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Bulgarian Orthodox Theology

More than a year ago I wrote an article on Rumanian Orthodox Theology, which was published in "Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift", Heft 4, 1959, and I promised to write an article on Bulgarian Orthodox Theology. Since then professor Stefan Zankov has published an article on the same subject in "Verkündigung und Forschung" 1959/III. Professor Zankov is a Bulgarian, an Orthodox and the grand old man of the Bulgarian Church as its representative in the ecumenical movement and I am only a beginner in this field. Nevertheless I want to publish my article as several theological textbooks have been published in Bulgaria after 1955 when professor Zankov finished his article and because I should like to try to review them from a Protestant point of view.

These Bulgarian textbooks and manuals are not published according to a fixed plan and the composition of these manuals are not "entrusted to" different theological professors as was the case with the Rumanian manuals. In November 1956 and September 1960 I visited the bookshop of the Holy Synod in Sofia and among other theological books especially found the following valuable for a review, all of them were published by the Holy Synod. I found a Textbook on the Holy Writ of the Old Testament by Konst. Sachariev (1955, 360 p.), an Introduction to the Holy Writ of the Old Testament by Ivan Markovski (1957, 352 p.), no introduction to the New Testament, no patrology, the History of the Christian Church by P.I.Malizki, vol.I (1951, 159 p.), vol.II (1956, 227 p.), the History of the Bulgarian Church by K.Dinkov (1954, 143 p.), the Orthodox Dogmatic Theology by Djulgerov and Zonevski (1947, 288 p.), the Orthodox Christian Ethics by Metropolitan Nikodim and others (1955, 325 p.), an Introduction to Moral Theology by Iv.Pantchovski (1958, 416 p.), Life and Happiness by Pantchovski (1957, 318 p.), Homiletics by Todor Todorov, part I (1956, 332 p.), part II, 1 (1957, 214 p.), part II, 2 (1959, 223 p.) and a Pastoral Theology by Christo Dimitrov, part I (1955, 232 p.), part II (1957, 279 p.).

The Textbook on the Holy Writ of the Old Testament is written for the second and the third classes of the theological seminary and contains a short introduction to and a reproduction with commentaries on selected chapters from each book of the Old Testament. The textbook asserts that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch–

without any debate. The problem of a "second Isaiah" is not mentioned.

The Introduction to the Holy Writ of the Old Testament is the second revised edition of the "Special Introduction" to the books of the Old Testament from 1936 (the general part of the introduction having been published in 1932). The list of litterature, including German, is very extensive, but practically no German litterature after 1940 (1945) is quoted. While the Rumanian Introduction to the Old Testament only uses 16 pages on the problem of the authorship of Moses to the Pentateuch, the Bulgarian Introduction uses 65 pages. A very careful account is given of the "hypothesis of documents" and of each of the four documents: J, E, D and P. Against this hypothesis it is asserted 1. that it is impossible to seperate different documents according to the criterion of the use of different names for God, Jahve and Elohim, 2. that neither language and style nor doublets prove the existence of different documents, 3. that it is impossible to prove that the so-called older documents (J and E) are partly polytheistic, and 4. that the documents D and P were written about 620 B.C. and later on. It is admitted that some parts of the Pentateuch and the final editing of this work belong to the time after Moses, but "the church tradition concerning the unity of the Pentateuch and its Mosaic origin" is defended. The church tradition is also defended regarding the unity of the Book of Isaiah, the authorship of the prophet Daniel and the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon.

The History of the Christian Church is not as interesting for Western readers as the Rumanian manual of Universal Church History, partly because the two volumes only deal with the period before the great Schism in 1054, partly because it is no original Bulgarian work, but a translation of a pre-revolutionary Russian work. The third volume of this church history has not yet been translated (after 1945). It is not of the same standard of scholarship as the Rumanian manual. Only little is written about the life of the Western Churches, mostly about the controversies concerning the Christian doctrine in the fourth and the fifth centuries and about the quarrels which led up to the Schism in 1054.

