

Romanian Orthodoxy at the Crossroads: Past and Present in the Higher Theological Education

„The Faculties of Theology should not only be places where theological knowledge is transmitted, but oases of spiritual formation and life.”

His Beatitude Teoctist
Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church

Doing theological studies or “making theology”?

I cannot begin this presentation without calling attention to the theological experience of the Church and what it means to do theological studies and to make theology. In our courses, we often stipulate that throughout history only three Church personalities have been called “theologians”: St. John the Theologian, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Symeon the New Theologian. However, all those who attend theology courses are called, more or less justifiably, “theologians”. The difference lies in the fact that doing theological studies is an open and public opportunity, while making theology is “to lay one’s head on Jesus’ chest, that is to know God through experience” (St. John), “not mistaking theology for technology, that is distinguishing between the genuine experience of God and the ability to interpret words” (St. Gregory) and “to see God in the light, through the tears of repentance”, which is the highest form of theology (St. Symeon).¹ Theology presupposes the capacity first to experience, then to transmit by word and deed “that [...] which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.” (I John 1: 1)

St. Gregory Palamas classifies theologians in three categories: the saints, meaning those who see God through experience (those who made theology), those who believe the saints, that is the servants of the word (those who did theological studies, but not exclusively), and those who do not believe the saints and do not possess the required depth of experience. Strictly speaking, only the former can be called “theologians.” The professors of

¹ Bishop Maximos of Pittsburg makes an interesting observation, stating that apart from the three “theologians”, the others are “theologizing”, a sort of expression of God and His relation with the world. Cited in the article *Educația teologică în context ecumenic și pluralist*, translated by Mihai Brânzea, in “ST”, Seria a II-a, XLVII(1995), no. 1-3, p. 98.

theology can only be placed in the second category, which includes those who believe the saints and pass on the depth of the divine teaching, while the third category comprises the “technologists”, whose discourses have no meaning and among whom heretics can be included too. The standard of training in theological schools seems to consist sometimes in acquiring the capacity to transmit the message of the saints with scientific accuracy.² Making theology involves the commitment of the whole human person, not just of reason, but also of spiritual intuition and of wisdom.

Dispite the fact that too often the study of theology claimed to be the science of God or the knowledge of God, it is more probably the positive reaction of the human person to the revelation of God (John 1: 18), as He is not an object of discursive knowledge, but a dynamic, interactive subject. To make theology means therefore possessing charism, accepting sacraments as a form of manifestation of divine presence, proceeding on a path of personal purification, and attaining *hesychia*.³ Theology must lead then to the discovery of the truth (I Timothy 2: 4 and John 17: 3) and living it by discerning the spirits in this world (I John 4: 1 and Matthew 16: 3).⁴

Theology is not the truth, but the expression or witness we present about the truth, because the Truth in absolute terms is God, who is unknown and impenetrable. Theology speaks of the truth, assessing itself only by living the expressed Truth. The final aim of the theological discourse must be the desire and practice of living in communion with God.

In conclusion to do theological studies must lead to making theology.

Romanian Theological Training at the Beginning of a Millenium

As part of the educational proces, the theological education mirrors the missionary and social state of a particular society and Church at a specific point in history. In the case of post-communist Romania, the central authorities have acknowledged the social and missionary significance of education for the future priests, religion teachers, social workers, ecclesial art restorers, painters and lay missionary, and have created channels of cooperation with the established education institutions. The level of education of priests and teaching

² Kallistos Ware, *Educația Teologică în Scriptură și la Sfinții Părinți*, translated by Anișoara Carol, in “ST”, II, XLVI (1994), no. 4-6, p. 89.

³ Kallistos Ware, *art. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴ Pr. Thomas Hopko, *Educația teologică și modernitatea*, translated by Anișoara Carol, in “ST”, II, XLVI (1994), no. 4-6, p. 91.

professionals, in a predominantly Christian Orthodox society, impacts the extent of the development of the European awareness of the faithful. The theological education in Romania is thus focused on four directions:

1. The pastoral and missionary training of the future priests, a millenary vocation of the Romanian Orthodox Church;
2. The scientific, methodological and pedagogical training of religion and theology researchers and teaching professionals;
3. The training of specialists in Church art restoration and conservation;
4. The training of social workers, and of the lay members of the Church eager to study theology for their spiritual and cultural progress, who should eventually play a more important role in Church mission.

The structure of theological education is organised on two classical schooling levels: seminary education and higher (university) education. We will first present a brief historical account of the higher education in the region of Moldavia, then in the second part of the paper we will reflect on the vocation and outcome of higher theological education, and in the end we will summarise some of the challenges that theology in Romania must address in the modern and post-modern context.

Higher education in North-East Romania (Moldavia)

Higher theological education in Romania is a product of the modern era. The establishment of the first theological academy in Moldavia, in the 19th century, did not represent an innovation. It had been preceded in the medieval times by the church schools established in the monasteries, where the candidates for priesthood were trained, such as the College set up by the ruling prince Vasile Lupu at the Three Holy Hierarchs Monastery in Iasi (1640) or the Spiritual Academy of Putna Monastery, founded by Metropolitan Iacob Putneanul (1765)⁵.

