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Rumanian Orthodox Theology II

In April-May this year I went to Rumania for the fourth time and stayed three weeks at the Theological Institute of Bucharest in order to finish a book on Rumanian Orthodox Theology, I hope it can be published in English and German before the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in November where the petition of the Rumanian Church for admission to this World Council shall be debated. Continuing my first article (in "Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift", 1959, 4. Heft) on Introduction to the Old Testament, Introduction to the New Testament, Patrology and Universal Church History I shall in this article mention two printed textbooks and several type-written ones. Out of 21 theological professors, lecturers and assistants 16 have before 1940 studied in foreign countries, generally 3-4 years, and they know the Western, Roman Catholic and Protestant, theology very well up to 1940 and often quote Western theology. As far as I know only one book has been written about contemporary Rumanian Orthodox theology, "Orthodoxie heute in Rumänien", Vienna 1960. The author Flaviu Popan writes: "Das grösste tragende Vehikel der theologischen Bildung ist heute nicht mehr das Buch, sondern die Zeitschrift..." (p. 56) and "Statt den echt christlichen Standpunkt zu beleuchten... wird so die christliche Wahrheit nach dem Mass des volksdemokratischen Lebens moduliert und entwickelt" (p. 105). None of these statements is true concerning the theological education to-day at the Institute of Bucharest.

After his enthronization as patriarch in 1948 the Patriarch Justinian assembled about 30 theological professors from Bucharest and Sibiu at his summer-residence in Dragoslavele during their long summer-vacations in the years 1949, 1950 and 1951. There they wrote new textbooks concerning all theological fields. In 1948 the communists came into power. The two printed textbooks are the History of the Rumanian Church in two volumes (464 and 651 p.), 1957, and Dogmatics and Symbolics in two volumes (559 and 448 p.), 1958. Dogmatics and Symbolics is from an ecumenical point of view the most important of all these textbooks.

The Symbolics mostly compares the doctrines of the three main confessions. It is debated if this comparison should be irenic or polemic. Generally speaking exaggerations should be omitted and not only the weak points in the two other confessions debated. Against the Protestant "dialectical theology" is stressed that "this world and

history has been sanctified and transformed into super-history and eternity through the Incarnation of the Son of God". The Protestants claim the superiority of the Bible over the Church. But it is not possible to speak of a Bible outside the Church, but only inside and through the Church. "The Tradition has only developed what is shortly stated in the Holy Writ." "A contradiction cannot exist between the biblical history of the creation and science... this history may be interpreted in the light of the fundamental truths of the faith and the sure results of science." According to the Protestants both the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1, 26) are lost by the fall and man has sunk so deeply into the evil that salvation is almost impossible and a real new creation becomes necessary. Christ does not repair and sanctify the law, when he repairs human nature: according to the Roman Catholics because there is nothing to repair in this nature (the original perfection being of a supernatural kind) and according to the Protestants because nothing can be repaired. Concerning grace and liberty the Orthodox according to their doctrine on the original state of man teach that grace restores the original image of God. When grace returns it means a restoration of human nature, inclusive of the freedom. The Protestants separate the grace absolutely from the freedom of man. The Protestants are erring distinguishing between justification and sanctification. From the Lutheran orthodoxy disappears what was common to Luther and the Greek Fathers: the salvation from the destructive powers. But M. Kähler and Paul Althaus has returned to the conception of Luther.

Among the typewritten textbooks the most interesting from a Western point of view may be Ethics (750 pages), Homiletics (726 pages) and Catechetics (369 p.), every page containing 42 lines. In the Ethics is debated if the State is the only source of Law as maintained by Hobbes and Spinoza: the State cannot be the ultimate source of Law because 1. an idea of State cannot exist without an anterior idea of Law and 2. it would be absurd to assert that God had no right to give Law to men. When the heart is good, good works will emanate in a natural way from the heart.

In the Homiletics a short chapter on "the preacher in our times" is most interesting. The preacher is called a prophet who sees in every desert a potential paradise and represents the only force which can de-satanize the world. The priest shall not be an idealist on the pulpit and an opportunist in his life. The Church is no mausoleum without

relations with real life. “The religious indifference of our time is very often provoked by the rationalism and scholastic intellectualism of our sermons.”

The Catechetics deals in detail with the religious instruction of children and youth. The family is the first school of life for the child and perhaps the most decisive one, here also is laid the foundation for its coming mature membership of the Church. “In the Rumanian People’s Republic the Rumanian Orthodox Church takes care of the religious instruction by catechists” (inside the churches for “believers of both sexes and all ages”). The catechist ought to settle the conflict between science and religion in the minds of the youth by recognizing the positive value of science and leading young people from the external world of science into the internal world of religion.

In the Fundamental Theology (= apologetics or philosophy of religion, 306 p.) and the History of Pedagogy (377 p.) is given a knowledge of “dialectical materialism” merely in the form of a report, not as an instruction. “We do not work in a negative, but a positive way: we do not fight the others (also the other confessions), but explain the foundations of our own faith.” Besides I must mention the General Pedagogy (243 p.), the History of Religions (239 p.), Liturgics (598 p. with 25 lines) and the Exegesis of the New Testament (1230 p.). Concerning Pastoral Theology and Canon Law I found no new textbooks, but listened to very instructive lectures, also on the Ecumenical Movement.

Personally I find that these Rumanian textbooks have not changed Orthodox teaching for Communist and Marxian doctrines and that this contemporary Rumanian Orthodox theology forms a good and sound basis for the coming ecumenical conversation between Churches of the East and the West.

Alf Johansen