The History of the Bulgarian Church is an original work. It first tells us how Constantinople and Rome fought to win the first Bulgarian Church. The Bulgarian patriarchate was recognized by Constantinople in 927, but abolished by the patriarch of Constant-

inople in 1018 when the emperor of Constantinople conquered the Bulgarian state. The Orthodox patriarchate during the second Bulgarian kingdom was destroyed by the Turks in 1393. Nothing is written about the dark years from 1393 to 1767. In 1767 the last Bulgarian archbishopric was abolished and then began the revival of the Bulgarian people, against the Turks and against the "yoke of Fanar". Fanar was a part of Constantinople where the Greek inhabitants lived. Political as well as ecclesiastical Greek emissaries were sent by the Turks and the Greek patriarchate to introduce Greek culture and liturgy and abolish the Bulgarian tradition. In 1870 the sultan recognized a Bulgarian exarchate in Constantinople, but the patriarch of Constantinople declared the Bulgarian Church schismatic. In 1945 the patriarch of Constantinople brought the schism to an end but did not recognize the re-establishment of the Bulgarian Orthodox Patriarchate in 1953 while the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem sent their congratulations. Since the independence of Bulgaria in 1878 the Roman Catholic propaganda has worked especially through Catholic secondary schools and Protestant propaganda through Methodists, Baptists and the "Pentecost-movement", but none of them with much success. The "Orthodox Christian Brotherhoods" between the two world wars carried out much important social and political work, also special work among children and youth and by this "protected" many from the Catholic and Protestant propaganda. A thourough account is given of the theological schools and religious periodicals since 1878, from this account it is easily seen that there were more seminaries and periodicals before the second world war than after.

The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology is written for the 4th and the 5th classes of the theological seminary, it is the second revised edition and probably the first edition was published before the war. It is stressed that dogmatic theology is a science, "the Christian notion of God is a synthesis of faith and reason", "our reason is not the source of our notion of God and we can only reach to knowledge of God in so far as the Revelation reveals him". "We can not receive new dogmatic truths outside the divine Revelation." The "mechanical world-outlook" is attacked because it denies that the world has a purpose and only acknowledges the law of causation. Science and the theory of evolution can not explain how the evolution began and how the organic evolved from the inorganic. The facts often contradict the belief in the Providence of God, but "Christian-

ity is the religion of the cross, the suffering of the good in order to conquer the bad".

"The redemption of Cnrist has two aspects: 1. the re-establishment of the love of God towards men (the objective aspect) and 2. the re-establishment of the love of men towards God (the subjective aspect)." "The view of Anselm on the redemption is one-sided and juridical, the believer must do a second, additional ransom... the good works of man are a redeeming work of man." "All men are justified and sanctified through no merit of their own and their good works, their love are only the conditions for their reception of and partaking in the justification given in Christ." "St. Augustine asserted that man through his fall completely lost the freedom given him by God and that he could only be justified by grace. And Luther denied completely the freedom of the will of man like St. Augustine." "The evangelical grace is the special supernational power of God which accomplishes such changes in the sinful nature of man which the providential grace of God can not accomplish." "The faith and the good works are not only in the same degree necessary for our salvation, but they are unthinkable and impossible without their mutual connection."

"The organic union with Christ is possible only within the Church. It is the mystic body of Christ, the spiritual godly-human organism." The Protestant teaching on the invisible Church is contested. From a Protestant point of view the chapter on "the relations between the Church in Heaven and on Earth" is most interesting. Here is treated prayers for the dead, "but the prayers have affect only for those who are worthy of holy prayers". He who believes, loves and prays is in union with all who believe, love and pray. Nobody can pray alone but must seek the intercession of the Church. Here is also treated the veneration of the holy relics and of the icons "which are the most conspicuous testimony of the unity of the Church in Heaven and on Earth". The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the sacraments (ex opere operato) is one-sided as the Protestant teaching (faith is the only condition), both faith and grace are necessary. "Not the word transsubstantiation, but the contents of the word is familiar to the Fathers." The hierarchy is necessary to the Church, but is not identical with the Church, as the Catholics assert, also laymen take an active part in the church life.

The Orthodox Christian Ethics stress that also ethics are a science and that man has his free will. "If man was not free, he

would not be responsible for his actions." It is denied (in a dispute with Roman Catholicism) that man can do more than his duty and reach a special perfection by fulfilling the "evangelical advice" on poverty and chastity. The Christian virtues are given a value different from what is found among Lutherans: "they relieve the conscience of man because through them he feels redeemed from his guilt and freed from the burden of his sin". Man must fight against sin with method, system and without concessions, that means ascetism and ascetism means "training" as in sports-life. "Holiness is the highest achievement through grace of life in the Church", especially the martyrs, confessors and ascetics are praised. One of the three authors of this text-book on ethics, Iv. Pantchovski, has written the Introduction to Moral Theology and in this book he deals more thoroughly with the fundamental problems.

