

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

1054 after the Great schism, and especially after the Reformation in the 16th century, not only questioned the issue of authority but also raised the question about the historicity of a particular church or movement. Reformers exerted great effort to show their rootedness in church history, and a particular contribution in our European context came from the great Croatian reformer Matthias Flacius Illyricus (*Catalogus testium veritatis*).

Movements which occurred after the Reformation sometimes questioned the importance of tradition and historicity. This is particularly observable in the Evangelical movement of the 20th century, when some groups put aside, or even totally rejected, the issue of the historicity of the church as unnecessary, or even as “unspiritual” ballast. Boris Havel is addressing this problem in an excellent analysis from an Evangelical perspective in a Croatian context in his article, “Povijest u Bibliji, tradicionalnom kršćanstvu i karizmatsko-pentekostalnim zajednicama.” However, a renewed interest in church history among Evangelical churches and believers came as a result of the many ambiguities in the area of ecclesiology, the understanding of authority and practical spirituality, to which postmodern theology and churches which follow a current marketing-consumer pattern cannot provide satisfactory answers.

These facts and challenges motivated American professor of history Robert F. Rea to write *Why Church History Matters*. According to the author, the book itself was written as “an invitation to love and learn from our past.” Rea has divided his book in three parts. The first part, “How We Understand Tradition”, explains basic terminology—such as tradition, its definition, necessity and dangers. For Rea tradition is the art of passing on the Gospel throughout the centuries of church history in various social circumstances and in the encounter with many parallel teachings, namely heresies. Tradition is a kind of container or reservoir of historical events—councils, theologians and preachers, many of whom had very significant roles in rerouting the direction for many Christian churches and in the creation of their theological identities. Often average believers take identity for granted without any knowledge that behind today’s confessions stand many prayers, apologetic battles, diplomacy and much shed blood throughout the history of the Christian church.

In the second part of the book, “Expanding Circles of Inquiry,” Rea refers to all these actors of church history as “a great cloud of witnesses,” quoting the epistle of Hebrews. These witnesses played key roles in formative phases of church tradition, one example being the handling of the Arian controversy in the 4th century when confession in Jesus’ divinity was defined. This key part of tradition is particularly useful to modern believers when they are faced with modern arianistic teaching, such as that of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, whom we encounter on the doorstep of our homes or in our streets. Equally important have been Bible translations in many different languages. In the second part of the book Rea calls

these actors our “mentors and friends.”

Based on what is said we can conclude that, for avoiding some of these old heresies which are wrapped in a cellophane of modernity, one must be acquainted with historical theology. However, historical theology is important for many practical things, from the issue of church organization and church-state relations to the most personal questions, such as raising children. By ignoring church tradition we expose ourselves to many perils, which can have fatal consequences. But to seek advice from this “great cloud of witnesses” is prudent and offers protection from many problems.

In the third part of the book, “Tradition Serving the Church,” Rea emphasizes the exegetical application of tradition. He starts this part of the book with a seemingly naïve question, “why would we spend time studying Christian history when we could be investing in Bible study and serving others in ministry?” In order to support the thesis present in the title of his book, Rea leads us chronologically through some important areas and people of church history. In this part of the book a reader should be prepared for a polemical reading, something that is necessary in the face of simplistic explanations, especially in discussions about the confronting and application of certain traditions in the face of many modern challenges. Rea states examples of how tradition can be useful in many areas of Christian ministry: in preaching, spirituality, worship, mission, ethics and charity, church unity and social activity. Rea ends this book by recommending resources for further study of church history and ministry.

Written in simple language, the book aims at a wide circle of readers, from church leaders to students and “average” believers, but it is noticeable that the author particularly wants to address so-called “Bible focused Christians,” that is, Christians who are primarily or solely focused on the Bible as the source where one can find all answers. These Christians are mainly modern Evangelical Christians, and many of them are members of so-called “free” and/or charismatic churches, which are experiencing tremendous growth around the world. Although the book deals with a delicate topic, it is not written in a critical but considerate tone, almost mentoring, so that those who are experts in church history may not gain any new information, but they will receive useful support for the promotion of the relevancy of church history.

It is a paradox that for an average Croatian reader the importance of church tradition is not in question (for example, Dalmatia is full of early Christian heritage), while this is not the case with Croatian believers from Evangelical (“Bible focused”) churches, who often do not know their own church tradition. Not only tradition that is far away, but also near one, which is aloof only few decades. Hence, this book is recommended as a motivation for (Evangelical) Christians to learn of the rich heritage of Christian (church) history in order to be educated

and inspired for ministry in the present. Robert F. Rea has prepared for us a small appetizer which invites us to the table to enjoy a feast with many other prominent Christians—sages, theologians and ministers—and to taste selected dishes of Ancient, Medieval, Reformation, and all the way to modern theological deserts, prepared by our elderly brothers and mentors such as Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and their works.

Vatroslav Župančić

Zrinka Blažević, Stanko Jambrek and Nataša Štefanec (eds.)

The Reformation in the Croatian Historical Lands:

Research Results, Challenges, Perspectives

Biblijski institut in Zagreb; Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb; and the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, 300 pages.

The book, *The Reformation in the Croatian Historical Lands: Research Results, Challenges, Perspectives*, published in the spring of this year, was edited by Zrinka Blažević, Stanko Jambrek, and Nataša Štefanec. The publishers of the book are Biblijski institut in Zagreb, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, and the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek. The book is 300 pages long.

The book is a collection of scientific studies, in the English language, that came about as a result of the international scientific gathering called, “The Reformation in the Croatian Historical Lands: Research Results, Challenges, Perspectives,” which was held in 2013 in Zagreb. A total of 16 authors, historians, and theologians wrote original scientific works regarding the Reformation in Croatia and neighboring countries.

After the editors’ introduction, which is entitled, “The Studies Of The Reformation In The Croatian Context: Possibilities And Prospects,” follow five chapters: “The Reformation In Croatian Historical Areas As An Exploratory Challenge;” “The Reformation Of Ideas;” “(Counter)Reformation;” “The Reformation In Bordering Areas;” and “The Culture Reformation.” Every chapter contains the works of several authors. Finally, there is “Notes About the Authors,” and a phrase index.

Reformation tradition is a part of the Croatian spiritual tradition, which has existed in a predominantly Catholic surrounding for centuries. As a minority, spiritual tradition has generally not been sufficiently explored, especially in terms of interdisciplinary and comparative studies. The reason why the convention was held and this book was published, is the celebration of the 450th anniversary of