

Alexei V. Nesteruk, *Lumina de la Răsărit. Teologie, știință și tradiție ortodoxă răsăriteană (Light from the East: Theology, Science, and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition)*, Editura Basilica, Bucharest, 2017, 460 p

Professor Alexei Nesteruk, the author of the below presented work, as Florin Caragiu put it in the forward from the beginning of the book, is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Portsmouth and a visiting professor of St. Andrew's Biblical Theological College from Moscow. He has the "rare ability to bring together science and theology through an excellent philosophical intuition, which draws together and conjugates the perspectives at the core of the integral, undivided human experience while preserving the specificity of the methods" (p. 5).

The work we refer to, *Lumina de la Răsărit. Teologie, știință și tradiție ortodoxă răsăriteană* (Light from the East: Theology, Science, and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition), was translated by Evagrina Dîrțu and Irina Scurtu and published by Editura Basilica in 2017. It is structured in seven chapters. This book is one of the most important attempts of patristic synthesis of the present, placing the vision of Eastern Christianity at the basis of a new, comprehensive and integrative understanding that opens the horizon of knowledge to the participation in the divine mystery that has been inscribed in the created life, and took the image within the human being.

From the Foreword, the author mentions that "nowadays, when post-modernity has penetrated to modern educational systems, as well as to research in social sciences, arts, philosophy, and theology, a project that attempts to treat the problem of theology and science from a particular perspective – one based on the living tradition of the Orthodox Church, enduring the ages without significant innovations - may seem a risky approach" (p. 15). The author goes on to say that there is the possibility of overcoming the break between theology and science, "if both are reinstated

to their proper relationship to the Eucharist, understood in cosmic terms as the offering of creation back to God through art, science, and technology” (p. 17). Then he goes on saying that “scientific activity can be treated as a *cosmic Eucharistic work* (a “cosmic liturgy”). Science can thus be regarded as a type of religious experience, a clear perspective for scholars who are part of ecclesial communities but still unfamiliar to those outside such communities” (p. 17), mentioning that this is one of the sources of inspiration of the above-mentioned book.

In the first chapter, “*Orthodoxy and Science: Special Experience*” (p. 19-32), professor Alexei Nesteruk shows that “the incarnation of the Logos of God in the world as the establishment of the intelligibility of the world in its utter contingency – that is the Christological dimension of the dialogue between theology and science” (p. 32). In this introductory chapter, the professor insists on the Christological character of the relationship between theology and science, according to which “it is through the hypostatic union of the Divine and the human that Christ recapitulated humankind and demonstrated to human beings that it is their duty to be in the centre of being to mediate between the world and God and to praise the Creator through creation, by carrying out its cosmic liturgical function, which can include the mediation between theology and science” (p.32).

The second chapter, “*Patristic Theology and Natural Sciences: Elements of History*” (p. 33 – 82) is the part of the work where the author develops a history of the relationship between patristic theology and natural sciences, dealing with the rise of Christianity and the development of modern science. Nesteruk underlines the difference in perspective between the patristic approach of nature and the modernity scientific one, showing that “for the Fathers, knowledge of nature was an integral part of the larger philosophical enterprise, and religion was a legitimate participant in the investigation and formulation of truths about the natural world far more frequently than it is today” (p. 36). Even from the introduction of this chapter, the author mentions that it “outlines the views of some of the Church Fathers on science and its relevance to theology. The first sections address the Greek Fathers, and the second half discusses the special contribution that St. Augustine of Hippo, a Latin Father, made to the formation of the church’s attitude toward science, a contribution that gave a unique flavour to the development of science in Western Christendom” (p. 34). It is emphasized the contribution of St. Clement (who operated

Alexei V. Nesteruk, *Lumina de la Răsărit. Teologie, știință și tradiție ortodoxă răsăriteană*

“the transfer of the language and methods of philosophy to the realm of faith” (p. 39), while affirming faith as a condition of knowledge, and of Philo of Alexandria, “precursory of the encounter of the Christian Church with Greek philosophical thought” (p. 39), of the Christian Apologists (those who have integrated Greek thought into the history of God’s revelation through Christ, “by identifying salvation history with world history”), of St. Irenaeus of Lyon fighting Gnosticism (p. 39-40), of St. Athanasius the Great, who bound the creation of the world to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, as transcendent basis for the uniformity and unity of the natural order (p. 52-56) and St. Maximus the Confessor with his mystagogy of liturgical consistency, for whom the mystical union with God passes through the contemplation of the logoi of things created as “way to enter into communion with the Logos” (p.56-60).

