

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

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### **Protos. Dr. Benedict Vesa, *Personalități duhovnicești contemporane* [Contemporary spiritual personalities], 1<sup>st</sup> volume (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2016)**

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The contemporary Orthodox Theological research needs works that provide an overview of the most important biographies and works in the Christian space, and that creates bridges among different faiths. Now, this need is partly fulfilled by the first volume from the series *Contemporary spiritual personalities*, written by Father Benedict Vesa.

The author, well-known in the Romanian Theological research<sup>1</sup>, provides a list of 24 biographies of contemporary personalities from the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant space, highlighting the defining element of their lives. Thus, in an unusual presentation, the reader discovers, gathered together, Orthodox Saints: John of Kronstadt (p. 37-44), Nectarios of Aegina (p. 45-52), Nicholas Velimirović (p. 69-76), Maria Skobtsova (p. 77-84), Porphyrios the Kapsokalyvite (pp. 133-140), John Jacob of Neamț (p. 149-156), Paisios of Mount Athos

(p. 205-212), Catholic Saints: Thérèse of the Child Jesus (p. 61-69), Maximilian Kolbe (pp. 93-100), Teresa of Calcutta (p. 141-148), Pier Giorgio Frassati (p. 197-204), Faustina Kowalska (p. 125-132), or Chiara Lubich (p. 181-188) and Protestant spiritual personalities like Dag Hammarskjöld (p. 117-124). Each title contains the name of the spiritual character and one of his/her important qualities, which is then analysed in the presentation. Therefore, when the author speaks about Saint John of Kronstadt, he highlights the importance of the Liturgy in his spirituality (p. 37), when he speaks about Saint Maria Skobtsova, he highlights her mundane apostolate (p. 7), when he presents Maximilian Kolbe, he speaks about his apostolate of love manifested in martyrdom (p. 93), when he speaks about Dag Hammarskjöld, he emphasises the way in which, in his love, the political career and the mystique of faith interacted (p. 117), and s. o.

The book contains a foreword written by His Eminence Andrei, Metropolitan of Cluj, Maramureș and Sălaj (p. 5), where he highlights the importance of spiritual models for today's society and speaks about the importance of the Spiritual Father nowadays. Then, in his foreword (p. 7-11), the author himself explains the reasons behind his approach:

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<sup>1</sup> Through books such as: Valentin Vesa, *Cântând milele Domnului. Scurtă introducere în Teologia Sfântului Isaac* (*Singing God mercies. Short introduction in Saint Isaac the Syrian's Theology*, (Alba-Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2010); Valentin Veda, *The Experiential Theology of the Saints and its ecumenical role: St. Isaac the Syrian and St. Thérèse of Lysieux. Comparative study*, (Alba-Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2011); Valentin Vesa, *Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu la Sfântul Isaac Sirul* (*The Knowledge of God at Saint Isaac the Syrian*), (Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2013).

"This volume simply wants to highlight the incredible power that the people of God have in preaching the Gospel by living it, and, as a consequence, in the creation of a beautiful world. I have selected 24 personalities, all contemporary, to enlighten our personal lives. We need models and they do exist! There they are, in contemporaneity" (p. 9).

After this foreword, father Benedict dedicates two chapters to His Eminence Andrei, His Spiritual Father (p. 15-35), highlighting the particular aspects of his thinking, his models and his sensibilities. Then, he presents each personality, in a beautiful presentation of several pages each. For the presentation, the author resorts to interesting books, published especially abroad<sup>2</sup>. However, despite the documentation and despite the presence of footnotes for each presentation, the book cannot be considered scientific research, but rather an interesting book that can be read by anyone curious to find out more about the most important personalities of the Christian spirituality of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Written in an accessible language and having a beautiful design and an interesting content, father Benedict's book, which, of course, is not addressed to Orthodox fundamentalists, but to open-minded believers, is an interesting contribution that speaks about the importance of models and tries to emphasise a few examples from all Christian denominations.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, for Maria Skobtova, he uses: Mother Maria Skobtova, *Essential Writings* (New York, Orbis, 2002), for Maximilian Kolbe: Luigi Boriello, Rafaele di Muro, *Breve storia de la spiritualita cristiana*, (Milano, Ancora, 2013); for Dag Hammarskjöld: Bernhard Erling, *A Reader's Guide to Dag Hammarskjöld, Waymarks*, Minnesota, St. Peter, 2010). But, at the same time, he never forgets to mention Romanian works dedicated to the personalities presented in the book. For example, Saint John of Kronstadt, *Liturghia - cerul pe pământ (Liturgy, the Sky on the Earth)*, translated in Romanian Language by Fr. Ioan Ică jr., (Sibiu, Deisis, 2002); Saint Nectarie of Eghina, *Morala Creștină (Christian Morals)*, (Iași, Doxologia, 2013); or Saint Nicolas Velimirovici, *Răspunsuri la întrebările lumii de azi (Answers to the today's world questions)*, (Bucharest, Predania, 2008).