

## BOOK REVIEW

### TEOLOGIE ȘI MISIUNE CREȘTINĂ [CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND MISSION]

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The volume *Teologie și misiune creștină* [Christian Theology and Mission] (2019, 536 p.), edited by Bibliotheca Publishing House/Valahia University Press (Târgoviște), is the result of the academic labor and effort of His Eminence Metropolitan Dr. Nifon, Archbishop of Târgoviște, in his quality of university professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and Educational Sciences, Valahia University of Târgoviște, but also in his quality of Patriarchal Exarch for the relations of the Romanian Patriarchate with international Christian institutions and European institutions.

This anniversary volume, edited at 20 years of service of His Eminence in the archiepiscopal see of Târgoviște, includes a series of theological and missiological studies, meant to promote the national culture and history, but also the young generations' education under the aureole of Christian values and treasury of Orthodox culture and spirituality. Realized in a scientific, rigorous, realistic manner and approaching each topic complexly, the studies and research work integrated in this volume present pertinent solutions to sensitive challenges of today's world context: ecological crisis, effects of globalization, economic crisis and sustainable development, spiritual theological grounds related to the concept of democracy, issues concerning migration in Europe, Christian values in politics, the role of young generations in the Church mission etc., offering an objective theological and spiritual answer. Consequently, the works integrated in the volume become true formative and educative beacons for today's society, contributing to the understanding of changes, challenges, limits, but also of opportunities that emerged along with the political, economic, and social changes that take place worldwide through the contemporary process of globalization, by overcoming the cultural and national differences, that inevitably lead to important effects on the medium and long term.

In the first chapter of the volume, entitled "*Theological Beacons for Today*", the specific of the Church mission is presented in the light of the present changes and challenges

at the level of human society, globalization being seen as a new missionary paradigm: *“The missionary work has to do with the enculturation process, better said to its continual or dynamic aspect, which aims to permanently adapt the Church mission to obtain a maximal receptiveness from those to whom is announced the Evangel of salvation”* (p. 9), because, *“(…) the Church mission, today, in the context of globalization, is dynamic, adaptive, visionary, open to new and integrative”* (p. 18).

In this complex framework is defined the role of the *“Orthodoxy in the contemporary European context”*, as having the mission and power to renew and transfigure the entire existence, offering new perspectives of the dialogue between religion and science, regarding the knowledge of the truth, in a pluralistic culture. After a detailed and profound presentation of the concepts of truth and knowledge, from scientifically and theologically perspectives, the author concludes that *“truth and knowledge are important realities of human existence, serving the aim of life, revealing to everybody a sense, and offering a means of referring to himself/herself as life ultimate realities. (...) Theology founds its truth on the divine Revelation, and the effort of searching for the truth is the person's endeavor to relate with God, the Creator, to understand Him, and to do His will, as a sense of life and means of perfection. For science, the search of the truth means, especially, the examination of God's creation, the observation of its beauty and harmony, the deciphering of its mysterious and hidden meanings, existing in the world”* (p. 46).

In tune with the latest trends, next, the author approaches the topic of *“Christian eco-theology”*, affirming *“the need to protect the environment, as part of each of our responsibility, as being created in God's likeness, in solidarity with the creation and turning it to good value as theophanic space”* (p. 65). So, the world (as creation) is the *“only biotopes of salvation”* (p. 66), with *“inestimable value in the accomplishment of the human destiny”* (p. 65). In this respect, there are presented: the biblical foundations of the relationship between individuals and nature, the Holy Fathers' vision regarding the person and the creation, the Christian perspective on ecology, but also the contemporary ecological challenges, concluding that *“Christian ecology offers a profound perspective on the interaction between each person and the world, as space of the divine presence and of deepening of communion among people, but also as the unique environment of the existence of the human being, without which life itself is impossible”*.

Other studies included in the first chapter refer to *“Prayer - as a state of normality of the human soul and bridge to God”*, to *“The icon - as a pastoral-missionary means specific of Orthodoxy”*, but also other *“Orthodox theological, missionary and ecumenical aspects”*. The first chapter ends with the work: *“The mission of the Church in the contemporary world in the light of the decisions of the Great and Holy Synod (Crete, June 2016)”*.

The second chapter of the volume *“Christian Theology and Mission”* brings together topics having as a central point the idea of ecclesial unity by *“Testimony and service in the inter-Christian dialogue”*: the ecumenical dialogue, contemporary priorities of the Orthodox mission, where the author has permanently in view the actual social realities and needs (active involvement of the laity in the ecclesial activity, permanent dialogue with the space of culture and science, amplification of the mission in the urban area, women's implication in the Church life, positive mediatic presence etc.).

His Eminence's capacity of reflection and profound manner of understanding life is highlighted in several topics as: *“the age of the existential void”* (p. 193), *“dilemma of urban*

society” (p. 200), culture as a “*reflection of man’s deep aspirations*” (p. 267), those being analyzed from the complexity of the philosophical ideas expressed throughout the work, in a style kindling the reader’s interest and exhorting him intrinsically for the awakening of conscience, self-analysis, actualization, and accomplishment of the ontological potential.

The topic debated in Chapter Three - “*The joy of announcing Christ’s Evangel, source of hope, trust and light for our life and world*” - offers a theological and missionary perspective on poverty; the economic crisis is associated with a crisis of values, and the economy is viewed as a space and opportunity of solidarity and spiritualization for each person: “*The relation between salvation and economic activity is founded, in the Orthodoxy, on an ethical system, based on the theology of our fellow*” (p. 292). The author exhorts to “*change together for a just, sustainable and intelligent economy*” (p. 305): “*The moral and economic crisis characterizing the contemporary society must and can be overcome by truly valuing the human being, by (...) respecting a rigorous and solid ethical and moral discipline, in all domains, and by the creation of an efficient system of responsibilities of decisional factors correlated to the real needs of our society*” (p. 303). “*This perspective puts the person in the center of preoccupations and the care for the person, not the profit or anything like that*” (p. 306). In the same chapter, there are debated topics related to the issue of migrants, diaspora, human dignity and respect, Christian values in politics, and also the role of spirituality in promoting democracy and the culture of prosperity etc.

Chapter Four reunites under the title “*The Church Mission reflected in our national culture and history*”, articles on the ample cultural work of the Romanian voivodes and printing activity recorded in the area of Târgoviște, during the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The last chapter of the volume is dedicated to the religious education of young people, as a pastoral-missionary priority, being highlighted the role of the Church in the Christian training of new generations, the importance of the partnership *school-Church-family*, and the educational challenges addressed to youngsters in the contemporary times. “*The educational mission of the Romanian Orthodoxy emphasizes the education of the youngsters because spirituality, culture, and education are means by which each person can perfect his/her existence*”, His Eminence concludes.

The work is valuable not just for the specialists in the area of Theology, but also for scientists and interested people, as it provides a clear, academic, and applied perspective on nowadays’ problems of interest, managing to draw the attention to the authentic Christian values: dialogue and inter-human communion, care for the environment, spirituality and relation with God, training, and education of young generations etc.

From his rich expertise and activity in the service of the Romanian Orthodox Church and theological education, His Eminence Professor Dr. Nifon, Archbishop and Metropolitan, a remarkable personality of the national and international life and culture, shares ideas, reflections, and solutions constituting valuable beacons in education, culture and spiritual training of young people, offering alternative models to the negative transformations of today’s world.