

About a scholastic of our days

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If you wonder what does a scholastic look like and if nowadays we may have the opportunity to meet one walking down the street, my answer can only be affirmative. This was my first impression when I dared to approach Florin Crișmăreanu’s book, *Analogy and Christology. Dionysian and Maximian studies*, published by ‘Alexandru Ioan Cuza’ University of Iași, in 2014. I therefore recommend 424 pages of Dionysian and Maximian studies, prefaced by Professor George Bondor, studies focused on a fundamental concept for medieval theologians and philosophers in particular the „analogy”. Beyond the interest of a specialised public, thus talking about a very restricted audience, beyond the overtones, merits and hypotheses debated with the precision of a versed surgeon, over which I have no intention of going in too deep, I intend to return to the initial statement, attempting to clarify what are the main preoccupations of a scholastic nowadays.

I shall commence the sketching of this portrait by highlighting and concurrently rejecting all the negative values tagged to the term scholastic. We shall therefore explore our own prejudices and preconceived ways of thinking the strange, the odd, and for some, the fearsome foe, tailored to the shape of our needs and anxieties.

The portrait of a scholastic is, in our collective mind, associated with the one of a cast away from reality, life and the burning issues of the moment, a hostage to sterile, out-dated disputes which do not concern anyone anymore. Furthermore, it sends us contemplating an inquisitorial style of thought and behavior, the scholastic being identified as an uncompromising and anachronistic character, unable to comprehend, explain and relate to his own system when it comes to the complex, urgent and, sometimes, spectacular upheavals we encounter on a daily basis.

These allegations of inadequacy and obsolete regarding scholasticism seem to belong to the philosophical language of Renaissance, and the mainly concerned with the inquisition applied to the 'inquisitor of thinking' can be recognized as Jacob Burckhardt, who, in his *'Civilizations of the Renaissance in Italy'* generates the portrait of a foe easily identified and blamed within the scholastic figure, the opponent of the Florentine, full of vitality and a profound admirer of the antique culture as well as its worldly joys of more or less carnal pleasures.

This negative portrait of the scholastic, the main character on the stage of thought for over a thousand years, has been selected and broadcasted in the history of philosophy guides and textbooks. Along the time it was developed one of the greatest preconception specific to the middle ages, a period without authentic or retainable philosophical writings.

The retouching of this maleficent portrait, the reawakening of the eternal features of the scholastic, its contextualisation via those surprising and well defined characteristics for every human being, the bringing into light of those lines of thinking is what we are going to focus on, starting with a fundamental term mentioned in the beginning, 'the analogy'. In Florin Crișmăreanu's words, analogy is more than a scholastic concern; it is a tool of the human mind. „Without a doubt – states the Romanian exegete – analogy designates the idea of a correspondence between two different assemblies, which enables a fair comparison. This process is fundamental to the entire human thought, revealed by all cultures, without exception. Also this method emphasizes the standard measure

of the diverse while it also withstands it” (pp. 314-315). For the medieval – continues Florin Crișmăreanu – this term was able to sustain the hypothesis of God concept, The Creator of all things and His relationship with His own conception. This analogue report between the two terms „assists us to understand that the created being, as a consequence of God, is not God” (p. 315). Similarly, the same report explains, in the eyes of the medieval thinker, why evil is only permitted in this world, without being caused by God, therefore, without having an ontological status. In post-modernism, this explicative model could be applied to the problem of Evil which embodies one of the most current themes in philosophical research, considering the role played by divine transcendence in establishing the basis of a moral and unanimous approach towards the suffering of others.

Therefore, a first argument which reveals the positive attitude of the scholastic links to a particular logic of openness towards different cultures, the medieval having to exert his aptitude to identify common places, guiding principles and mutual research methods of identifying and seizing reality.

He must be, above all, a master of his own research field, a professional who grasps an up-to-date knowledge of the first manuscripts considered, as well as the last editorials on the elected subject. Philosopher or theologian, *rational*-ist or *fide*-ist (i.e. Thomas Aquinas or Maximus the Confessor), what links them together is the standard of scientific research as well as living they belong to.

An additional argument, closely related to the first one, is the special consideration granted towards bibliographical sources, the critical argumentative method having the upper hand in most debates, the abundance of explicative notes overwhelming textbooks, thus competing with the length of a textbook itself. The critical argument tool becomes a trustworthy device for the one who is pursuing the accomplishment of studies in that particular field. Thus Florin Crișmăreanu seems to depict the portrait of a scholastic from the XIV-th century, harshness aiming for the desire to exhaust the chosen subject (I shall of course be challenged here, as the humbleness of philosophers or their followers is legendary).

A third argument links to the style of writing: clear, concise, sober and, wherever is needed, direct. It is the opposite of essayistic style, loaded with eulogistic and sleep-compelling paragraphs, similar to Gilson for instance, or even Jacques Maritain. It does not imply that the Romanian researcher's studies are not therewith a *laudatio* for what symbolizes the theology and the Eastern Church.

Thus to avoid the blame placed on the term scholastic in a too casual way (so that not all of us could qualify as scholastics as Thomas would have named all the thinkers before him, more or less, Aristotelian, hence Dionysius, a trademark of the East, who was seen as an Aristotelian) I shall stipulate a few specifics over the discussed subtopics.

What I appreciated the most was the study „Analogy and Christology in *Corpus Dionysiacum*”, where the ontological value of analogy clearly stands out, beyond its well-known gnoseological significance assumed by Thomism followers' *et alii*.

Beautifully presented was also the study of „About the game of God”, which explains how the Romanian exegete delivers the expertise of biblical hermeneutic Maximus the Confessor, where we, the mortals, may observe how significant the tradition of interpreting a sacred text is.

Another text which appealed to my interest was the one so-called „Jean-Luc-Marion, lecturer of the holly Maximus the Confessor”, as stated by the title, a study of Conceptual archaeology which reveals the fact that the past is a vivid entity influencing the way of thinking, reading and its interpretation, as well as giving us the licence to protrude the knowledge of new worlds, new criteria of human thought.

Here therefore is a positive sense of the word scholastic – with a special interest towards the concept of divinity, for its assumed limitations and strengths as a concept, touched by hermeneutical sensitivities which willingly or not fit in with the paradigm (παραδείγματα) which surrounds us in our attempts to read, comment, daubed by the knowledge (γνώσις) which, although partial, seeks our rescue in this world.

Let's not forget that the scholastic was and still is a vital sign of humanity, an active community member, and, why not,

with his own problems and joys, family and kids – the motto from the beginning of the book – a clear evidence which totally deserves my gratitude and admiration.

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