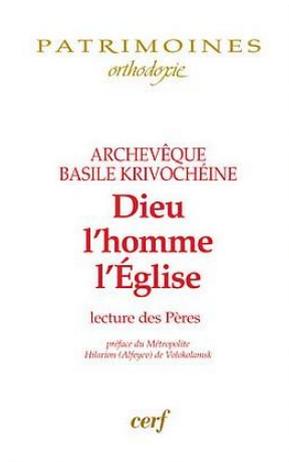


Basile Krivochéine



Dieu, l'homme, l'Église. Lecture des Pères de l'Église

Paris : Cerf, 2010 (Collection « Patrimoines-Orthodoxie») 294 pp.

Reviewed by Job Getcha

This posthumous volume presents in chronological order twelve patristic studies translated into French that were published in Russian when the author was alive mostly in the journal *Le Messager de l'exarchat du patriarche russe en Europe occidentale*. It is a witness of the author's significant contribution to the patristic renewal as a pioneer of Palamite studies¹, specialist and editor of the Catecheses of Symeon the New Theologian², collaborator to G. Lampe's *Greek Patristic Lexicon*³ and regular participant to the International Oxford Patristic Conference, where more of these studies were actually presented as papers.

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- ¹ Monk Basil (Krivocheine), « The Ascetical and Theological Doctrine of Saint Gregory Palamas » (in Russian), *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, Prague, 1936, p. 99-154.
- ² Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, *Catéchèses*. SC 96, 104, 113. (Éd. B. Krivochéine), Paris, 1963-1965 ; B. Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1986.
- ³ G. Lampe, *Greek Patristic Lexicon*, Oxford, 1961.

The first study, entitled: “The Ascetical and Theological Doctrine of Saint Gregory Palamas”, written when the author was still a young monk on Mount Athos, was first published in Russian in 1936 and had then initiated an interest for Palamite studies. In this fundamental article, the author rehabilitates Gregory Palamas by showing how his apophatic theology, his distinction between essence and uncreated energies, and his concept of Divine (Thaboric) uncreated light is based on the traditional teaching of Church Fathers, and more specifically on Pseudo-Dionysius, Andrew of Crete, Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus. In relation to this article, we could mention those entitled: “Simplicity of Divine Nature and Distinctions in God according to Gregory of Nyssa”, “Spiritual drunkenness in Symeon the New Theologian” where the author explores the notion of spiritual ecstasy, “Created Essence and Divine Essence in Symeon the New Theologian”, and “Symeon the New Theologian throughout centuries” where the author explains the genealogy of the manuscripts’ tradition and its translations, where 10% of the text was evacuated, thus presenting a distorted image of Symeon. Reading these chapters, one can better understand how the author’s interest in Palamas brought him to study the writings of Symeon the New Theologian. Indeed, according to the 17th century French patristic scholar F. Combefis, the later would have been “the source of all Palamas’ errors” (*fons omnis Palamis erroris*) (p. 57-58). But Krivocheine notes that with regards to the hidden essence of God and the rays of his glory, Symeon is much closer to Gregory Palamas than his adversaries (p. 236).

Other studies retained in this volume are still actual and valuable. Among them, the remarkable article on “the Symbolic Texts of the Orthodox Church” written in conjunction with the First Panorthodox Conference of Rhodes in 1961 and with reference to the two volumes of Prof. John Karmiris published in 1952-1953⁴. Here, the author discusses the necessary criteria to determine which dogmatic texts should have an indisputable authority in the Orthodox Church. The author goes on to review such various documents. For obvious reasons, he gives great importance to the Council of Constantinople of 879-880, that rehabilitated Photios the Great, and which he considers, together with other scholars, as the 8th Ecumenical Council (p. 129-131). Among these documents, the author mentions as well the Hesychast councils of Constantinople of 1341, 1347 (that approved the Hagiorite Tomos) and 1351 (that approved the confession of faith of Gregory Palamas, and which had been considered as the “9th Ecumenical Council” by Neilos of Rhodes in the the 19th century –

⁴ I. Karmirès, *Ta dogmatika kai symbolika mnèmeia tès Orthodoxou Katholikès Ekklèsias*, (2 vol.), Athens, 1952-1953.

p. 133-134). Regarding confessions of faith of post-Byzantine times, the author notes that these try to bring the Orthodox Church into Western internal disputes which are foreign to it and therefore have naturally a polemical character, either anti-Latin, or anti-Protestant (p. 138). We can add to this dogmatic chapter the ones on “The Authority and Infallibility of the Ecumenical Councils”, “Authority and Holy Spirit”, as well as the one on “The Work of Salvation of Christ on the Cross and in the Resurrection”.

We ought to mention as well the remarkable chapter dedicated to “Orthodox Spirituality”. Brief, concise, it is at the same time one of the most complete and most objective on the topic, where the author – speaking out of experience as a former Athonite monk, and not merely as a University scholar – underlines the importance given in the Orthodox Tradition to prayer and ascetic life (p. 176). We can join with the thematic of this important chapter another major one on “Angels and Demons in Spiritual Life according to the Teaching of Eastern Fathers” where the author focuses on the Life of Anthony the Great, the Pseudo-Macarian Homilies, and the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and Diadochos of Photiki – four major sources of Orthodox spirituality.

Last, but not least, we shall mention the chapter on “Ecclesiology of St. Basil” which is a good example of “reading the Fathers”. It shows admirably the reason why the editor chose this last expression as the subtitle of the book. The author notes that, of course, St. Basil the Great never composed a systematic treatise on ecclesiology, therefore, one has to be careful to not excessively systematise his sayings (p. 183). Nevertheless, while reading the works of this eminent Church Father, and looking especially at his distinction between heresy, schism and parasynagogue, the author considers contemporary ecumenical questions, such as validity of sacraments of other Christian confessions, the way of receiving Christians from other confessions into the Orthodox Church, and the Roman primacy. Krivocheine concludes by saying that although we are living in a different – ecumenical – epoch, the ecclesiological positions of St. Basil remain essential and actual even after 16 centuries, and that therefore, they should guide us in our ecumenical epoch (p. 209).

Conclusively, this collection of articles shall be useful not only for readers interested in patristic studies, but also to anyone interested in dogmatic theology or ecumenical studies. It would also appeal to all people trying to understand better the tradition of the Orthodox Church.