

more biblical stance, as is the case with the baptismal or common priesthood “approaching one of the key doctrines of the Protestant Reformation: the priesthood of all believers” (346).

The book is also balanced in presenting a wider evangelical variety of views. This makes it a valuable resource for evangelicals of all persuasions. For example, in his treatment of baptism the author knowingly describes both the paedobaptist and the credobaptist view. While clearly not leaning toward an Arminian theology in his views of salvation, he does present the view accurately.

Nevertheless, the author meticulously goes over those points of divergence between Catholic and evangelical theology, offers a critique of the Catholic view and then explains evangelical belief, proving it from Scripture and even historical theology. For example, while noting that Catholic theology does not hold to a purely meritorious view of salvation, since there is no merit that can be deserved without the grace of God, he does show why even this “graced” view of merit is incongruous with the Scriptures’ sharp denial of works as a basis of salvation, even in this “grace/faith plus works” construct.

Overall, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice* is an encouraging and instructive book, refreshing in its rich theological polemic and solid biblical exegesis. From a literary aspect, it was easy to read and understand. The only thing that was not very clear is whether the first axiom of Catholic theology, “the nature-grace interdependence,” is an axiom that Catholic theologians themselves would acknowledge, or is more of an inference made by the author. Nevertheless, even if this is not as clear as one would like it to be, a reader will clearly see those two axioms stemming from the Catholic theological construct and likely remember and be aware of them while reading Catholic material or ministering to Catholics. This was also clearly the author’s intent, and it was achieved masterfully.

Miroslav Balint-Feudvarski

Damir Šićko Alić

**Katolička vjera u crkvenoj predaji (The Catholic Faith in Church Tradition)**

Obiteljska kršćanska knjižara, Zagreb, 2015, 210 pages.

In March 2015 a book called *Katolička vjera u crkvenoj predaji (Catholic Faith in Church Tradition)* by Damir Šićko Alić was published by “Obiteljska kršćanska knjižara” in Zagreb. As an author of eighteen books dealing with popular Christian subjects, this is the first time he enters the realm of church history, using primary sources as the basis for reconstruction of what he refers to as “the Catholic

faith” of the early Church. Focusing primarily on the pre-Nicean fathers and their writings, the author uses nineteen chapters to touch on just as many topics. In each of the chapters, the author leads us into an issue, then goes on to cite church fathers who spoke on the matter, and finally he offers his own interpretation and/or conclusion on the subject.

In chapter one, “The Catholic Faith Of Our Fathers,” the author defines the term “church fathers” and explains their significance in understanding the catholic faith, hoping that they will aid us in following their faith. In the second chapter, “The Church’s Treasure: Scriptures and Tradition,” the author points out that knowing Christ requires being familiar with both the Scriptures and tradition - two concepts which are not conflicted. In chapter three, “The Apostolic Legacy,” the author discusses a correct understanding of succession, emphasizing that there is a “succession of the message through the succession of people” (p. 25). However, since people are subjected to change, i.e., they are corruptible, and the message is immutable, because of everything that’s happened in church history, we can no longer refer to the existence of succession. Only the Scriptures have succession, and they are immutable. Chapter four, “The Church and the Scriptures,” deals with the question of the role of Scriptures in the life of the Church. Here, the author points out that whatever is not part of the Scriptures or church tradition cannot be considered as accurate. Continuing from the previous chapter in chapter five, “The Catholic Faith,” the author defines the term “catholic,” and points out that not everything that is called “catholic” is necessarily catholic. According to him, the catholic tradition includes everything that is universal, old, and agreed upon. From this follows that all theological and practical novelties and innovations cannot be part of the catholic faith. In chapter six, “Different Types Of Tradition,” the author points out that we need to talk about three kinds of traditions: apostolic tradition; human traditions which emerged during the apostles’ days but were not supported by the apostles; and the traditions which have been emerging since the first century until today, which may or may not be in accordance with the apostolic tradition. In chapter seven, “The Scriptures in Worship,” we learn about the place which the Scriptures had in church worship. In chapter eight, “Example from the Past,” the author uses the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13) to show that church history is filled with attempts to mix the good seed with the weeds, and shows how the first church dealt with the “weeds” in its own ranks. In chapter nine, “The Attitude Towards Ministers,” the author lists examples of false teachers and ministers who’ve attained their church positions in false ways, and demonstrates what God’s ministers should be like. In chapter ten, “The Message of Scriptures,” the author expounds on the foundational message of the Scriptures - the Gospel - emphasizing that nothing may be added to or taken from this message, while in chapter eleven, “The Only Reliable Teacher,”

the author points out that, as far as church fathers were concerned, Jesus was the only true and reliable teacher. In chapter twelve, "Salvation and the Afterlife," the author demonstrates how the church fathers believed in the security of salvation now, that salvation can be lost, and that after death a person goes either to hell or heaven. Thus, the idea of a purgatory does not exist. Chapter thirteen, "How to Recognize Heresy," offers guidelines on how church fathers were able to recognize different heresies. The author points out that the greatest danger did not come from heresies which differed drastically from Christianity, but from those which were just slightly different from it, i.e., which contained a combination of truth and lie. This subject serves as basis for chapters fourteen ("Idolatry And Tradition") and fifteen ("Prayer In The Early Church"), where the author points out how worshipping statues and idols is actually about worshipping demons, while praying to Mary or the saints was opposed to the Scriptures and church fathers' tradition. In chapter sixteen, "Signs and Wonders," the author shows that the gifts of the Spirit, signs, and wonders didn't stop after the apostles died, but remain available to believers today. In chapter seventeen, "No New Things," the author points out how it was the heretics who kept emphasizing new and different things which were completely their own (pp. 174-75), while the church fathers kept calling for going back to the "old," that is, the source which is comprised of apostolic teaching and the Holy Scriptures. Chapters eighteen ("Structure and Authority") and nineteen ("Inside the Dioceses and Metropolises") deal with the issue of church structure. Here, the author shows the relationship between churches and explains how the idea of Roman primacy has no foundation in church tradition. In the same way, when it comes to dioceses and metropolises, the author describes the attitude believers had towards church ministers, as well as disciplining bad ministers. In the afterword, the author summarizes some of his own claims that were stated in the book, and calls on the readers to make room for God's mercy in their hearts.