The special part of the Ethics is divided into the following sections: 1. Love is the base of moral life, 2. The Christian duties and virtues towards God (faith, hope, charity, prayer, divine service and fast), 3. towards oneself (humility, the education of intellect, feeling and will, the training of the body and the sanctification of labour), 4. towards the neighbour and 5. towards the community. Most interesting are the following sentences: The love towards those who are wronged and those who suffer innocently is above our love towards their tormentors and enemies, the human personality is not possible outside the society and Christianity is deeply social, the Christians deny the right of the State to prohibit their service to God.

The Introduction to Moral Theology is in my opinion the most important of these theological works and the most interesting from a Western point of view. It is written with "German thoroughness" and with lucid definitions. Professor Zankov has in his article examined 4 dissertations by professor Pantchovski on religion and ethics, published in the Yearbook of the Theological Academy as a preliminary work to this book.

The first four chapters deal with the essence of religion, the essence of ethics, the moral presuppositions of religion, and the religious foundations of ethics. Rudolf Otto asserts in Das Heilige that ethics not necessarily belong to the essence of religion. Against this the author asserts that "every religious experience of God as holy at the same time is an experience of God also as good" (p. 25). Religious truths differ from scientific truths by their moral character,

if the belief in God had a compulsory character like the scientific truths "the believer would be no moral personality, but a moral automaton" (p. 78). Repentance is a moral act, but more than that, only belief in God can call forth a real repentance (p. 86). Some ascetics and mystics regard charity as dangerous and detrimental to personal salvation, but ascetism will prepare for charity. Both repentance and ascetism are built on moral foundations, but can not succeed without the grace of God (p. 90).

"In the subjective sense (phenomenologically) the moral comprehension of oneself always precedes the moral notion of God. Without moral education, without moral ascetism and moral experience man can not be able to listen to the voice of God and still less to live in God." But in the objective sense "the existence of God is the ontological condition for man's perception and feeling of God" (p. 107). "The religious act rests on moral presuppositions, but ethics rest on religious foundations and every moral act contains in itself religious elements." "Phenomenologically-psychologically this interdependence of religion and ethics is explained by the unity of the human personality. Ontologically this interdependence rests on the Godlikeness of the human personality. This likeness manifests itself not only in religion, but also in ethics" (p. 154).

The two last chapters are called: The autonomous ethics and ethical evaluation of religion. As representative of the autonomous ethics are among others mentioned Feuerbach, who asserts that theology is anthropology, and "the ethics of the dialectic materialism, the Marxism", which maintains the dependence of ethical norms on economic conditions and the class-dependence of ethics. The author criticizes this autonomous-ethical immanent philosophy and asserts 1. that "nature is amoral and indifferent towards all moral evaluation, because it is subject only to mechanical necessity and blind instincts", 2. that "the moral evil is the most unquestionable fact in human life", and 3. that human nature "is weak and powerless without the co-operation of God". "Those who radically and consistently deny the belief in God may, however, have reached a relative moral perfection", but also they are created in the image of God ("this image of God can not be annihilated completely by the most violent nihilist") and they are under the "influence of the religious education in the family, the school and the church". "The roots of the Christian culture have so deeply penetrated the human soul and our society that even those who reject Christianity are not

able to free themselves definitively from its influence" (p. 237). "Consequently no man can be a complete nihilist or amoralist in his life" (p. 243). But the autonomous ethics are a transitional form and may lead either to belief or complete nihilism (p. 248).

The autonomous ethics regard the Christian ethics as heteronomous and given by a foreign authority. But the author maintains that man is created in the image of God and that the divine moral law therefore is not strange and heteronomous for man. "Consequently the principle of theonomy is not incompatible with the principle of autonomy of ethics" (p. 304). The faith has a social value. "The social and religious development of a nation always depend on and penetrate each other so that they can not be isolated from or exist without each other." "Religion creates a spiritual union between man and his neighbour and is therefore a social force of the first degree which can neither be replaced nor completely removed." Love is the highest social feeling from which "all social teachers, reformers and revolutionaries are inspired" (p. 330). Feuerbach asserted that the belief in personal immortality is egoistic. But the Fathers of the Church taught that man should not do good works because he feared punishment or expected reward in eternal life, but because he loved God (p. 346). It is also said that the belief in life after death kills the interest of man for life and civilization on earth. But "according to Orthodoxy the reality on earth is the beautiful creation of God and not a satanic reality" (p. 365), and this belief in personal immortality helps man "to fight the evil and when necessary to sacrifice himself with joy because he knows that not death but eternal life will be victorious at last" (p. 368).

