

Rumanian orthodox theology

Autor(en): **Johansen, Alf**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie**

Band (Jahr): **49 (1959)**

Heft 4

PDF erstellt am: **24.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-404370>

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Rumanian Orthodox Theology

The Russian Orthodox Church now seeks closer contact with the World Council of Churches. It is therefore important to become acquainted with the present Russian Orthodox theology. But since the communist revolution in 1917 the Russian Orthodox Church has not published any theological textbook and has only made plans for a theological periodical. The Serbian Orthodox Church began to publish a theological periodical, *Bogoslovlje*, in 1957, but has not yet published any theological textbook. In communist countries there are two more national Orthodox Churches, the Bulgarian and the Rumanian. The Bulgarian Church does not publish any theological periodical, but has published several theological textbooks during the communist regime. Besides the theological academy of Sofia publishes a large yearbook. Among these Churches the Rumanian Church publishes the largest theological periodical, *Studii Teologice*, and publishes theological manuals according to a fixed plan.

These manuals are written for the students of the two Theological Institutes, in Bucharest and Sibiu. All of them are printed "with the approval of the Holy Synod and with the benediction of His Holiness Patriarch Justinian". "The composition of these manuals was entrusted to" different theological professors. *Studiul Noului Testament* (207 pages) was published in 1954, *Studiul Vechiului Testament* (288 p.) in 1955, *Patrologie* (323 p.) in 1956, *Istoria bisericeasca universala*, vol. I (398 p.) in 1956, vol. II (466 p.) in 1956, *Istoria Bisericii romine*, vol. I in 1957, vol. II was in the press in 1958. I have not yet received the two last-mentioned volumes. According to a Rumanian periodical no other theological manuals have been published.

In the Introduction to the Old Testament a careful account is given of the Protestant biblical criticism. As a manual of an Orthodox Church it is always defending the traditions of the ancient Church when discussing who are the authors of the different books of the Old Testament. It is stated that also the Roman Catholic investigators defend the traditional points of view, while the Protestants are generally "influenced by the negative criticism".

Only "the Holy Church on the basis of the Holy Tradition" and not "every believer according to his individual subjective opinions" decides whether a biblical book is canonical and inspired or not. The books which are added to the canon of the Jews of Palestine by

Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, are called the Apocrypha by Protestants, regarded as canonical by Roman Catholics, and generally as non-canonical by Orthodox: they are not inspired, but useful and edifying, they are superior to profane literature and are an indispensable part of the biblical text. Concerning these problems the Rumanian Church takes its stand on the “decrees of the Synods and the opinions of the Holy Fathers”. The Holy Writ is inspired and “God may be called the principal author”. Inspiration is only accompanied by revelation in the true sense of the word, when God will communicate such truths which the human author cannot find in a natural way (prophecies...)”.

The manual defends that Moses is author of the Pentateuch. A careful account is given of the “hypothesis of documents”, used in the Pentateuch. Against this hypothesis it is asserted 1. that it is impossible to separate different documents according to the criterion of the use of different names for God, Jahve and Elohim, 2. that it is impossible to prove that the older documents (J and E) are partly polytheistic, and 3. that the document D (Deuteronomy) was not written until the reign of king Josiah.

Concerning the Book of Isaiah it is asserted that also the chapters 40–66 are written by the prophet Isaiah before the captivity in Babylon. Only those who deny the ability of the prophets to predict coming events will deny the possibility of the prophet Isaiah to predict in detail how Kyros would deliver the Jews from the captivity. It is reported that the “rationalist critics” hold that the Book of Daniel is first written during the time of the Maccabees, because it contains historical inaccuracies, Persian and Greek loan-words, the doctrines of the resurrection and of the angels and finally is not mentioned by Sirach (about 180). All these arguments are refuted and the authorship of Daniel is defended according to the Tradition of the Church. The different interpretations of the Song of Solomon as a love-poem are reported and the allegoric interpretation of the poem as dealing with the relations between God and his people (Christ and his Church) is asserted according to the almost unanimous Patristic tradition.

In the Introduction to the New Testament the theory of “verbal inspiration” is maintained. According to the Tradition inspiration does not “exclusively affect the truths of faith and morals”. “Our Church guarantees and defends the authenticity of all the books contained in the canon of the New Testament.”

