Daniela Dumbravă et Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban (textes édités par), André Scrima. *Expérience spirituelle et langage théologique. Actes du colloque de Rome, 29-30 octobre 2008*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 306, Roma, Pontificio Istituto Orientale 2019, 255 p., ISBN: 978-88-7210-401-9

Ionuț Biliuță*

The landmarks of Fr. André Scrima's life (1925-2000) and his substantial contribution to the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century only recently came under scrutiny. We know much more today about the brilliant spirit of Fr. Scrima, the monk of the Romanian Orthodox Church who was the intellectual bridge across religious traditions and geographical boundaries.¹ Various researchers, friends, and monastics re-edited, published, translated, commented, and addressed various aspects of Scrima's intellectual contribution to the field of Christian theology and ecumenism in the recent century. One of these undertakings published recently (2019) by *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* in Rome is edited by Daniel Dumbravă and Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban. Based on the proceedings of a workshop that took place in Rome in 2008 and entitled "Andrei Scrima e il linguaggio teologico contemporaneo" [Andrei Scrima and the contemporary theological language], the collective effort clarifies some aspects of Scrima's theological linguistics and intellectual acumen.

The main argument of the edited book revolves around the interconnection between the theological renewal of conceptual categories and the radical reassessment of previous entrenched perceptions regarding ecumenism in the light of intensified interactions between the Roman-Catholic West and the Orthodox East. The introduction by Edward J. Faruggia SJ (p. 11-29) provides the reader with a thorough synthesis of the main arguments of the authors, and it has several sections such as "Testimonies" (p. 29-57), "Hermeneutics and Theological Language" (p. 57-101), "Language of prayer, the language of unity" (p. 101-141), "Speaking about the plurality of religions" (p. 141-175), and "Words and readings of the Tradition" (p. 175-241).

The first section opens with a section on personal recollections of those who knew personally and witnessed first-hand Fr. Andre Scrima's efforts to

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* Ionuț Biliuță, Gheorghe Șincai Institute for Social Sciences and the Humanities, Romanian Academy, 10A Al. Papiu Ilarian, Tg. Mures, 540074, Mures, Romania, ionut.biliuta@academia-cj.ro.

¹ Cristian Sibișan, *Theanthropologie–Grundzüge der Anthropologie und Christologie Andrei Scrimas* (Hamburg: Dr. Kovac Verlag, 2017); Athanasios Giocas and Paul Ladouceur, "The Burning Bush Group and Father André Scrima in Romanian Spirituality," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 52, no. 1-4 (2007): 37–61.

consolidate the ecumenical dialogue among the Roman-Catholic and the Orthodox Churches but also his desire for an all-out openness towards other religions such as Islam, Buddhism or Judaism. While Raimon Panikkar approaches his encounter with Fr. Scrima from an “ecumenical ecumenism” perspective that considers all religions have to be in constant dialogue with each other (p. 29-30), Andrei Pleșu returns to Scrima’s Romanian spiritual roots, that was the Burning Bush (*Rugul Aprins*) movement of hesychast renewal in the late 1940s (p. 31-39). Based on the personal testimony of Fr. Scrima, through the filter of Andrei Pleșu, the reader goes through various facets of Scrima’s life in Romania and abroad to certify the impact that a Romanian monk had upon a new generation of intellectuals after the Communist regime.

Michel Van Parys O.S.B. discusses the theological intersections and various ideas of Scrima’s view encapsulated in his commentary of the Gospel of John. As a product of an oral exposition for a monastic community in Liban (p. 42), Scrima’s biblical exegesis touches upon the mystagogical aspect of the written Word (p. 43) but also touches upon the tension between eternity and temporality in John’s account of Jesus’ works (p. 45-46). One of the most important ideas that Scrima attempted to communicate throughout his work deals with the communication of the “theology of the Cross” (p. 50) through the dialogue between the spiritual father and his disciple (p. 49). How Jesus’ self-sacrifice becomes manifest for the disciple and materializes through the “liturgical imprint” (p. 52) into a component of both the ascetical and the liturgical path defying the ontological love-for-one-self (*philautia*) that prevents any monk from reuniting with God (p. 53).

In the section focused on the hermeneutics of theological language Anca Vasiliu addresses the themes of “solitude” (*xeniteia*) and “singularity” in the patristic tradition, especially in the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers, with a certain emphasis on theological discourses of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, also known as the “Theologian” (p. 57-75). Vasiliu’s text emphasizes the clear-cut distinction between the two languages of knowledge employed by Fr. Scrima: that of theology and that of Western philosophy. Following the footsteps of the Cappadocian Fathers perceived through a monastic lens, Scrima’s theological gnoseology turns out to be a personal awareness of God and His presence apart from philosophical knowledge through the analytical categories (p. 63). Basically, through his contemplative intellect and in solitude, the monk could see himself outside himself and theological language should be able to convey the paradoxical experience of “to witness and contemplate in the same time” (p. 69).