Higher education in Iasi began with the Academy established by the ruling prince Mihail Sturza in 1835, which comprised three faculties: Philosophy, Law and Theology, with

⁵ Rev. Mihai Vizitiu, Ph. D., Rev. Dragoş Bahrim, A. Timofti (eds.), *Două secole de învățământ teologic seminarial (1803-2003)*, Trinitas, Iași, 2003, pp. 86-109.

teaching staff brought from Transylvania and Bucovina and a public library. It operated initially as part of the *Veniamin* Seminary. The disciplines taught there were theology, philosophy, exegesis and Latin.⁶ It functioned as part of the Seminary but in 1860 it was incorporated in the newly established University along with the faculties of philosophy, law, and medicine. The Faculty of Theology functioned until 1864 when a new Education Law imposed its closure for lack of teachers and students,⁷ while the seminaries were turned into public schools.

In those times Moldavia included territories to the north and east and the cities of Cernauti and Chisinau (in present-day Ukraine and Moldova respectively). The theological education initiated in Iasi was continued at Cernauti with the elevation to the rank of faculty of a theological institute originally set up by Metropolitan Isaia Baloşescu around 1827 which offered four-year courses. Courses were taught in German and Romanian and the aim of the institute was to train priests for the region of Moldavia. The faculty boasted well-known teachers, European cultural and ecumenical openness, and visiting professors from all the main theological centres in Europe and by 1934-1935 there 1,325 students were enrolled. However the Faculty was closed during the war, in 1941, and was transferred to Bucharest and then the same year to Chisinau. It functioned intermittently until 1945, when for political and social reasons it was transferred to Suceava. The faculty of Suceava was then closed in 1948, being incorporated in the Faculty of Theology of Bucharest.

An important development occurred in parallel at the beginning of the 20th century in Iasi. On the basis of the *Higher Education Law* of 1910, which stipulated that each university should include a faculty of theology, the University of Iasi belatedly agreed, in 1926, to reopen the Faculty of Theology but located it in Chisinau, despite the protests of the Church authorities of Iasi, who considered that it was appropriate and beneficial that the Faculty of Theology should function within the University, in an internationally recognised academic centre such as Iasi.⁸ The Faculty continued to exist until 1938 when its decline started

⁶ Further details in Virginica Popa, *Monografia Facultății de Teologie din Iași*, manuscript under publication.

⁷ The reason for the closure seems to have been wholly different, since other faculties had fewer professors and students and were not closed. The real reason should be found either in the political sphere or in the adaptation of the Romanian education system to the Belgian or French one which at the time did not include theology faculties in universities.

⁸ The Romanian Orthodox Church Holy Synod in an official document, provided the arguments for the existence of the Faculty in the city of Iasi: the students of theology and the other students would have created friendships and thus since their student years they would have shared plans and ideals; the students would have

because of the compacting of some university chairs and the transfer of some of the teaching staff to the Faculty of Letters in Iasi. In 1940, the Soviet Bolshevik forced them to take refuge in Iasi, but eventually it was closed in 1941. From 1926 to 1941, 6,440 students attended the courses of the Faculty of Theology.

In 1948, under the new *Law on the General Organisation of Religious Affairs*, many theological schools were suppressed or relocated, because some of the teaching staff or students were opposing the newly imposed communist regime. At the same time, under the Decree no. 176 of 2 August 1948, all the Church properties and assets used for education purposes were confiscated.

This marked the brutal end to a glorious tradition of a type of education which had formed great lay personalities as well as thousands of priests, who were devoted to the spiritual advancement and education of the Romanian people. Many seminary graduates continued their studies in Law or Medicine, History or Letters, against the background of silent persecutions by the developing communist regime.

The same Decree 176 ruled that the theological education was to be provided exclusively by the Church, under strict state supervision through a special body. By excluding theological training from the public education, the communist state attempted to push it to the periphery of the education system. One positive element was that the Church regained its authority and tutelage over the theological formation, giving it a spiritual and formative dimension, focused on the missionary and pastoral needs of the faithful, as opposed to the purely laic orientation of the secular universities of the 19th and 20th c.

During the communist era, the degrees awarded by the theological schools, governed by the Church, were only valid within the Church. Despite its accomplishments in that period,⁹ the Romanian theological school was critically marginalised, with a clear purpose of

had access to greater knowledge, by participating in the courses of other faculties; the theologians would have been able to use the university and seminary libraries, which were much better equipped; and the academic and cultural tradition of Iasi would have contributed to modelling the mentalities of the students. Cf. Patriarch Miron, *Congresul Național și Facultatea de Teologie*, in "Mitropolia Moldovei", II (1926), no. 10, pp. 220-221.

