

VARSANUFIE, Arhiepiscopul Râmnicului, *Aceasta este viața veșnică. Studii de gnoseologie patristică [This is the Eternal Life. Studies in Patristic Gnostiology]*, Editura Praxis, Râmnicu-Vâlcea, 2015, 164 pp.,

The book *This Is the Eternal Life. Studies in Patristic Gnostiology*, written by the Most Holy Barsanuphios, Archbishop of Râmnic, it is a collection of patristic theology published by Praxis Publishing House of Râmnic's Archbishopric in the year 2015. Realized in exceptional graphic conditions, this work falls into the current sphere of the dogmatic preoccupations from the Romanian theology. The content of the book unveils with clarity the thinking of the Holy Fathers referring to the knowledge of God, to the communion of the man with God, to the possibility of knowing God, to the spiritual experiences which open to the man the road towards bookish one, but the experiencing of the Word in the life of the believer, it supposes a certain effort from the part of the man; only after a certain cleaning of the man, after liberation from the passions, one can reach towards the growing into the knowledge of God (p. 6).

In the first chapter the book, His Eminence Barsanuphios, Archbishop of Râmnic, he presents the way of the knowledge of God described by Saint Cyril of Alexandria, in which it is highlighted the communication of the man with God in and through the Holy Scripture, but also the impartation with the Body and the Blood of the Christ Savior, as an act of giving (communication) of God to the people.

In the second chapter he describes ΠΡΑΞΙΣ and ΘΕΩΡΙΑ, the stages of the knowledge of God in the doctrine of Saint Cyril of Alexandria. The spiritual knowledge of God, of the man and of the world, comprises two dimensions: one practical and the other one theoretical or contemplative. ΠΡΑΞΙΣ, it is the practice, namely the asceticism or the permanent trying of the man to force his own body towards spiritualization and to make from the godlike commandments a paradigm of the living. The purpose,

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the ΠΙΡΑΞΙΣ, it is not another one but the spiritual ascension, towards the achieving of the Holy Ghost; thus the practice is proven to be the beginning of the knowledge of God. The ΘΕΩΡΙΑ, or the seeing of God. The soul is elevated to the seeing of God, as the one who has become the soul of the Son of God, eternally loved by the Father. The simple loving look of the Father directed towards the soul which is full of His Son, the soul filled up by the love of the Son towards the Father, gives to the soul eternal life. One must walk in the knowledge on the road of the seeing. The Son shew the name of the Father, bringing us to the knowledge and to the sure seeing that is not only God. The one who have enlightened their mind through all the virtues and they have become able to find out the godlike and hidden mysteries, receiving the light of the Ghost and God Himself dwelled into them, they will watch Him with the eyes of the understanding.

In the third chapter he shows the way of the knowledge of God described in the teaching of Evagrius Pontius. Evagrius divides the spiritual life in two main stages of consummation: the active or the practical one (πρακτική) and another one contemplative or the gnostic one (γνώσις). The last one is composed from two stages: a physical one and the theological one. The Christendom is the teaching of Our Savior Jesus Christ, composed by practice, physics and theology. A special accent is put by Evagrius on Repentance as turning back of the man towards God. The prayer with tears it is the sign of the presence of God and of His Almightyness. It is the only way which leads inside the heart.

In the fourth chapter it is described the way of the knowledge of God as personal experiencing in the teaching of the Saint Maximos the Confessor. The knowledge of God and the man's deification are essential aspects of the theology of the Saint Maximos the Confessor (p. 63). The teaching of the Saint Maximos the Confessor about the knowledge of God it has as departure point, on one hand two scriptural verses: "And with the Word He made Himself body and dwelled among us and we saw His glory" (John 1, 14); and "And for this is the eternal life: to know You, the Only One True God, and Jesus Christ Whom You sent Him" (John 17, 3), which affirms the possibility of the seeing of God, and on the other hand, a word of Saint Apostle Paul, who strengthens the apophatism in the knowledge of God: "in part we know and in part we are prophesying" (I Corinthians 13, 9). The impotence of the man of knowing God according to His being it is a teaching inherited from the Fathers of the Church predecessors to Saint

Maximos the Confessor (p. 64). According to the same patristic tradition, there is a cataphatic or affirmative knowledge of God, and another one which is apophatic or negative: this last one it is superior to the first one, showing the impotence of the man to express God in words: “For I reckon that the ones happened to the Transfiguration, on the mountain, they show in a secret manner the two ways of the theology. Namely the first one which is simple and without cause, that through silence truly affirms the Godhead through the only and the total negation and the praise due to the transcendence, and the one next to this one and composed, which describes it in a glorious way through affirming the caused ones. Through these ones, as much as it is possible to the men to receive the high knowledge about God and the godlike ones, it brings us, through the symbols that are appropriated to us, towards the both of the ways, unveiling to us, through well faithful understanding of the things, the rationality of the both ones, and teaching us, that symbol of the first one it everything that is about the feeling, and the second one is the ensemble of the great works submitted to the senses” (p. 64). The only way to climb towards God is the cleaning of passions. Only the one who tends towards consummation he grows into knowledge (p. 67). Thus, the man must first come back to the state of Adam before falling to climb towards the knowledge of God (p. 69). The knowledge of God is a continuous process, a continuous ascension towards God, which cannot be fulfilled without the cleaning of the passions and the impropriation of the virtues (p. 72).

