

**Vasile Rojneac**, *Sfântul Niceta de Remesiana. Viața și activitatea [Saint Nicetas of Remesiana. His Life and Activity]*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană), 2017, 330 p.

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This work with the same title, i.e. *Sfântul Niceta de Remesiana. Viața și activitatea/Saint Nicetas of Remesiana. His Life and Activity*, was the PhD thesis in Theology presented by Vasile Rojneac on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, under the scientific guidance of the author of this book review. The examination board was chaired by Rev. Prof. Vasile Stanciu, PhD, the dean of the faculty, and included the following members: Rev. Prof. Ioan Vicovan, PhD, Dumitru Stăniloae Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Al. I. Cuza University of Iași; Rev. Prof. Mihai Săsăujan, PhD, and Rev. Prof. Ioan Moldoveanu, PhD, both from the Justinian Patriarhul Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest, as well as Prof. Paul Brusankowski, PhD, Andrei Șaguna Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

Following the suggestions made by the professors mentioned above, this solid research was published by the prestigious Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House.

It is important to mention that this book is based on the dissertation presented a while ago by Vasile Rojneac, under the scientific guidance of the author of this book review. I appreciated then the profundity of this work and the involvement of the candidate in this subject. This is why, after accepting to become his scientific supervisor, I suggested that he continued

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the research in this direction, but focused on the theological aspect of the works of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana. This is how this PhD thesis was born. It elaborates on the clear, orthodox teaching left by Saint Nicetas both to our ancestors on the border of the Danube and to us.

We think that it is necessary from the very beginning to make a remark regarding the choice of this thesis, especially that in time, at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Cluj-Napoca, there have been two more theses on this subject (written by Rev. Ștefan Alexe and Ovidiu Pop). Hence, one may ask a legitimate question: Why another thesis on this subject? The answer is simple: The previous two did not treat the theology of Saint Nicetas thoroughly (from liturgical, dogmatic and moral perspectives) the way the present work does.

As we know, even from its beginning, the Church of Christ was put to test by persecutions and heresies, but it was also blessed by God with Holy Fathers and church writers, some of whom defended it at the expense of their lives. It also had a large number of clergymen and faithful. A Holy Father who tenaciously defended the primary Church in writing and speeches was also *Saint Nicetas of Remesiana* whose life and activity are the subject of the work written by Dr. Vasile Rojneac.

The author organized his book as follows: *Introduction* (pp. 9-15); 1. *The perception of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana in historiography* (pp. 17-71); 2. *The Life and Activity of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana* (pp. 73-124); 3. *The Works of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana* (pp. 125-167); 4. *The Theology of Saint Nicetas* (pp. 169-297); *Conclusions* (pp. 299-306); *Addendum* (p. 307), *Bibliography* (pp. 309-330).

Regarding the state of research and the bibliography concerning this subject, in the *Introduction*, the author briefly analyzes several representative Romanian and foreign works, such as that of A. E. Burn, Ernst Hümpel, W. A. Patin, Ioan G. Coman, Ștefan Alexe, Ovidiu Pop, Mihail Diaconescu, and others.

Referring to the manner in which this work was written, we will quote the author who says that he “used the historical method, the descriptive method, the chronological method, the comparative and analytical methods as well as the geographical method” (p. 15), to which one may add, in some places, the synthetic method.

In the chapter dedicated to the perception of the work of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana (Chapter 1), in the specialized foreign historiography section, the author mentioned theologians, historians and Western researchers from Spain, Italy, France, England, Germany, who had an important contribution in “sketching the identity of Saint Nicetas”, but also in the identification of his works. Special interest was manifested by Romanian Orthodox and Catholic theologians, historians and researchers, whose works do not reach the level of the previously mentioned ones due to the lack of primary sources.

As a result of the thorough analysis of these works, the author observed that regarding the missionary activity of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana, two obvious conclusions can be drawn:

1. He preached the Word of the Gospel North of the Danube as well, to our ancestors, and
2. His missionary activity developed only in the jurisdiction of his Eparchy, where there were also some of our ancestors, namely Dacians, Scythians and Gets, an argument that seems to be logical and real. This is a position accepted by the author.

In Chapter 2 we encounter important data regarding the life and activity of Saint Nicetas, coming from important sources, such as *Germinius of Sirmium*, *Paulinus of Nola*, *Gennadius*, *Cassiodorus* and *Jerome*. Born in Remesiana between 335 and 338, we can assume that he was a lay reader of psalms already in his youth. Then he became a deacon, priest, and bishop in 336/337, preaching in Remesiana until his death in 414. The political context

of his time was a troubled one because of the invasion of the pagan migratory peoples, Visigoths and Huns, who caused a lot of loss and sufferance to the Christians in the Eparchy of Remesiana. At the same time, the heresies of Arius and Macedonius also made several victims amongst the Christians who were under his jurisdiction. These were the events that determined Nicetas to fervently defend orally and in writing the people under his spiritual guidance. This is the religious context in which the synods against the Arians took place (4<sup>th</sup> century) in the Balkan Peninsula, in which we do not know if Saint Nicetas participated, or that of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, in the lists of which Saint Nicetas is not mentioned among the participants. Why is that? This is a question to which we cannot find an answer. The two journeys that Nicetas made to Nola, Italy (in 398 and 402, respectively) reveal details about the special image of *Paulinus*, a former Roman dignitary converted to Christianity, a married man who became a priest (in 394) and bishop of Nola (in 409). He wrote two poems on the itinerary of Nicetas' journeys to Nola. Moreover, the bright figure of Nicetas is also described: notable confessor, career monk, man of prayer, with a distinguished moral life, learned hierarch, great missionary, and a very good pastor. It seems that due to Saint Paulinus, Nicetas of Remesiana also became known to the great Western theologians: *Saint Ambrose*, *Jerome*, and *Augustine of Hippo*. We must remark on the fact that the itineraries described by Saint Paulinus generated some confusion on the areas and settlements, such as: "*Dacians*", "*Tomi*", the "*Tomi fortress*", names that made some of the historians, theologians, archaeologists, and researchers, especially Romanians, believe that he speaks about the territories North of the Danube, which belonged to our ancestors; others think that Paulinus referred to the Dacians, the Gets, and the Scythians from the Eparchy of Nicetas, meaning from Remesiana. Shortly after, Saint Nicetas of Remesiana passed away

(+414), he was included among the saints, and centuries later, he was canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church as well (in 1992).