⁹ We should thus point out that the main specialist journals "Studii Teologice" [Theological Studies] and „Ortodoxia” [Orthodoxy] continued to be published, along with the periodical bulletins issued by each diocese. Other publications included *Învățătura de Crediință Creștină Ortodoxă* [the Christian Orthodox Faith Guide], manuals, such as *Teologia Dogmatică pentru seminare* [The Dogmatic Theology for seminaries], the three volumes of *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* [The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology], by Fr. D. Stăniloae, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* [The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church] by Fr. M. Păcurariu, *Patrologia* [Patristics] by Fr. I.G. Coman, *Liturgica* [Liturgics] by Fr. E. Braniște, *Teologia Morală* [Moral Theology] by

reducing its influence in society as much as possible. Until 1989, there were six Theological Seminaries, in Bucharest, Buzau, Neamt Monastery, Cluj Napoca, Craiova and Caransebes, along with the two theological institutes of faculty rank (Bucharest and Sibiu), which contributed, despite all the restrictions they had to tolerate, to forming the clergy that the Church needed. Given the obstructive regime, the theological formation had to be oriented to moral and pious issues rather than to theological debate and the problems of the society at large.

In 1990, the first year of post-communist freedom, the Faculty of Theology of Iasi, closed in 1941, was reopened, first as a Theological Institute of faculty rank, under Church authority, which in 1991 was transformed into the Faculty of Theology and integrated in the “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iasi. The need to train young people to teach religion in state schools has been a great challenge for the higher theological education, and for this reason two other departments were created within the faculty, namely Theology and Letters and Social Theology, the latter with the aim of training social workers. In 1993, another department was established, Theology Restoration and Conservation, to train specialists in the restoration of Church art. Most of the other Romanian theological Faculties have adopted the organisation model implemented for the first time in Iasi. Nowadays, the Faculty is located in the buildings which once hosted the „Veniamin Costachi” Theological Seminary and has a chapel and a library. There are 1,140 students who are doing undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral studies.

Profile of the Romanian theological education

16 years after the events in December 1989, the configuration of the Romanian higher education in general is hard to define due to the dynamics imposed by the rapid changes determined by the frequent political changes of the leadership of the Education ministry. There is a state higher education system, which still upholds a top academic profile, and a private higher education, where the level of training depends on the number of students that are able to financially cover the awarding of a graduate degree. To these one should add the confessional theological schools, in particular the Roman-Catholic, Protestant and Neo-Protestant ones.

Metropolitan N. Mladin, *Istoria Religilor* [The History of Religions] by Fr. Emilian Vasilescu, classical languages handbooks; the *Philokalia*, translated by Fr. D. Stăniloae (12 volumes) and the collection „*Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*” [Church Fathers and Writers], initiated by Patriarch Iustin Moisescu.

The Orthodox theological education is an integral part of the state education system, under the *Protocols* no. 9870 of 30 May 1991 and no. 124 of 31 May 1991, agreed and signed by the Romanian Patriarchate and the Education and Research Ministry. The study of theology is under dual jurisdiction, of the Church in matters of faith and of the Education Ministry, through the tutelary university, in terms of organisation and financing. Following these decisions the theological study is accessible to the society at large after 50 years of marginalisation, the dialogue with other faculties is promoted, and the Church, through its teaching professionals and the students, can play an important part in the moral and spiritual revival of the society. Owing to the enthusiasm of the first years after the revolution and the freedom that the Church enjoyed, besides the schools existing during communism (2 faculties and 6 seminaries), many seminaries and faculties were established or re-established in various cities and traditional university centres (36 seminaries, 11 faculties of theology and 4 departments of Orthodox theology).¹⁰ The seminaries were founded in dioceses to serve their pastoral and missionary needs (training church chantors, formation of church choirs, and preparation for university studies a. o.).

Both in terms of their numbers and the financial and human resources they involve, theological schools have a central contribution in the modern social development of the country, all the more so since the Church has the highest approval ratings of all the national institutions (87%).

Reforms in Education

At first, the Romanian theological education adopted as authoritative the methods of Western theology, which were applied to the local system. This system was based on: rationalising the disciplines of theological study, imposing unrelated disciplines only because there were specialists to teach them, old teaching practices, curricula and methodology. In brief, theology meant the erudite transmission of a set of information about God and His work in the world, backed by arguments from the Holy Scriptures and the Church Tradition. All too often the height of theological knowledge was the memorisation of texts instead of the meeting with the living personal God.

¹⁰ Faculties of theology in Bucureşti, Iaşi, Sibiu, Cluj Napoca, Alba Iulia, Craiova, Oradea, Arad, Constanţa, Târgovişte and Piteşti, and departments of Orthodox theology at the Universities of Galaţi, Timişoara, Baia Mare and Reşiţa.

Today the theological reform in Romania aspires to the latter ideal. There is a genuine desire for educational reform on both sides, clerical and lay, yet each regards it in a particular manner: the Church favours a change in quality and methodology that should not impact the fidelity to the tradition, the revealed content of theological teaching, threatened by the secularising trend, whereas the Education Ministry calls for reform at all costs, in agreement with transformations at national and European level, focusing on harmonisation with the European higher education rather than on content and the purpose for which students are trained.