On the historical side, Adalberto Mainardi highlights “the Philokalia as an analytical category” for Romanian Orthodoxy and the facets of this

ongoing reflection on the spirituality of the Church Fathers that nurtured Scrima's thought and intellectual path (p. 101-121). As Mainardi shows, according to André Scrima's articles and conference papers, there are several moments in the development of an Orthodox spirituality based on the Philokalia. On the one hand, the publication in 1782 of the Venetian edition by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite († 1809) and St. Macarius of Corinth († 1805) and in 1793 of the Slavonic version in Sankt Petersburg by St. Paisius Velichicovsky from Neamț Monastery († 1794) marked the first historical moment of the philocalic revolution in Orthodox spirituality. In the second part, Scrima focused on the Romanian philocalic moment, that is the late 1940s spiritual movement from Antim Monastery in Bucharest and the Romanian edition of the Philokalia edited by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae († 1993) in the same period (p. 115). The last section of Mainardi's contribution addresses the theological intersections with other religious traditions (Roman-Catholicism, Buddhism, etc.) of Scrima's philocalic reflections emphasizing the ecumenical character of the philocalic movement (p. 118) and its main emphasis on the mystery of the human person for any future spiritual movement of renewal in Christianity (p. 120).

The main contribution in the edited book both in terms of length and substance belongs to Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban and Miruna Tătaru-Cazaban. Based on a prodigious array of primary and secondary sources, the aforementioned authors reconstruct the language of Scrima's ecumenical theology concerning the Second Vatican Council. Identifying the sources of his theological view (Fr. Benedict Ghiuș, the *ressourcement/la nouvelle théologie* professed by the Roman Catholic monks from Istina Center in Paris and the Monastery of Chevetogne) and corroborating in his monastic vocation the attributes of contemplation and action (p. 126), Scrima advocated during Vatican II for a renewal of the theological language that would enable theologians to escape the pitfall of nominalism and return to "an existential reflection on the mystery of the Living-God." (p. 128). Based on Scrima's works but also his activity during the Second Vatican Council, the authors were able to establish a detailed taxonomy of the conditions for the "creative fidelity" of the Christian Churches to work: every church represents for the other the first interlocutor as being Churches; the Eastern Orthodox Church stands as the Christian catholicity that never changed while the Western Church did change after the eleventh century; between the two Churches the unity had to be actualized meaning the shared experience of the unique reality of the Church (p. 137-138). Furthermore, the authors have identified Scrima's three criteria of any future common ecclesiological approach between the Roman and the Orthodox Church: the historical dimension

focused on the apostolic foundation upon which these two Churches dwell; the theological dimension based on a pneumatological ecclesiology that emphasizes the reality of the Church as a universal and particular at the same time, and an institutional dimension forged on a conciliar ecclesiology that reclaims the old Patriarchates as the centers of Christianity.

Although prodigious in opening new avenues of research, several shortcomings hinder the reader from having a detailed overview of Scrima's theological contribution. Besides some minor typos (see p. 17 where Băncilă becomes Bănică) the book fails to provide the reader with a detailed historical outline of Scrima's life, theological contribution, and involvement in the ecumenical movement that would establish his profile along with other relevant theologians of the twentieth century. Since 2008, when the workshop was held, a lot has changed in the literature and the Romanian archives opened to the public. A large number of Romanian scholars failed to notice the importance of historical dimension as reconstituted through archival research and, therefore, to offer the much-needed contextualization for understanding Scrima's profile. As an example, what was the relationship between the Orthodox ecumenism in the West as extolled by the St. Serge Institute in Paris and the relations with the Roman Catholic theologians (Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, Louis Bouyer)? How the Parisian theological dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholics and the construction of a common idiom of theological discussions in the late 1950s impacted Scrima's future ecumenism and his striving for the constructive renewal of theological language?²

Furthermore, going for a hagiographic profile of Fr. Scrima instead of a critical reassessment of his intellectual detente, the authors disregard one important question: how original was the (ecumenical) theology and the language of Fr. André Scrima regarding both the Patristic tradition and the main streams of Western theology in the twentieth century? Apart from the timid references in various texts, what differed in his conceptual taxonomy from Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth, or Jacques Yves Congar, for example? What distances Scrima's view on spiritual experience from other such

² For a few reading suggestions, please see Andrew Louth, "French *Ressourcement* Theology and Orthodoxy: A Living Mutual Relationship?," in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*, eds. Gabriel Flynn and Gabriel D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 495-508. For a more recent perspective from the Orthodox side, see Olga Lossky, *Vers le jour sans déclin: Une vie d'Élisabeth Behr-Siegel (1907-2005)* (Paris, Cerf, 2007); Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al. eds., *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education* (Volos: Volos Theological Academy in collaboration with WCC Publications and Regnum Books, 2014) and *On Christian Leadership: The Letters of Alexander Schmemmann and Georges Florovsky (1947-1955)*, edited and annotated with an introduction by Paul L. Gavriluyuk (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2020).

opinions in Christianity? Despite the heterogeneous character of his work, the impulse to achieve an overarching synthesis between various religious traditions, and often the scattered details of his intellectual profile, a critical perspective about Scrima's real contribution to the field of contemporary theology should be a good place to start an actual discussion about the relevance of his work.

Highly-interdisciplinary, broad in scope, with a wide range of theoretical perspectives stemming from theological, comparative religion, and philosophical milieus the present book serves as a conceptual *vade-mecum* for any scholar interested in the ecumenical relations between the Orthodox and the Roman-Catholic Churches in the twentieth century in general and on Fr. Scrima's works in particular. The intellectual sophistication of some of the texts in the book (van Parys, Vasiliu, Mainardi, Tătaru-Cazaban & Tătaru-Cazaban, Toti, Montanari) should also be praised; that could open new avenues of research and fresh perspectives in perceiving Fr. André Scrima's contribution to contemporary theology. It is a welcome addition to the literature on ecumenism, comparative Christian theology, inter-religious relations, and religious experiences in the twentieth century.