The Homilectics is another very important theological work. These three volumes contain very many details and names. Part I deals with the "theory of the sermon". It is somewhat difficult to seperate three chapters from each other, namely the chapters on the contents, the sources and the different forms of sermons, almost the same sections are used in all these chapters. The forms of the sermon according to the contents (chapter 6) are ascetic, dogmatic, ethical, catechetic, apologetic, liturgical, church-historical, panegyric and social. The doctrine on the Church takes more place than in Protestant sermons (p. 76). "Arguments from the Bible are not sufficient for listeners with a negative attitude", the preacher must also use arguments from science, common sense and practical experience (p. 95). From the "daily press" only that may be quoted, which

"deals with sin as moral wickedness and as offence against the divine law" (p. 127). The sermon of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church often suffers from 1. too much general reasoning, 2. too few vivid illustrations, and 3. too many precepts and too much advice (p. 279.)

The Homiletics, part II, 1, deals with the history of the sermon in the Bible and the Ancient Church. The sermon of the Old Testament from Moses to St. John the Baptist was a prophetical sermon of current interest. The sermon of our Saviour is treated with great thoroughness, it "adapts itself to the spiritual and cultural level of his listeners" and it is actual. The chapters on the sermons of the Ancient Church form the historical foundation of the theoretical division of sermons in different forms in part I (chapter 6). The sermon of St. Athanasius is called apologetic, the sermon of St. Gregory of Nazians dogmatic, the sermon of St. Basil the Great ethical and the sermon of St. John Chrysostom exegetic and social. Although St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine are called the greatest preachers of the East and the West, only 3 pages deal with St. Augustine and 20 pages with St. Chrysostom. The sermons of the West receive their ideas from the sermons of the East, but treat them in a form nearer to the practical life (p. 205).

The Homiletics, part II, 2, deals with the history of the sermon in the Middle Ages and after the Reformation. While the sermon flourished in the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, the decline of the sermon began when the emperor Justinian closed the pagan classical schools where the preachers had been educated in philosophy and rhetoric. In the West the period from 600 to 1200 is called the "era of homiletic futility"; the scholastic sermon, beginning in the 11th century, is condemned and the mystic sermon of the travelling monks is mentioned as a healthy reaction which, however, had an inclination towards pantheism.

In the West the sermon was regenerated during the Reformation, especially by Luther who was influenced by St. Augustine and the above-mentioned mystic sermons. "The leading idea of the sermon of Luther is Christ, the grace and the salvation by faith, the doctrine on justification only by faith, and the relation between faith and good works." "Luther recommended social reforms." Zwingli has not the same mystic depth in thought and feeling as Luther. The scholastic sermon, from which Luther had freed himself, returned during the Lutheran orthodoxy, but was fought by pietism. In modern German Protestant sermon Karl Heim (about 1940) and

Paul Althaus are praised and concerning Scandinavia a long list of names is given from the 19th century, especially Grundtvig (Denmark), Klaveness (Norway) and Wallin, Billing and Schartau (Sweden) are pointed out. A special chapter deals with the Anglican sermon and the sermons of the Methodists, the Salvation Army and the Baptists, among whom especially Spurgeon is praised.

The Roman Catholic sermon flourished in France about 1700 with preachers as Massillon, Bossuet and Fenelon and in modern times in Germany with Paul W. von Keppler and Robert Linhardt (about 1920). This Bulgarian manual differs from Western homiletics mostly by the very thorough examination of the Orthodox sermon in different countries after 1500. The Russian sermon in the 16th and the 17th centuries was often scholastic. The Orthodox sermon is "flourishing" with the dogmatic sermon of metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (d. 1867), the mystic sermon of Metropolitan of Krutitzy, Nicholas, and the "analytic-synthetic sermon" of the present Bulgarian patriarch, Cyril. Finally it is said that the Orthodox sermon to-day "stands in the background" (p. 197), but especially in Bulgaria "has registered considerable success".

The Pastoral Theology, the other book by professor Pantchovski, the works on Bulgarian church history and sermons by Patriarch Cyril and the Rumanian manuals on dogmatics and the History of the Rumanian Church will be reviewed in another article. Professor Zankov has treated the articles in the Bulgarian theological yearbook with such thoroughness that I shall only treat the articles after 1955.

Alf Johansen