

PUTI PRAVOSLAVNOGO BOGOSLOVIA NA ZAPADE V XX VEKE. [CESTY PRAVOSLAVNE TEOLOGIE VE 20. STOLETI NA ZAPAD]. BY IVANA NOBLE, KATEŘINA BAUEROVÁ, TIM NOBLE, PARUSH PARUSHEV. TRANS. FROM CZECH (SERIES “SOVREMENNOE BOGOSLOVIE”). MOSCOW: IZDATEL'STVO BBI, 2016. PP. XIV + 438; ISBN 978-5-89647-339-8; 490.00 RUB.*

DOI: 10.29357/ISSN.2521-179X.2018.20.13

In my opinion, the title of the book, *Puti pravoslavnogo bogosloviia na Zapade v XX veke* [Paths of Orthodox theology in the West in the XX century] does not completely accurately reflect the content of this foundational work. The Czech researchers Ivana Noble, Kateřina Bauerová, Tim Noble, and Parush Parushev have accomplished a colossal task and produced a practically encyclopedic work which encompasses at least five centuries of the development of Orthodox theology and mission.

It is precisely the connection of theology and mission that I noted first of all as the incomparable virtue of the book. Analyzing missionary service in America (especially in Alaska, although not only there) as well as in Europe, the authors demonstrate what a powerful influence mission has had on the formation of theology. Deprived of the support of the state apparatus and obliged to respond to the challenges of another culture, the church rediscovered Christ, which, in turn, became the basis of successful mission work. Although, in my opinion, the authors did not set themselves this task, they have managed to show that without a missionary focus, theology fails to develop in the church. This is especially evident from the example of other, at first glance completely opposite, situations: the domination of the church in society, on the one hand, and the persecution of Christians on the part of a totalitarian state, on the other. When one or another denomination (in this case Orthodoxy, although this holds true for other Christian confessions) dominates the religious and cultural space, its theological thought freezes and leads, in part, to “preservation of the old.” This is what happened to late Byzantium. This is what happened also in the Russian Empire when the challenge of other world views (Marxism, among others) did not cause a part of Orthodox thinkers to seek a worthy response to these challenges. Theological thought also comes to a standstill in a situation where the church is persecuted: in any case, the development of theology requires freedom, it requires the opportunity for representatives of various world views to enter into dialogue at different levels.

The theme of dialogue is also, in my opinion, one of the keys to this book. The authors show how, after the fall of Byzantium, Orthodox theological thought (and consequently theological education) was under the influence of Protestant and Catholic ideas for a considerable time. And only after a long period are attempts made creatively to overcome that dependence and form a specifically Orthodox method of theologizing: here we see

The article received on 28.12.2017; approved for publication on 13.03.2018.

the beginning of hesychasm, the neo-patristic synthesis, sophiology, and so on. In this regard, the authors of the research avoid setting up an important question: what led to the situation, that in the middle of the second millennium Orthodox theological thought was so emasculated that eastern theologians were obliged to borrow theological method from the West? However, the very description of the way that dependence was overcome leads to the idea that theological thought in the East was stopped precisely by the absence of constructive dialogue with Western brethren (who were simultaneously theological opponents). And the subsequent decades (centuries, even!) of Orthodox dependence on Western schools of theology was the unavoidable price of “catchup development.” It was only when it had grasped the achievements of Western theology that it could bring forth anything truly valuable. And that was not only for Orthodoxy itself, but for Christianity as a whole.

I consider that this is an extremely important lesson for evangelical believers as well, especially in the post-Soviet setting. This is because the tendency to seek isolation from those who believe somewhat differently for the purpose of preserving “pure faith,” “personal identity,” and so on, is so strong among evangelicals as well. The historical path trodden by our Orthodox brethren shows that the only result of that method of “preserving identity” is theological and missionary weakness.

Be warned that reading *Puti pravoslavnogo bogosloviia na Zapade v XX veke* is a rather daunting task. The book is written in an interesting, lively way, but the abundance of facts, surnames, and ideas discussed, demand that the reader be prepared to make an effort. Nevertheless, I would heartily recommend this work to all who take part in theological discussions and practical ministry in those countries where Orthodoxy has had a significant influence on the history and culture of the people and continues to be an influential force today. Reading this book will help us better understand our brethren, their way of thinking and acting, and also will allow us to draw not a few useful lessons for our own life and ministry.

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