The positive feature of this cohabitation is that the Church, through the Romanian Orthodox Church Holy Synod, decides on the subjects to be studied, the curricula, and communicates to the Education Ministry the decisions taken by the Liturgical and Education Commission within the Patriarchate. Of course, the decisions are made in agreement with the *Education Law* in force. Thus, for instance, at the suggestion of the faculties, the Holy Synod has decided not to change the disciplines taught within the Pastoral Theology Departments,¹¹ because the graduates will be priests who will serve Sacraments, while the Restoration / Conservation Department can expand to include up to three specialisations, namely conservation, painting and museography. Since the aim of a Faculty of theology is to help form reliable people (priests, teachers of religion, social assistants, restorers) who can teach others and especially guide them towards the life in communion with God, the vocation of the faculties of theology matches the vocation of the Church itself,¹² without damaging academic autonomy. Recently, HB Patriarch Teoctist wrote: “Academic autonomy must exist as a form of expression of the innovating academic spirit, yet when the purpose is uncontrollable empty freedom, it can turn into anarchy and as such it can become detrimental.”¹³

¹¹ The following is the list of theological disciplines being studied by students of the Pastoral Theology Departments: Study of the Old Testament, Study of the New Testament, Universal Church History, Byzantinology, History of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Patristics and Post-Patristic Literature, Fundamental Theology, Dogmatics and Symbolics, Christian Moral and Orthodox Spirituality, Missiology and Ecumenism, History and Philosophy of Religions, Liturgical Theology, Pastoral Theology and Practice, Church Law and Church Administration, Catechetics and Homiletics, Christian Art, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Church Music and Ritual, Spiritual Formation and Liturgical Practice.

¹² Rev. Nicolae Achimescu, Ph. D., *Relația dintre facultate și Biserică*, in “ST”, III, I (2005), no. 1, p. 194.

¹³ *The Address of His Beatitude Teoctist at the Second Congress of the Faculties of Theology*, in “Vestitorul Ortodoxiei”, XVI (2005), no. 365, pp. 1-2

The reform from the point of view of the Church

In parallel to the participation in the academic and scientific life of Universities to which they belong, the Romanian Faculties of Theology have decided to set up distinct bodies, namely the *Deans' Conference*, which is convened annually, and the *Congress of the Faculties of Theology in Romania*, which is held every two years. These meetings have been required by a certain crisis manifested in the contemporary Romanian theological theory and practice. Citing the Archimandrite Georgios Kapsanis, Rev. Constantin Coman, deputy dean of the „Patriarch Justinian” Faculty of Theology of Bucharest argues that Orthodox theology today is detached from God, the Church and the contemporary human person¹⁴, which indicates a serious crisis. Therefore, the above mentioned reunions have been initiated with the purpose of making proposals for the improvement of the quality of theological education.

The first Romanian Congress of Faculties of Theology was held in Durau, from 8 to 10 September 2003. It was decided that the teachers of theology, who are generally clergymen, should have pastoral experience in a parish, in order to exercise the missionary side of the theology they teach. Moreover, the teaching activity can only be done with the agreement of the local bishop who is responsible for the Orthodoxy of the teacher's faith. Also before being accepted to the Faculties of Theology, the candidates are required to pass an entrance exam. The theological training is no longer primarily focused on preparing the clergy, but on educating the lay people in the theological spirit for missionary activities in other fields of activity, for more effective mission outside the place of worship.

The second Congress, with the theme *The Faculty of Theology in the life and mission of the Church*, was organised at Brancoveanu Monastery, Sambata de Sus, from 25 to 28 September 2005. This second meeting produced several decisions regarding: the creation of a commission for academic deontology that should purge any negative aspects in the activity of the faculties; the involvement of the professors of Faculties in parish activities so that they should come into contact with the reality of mission; the adaptation of the curriculum to the present needs of the redeeming work of the Church in society and in agreement with the reforms planned within the framework of the Bologna process; the greater interest paid to

¹⁴ Rev. Constantin Coman, Ph. D., *Teologia ortodoxă românească în epoca post-Stăniloae*, in “Studii Teologice”, Seria a III-a, I (2005), no. 1, p. 160.

liturgical and spiritual formation in the process of theological training, in order to curb the effects of secularisation.¹⁵

Whereas in the traditional theological schools the graduates were supposed to acquire a certain amount of knowledge to help them shepherd the faithful in the existing parishes (as we mentioned above), today theological education is called to form missionary priests who must face such unprecedented issues as: massive migration to heterodox areas; the risk of the dislocation of the traditional family; illiteracy; increasing juvenile delinquency; record suicide rates, especially among young people. Besides these issues, the local Romanian mission has to fight underlying traditional social evils generated by the communist past such as corruption, academic fraud, and incompetence. To combat the disintegration of theological education, the representatives of the faculties of theology have put forward some initiatives related to: re-establishing the chaplain position in the faculties; opposing mystical fundamentalism, sectarianism and syncretism; the formative and missionary orientation of the educational process; introducing additional pedagogical formation courses, as it has been observed that the priest is more important as a consecrated figure in state schools than the teacher of religion.

The four directions of development entail other specific transformations. For instance, there is a need to introduce new subjects in the social preparation of theologians, such as Theological anthropology, Christian psychology and Christian sociology. Furthermore, the diocesan centres can play a role in the constant formation of specialists by setting up restoration and conservation centres, missionary centres, research and ongoing missionary training.