The manual asserts that the first gospel is written by St. Matthew in the Hebrew language, against the opinions of the Protestant theologians. Concerning the synoptic problem both the hypothesis of an oral tradition (before the writing down of the gospels) and the hypothesis of two pre-evangelic documents (the words of the Lord—logia—and an original gospel of St. Mark) as basis for the three first gospels is rejected, whereas the hypothesis is maintained that Mark has made use of Matthew and that Luke has used both of them. The fourth gospel is written by the apostle St. John and not by a presbiter John in Ephesus; the problem of the contradictions between the three first gospels and the fourth gospel, especially about the length of the public activity of the Lord, which are often put forth as insoluble, can be solved.

The authenticity of the Epistle to the Ephesians is debated at length. The manual asserts that it is written by St. Paul and that it is not a circular letter, but a letter to Laodicea, in which the name of Laodicea later on has been replaced by Ephesus, because the congregation of Laodicea was blamed by the Lord (Revel. 3, 15). The manual makes a very thorough investigation of the authenticity of the “pastoral letters”. The objections against this are debated in detail: the language, the fight against gnosticism, the church organization and the doctrine. All these objections are rejected. The Eastern Church has from the beginning—in contradistinction to the Western Church—attributed the Epistle to the Hebrews to St. Paul, the manual maintains the authorship of St. Paul and mentions that the Roman Catholic Church now does the same.

The author of the Epistle of James is the brother of the Lord, who is not identical with the apostle James, the son of Alphaeus, as the Roman Catholic Church asserts. Concerning the Second Epistle of Peter the manual admits that this letter depends on the Epistle of Jude, but still maintains that St. Peter is the author, he has used two different persons as helpers when he wrote the two letters which are called the letters of Peter.

The authenticity of the Revelation is defended, especially because there are many similarities in ideas and language with the Gospel of St. John (logos, the Lamb of God, living water, the light, witness...). The dissimilarities are quite “natural”: the Gospel is a historical writing intended for the dissemination of the Christian faith, the Revelation is a prophetic writing intended for the defence of the faith against persecutors.

The Orthodox students of course use a larger Patrology with many more details than Protestant students, as the Orthodox Church more than the other Churches is the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the ancient Church. There are three periods: the beginnings until 313, the classical period up to 451 and the so-called “period of decadence” till the death of St. John Damascene in 749.

St. Ireneus is called “the creator of Christian Theology of the Western Church”, his merits are that he has formulated the doctrine that man becomes divine, the doctrine of the “recapitulatio” of Christ and that he has emphasized the importance of the Tradition. Origen is called “the real creator of the scientific theology in the East”, he was not a heretic in the true sense of the word. St. Athanasius “has been an incomparable defender of the Orthodox teachings formulated in Nicea”, but not so great a speculative theologian as the Capadocians.

Among these Capadocians St. Basil the Great is praised mainly for his regulations for the monastic life, which are used by the Eastern Church to-day, and for his liturgy, St. Gregory of Nyssa as “the greatest mystic theologian from the fourth century” and St. Gregory of Nazianz as “classic and normativ concerning the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation of the Lord”. “He is the first theologian who has definitively expressed the relations between the persons of the Holy Trinity and the specific position of each of them”.

St. John Chrysostom is not a particularly original theologian, but his pamphlet “About priesthood” is classic. St. Augustine is “one of the most inspiring and profound writers and theologians of Patristic Christianity”, but the Orthodox Church does not accept his teachings about the predestination. The teachings of the western theologians are on the whole correctly described.

“The period of decadence” does not create any original work, but systematizes the ideas of the literature of the preceding periods.” The same can be said about St. John Damascene. According to him the unwritten Tradition is of the same value as the Holy Writ: the prayer towards the East, the veneration of the cross, of the gospel and the icons.

From an ecumenical point of view the Universal Church History (in two volumes) is the most important of these manuals. The period before the Reformation takes up two thirds of the whole work. For western readers the period after the Reformation will probably be

the most interesting. These two volumes are more like a manual than a text-book containing very many details.