In the fifth chapter it is treated about the knowledge of God through the uncreated energies in the writing of Saint Gregory Palamas. God remains unknowable according to His being, but He makes Himself knowable by His energies of godlike works which practically lead the man towards Him, and through which God comes in personal and real connection with the world. These works unveil themselves either directly, through the mystical contemplation (θεωρία), or indirectly, through the contemplation of the nature. The two ways of the knowledge of God developed in the Orthodox Church regard the two perspectives: the immanence and the transcendence of God (p. 75). In this chapter he described also the role of the intellectual and mystical knowledge of God. The Spring of the knowledge of God in the Eastern patristic tradition, it is not the rationality of the man, as it is in the Western, scholastic one, but the participation at the godlike life: “Our teaching says to us that the life of the soul consists from its participation

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to God, in this case the knowledge itself depends on the measure with which we impart ourselves from God” (p. 77). Once elevated from the bodily knowledge to the one of the soul, and from the one of the soul to the spiritual one, the man sees God and becomes worthy of His knowledge – which is the ground of the salvation. In this way, the true knowledge of God by man results from the deification (θεωσις) of his being. As much the man ascends in the spiritual knowledge, the more consummated is the knowledge of God that he achieves. The impartation from the Mysteries of the Church, the observing of the godlike commandments, the prayer and even more, the mystical contemplation of the uncreated Light, they lead the man, not only towards the union with God, but equally to the knowledge of Him, so that the true coming close to God does not present itself as result of the intellectual capacities of the human being, but as a gift of the life into Christ and into the Holy Ghost (p. 90). The book also presents the dispute between Saint Gregory Palamas and Barlaam, who was a very well taught young man from Calabria (Italy) become monk of several years in Constantinople, who affirmed that not from the contemplation of God springs out the knowledge about God but from the rational capacities of the man, namely from the understanding of the man and that only the way of the philosophy can achieve the knowledge about God. Saint Gregory Palamas, s defender of the Orthodox Tradition, sustains though the contrary, namely: “Not only truly knowing God as much as it is possible, overpasses without likeness, the whole knowledge of the Hellenes, but only to know what place has the man in front of God succeeds the whole wisdom of those people. Because the man only from all the earthly and the heavenly ones was built in the image of the Creator to look at Him and to love Him and to be grateful to That One, and through his faith, through his inclination and love towards Him, to preserve His beauty; and all the other ones as much the earth and the heaven bears them to see them bellow himself and totally without mind” (p. 91). The seeing of God is the spring of the true knowledge. The seeing of God, the deification of the man and the union with Him lead to the existential or empiric knowledge of God; only then one can say that the man possesses the truly savior knowledge (p. 99). In the Orthodox Theology we freely know God, namely the revelation, the unveiling, the impartation of God. The man alone without the grace of God cannot reach at seeing of God and implicitly at His knowledge, but God unveils Himself, He comes in the

way of the one who searches for Him, through His uncreated energies. The Revelation is the only way of the knowledge.

In the sixth chapter, the Knowledge of God and the Mystery of the Eight Day in the writings of Saint Gregory Palamas, the author show to us that the Kingdom of God, which is expected at the end of the history and of the world, it was shown through the coming of Christ and already it exists inside the world and of the history. The event of the Transfiguration of the Savior entrusts the disciples that some of them will see before to die, the Kingdom of God coming into power. The waiting for the Kingdom of God it is lived so, into the Church, in two ways: by waiting for the second coming of Christ, which will mean the end of the world and of the history and through the experience of the presence of the Kingdom of God within the history, that is always on the measure of the human sensitivity.

In the last chapter, the Knowledge of God and the achieving of the eternal Kingdom in the teaching of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, it is shown that the patristic theology is the deepening of the Word of God and not an adding, it is only a deepening, and growing in living, in experiencing, and thus in the knowing of the Truth. The truth is not an object, but a Person, Who enters in connection with the man; the knowledge it is not achieved at the level of some interpersonal reports but at the level of the personal communion (p. 133). The authors show then the importance of keeping the godlike commandments as possibility of knowing God, showing that the man cannot keep the commandments only with his won power. But through the faith of God and through the Holy Ghost overcomes his impotence, overcomes himself and he is elevated to the godlike life (p. 135). Then he highlights the importance of the grace of God and its role in the knowledge of God. In the writing of Gregory of Nyssa there are distinguished three ways of knowing God: the knowledge into light, the one into cloud and the one into darkness. Through all these passed Moses and passes every soul that continuously advances towards the knowledge of God. The impossibility of knowing God it unites itself secretly with His knowledge; on that measure on which we ascend ourselves more towards God, He descends towards us and leaving all the way of understanding, we have found out the desired One by faith. The life into Christ, through practicing the virtues and liberation from the passions, makes the man to live the Kingdom of God even from this life but more beyond there. The knowledge from part from here it will increase through the continuously

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growing of the soul even in the next life. The knowledge of God it is thus endless, the ascent towards God does not ever end, and love it is not exhausted but grows permanently and *this is the eternal life*.

This book proves to us that the author it is a man preoccupied with the knowledge of God, it is a spiritual man, a man of the prayer of the true spiritual life, the only way of reaching at the true knowledge, a monk of vocation who follows his hierarchal call into the Church of Christ.

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