

BOOK REVIEW

Dictionary of Orthodox Theology and Science

Răzvan Ionescu and Adrian Lemeni
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Generally speaking, the function of the dictionaries published in the postmodern era – regardless of the field of knowledge that their authors assumed as a criterion term selection, was that of determining the content and the scope of specific notions, in order to provide users with a working tool that would inform, increase and deepen the knowledge of all those interested. As a rule, dictionaries have also had an encyclopedic, instructive and formative vocation. These characteristics can be encountered in the work entitled ‘Dictionary of Orthodox Theology and Science’, authored by reverend Răzvan Ionescu and Adrian Lemeni, who, with the modesty that is proper to creative personalities of a high cultural level, assert that “this work is, fundamentally, a proposal. Its authors, aware (be it only in part) of the limitations and insufficiencies of their demarche, entrust it to the discretion of each reader, by urging them to retain those parts that they might think to be most useful” (‘În loc de introducere’, p. 13).

Indeed, an expert reader (such as Cristian Român, editor-in-chief of the ‘Science and Technique’ – review of Romania, who wrote the foreword for this book) can realize, based on the arguments, that publishing the *Dictionary* is both a scientific and a cultural event, in the backdrop of a long series of publications belonging to this field. „Each page is a window through which we can gaze at distant horizons” – Cristian Român wrote, metaphorically (‘Foreword’, p. 5). The reasons that such a judgement of value might rely on are diverse. One of them consists of the fact that the work aims at more than the connotation and denotation of an aggregate of terms succeeding one another in an alphabetical order; the authors, endowed with a profound multi-disciplinary philosophical, scientific and theological culture, with an opening towards the ‘peak’ of contemporary knowledge, have proposed to make a selection of terms that would cover the area of knowledge in which the dialogue between Science and Religion is being developed today, to bring down the dominating ‘walls’ that have separated the two fields of knowledge/culture for centuries, and to assert the virtues of dialogue as a reciprocal source of enriching theological sciences, together with the scientific culture of the contemporary world. In this sense, the

authors assume an ecumenical attitude and employ a philosophical conception, an epistemology that is contemporary to us, at the same time showing Neoplatonic and Philonian attitudes and options (p. 9). The theological orientation, the unitary philosophical conception, the intercultural openness of the authors give a certain coherence to the explicative demarche, and even to the work itself, and allow the reader to intuit and perceive, in the substratum of the definitions and explanations of terms, a humanistic message, a confidence in the virtues of the dialogue between science and theology, characteristics of the times we are expecting.

Another reason is represented by the mission established and, to a great extent, accomplished by the authors – that of familiarizing readers with fundamental concepts and terms belonging to the postmodern scientific progress, to the contemporary Orthodox theological one and to the conceptual implement, useful to all those who dare to take a trip into the zone bordering the two knowledge domains. Consequently, the number of terms selected for being explained does not tend towards exhaustiveness, but is limited to a possible basic substance, to the nucleus of conceptual approaches of the relation between Orthodox theology and Science. Based on the adopted criterion, three categories of notions/concepts comprised in the dictionary resulted:

1. The ones exclusively belonging to the field of Science;
2. Concepts exclusively belonging to the area of Theology.
3. Terms (notions) with a double meaning – scientific and theological.

All these terms, presented in an alphabetical order, are defined using not only the classical, logically formal conventions of definition (nominal definition, definition proper, ostensive definition, descriptive definition etc.), but, particularly, those of the causal definition – genetic, functional and performative, with a view to inserting the content and scope of each notion into cognitive, cultural, historical, cross-disciplinary, and especially postmodern contexts.

Another motive consists of the fact that the selection of terms, according to the remarks of the authors themselves, „was made by critically analyzing their relevance for the current dialogue between Sciences and Orthodox theology” (p. 10). In this sense, bibliographical references of the highest cultural renown, in the field of Theology, sciences and knowledge in general, have been employed – from Plato to Albert Einstein, from R. Descartes to Werner Heisenberg, from Mircea Eliade to Thomas Kuhn, etc. Simultaneously, the authors were aided by various dictionaries/encyclopaedias of ‘Science – Religion’, of ‘apologetics’, of ‘History and Philosophy of sciences’, of ‘Orthodox theology’ that were issued, over the last few years, in the Romanian, French and Anglophone literature of this field. Among the reference dictionaries that the authors mention are the following: J. Wentzel Vrede van Huyssteen, (*Gale Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*) (2003), George W. Grube, *The Complete Book of Orthodoxy. A Comprehensive Encyclopedia and Glossary of Orthodox Terms, Theology, History, and Facts from A to Z* (2001), Dominique Lecourt, *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences* (1999), Michel Blay, *Dictionnaire des*

concepts philosophiques (2006), Friedel Weinert, *The Scientist as Philosopher. Philosophical Consequences of Great Scientific Discoveries* (2005), Ion Bria, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă* (1994), etc.

Thus conceived and realized, the work was supervised by Academician Basarab Nicolescu. The solid scientific accuracy, the methodology employed, specific to such scientific elaborations are as many reasons for the authors to be included in among the referential ones in the field.

According to the thematic and problematic areas to which the selected terms belong, Răzvan Ionescu and Adrian Lemeni privileged the unanimously recognized as fundamental in postmodern scientific research methodology, followed by those with which scientists and science philosophers contemporarily operate, then by philosophical terms that are relevant in the context of the current philosophical thought, and last, but not least, terms classifying the distinctions which the contemporary world makes between science, technique, techno-science and technology. As for theological terms, the authors primarily focused on those forming the basic lexicon of Orthodox theology (those with which Christology and other Orthodox disciplines operate), terms emphasizing the identity of the Orthodox Church and reflecting the Christian experience in the broader context of culture, or notions located at the border between Theology, Science and culture. The basic concepts in theological philosophy and Christian anthropology have not been omitted, nor have the relevant terms with a double theological and scientific meaning, or those regarding the relationship of the Orthodox Christian theology with the entire world (*oikoumene*).

The quantitative analysis of the terms comprised in the work, in comparison with others in the field or even with respect to the authors' purpose, might generate debate: some will say that the coverage of the entire area of knowledge concerned is insufficient, that other encyclopaedias in the field have tens of times as many terms in their content; other will say that essential, highly relevant terms have been left out. That might be true! But what an expert reader retains resides in the qualities stated above – complementarily apophatic and cataphatic, in the specific methodology employed and in the original, problematizing and enticing style practiced by the authors. Therefore, sufficient premises and motives are met for the authors to enlarge the scope of their terms/articles and even that of fields of scientific knowledge (I have in mind the evolutionism of the 20th and 21st centuries, the progress made by Genetics, Molecular biology, Medicine etc.) in a possible and desirable reissue, as a new step towards completing a valuable piece of work, from a scientific and philosophical point of view.

To conclude, we may all agree with the authors themselves that „the work represents a plea for dialogue, for experiencing dialogism as a state of normality. It proposes, beyond the encounter with the terms, the encounter with one's neighbour” (p. 13). The results of the authors' demarche offer a useful working tool for learning, knowing and creating, which would respond to those who have the passion and vocation to carry out a thorough study of the exciting dossier of

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data regarding the connecting bridges between scientific epistemology and Christian theological gnoseology.

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