The reform from the point of view of the Education Ministry

By act no. 10114 of 10.03.2005, the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research has approved the cycle of studies for all specialisations in theology according to the Bologna reform namely the 3 – 2 – 3 system. The specialisations are now designated as: Pastoral Theology, Didactic Theology, Social Theology, and Sacred Art. At first, the faculties of theology did not agree to the reduction of the students' training period to 3 years, as it may

¹⁵ Final document, published in *Analele Științifice al Universității București*, 2005 and „Telegraful Român”, no. 37-40/2005, pp. 1 and 7.

lead to an unacceptable decline of the quality of theological education, given the potential ordainment of graduates with only 3 years of university studies. However the specialisation achieved by attending the MA courses will facilitate an optimal selection between those who wish to further their theological studies and those who prefer to remain parish priests.

While the Church has agreed to this major unprecedented amendment of the theological education system in Romania, reflecting the fact that it regards as positive the integration into the European structures, the Romanian Church also points out that the integration must not cause a dilution of individual values or the replacement of Orthodox values with heterodox substitutes. His Eminence Dr. Daniel Ciobotea, the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, has expressed the Church's conviction that the harmonisation of the Romanian theological education with the organised structuring of the European higher education and the subsequent recognition of the degrees awarded by the Romanian Universities represent a great opportunity for the Romanian Orthodoxy to bring a significant spiritual contribution to the European religious culture. On the other hand, this is an opportunity to develop a "scientific theology" which presents a theological interpretation of reality.

The Bologna process must be viewed in terms of the contribution to the interdisciplinary theological research, with greater emphasis on promoting the role of the lay members of the Church. "The scope of theological education is much broader and could be defined as the effort to form, according to all the academic criteria and requisites, laymen and women who are thoroughly aware of the theological sources of their own faith. The theological education can be of various types ranging from the additional study of other fields such as philosophy and history to catechesis programmes at academic level, and from the continual training of priests, religion teachers and of all those involved in Church-related projects to the articulation of an apologetic perspective in the relation with the world. In other words, theology must become the science of the profound and ultimate meaning, open to the world in order to mediate the world's dialogue with Christ."¹⁶

The European education reform, besides the still debatable aspects it involves, can lead to a different approach to course subjects, which up until recently were taught according to classical rules and old-fashioned methodology. Some conservative teaching professionals still believe that theology is meant to "defend Orthodoxy", to safeguard the national and cultural role of the Church, regarding Orthodox theology and spirituality as means to serve

¹⁶ Radu Preda, *Înnoirea patristică a teologiei*, in "Renașterea, XVI, no. 10/2005, p. 3.

nationalist beliefs.¹⁷ As stated by Rev. Ioan Sauca, a representative of the younger generation, Orthodoxy does not need to be defended by genuinely witnessed, within and without time.

The Bologna Process - a structural reform

The Bologna process has been received in Romania with optimism and many positive developments are expected, although it is a lengthy process, which does not involve all the European universities. One can identify certain positive effects of the process, as well as some negative ones.

To start with the last, an immediate effect of adapting the theological education to the 3-2-3 system is seen in the removal of certain disciplines in the Curricula of the first 3-year cycle. The common branches with large groups of students who are taught indiscriminately the same subject, regardless of their main specialisation, causes them to not acquire skills specific to that particular specialisation. For instance, the students who were studying theology and a foreign language could opt either for teaching religion or the foreign language they were specialising in. Under the new circumstances, they will have to specialise in teaching religion only.

One immediate effect of the reduction of the number of years of study in the first university cycle is the shallowing of theological education. Whereas in the past students who were training for priesthood were taught in more detail such subjects as Bible Study, Dogmatics, Spirituality and Liturgics, now these disciplines are taught in the same manner for all specialisations, being adapted to the level of theological seminaries graduates who do not possess extensive theological notions. This will arguably lead to the establishment of confessional theological schools, which will provide additional missionary and pastoral training to those who will become priests as compared to those who, on completing the first cycle, will seek another career.

The reduction in the number of training years also has a social consequence in that it some chairs disappear, while others are restricted. Thus, for instance, the subject which was previously taught over two years is now being taught in a single year. Disciplines such as

¹⁷ Ion Bria, *Orthodox Theological Education: the Case of Romania*, WCC, Geneva, 1993, p. 11.

Hebrew, Greek and Latin barely survive to make way for subjects which are more relevant from a pastoral perspective.

One major risk lies in abandoning the content of the theology course, fragmented as it is among different disciplines, in favour of the modern teaching methodologies, standards and stereotypes. Theology must now adapt to a fixed number of teaching hours, the students must comply with certain levels of “scientific” research, professors must seek methods to access international grants to support certain programmes, which is time-consuming and detrimental to the didactic and formative activity.

The evaluation and self-evaluation of theology teachers causes them to focus on the volume of literature they are required to publish (a book every two years and four studies per year, according to the latest regulations), which may impact on the quality of the publications. The whole didactic process and the interaction with students are also affected. The classical model of the erudite, accessible and spiritual teacher is now replaced with the informed, skilled in course management and attracting European grants.

The reduction of the number of courses leads to the formation of huge study units, courses being taught to large groups (of up to 150 students), one immediate effect being the impossibility of working individually with a student. The course should be followed by individual study, so that the actual interaction with students is only occasional.

