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Book Review:

**Nicu Dumitraşcu (ed.),**  
*The Ecumenical Legacy  
of the Cappadocians: Pathways for  
Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue*  
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 297 pp.,  
ISBN 978-1-137-51394-6

Professor Nicu Dumitraşcu (1945–) has enriched patristic literature with an interesting volume on the legacy of the Cappadocians. This work is a collection of studies made by international scholars presented at a conference organised by the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Episcop Dr Vasile Coman” at the University of Oradea in Romania on October 6-9, 2009. It is undoubtedly a bold attempt to bring together in one volume the rich Christian heritage handed down by the three outstanding figures of the fourth century: St Basil the Great (c. 330 - 379); St Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329 - c. 389) and St Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330 - c. 395).

The book is divided in four parts, each of which contains four articles. The first part deals with Cappadocian thought at large, while the three remaining parts deal with the respective aforementioned theologians. This volume is remarkable on three counts. First, it presents a *fresh rereading* of the three Church Fathers in question through the lenses of scholars from a variety of academic backgrounds including philosophy, theology and classics. Second, it fosters *an approach of convergence* by melding together thematic and individualised approaches. Thirdly, it demonstrates the beauty and relevance of this fourth century theology that undoubtedly can have a positive impact on *ecumenism today*.

The editor does not provide a title for each dividing part. Although this may seem odd to some, it might be a strategy to keep the whole work tightly ordered

together, even though divided into parts. In my opinion, a fulcrum that keeps everything in balance is provided - in the form of a question - by the Metropolitan of Diokleia, Kallistos Ware, in his introductory words: "What can we learn from the ecumenical legacy of the Cappadocians?" (p. 1). Above all, he emphasises four elements: family and friendship; the monastic ideal; the revolutionary implications of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the living mystery of God.

Nonetheless, the contributors present various themes, which make up a rich Cappadocian tradition. In this sense, the ecumenical legacy of the Cappadocians sets their theoretical views in relief against the political and historical background of their day, enlivening and vivifying the analysis with engaging biographical sketches. The contributors include Kallistos Ware, Carl Séan O'Brien, Mihai Himcinschi, Krzysztof Leśniewski, Gunnar af Hällström, George Ovidiu Sferlea, Nicolae Chifăr, John A. McGuckin, Anne Karahan, Pablo Argárate, José R. Villar, Miguel Brugarolas among others.

In his contribution, Carl Séan O'Brien seeks to explain how the Cappadocians offer an example of the use of a philosophical framework to interpret the biblical narrative in a way that is not directed to the intellectual elite, but aimed at a more general audience. The intention of Basil and Gregory in their exegesis of the Genesis narrative is identical - allowing their audience to approach God, adopting the strategy of the *Timaeus* in expounding the order inherent in the cosmos and accounting for the apparent disorder. Mihai Himcinschi, on his part, aims at presenting some of the Cappadocian Fathers' teachings that the Church preached over the centuries, and to evidence, on the basis of Revelation, the existence of personal relations between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Revealing a clear teaching about God in the Trinity, the Orthodox Church leads its believers to the kingdom of God in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; to a life of communion with the Trinitarian God; and also to a life of communion between all people and between people and God.

Another theme which equally occupies an important place is that of the Holy Trinity. Krzysztof Leśniewski explains that this is the central and most important content of the Christian doctrine of God. It has been necessary for the Church to defend the mystery of the Holy Trinity against the natural tendencies of human reason. Such a spiritual and rational effort seems to be in tune with Metropolitan John Zizioulas' words: "The Cappadocians taught us that the Trinity is not a matter for academic speculation, but for personal relationship". Dumitraşcu speaks about how friendship between St Basil the Great and St Gregory of Nazianzus began, the environment in which it developed, and the means and goals that strengthened it and turned it into a role model for any Christian who wants to find his way to the kingdom of heaven.

In the second part, Gunnar af Hällström studies the state of loneliness and estrangement that St Basil experienced when being away from his home and relatives in Africa. George Ovidiu Sferlea, then, presents and discusses the debate between Basil and Eunomius on topics of major significance for the Christian tradition, such as the proper way of interpreting the Scriptures, the source of theological knowledge, and the relation between natural reason and revelation.

Another issue dealt with in the second part is that of pneumatichism. Here, Nicolae Chifăr writes that even if St Basil did not explicitly name the “Holy Ghost” God, he used synonyms, which did not irritate his adversaries but made them admit that the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost are “of the same essence.” In turn, then, Elena Giannakopoulou studies Holy canon 89 (Letter 54) where St Basil expresses his sorrow after having realised that the Holy Canons of the Church Fathers regarding the precise procedure of the inclusion of “servants” in the sacerdotal list had been ignored in his time.

Other studies include those by John A. McGuckin, Anne Karahan, Pablo Argarate, Florin Tomoioagă, José R. Villar, Marius Telea, Miguel Brugarolas, and Victor Yudin. The entire opus is in fact the second volume in a series entitled: “Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue” whose editors are Mark Chapman and Gerard Mannion, and it includes seven illustrations which complement and exemplify Cappadocian Theology and aesthetics. The postface is skilfully written by Professor Hector Scerri. Here we find a fascinating conclusion depicting the Cappadocians as three beacons whose light still illuminates even today. Indeed, “the readers of this book will not only agree with these words of wisdom but also experience for themselves that they have sat on the shoulders of the three Cappadocian giants” (p. 281).

This book is undoubtedly one of the latest efforts to study, appreciate and draw on the Theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. I would suggest that a possible answer to Ware’s question “What can we learn from the ecumenical legacy of the Cappadocians?” has to do simply with a theology method, one which reflects a happy synthesis between the Christian faith and the spirit of the age in which the Cappadocians lived. Undoubtedly, this volume is useful particularly for patristic scholars and students.

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