

International Orthodox Theological Association Inaugural Conference

Prelegerile prezentate au fost de calitate dintre cele mai diferite. Sper că organizatorii vor publica în curând prelegerile susținute în cadrul IOTA. În cadrul sesiunii pe care am avut onoarea să o moderez (Sesiunea 34: Grupul patristic) precum și în cadrul sesiunilor la care am participat, prelegerile prezentate au fost în general de nivel înalt. Am fost însă mai impresionat de întrebările și discuțiile care au avut loc după prezentarea prelegerilor. După experiența IOTA pot să spun că am primit încă o confirmare că există mare nevoie de mai multe discuții și mai mult discernământ și reflecție între teologii ortodocși care aparțin diferitelor Biserici Ortodoxe și/sau trăiesc și activează în contexte diferite. În ciuda contactelor tot mai intense și a legăturilor din cadrul Ortodoxiei globale, se poate afirma că ortodocșii încă mai trăiesc într-o anumită izolare.

Așa cum m-am exprimat într-un interviu acordat după sesiunea pe care am moderat-o, de acum înainte IOTA are datoria, sau poate chiar obligația de a continua să susțină această nouă generație de teologi ortodocși în efortul lor de a explica Ortodoxia pentru lumea de astăzi. De proiectul IOTA sunt legate multe speranțe și așteptări!

Daniel BUDA

IOTA – International Orthodox Theological Association. Inaugural Conference Pan-Orthodox Unity and Conciliarity, 9-12 January 2019, Iasi, Romania

I decided from the very beginning to write a kind of chronicle on the IOTA Conference 2019. However, this is far from being a classical chronicle on a scientific event, but rather a sincere and personal opinion on the IOTA Conference 2019. In order to make sure that I present my own uninfluenced opinion, I intentionally avoided reading any other chronicle or opinion on the conference. I know there are many reviews and chronicles on the IOTA published in different periodicals and especially on the internet.

More than a year before the IOTA conference, I was contacted by a famous senior Orthodox theologian from the USA who told me that an international orthodox theological association is going to be shaped and that he proposed for me to be a part of the organizing committee. This message was for me already a guarantee that this new initiative is worth investing time and energy. I think that very few people could imagine that this new initiative would attract such a big number of contributors and participants. I tried to find a reason why so many Orthodox theologians joined this event as many explanations are possible. In my opinion, the main reason was the fact that Orthodox theologians wanted to express

their unity in this way, in a difficult time, when within Eastern Orthodoxy there is, perhaps, less unity than ever. Otherwise I cannot explain why so many Orthodox theologians from all over the world decided to come at the beginning of the year to Iasi, Romania, being ready to pay participation fees, meals and accommodation (which were quite high) and to confront winterly weather conditions.

The discrete but effective and enthusiastic work of the IOTA President, Dr. Paul L. Gavriiliuk and IOTA officers was highly appreciated. The host (Archdiocese of Iasi) did a great job! As one who attended conferences of similar size in all parts of the world, I can only state that IOTA Conference in Iasi was excellently organized. There was no moment during the conference in which I had the feeling that I was attending a conference taking place in Eastern Europe.

The program of the conference contained an inaugural keynote presentation done by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware. Organizers could not find a better personality for such a presentation. Participants enjoyed a speech which was an excellent combination of vivid and inspiring Orthodox theology, deep scholarly reflection, balanced church-political discourse and English humour. As any presentation of this kind, some affirmations of the outstanding Oxford scholar could (and should) be exposed to critique and reflection.

The general profile of the Orthodox participant in the IOTA Conference could be described as the following: he or she is young (under 50), was born in an Orthodox country or has a migration background, studied Orthodox theology in his/her native country and afterwards theology in a non-Orthodox academic institution and is active in a non-orthodox academic institution. It seems that this is the general profile of Orthodox theologian today who is able to articulate his/her theology at an international platform as IOTA. This new reality cannot remain without consequences both for the future of Orthodox theology, as well as for theology in general.

The above described profile of the IOTA Orthodox participant applies more precisely to Romanian Orthodox participants. After having a careful look at the IOTA program, I can affirm that at the IOTA conference organized in Romania, almost more Romanian Orthodox theologians who are active abroad participated than Romanian Orthodox theologians who are active in Romania. This fact says a lot about the actual situation of Romanian Orthodox theology. The absence of some prominent (and senior) representatives of Romanian Orthodox theology can be partly explained through the fact that some of them are unable or consider it a challenge to articulate their theology in English. Some others also do not consider the idea as something of real value, to be linked and eventually challenged and confronted with Orthodox theology at the global level.

As in any Orthodox conference of this kind, a significant number of non-Orthodox theologians attended IOTA and some of them presented papers. Looking

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at IOTA from this perspective, one can affirm that it had a good ecumenical profile. And a sign that there is a significant and constant number of theologians from all over the world belonging to other churches who are interested in Orthodoxy. Some of non-Orthodox participants attended IOTA also because they wanted to observe what happens in Orthodox theology and what are the tendencies and trends of World Orthodoxy. IOTA was in many ways the appropriate place to perceive all these.

I was displeased to see that just a few Oriental Orthodox attend IOTA Conference in Iasi. Or, in other words, I expected to see a more significant presence of our Oriental Orthodox brothers and sisters. I was also equally unhappy to see that just a few Orthodox bishops attended IOTA conference and contributed with papers. I do not want to speculate about this fact. I just wanted to point it out as part of the IOTA reality.

Part of the IOTA reality was also the many discussions which took place during coffee breaks and meals. The main subjects discussed were, as everyone may guess, the ecclesial situation in Ukraine and the latest developments in the Middle East.

The papers presented were of very different quality. I hope that the organizers will soon publish the proceedings of IOTA. In the session I had the honour to moderate (Session 34: Patristics Group) and in the sessions I attended, the papers presented were in general of high scholarly level. I was however more impressed of the questions and discussions which occurred after paper presentations. After the IOTA experience, I got another confirmation that there is a big need for more discussions, discernment and reflection between Orthodox theologians belonging to different Orthodox Churches and/or living and acting in different contexts. In spite of increasing contacts and networking within World Orthodoxy, one can still affirm that the Orthodox still live in a certain isolation.

As I expressed in an interview after the session I moderated, from now on, IOTA has the duty, or even the obligation to continue supporting this new generation of Orthodox theologians in their effort to translate Orthodoxy for today's world. A lot of hope and many expectations are connected with this project!

Daniel BUDA