by the effort and humility of Father Ioan Lazăr.

**Protosyngellos lect. dr. Nicolae M. TANG**

**Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Cristinel IOJA, Pr. Conf. Univ. Dr. Caius CUȚARU, Pr. Lect. Univ. Dr. Adrian MURG, Protos. Lect. Univ. Dr. Iustin POPOVICI, Pr. Lect. Univ. Dr. Filip ALBU (coordonatori), *The Significance of Theology in Today's Society and Culture*, Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu” din Arad, Arad, 2023, 615 pp. ISBN: 978-973-752-936-7**

In the year 2022, the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Ilarion V. Felea” from Arad, with the blessing of the Most Reverend Father Dr. Timotei Sevciciu, Archbishop of Arad and the Most Reverend Father Dr. Emilian Crisanul, Vicar Bishop of the Archdiocese of Arad, celebrated the Bicentennial of Arad Theology (1822-2022).

The event brought together in Arad professors of theology from the Universities of Romania, Europe, America and Canada, on a current topic regarding the meanings of Theology in today's society and culture, a topic of contextual reflection, in connection with the anniversary of the Bicentennial of Aradian Theology.

Also during this period, the College of Deans of the Romanian Patriarchate was organized. The international symposium enjoyed the

presence of hierarchs and professors of theology from the country and abroad, among whom we mention: Archbishop Prof. Dr. Alexander Golitzin, (Marquette University, USA); Bishop Prof. Dr. Andrey Borkowski, (Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw, Poland); Rev. Prof. Porphirios (Fadi) Georgi, (University of Balamand, Lebanon); Prof. Dr. Martin Illert, (University of Halle/Wittenberg, Germany); Prof. Dr. Andreas Müller, (University of Kiel, Germany); Rev. Prof. Dr. Sergey Trostyanskiy (Marist College, New York, USA); Rev. Prof. Dr. Ștefan Buchiu, (University of Bucharest); Rev. Prof. Dr. Stelian Tofană, (Babeș-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca); Associate Professor Dr. Sorin Șelaru, (University of Bucharest); Rev. Prof. Dr. Daniel Buda, (“Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu); Prof. Dr. Peter Mikhailov, (St. Tikhon’s Humanitarian University of Moscow, Russia); Prof. Dr. Nicolae Xiónis, (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece); Prof. Dr. Marina Kolovopóulu, (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece); rev. Prof. Dr. Gregory-Telemachos Stamkopoulos, (University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki, Greece); Prof. Dr. Eirini Christinaki-Glarou, (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece); Prof. Dr. Jerzy Ostapczuk, (Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw); rev. Prof. Dr. Daniel Benga, (Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich, Germany); rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Moga, (University of Vienna, Austria); Prof. Dr. David J. Goa, (University of Alberta, Canada); rev. Prof. Dr. Jerzy Tofiluk, (Orthodox Theological Seminary in Warsaw, Poland); Archim. Lect. Dr. Nathanael Neacșu, (“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University from Iasi); Prof. Univ. Dr. Ion Marian Croitoru, (“Valahia” University from Târgoviște); Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Megheșan, (University of Oradea).

The papers presented at this symposium can be found in the volume *The Significance of Theology in Today’s Society and Culture*. The purpose of this collective volume is not only to commemorate the past two centuries of Arad theology and the prominent representatives of theology departments in Arad, but also to present the openness and the need for openness of theology in the social and cultural context of our days.

It was also emphasized the role of theology as a science within the other sciences that are taught within a university and its importance in the

social, educational, political, economic, ethical and utilitarian context, in a secularized world. Professors and theologians from all corners of the world bring before the readers from a dogmatic, patristic, historical, liturgical and moral perspective, the utilitarian meaning of the Holy Tradition of the One Church of Christ. Unity and diversity are the two terms by which this remarkable achievement can be defined.

Through updated theological language, the authors of this volume shed light on the importance of Tradition in theological thinking and implicitly in the works and thinking of the Holy Fathers. It is only possible to express the truth of faith starting from the concepts and formulas already discovered by the Fathers. And this expression does not have the role of being an imitation of patristic theology, but a discovery of the Fathers' thinking, of their way of theologizing taking into account the historical turmoil of the time in which they lived. And the method by which this is achieved is called neopatristic synthesis. The Neopatristic synthesis is still in its beginnings. Its directions were announced by Father Georges Florovsky at the Congress of Orthodox Theological Faculties in Athens in 1939. Beginning with the second half of the 19th century in universal Orthodox theology a movement of renewal is observed, more a paradigmatic change than a pragmatic. Today's neopatristic theologians keep these directions which boil down to the creative rediscovery of the Holy Fathers' thinking, to the opening of theology towards society and culture, to inter-confessional and ethnic dialogue. The authors found in the volume I talked about above can very well be classified among neopatristic theologians, who each contribute from their own perspective to the development and deepening of theological thinking in the current context of the third millennium. Various but complementary disciplines of Orthodox theology are found in this volume, which includes both dogmatic, liturgical and historical themes, along with pastoral, social-missionary and bioethics.

In the volume *The Significance of Theology in today's society and culture*, significant directions of the neopatristic movement can be observed, which I will present in the following.