The author continues his work with the third chapter, “What Makes Theology Unique among Sciences: Patristic Perspective versus Modern Perspective” (p. 83-140), in which he outlines an epistemological formula for the relationship between science and Orthodox theology, based on the assumption that the field of theology as a cognitive expression of faith in God is wider than the field of science that explores a sub-domain corresponding to the created world. Therefore, “the mediation between science and theology is, in fact, an inseparable part of the undivided experience of the person as sharing the being and God” (p.140)

In the fourth chapter the author chooses “Toward a Theological Methodology of Mediation with Science” (p. 141-214), the usual logic being replaced by a “logic of a mystery”, where philosophy finds its place as “the right tool to express both differences and similarities” between theology and science. This equates to an emphasis on participatory knowledge that experiences the truth that cannot be exhausted by any formal theological affirmation. Nesteruk says that God’s knowledge “is not accessible through syllogism, formal logic, or observation of causal connections, but has a profound relational, dialogical character, with a mystical-liturgical consistency, indicating the present and working transcendence in creation. Penetrating the mystery of God exceeds the rational capacity to speak of Him, therefore he appeals to an apophatic culture of reasoning” (p. 141-150). At the conclusion of this chapter, the professor states that “it is clear that science is closely linked to the articulation of the created nature of their things and their foundation in the fulfilled words of God-Person,

and that it cannot be estranged in any way by theology; because, through its functions, science articulates man's participation in creation and thus participation in the relationship between world and God" (p. 214).

The fifth chapter, "Creation in Cosmology and Theology" (p. 215-282) starts with subchapter "Creation ex nihilo and the Contingency of the World" where he explains the term "creatio ex nihilo", which "has its roots in the Hebraic tradition, was radicalized in the Christian context through the doctrine of the self – revelation of God in the incarnation of God's Son, the Logos of God, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (p. 216). Then he proceeds by analyzing the relation between "Creation and Incarnation – Intelligibility of the World and Scientific Advance", where he highlights the theology of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon and St. Athanasius the Great. Next, the author insists on the idea that "the creation (theologically understood) of the meaning of sensitive things is indeed the work of the Logos through the uncreated *logoi* of God, Who, by definition, are the principles of existence and sense of all things, including intelligible forms" (p. 275). In conclusion, "science therefore can responsibly argue only for "half" of the creation (the empirical realm), assuming that the meaning of this half is provided from the outside, from the noetic realm, which is not itself a subject matter of science (but rather of philosophy and theology)" (p. 275).

As the author himself states in its introduction, the sixth chapter, "Irreversibility of Time and The Logos of Creation" (p. 283 – 334) contains "some theological reflections on the problem of irreversibility of time in modern physics" (p. 283). The issue of the irreversibility of time and processes is thus qualified as "as a theological problem of the creation of time in the context of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*" (p.334). The author completes this by saying that "science itself cannot provide a consistent and accomplished theory of irreversibility, in the same way that it cannot explain away the contingency of nature in a theological sense" (p. 334).

The last chapter of this book, "Humanity as Hypostasis of the Universe" (p. 335 – 422) develops the idea that the phenomenon of intelligent human life in the universe is not entirely conditioned (from the perspective of its existence) by the laws of the universe and the natural structures. The actual happening of humankind-event, which is treated as a hypostatic event, the author said, "is contingent on non-natural factors that point toward the uncreated realm of the Divine" (p. 336). And the author goes

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on: “We develop an argument that modern cosmology, if seen in a wide philosophical and theological context, provides indirect evidence for the contingency of the universe in relation to non-physic factors, as well as its intelligibility, grounded on the humankind-event, rooted in the Logos of God and discovered by the human being through the *logoi* of the creation” (p. 336).

Without attempting to establish any superficial compromise agreement, this book constitutes an excellent attempt at patristic synthesis. It re-establishes the dialogue between science and theology, mediated by good philosophical intuition on the iconic bases of anthropology and cosmology that enable the development of an epistemology open to participation of the creation in the Divine.

This monograph is an exceptional achievement in terms of fluent and integrative thinking, attentive to details and to the specificity of working methods, but also to the unity and integrity of human experience that operates with open concepts and is open to participation in the Divine.

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