We must also highlight the positive effects of the Bologna system, as seen from the perspective of a country that is a candidate for accession into the EU. During the totalitarian regime there was certain empathy of the Orthodox and heterodox schools from the Western countries which offered scholarships to Romanian theology students with outstanding academic records. An important role was played by the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches of Geneva and Diakonisches Werk, of Germany. The fall of the Iron Curtain, the freedom to travel, the subsequent exodus of the poor and often delinquent people to the West have led to a decline or almost vanishing of the interest in specialising Romanian theologians in the West. The effects have been felt particularly by the good promising students whose positions were taken over by daring, often fraudulent scholarship hunters. We now notice that ever more seminary graduates who emigrated to the West have received degrees in Catholic and Protestant theological schools would now want to be integrated in the theological education system of Romania. That is why, through the Bologna Process, the Faculties of Theology become officially international.

The transferable credits encourage promising students to study abroad, in different academic settings, under the guidance of the responsible professors in their faculties. From

our own perspective, there are three positive aspects of this process: the familiarisation with the foreign language of study; acquiring a methodology of theological research, by comparison to the Western models; and the access to libraries and theological literature still hardly available in Romania following 50 years of prohibition on publishing and importing of Christian literature.

Equally important is the ecumenical aspect, because the Socrates/Erasmus mobility programme allows students for the first time to confess the faith they study in our schools in heterodox milieux. The particular life-style, practice, tenure and commitment to the Orthodox faith have often represented the best missionary means of familiarising the Western students with the Orthodox ethos. The same phenomenon occurs with foreign students who come to study in Romania.

The Bologna Process promotes interdisciplinary dialogue which can constitute a basis for European research programmes. It encourages the attempts of teaching professionals and researchers to discover new fields of non-theological study, with beneficial long-term effects. For the Romanian higher education which has generally lacked proper funding, each international programme is an encouragement and an opportunity for all those involved.

Trends in the theological education today

The invasion of the new religious movements, the experience of syncretism involved in the lay culture, promoted by all the media channels¹⁸ have led to the emergence of a ‘defensive’ trend in the Romanian Orthodoxy, spearheaded by certain monastics, which is sometimes felt in the reserved and non-communicative attitude of some theology teachers. In each faculty, two groups can be distinguished: those who defend the “traditional faith” which they associate with nationalism and the set of traditional Romanian values and those who are open, ready to connect with the society at large, with members of the other Christian Churches and denominations, and equipped for missionary projects.

Academic theology nowadays plays a very important role, although the response of the target audience is not always as expected. Openness and dialogue are quite often perceived as a renunciation of Orthodox values, whereas reclusion is proposed as a solution

¹⁸ There are confessional and New-Age TV channels which propose a combination of traditional Orthodox life with meditation and yoga practices of far Eastern origins and which advertise themselves as a religious alternative for the future.

to avoid problems and focuses theological work on learning unrelated Patristic texts. The ecumenical disciplines often have a formal advertising role, because in reality they are treated as “sectology”. The immediate result is an isolation of Orthodoxy, which is perceived sometimes as a medieval faith. “Our theology seems to be atemporal and irremediably locked in the past. It is appropriate to emphasise the absence of the prophetic dimension of the theologians’ work, which can only be activated when they become the messengers of a living God for a living people, here and now,” as Fr. Constantin Coman remarked.¹⁹ The closed-in attitude of a traditional Orthodoxy causes it to be threatened by liturgical formalism, traditionalism and even a centrifugal tendency, generated by dissatisfied clergy and laypersons.²⁰ The risk of ‘confessionalisation’ is greater when students do not possess the ability to communicate with counterparts and friends of other denominations.

Orthodoxy nowadays has the opportunity to make known, through international institutions, its liturgical and spiritual heritage, placing Christ at the centre of dialogue, as He is the model for unity and solidarity. One does not call for doctrinal relativisation, but for missionary activity, based on solid theology, visible in the social and missionary work. Here emerges the crucial role played by the school, if one takes into account the fact that the dogmatic and historical practice of the Church is a call to communion.²¹

The academic theological education finds itself at a point of struggle between the theological traditionalism and the contemporary mutations, which bring in new challenges. We should only point to the transformations occurring in the social sphere, such as the emerging economic totalitarianism determined by globalisation which generates conflicting attitudes on life, global educational and cultural disarray, and a barbarisation of the future society; the mutation of the human, namely the mundane transformation of the human person, the secularisation of the solitary, economic person for whom consuming, perceiving and satisfying one’s pleasures are more important activities than being, thinking and praying; the mutation of the religious, which leads to certain types of “collectivism, integrism and

¹⁹ Rev. Constantin Coman, Ph. D., *art. cit.*, p. 162.

²⁰ The phenomenon the Flock of St Elijah and the Secret Church, sectarian movements within the church structure.