When it comes to the contents, as is emphasized in the book itself, the book was written in a simple manner, as it was intended for the widest audiences, offering helpful insight into various topics with which the church fathers were dealing. Methodologically speaking, this kind of thematic summary of the writings of the church fathers is helpful because it offers a simple insight into various subjects, whereas quoting large amounts of text without a wider context and a lengthy discussion can always open a possibility of interpreting outside of context. However, those are both the strong points and weaknesses of this approach. The author cites church fathers' writings, offers a brief interpretation, and draws a conclusion without mentioning any opposing views or debating them. That's why it's important to view this book as an *introduction* to the writings and theology of church fathers. There are also some flaws in the book, the most notable

one being an incomplete bibliography at the end. Also, in chapter eight, when the author talks about the weeds in the field, he draws the erroneous conclusion that the field is referring to the Church. The entire argument following from this assumption is flawed as well, because in Matthew 13:38 Jesus clearly says that the field represents the world, not the Church. Jesus is not talking about hostile activities inside the Church, but in the world.

Although the author does not discuss or debate opposing views, there's no doubt that this book will cause a lot of surprise, questions, raised eyebrows, and fierce reactions due to the very subject it is covering. First of all, the author belongs to the Charismatic part of Reformation heritage churches which are, in their very nature, the least interested in church history and have a strong tendency towards sectarianism. The very fact that someone like him would decide to deal with this sort of subject is a pleasant surprise and can be an encouragement for others to do the same. Secondly, the author belongs to the part of the Christian corpus which is very emphatic about the "new" this or "new" that, so it's nice to read how the author himself proposes discovering that which is old, catholic, and in accordance with Scriptures and apostolic tradition. Maybe the strongest part of the book can be found on page 105 where the author mentions what is, in my opinion, the key problem in the Church, especially when it comes to Reformation heritage churches: "All of the new teachings and practices kept bringing in confusion and dissension in Church. People who lacked knowledge were easily seduced. That's why throughout history until today there have been those who've been challenging the emerging novelties. They challenge the novelties and attempt to return to the apostleship principle instead. They are afraid of adding to or taking away from what the apostles handed down." Dissensions are a consequence of "new revelations" and "novelties" in theology and practice, and are not caused by those who challenge them. In the same way, it's obvious that those with insufficient *knowledge* can be easily seduced, and in several places (pp. 45 and 47) the author uses the positive example of diligence in exploring what the elders had said. Thirdly, this book is a sort of "battle for the legacy." In other words, the question is: who gets to inherit the true and uncorrupted tradition of Jesus? During the Reformation, we had a situation in which Protestant Matija Vlačić Ilirik used tradition and history in his attempts to prove that the Roman Catholic Church stepped away from Scriptural authority, while the Roman Catholic Petar Kanizije attempted to refute Vlačić's writings using the Scripture, pointing out how the Roman Catholic theology and practice do, in fact, have a Scriptural foundation. Šićko is most certainly not Vlačić, but the principle is the same: using history as evidence, as opposed to Scriptures, the author wishes to point out how the heritage is found neither in the Catholic nor Orthodox churches. However, the author also deals with the happenings in Protestant churches, when he speaks against

the teaching that it's impossible to lose your salvation, and when he criticizes the teaching which says that the gifts of the Spirit, signs, and wonders ceased with the death of the apostles. For this and many other reasons, this book will no doubt cause reactions and open the doors for some new questions, thus encouraging further debates.

And a final thought with which I wish to conclude this review: Damir Šićko Alić has raised the bar very high, both for himself and for others. The question is, are we willing to jump this high?

Ervin Budiselić

Robert F. Rea

### **Why Church History Matters: An Invitation to Love and Learn from Our Past**

IVP, Downers Grove, 2014, pp. 231.

In today's discussion about history one proverb of the famous Roman orator Cicerone is often mentioned: "Historia magistra Vitae est," i.e. "history is the teacher of life." That proverb suggests that by studying history we can obtain important lessons that can give us wisdom for the present and the future. However, this proverb represents only a small part of what this famous classical statesman, philosopher and orator Cicerone said about history in his work *De Oratore*. Cicerone's view of history also points out that history is "vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur," that is, "the evidence of time, the light of truth, the life of memory, the directress of life, the herald of antiquity, committed to immortality".

This antique elevation of the history on the highest level of immortality for Jews was not anything new. History in the Hebrew Bible and tradition was a proof of authenticity (*vita memoriae*) for establishing and preserving the covenant between God and the Israelites, as well as in their chronology, starting from Abraham and through the kings and prophets, whose task it was to remind Israelites of their past, to warn and admonish people in the present, and to comfort people by proclaiming the hope that would come in the future through the coming of the Messiah.

The Christian church, which originated from Judaism, inherited, preserved and integrated this classical Roman understanding of history. The world at large has also accepted as a part of their legacy a Christian division of time into two major epochs: prior to and after Christ. Church splits, which occurred first in