In the beginning of Chapter 3, Vasile Rojneac presented the history of the transmission of texts by Nicetas, and then he made a brief analysis of the works of Saint Nicetas, namely the *dogmatic, liturgical* and *moral* works through which Saint Nicetas rebuts the teachings of Arius and Macedonius, offering advice for the dogmatic, liturgical and moral unity, according to the evangelical precepts.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter, *The Theology of Saint Nicetas*, constitutes the original contribution of this thesis, which resides in the pertinent analysis made by the author on the three levels: *liturgical, dogmatic* and *moral*.

At *liturgical level*, there is the Christian initiation that was performed south of the Danube as a result of the service of Saint Nicetas. Here is briefly “the program of Christian initiation used by Saint Nicetas”: Initiation usually lasted between 1 and 3 years. Saint Nicetas does not mention the period, but he presents three stages of catechumenate: *catechumen, aspirant* and *baptized* (neophyte). At the end of the preparation, the catechumen was marked with the Cross, the bishop put his hands over him, and thus he became an aspirant. He was exorcized, anointed with holy oil and received grains of salt, according to the biblical text “you are the salt of the earth”. The *aspirant stage* lasted for forty days, and it coincided with the *Lent*, a period in which they were instructed daily for three hours in dogmatic catechesis. The *Creed* and *Our Father* were explained and recited daily, and they were marked with the Holy Cross. On Thursday, in the 5<sup>th</sup> week, they took a bath, they fasted on Friday and Saturday and then on Saturday, all the pre-baptismal rites were performed, after which they were baptized. The *neophyte stage* is not precisely defined by Saint Nicetas. It seems that it was identical with that of Saint Ambrose. After the baptism came the anointing with Holy Oil. The neophytes

participated in the Holy Liturgy and they performed communion. In the Bright Week, the neophytes received mystagogical instruction. When the author refers to these stages of catechumenate, he also takes into account the works of the great Eastern and Western Fathers concerning this matter. Saint Nicetas has also left important data on the *Vigil Ritual* before the feasts, based on texts from the Old and New Testament. This is a practice used beginning with the apostolic era, and it was mentioned by the Western and Eastern Fathers, who considered it to be important for the improvement of the moral life of the faithful.

Subchapter 3 of chapter 4, *Psalmody or the Religious Music in the Works of Saint Nicetas*, focuses on the song entitled *Te-Deum*, a Trinitarian and Christological hymn, an apologetic weapon against Arius and Macedonius, argued biblically and patristic, a real musicological treatise. The view of Nicetas in comparison with the opinions of other Eastern Holy Fathers is very useful.

Regarding *dogmatic theology*, the author observes in the works of Saint Nicetas elements of *triadology* and *Christology*. In short, *there is only one God in three divine persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who have in common the essence and the substance. The Persons of the Holy Trinity are co-substantial and equal*. Based on texts from the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, Saint Nicetas, without defining profound theological concepts, defends the orthodoxy of faith regarding the Holy Trinity from the following points of view; *pneumatological* – he defends the divinity of the Holy Spirit against Macedonius; *mariological* – the birth of Jesus Christ from the Holy Virgin Mary was possible through “the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit”, by this defending the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God; *ecclesiological* – “the Church is the synod of all the Saints”, in which we may achieve communion

with them; *eschatological* – the resurrection of the dead and achieving eternal life is the supreme purpose of every real faithful.

If we consider *moral theology*, we may observe the influence of Saint Basil the Great on the Dacian-Roman monastic life. In the opinion of Rev. Prof. Ioan G. Coman, Saint Nicetas translated the *Great Rules* and the *Small Asketikon* of Saint Basil the Great, thus enriching the monastic spirituality of the West, in which Saint Nicetas lived. The monastic life is also the field of battle with the temptations of the devil. It is not only a chance to come closer to God in an easier way, through *prayer, fasting, meditation, and merciful acts*. Regarding *the fallen virgin*, he recommends her deep repentance from the bottom of her heart as an antidote for correction and penitential prayer. This was also very well emphasized by other Holy Fathers of the time. In general, Saint Nicetas was characterized as a *good apologist, great orator, active missionary, accomplished catechet* and *Doctor Ecclesiae*.

In the final Conclusions, the author made a synthesis of the subject, followed by an Addendum (a map) with the itinerary of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana during his two journeys to Nola, Italy. This is a very necessary map for such a scientific work.

The final Bibliography was organized according to the methodology of the Romanian Academy, mentioned in the magazine *Studii Teologice* – Bucharest. This bibliography reveals the richness of information that the author has used for elaborating on this subject.

The work of Dr. Vasile Rojneac contains notes and numerous subsidiary explanations, in which there are elements of theological-historical analysis and synthesis. His style is accurate, pleasant, and easy-to-read. These are just a few of its qualities that recommend it for publishing. In addition, it is useful for those interested in the matter of primary Christianity.

The book design, text formatting, and the covers fully honor both the fame of the Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House and the author of this volume.