Concerning the Lutheran Reformation the two volumes written by a Roman Catholic author, J. Lortz (*Die Reformation in Deutschland*, 1939–1940), are mentioned as “the best work”. In 1957 I stayed two weeks in a Rumanian convent, Hurezi; the leading nuns had gone through a full theological education, they asserted that the account of the doctrine of Luther in this Rumanian manual was correct, and mainly I must admit that they were right. I do not think, however, that the doctrine of justification has been properly understood. There were many reasons for a Reformation, but it is admitted that without Luther it would not have come. The contents of the principal works of Luther from the year 1520 are correctly represented, the book “About the Liberty of Christian Man” is called his “most Christian book”: “By faith we live in Christ, by charity among our neighbours”. The final opinion about Luther is this: He was profoundly religious, “the power of God and his trust in God made Luther a preacher and a prophet”. “But he has abolished the liturgy and the unity of the Church, contesting its sacramental character and taking for its basis only the word of the gospel which he interpreted subjectively.” “Instead of the action of God which Luther still recognizes in the holy sacraments Zwingli puts the audacity of human reason.” “The supreme virtue of the Christian according to Calvin is obedience and discipline, while according to Luther it is love and piety, springing from faith as their source.” “In organization and exterior life the Scandinavian Churches—as the Anglican—are more conservative than the German Lutheranism and the Swiss and French Calvinism.” Reading the description of the Reformation in this manual, Protestants must generally agree, but reading the verdict on this period, they may now and then disagree.

“The Anglican Church occupies an intermediary position between Catholicism and Protestantism which has facilitated its negotiations with the Orthodox Church.” “It is Catholic in organization and cult, Protestant in doctrine.”

Concerning the Catholic Church the reformation as wanted by the medieval Church Councils has not been carried through, abuses have been removed, but papacy preserved. The Jesuits who are semi-pelagianist have succeeded in conducting both the papacy and the whole Catholicism.

A correct description is given of the Lutheran orthodoxy, pietism and rationalism. The final judgement is that “the Church has become an association, a simple community where subjectivism and individualism rule... still its missionary and charitable merits remain”. In detail the Catholic and the Protestant missionary work is described, especially the Protestant one in the 19th century is praised. Most interesting is the opinion of the Orthodox on Protestants and Catholics: The first ones have too little interest in ethics, the last ones have often changed ethics into casuistic probabilism. “The Protestants have given us books of deep individual experience (John Bunyan and Milton).” The Catholics suffer from a certain superficiality and are too optimistic concerning the works of man, the Protestants are too pessimistic on account of their individualism.

The French revolution also had good consequences: “The sufferings of the revolution have revived the Church” and the revolution created a real religious tolerance. Concerning the 19th century the Rumanian manual deals much more with the Roman Catholic Church (in the different countries) than with the Protestants, least with the denominations in USA.

The history of the Orthodox Churches is dealt with at great length, but quite separated from the history of the Western Churches. The Turks have separated East from West, kept the Orthodox peoples down in ignorance and poverty, but not divided the Churches from their respective peoples. The ways of the Eastern and the Western Churches have only met when the Roman Church on Orthodox ground has established Churches “united with Rome” and when Lutherans and Calvinists have asked for the help of the Orthodox Church against the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. The reforms of Peter the Great are considered as measures which intended to make Russia a secularized rather than a western and civilized state.

A careful account is given of Roman Catholic theology, especially the French theology is praised, also the history of the Catholic modernism is retold. But a more thorough account is given of the German Protestant theological schools and the most important theological periodicals, “the dialectical theology” is mentioned as humble without love. Many particulars about the Orthodox theology in the different eastern countries are given, the manual admits, however, that the Orthodox Church has not such theological schools and periodicals as the Western Churches. The negotiations between the Orthodox Church and the Old Catholic Church are mentioned.

It is deplored that owing to practical reasons the authors have suppressed all the notes and the largest part of the bibliography, still it is large.

The conferences of the Ecumenical Movement before the second World War were held in “a beautiful atmosphere of Christian love”, but after the war the Ecumenical Movement became more interested in “economic and political problems”, as the Orthodox Conference in Moscow in 1948 asserted. Personally I have got the impression that the Rumanian Orthodox Church now is just as interested in connexion with the World Council of Churches as the Russian Orthodox Church has been during the last years,

Alf Johansen