²¹ Rev. Ioan Tulcan, Ph. D., *Bisericile in dialog. Seminar internațional cu tema “Reconcilierea dintre Bisericile Europene. O contribuția a școlilor teologice”*, in “Teologia”, III (1999), no. 3-4, p. 145.

fundamentalism or on the opposite side, diffuse, relativist, anonymous and syncretic religiosity, non-committed from an ecclesial and political point of view.²²

In this psychological and social mosaic the Orthodox Church appears to be “detached from the social and cultural destiny of the modern man, as it is haunted by the ghosts of the past, by meditative, Byzantine and rural nostalgias and sentimental reveries and lacks genuine reflection and true inspirational social and intellectual enthusiasm”.²³

Caught up in this inertial engulfing process, it seems that the modern human person surrenders to certain systems which he has created and which will eventually make him into their victim. A theology that overcomes the nihilistic globalisation can lead to the liberation from this inertial process, by transfiguring modernity from the inside, promoting the global ecumenical unity and elaborating a new spiritual human life style.²⁴

A new direction – theology and science

On the cultural and scientific level we observe a mutual move towards closer cooperation between theology and sciences, two fields that were considered as antagonistic during the communist era. The type of scholastic theology taught by certain professors during communism is now abandoned in favour of spiritual and liturgical theology inspired by the experience of the Church and open to the dialogue with the modern sciences. This transformation was first signalled by Rev. Dumitru Stăniloae who translated the *Philokalia* into Romanian and Patriarch Iustin, who initiated the translation of Patristic literature, part of the collection *Church Fathers and Writers*.

A distinguished continuator of this orientation is His Eminence Daniel, the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, for whom the model of dialogue between faith and science is found in the theology of the Church Fathers, most significantly that of St. Basil the Great. Obviously, science and faith do not substitute each other, they are complementary, as they contribute to knowledge, without eliminating the mystery. This dialogue can produce three significant results: discerning the meaning and the purpose of the universe; discovering the meaning of the communion between the uncreated Intelligence and the created

²² Archdeacon Ioan I. Ică Jr., Ph. D., *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae – “clasic” al teologiei secolului XX și misiunea teologiei în Biserică și în societate*, in “ST”, III, I (2005), no. 1, pp. 174-178.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

intelligence; and cultivating the shared responsibility and love for the creation.²⁵ Theology is not exclusively ecclesial, it is always public and present in all aspects of life. A scientific theology cannot put the faith of the Church at risk, because it uses the methods of modern science and, with faith in the power of the Word of God, without methodical “doubt”, can critically interpret the Scripture, which it proposes as object of academic debate. This type of theology eliminates the tension between modernity and fundamentalism.

At the crossroads of a millennium and of a social system

For the Orthodox Church and the Romanian society the turn of the millennium was accompanied by the change in the social organisation of the country. Whether or not it is wholly prepared the Church enjoys the highest approval ratings in our society. It is seen as the credible redeeming institution, to which people turn, yet they are also presented with the alternatives of the consumerist, globalising society. Against this background, we can conclude that the present developments within the Church will influence the religious configuration of Romania in the next decades and the manner in which the message of Christ’s Gospel is to be applied.

In this country there is a highly permeable religious ground on which the priests and the theology teachers educated in our faculties must sow “the good seeds”. This religious ground is nevertheless equally permeable to the religious syncretism of any kind. This would explain the fact that in the most profoundly religious area, the traditional village, where the sacred feeling has been kept alive by the millenary monastic life, without proper religious education to match the emotional, sacred and liturgical education, the advent of freedom has created the conditions for the emergence, more than anywhere else, of Pentecostal and Adventist missions which provide confessional religious education and manifest social solidarity. Nowadays, in these villages, besides century-old churches or monasteries there is at least one new house of prayer of the main Neo-Protestant denominations, which raises serious questions about the effectiveness of Orthodox mission and religious education.

Another serious concern is represented by the commitment of those who study theology. Given the large numbers of graduates of higher theological education, it is hard to distinguish the limit between the studies done to secure a rewarding clerical career and the genuine vocation for priesthood. Although the theological education will follow the course

²⁵ In the working paper *The Necessity of the Dialogue Between Science and Faith Today*, manuscript.

imposed by the global European transformations, we consider it vital that greater attention be paid to the selection of candidates for priesthood and to the particular type of spiritual and liturgical, social and missionary education they receive in order to equip them with openness to the values of the modern world and with fidelity to the millenary teachings of the Orthodox Church. There is a great risk inherent in the misuse of freedom by the young theology students. Moral education is one of the most demanding areas in the modern educational system. The participation in the liturgical life, the moral restrictions, ascetism, prayer, avoiding the harmful influence of the media on the personal life of the students are formative prerequisites which are however difficult to realise.

At the other hand it is understandable that the candidates for priesthood come with a certain “secular” background which they have to discard in the theology school for the rest of their lives. If in school some coercive methods may apply, in the personal life, as priest and religion teacher, such constraints must be applied of one’s own will in order to become a credible model. This appears to be the greatest challenge of the modern theological education.

Another provocation for the mission of the future steward of Christ is the decline of family values. Under the influence of the media assault, not only the Christian family is challenged but the priest’s family too. The lack of any moral restrictions poses spiritual risks for the young generation, which is a concern for each of us, as we are all members of the Church. The education for mission is done in general with young people who study theology; from the outside, young people, including the future priests’ wives and religion teachers, do not understand the difficulty of the mission of being a practicing Christian, which can make them unable to adapt to a life of missionary sacrifice. The frequent abandonment of the family home by one of the spouses shows that this concern should also be addressed in educating youth of any formation.