In the present volume, the notion of person is a central theme and constitutes the essential basis of the divine image in man. The concept of

person is used in the context of patristic anthropology in its vertical meaning, from God to other people: a) each person is unique and irreplaceable; b) the human person is not reduced to human nature; c) the person always defines himself in relation to other people; d) it is unknowable in its depths, but like the divine Persons it can be known and experienced; e) the image of God in man is also reflected in the relationship of communion between human persons; f) the communion between human persons is an obscure face of the communion between the Triune Persons; g) human persons can only exist together with other persons, in a loving communion, which again springs from triune communion and love; h) the communion between the Triune Persons becomes the source and model of the communion of the Church. Starting from this concept, a true theology of love was developed in response to modern conceptions of love and sexuality. The ideal of the human person is love, and the path to the perfection of this feeling defines the fulfillment of the relations between human persons and of man with God.

Expanding on the ecclesial level, the concept of person leads us to that of sobornost. The Church is one because God is One and the unity of the Church does not take into account time and space because it consists in the unity of grace. The Church is an invisible reality, formed by all those who have a common belief in the Christian God. The works of this volume highlight masterfully the Church's ecumenical openness towards all persons, faces of God.

One of the means by which the faith of the Church is to be applied in its practice and understood by believers is liturgical theology. The authors of the volume *The Significance of Theology in today's society and culture* highlight the fact that theology must be embodied in life and united with the spirit of prayer of the Church. There is no effective talking about God without talking to God in prayer. It is reaffirmed here again, the necessity of connecting theology to the spirituality and faith of the Church, confessed and practiced in worship.

Another central theme of the works contained in the aforementioned volume is anthropology. The teaching about man is derived from the teaching of Scripture and Tradition and the application of some fundamental principles of patristic anthropology is considered: a) the human person is

created in the image of God and called to reach the likeness of his Creator; b) people are biologically, psychologically and spiritually complex beings, so each person is unique and irreplaceable. The key to approaches in the field of bioethics is precisely the in-depth understanding of the concept of person.

In terms of environmental protection, neopatristic theologians developed a true theology of creation. Starting from the idea that God is the creator of heaven and earth, they showed that God created everything from nothing and not from something pre-existing, He differs from creation by the fact that He is uncreated, He is present in creation not by His being, but by His uncreated energies and the reasons of things. Man discovers God through creation, and his mission as the link between creation and God is the transfiguration of creation, man also has the option of disfiguring and exploiting the world. Creation theology is related to liturgical theology in the sense that man as a liturgical being can sanctify creation and progress in dialogue with God through it.

It is highlighted that modernity and post-modernity constitute the historical, social and cultural framework in which the Orthodox Church is called to carry out its mission. This is the context in which the Church must present the incarnate Son of God. It is noteworthy that in the themes addressed in the volume *The Significance of Theology in today's society and culture*, a remarkable theology of the Incarnation is reformulated in the spirit of the Fathers. Beyond the phenomenon of theological and ecclesial self-definition and self-understanding, the theology of the Incarnation must be applied to the problems of the society in which the Church lives, such as human rights, the secularization of policies and institutions, the desacralization in politics, culture and ethnicity, exacerbated consumerism, the establishment of social hierarchies in the name of a fair society, the affirmation of authentic Christian love in the relationship between the sexes, the position of women in society and in the Church, bioethics and hyper-technicalization, ecology etc. Post-patristic theology's answer so far has been more based on the phrase: „we prefer to observe rather than act.” Theology must be embodied and this to always remind us of the antinomian character of the ecclesial event, in its commitment to the newness of the world, beyond what it has known so far.

From what we have presented so far, it follows that the role of theology in today's society and culture must be a central one, although the road to embodying theology in everyday life turns out to be a long and arduous one. The theological schools of the 19th and 20th centuries, intuited and indicated referring to the concept of Tradition in the life of the Church and society, the directions that the theologians of the 21st century must follow, with the aim of organically embodying theology in life, in worship and ecclesial experience, in the creative and transcendent response to the current anthropo-cosmic reductions, to nihilistic rationalism, to the re-enchantment of the world and its perversion. The neopatristic synthesis, as thought by the great theologians and teachers of the last century, does not aim to deepen the theology in a fundamentalism of Tradition and patristic thought, but on the contrary, it opens our horizons to the future. The tradition of the Church does not limit us only to the past, but, like the faith, must remain alive and include in its uninterrupted and inexhaustible historical continuity, the past, the present and the future alike. The statement of the Most Reverend Father Archbishop Timotei is eloquent in this regard, who drew attention to the fact that today's must be an extension of yesterday's, that today's theological contribution must be an organic extension of yesterday's and that we must always remember by our forefathers:

“It is again worth looking at the contribution to the religious and social, scientific and cultural life of almost two centuries of work together of two Romanian higher schools, one of teachers, the other of priests, counting names that stood out especially in the publication „Church and School” from Arad with honor for the contribution they made through training and work for the common good”<sup>1</sup>.

**Rev. Dr. Florin Ioan GAȘPAR**

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<sup>1</sup> IPS Timotei SEVICIU, “CUVÂNTUL IPS DR. TIMOTEI SEVICIU, ARHIEPISCOP AL ARADULUI, LA BICENTENARUL TEOLOGIEI ARĂDENE (1812-2022). Cuvântul Domnului rămâne în veac”, in: Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Cristinel Ioja, Pr. Conf. Univ. Dr. Caius Cuțaru, Pr. Lect. Univ. Dr. Adrian Murg, Protos. Lect. Univ. Dr. Iustin Popovici, Pr. Lect. Univ. Dr. Filip Albu (coordonatori), *The Significance of Theology in Today's Society and Culture*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2023, p. 12.