As regards mission in the rural areas, the priests who come from the academic centres find it very difficult to live in deprivation, as more than 80% of Romanian villages do not have paved roads and running water. It is therefore necessary to insist on the need of Orthodox solidarity and on the students’ practical training by concrete activities for such demanding situations. The solution to commute to the parish or to simply move from the village to the urban areas is detrimental for the believers, as it undermines their identification of the priest as a “paternal figure”, as the shepherd of their souls. An important role in this anticipatory training can be played by the theological seminaries, where basic education is provided in the spirit of communion. In the seminary personal prayer and communal prayer

are specifically encouraged. The pupils learn to pray, learn, work, and live in communion. There time must be divided among study, prayer and spiritual life, and work and community service. This is the period when responsible freedom is cultivated, while, on the contrary, in many other schools personal liberty is substituted by libertinage. We subscribe to the view of Fr. Thomas Hopko who states that students must learn “to do theological studies” by observing “the organisation, management, administration and financing of the schools of theology, as well as of the local parishes, dioceses and churches, and by participating in the life of these institutions.”²⁶

The Church in the former communist bloc experiences nowadays a dual trend in theology: a so-called academic or scholarly theology and a popular, spiritual, charismatic theology, promoted by the spiritual fathers living in secluded monasteries. As a result, on the theological literature market, one can find both theological books of academic stature, usually characterised by austerity, scientific accuracy, and inaccessibility, and pseudo-theological literature, which popularises certain Christian teachings or the spiritual profile of certain great spiritual fathers, which are characterised by simplicity, unprofessional practices, often by errors of faith, although they claim to possess a kind of patristic and philocalic erudition. This double standard causes a detachment of the academic theology from the life of the Church and to confusion in the mind of theology graduates as to the nature of the redeeming theology.

There is a concern for cooperation with other university centres, with theology faculties from all over Europe, within the framework of the European programmes for academic mobility of higher education students and teachers. By its positive aims this activity presents a great opportunity by allowing the theology students to confess their Orthodox spirituality and heritage. The linguistic obstacle could be overcome by closer cooperation among the Orthodox theological schools, by introducing courses for languages of international circulation namely English, German, French and Italian.

We are aware of the threefold mission of theological education: to inform, to form and to transform. The modern and post-modern world appears to be desperately in need of formation and transformation, because information is everywhere, but must be approached with good judgment. Therefore, it seems to be right that “the third millennium”, a Romanian

²⁶ Thomas Hopko, *art. cit.*, p. 97.

theologian recently remarked, “is unfolding to Christianity, in general, and to Orthodoxy, in particular, with dramatic challenges and an overwhelming agenda.”²⁷

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Achimescu, Pr. Nicolae, Ph. D., *Relația dintre facultate și Biserică*, in “Studii Teologice”, III, I (2005), no. 1, pp. 194-199.

Bria, Ion, *Orthodox Theological Education: the Case of Romania*, WCC, Geneva, 1993.

Coman, Pr. Constantin, *Teologia ortodoxă românească in epoca post-Stăniloae*, in “Studii Teologice”, Seria a III-a, I (2005), no. 1, pp. 158-170.

Hopko, Pr. Thomas, *Educația teologică și modernitatea*, translated by Anișoara Carol, in “Studii Teologice”, II, XLVI (1994), no. 4-6, pp. 91-100.

Ică, Arhidiacon Ioan I. Jr., *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae – “clasic” al teologiei secolului XX și misiunea teologiei in Biserică și in societate*, in “Studii Teologice”, III, I (2005), no. 1, pp 168-181.

Maximos, Episcop de Pittsburg, *Educația teologică in context ecumenic și pluralist*, translated by Mihai Brânzea, in “Studii Teologice”, Seria a II-a, XLVII(1995), no. 1-3, pp. 98-109.

Popa, Virginia, *Monografia Facultății de Teologie din Iași*, manuscript under publication.

Preda, Radu, *Înnoirea patristică a teologiei*, in “Renașterea”, XVI, no. 10/2005.

Tulcan, Pr. Ioan, *Bisericile in dialog. Seminar internațional cu tema “Reconcilierea dintre Bisericele Europene. O contribuția a școlilor teologice”*, in “Teologia”, III (1999), no. 3-4, pp. 143-146.

Vizitiu, Pr. Mihai, Pr. Dragoș Bahrim, A. Timofti (eds.), *Două secole de învățământ teologic seminarial (1803-2003)*, Trinitas, Iași, 2003, pp. 86-109.

Ware, Kallistos, *Educația Teologică in Scriptură și la Sfinții Părinți*, translated by Anișoara Carol, in “Studii Teologice”, II, XLVI (1994), no. 4-6, pp. 82-90.

Rev. Lecturer Dan Sandu, Ph. D.

„Dumitru Stăniloae” Faculty of Orthodox Theology

²⁷ Archdeacon Ioan I. Ică Jr., Ph. D., *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae – “clasic” al teologiei secolului XX și misiunea teologiei in Biserică și in societate*, in “ST”, III, I (2005), no. 1, p. 181 (whole text on pp 168-181).

Iași, Romania