Book Reviews

Christoph Klein, *Kirche mit anderen. Bemühung um die Ökumene in Rumänien, (Kirche – Konfession – Religion Band 63)*, V&R Unipress, Göttingen, 2014, 227 p.

Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai*

Christoph Klein (b. 1937) was Bishop of the Evangelical Church A.C. of Romania from 1990 to 2010 and is currently Associate Professor Emeritus of Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

Dedicated by the author to “women and men who strove for ecumenism in Romania”, this book is the result of a life in the service of ecumenical dialogue. It is an experience which, the author confesses, began when he was a student at the Institute of Protestant Theology in Cluj (Romania) where Hungarian, Reformed, Unitarian and Lutheran people (p. 13) were studying. Over time, this experience enriched his life: Christoph Klein became a pastor, professor of theology and then Lutheran bishop in Sibiu. He simultaneously participated in the “Faith and Order” and “Mission and Evangelization” committees, and, from 1998 to 2006, he was a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. To that can be added his participation in the bilateral dialogue between the LWF (Lutheran World Federation) and the Orthodox Churches.

If Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of a “Church for others” (“Kirche für andere”), Christoph Klein speaks of a “church with others” (“Kirche mit anderen”). In fact, this phrase is very appropriate, given the socio-historical context in which the author lived. The introductory chapter (p. 19-31), which is dedicated to the religious situation in Romania states that many other religions coexist here alongside the dominant Orthodox denomination: Greek Catholics (Uniates), Roman Catholics, Protestants, Unitarians, Baptists, Lutherans (Hungarian and German) etc.

Structurally, the book consists of three main sections: the first one dedicated to ecumenical theology (p. 31-122); the second to a “lived ecumenism” (p. 123-184); and the final one to some of the leading figures of ecumenism (p. 185-220).

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Part one brings together papers presented by the author at various ecumenical gatherings in which he took part both in Romania and abroad. These papers discuss theological issues such as: the unity of the Church, ecclesial conciliation, confession, and prayer, the relationship between the East and the Christian West, the relationship between Church and State (nation) and the central role of Jesus Christ in unity. These issues are important for strengthening the ecumenical dialogue. The approach is irenic, although the Lutheran tradition perspective is, obviously, present.

Unlike the first part, the second addresses issues related to “practical ecumenism”. At the heart of this section are three presentations dedicated to a very important time in the cultural and religious life of Sibiu. In 2007 the city was chosen not only as the “European Capital of Culture” but also as the “European Ecumenical Capital”. These designations occurred alongside the Third European Ecumenical Assembly which was held there (see p. 161-174).

The third part of the book discusses some “oekumené” figures and events of a religious and ecumenical nature. From the list of Church theologians described here, figures from different denominations such as Otto Nutz, Pope John Paul II, Dumitru Stăniloae, Ion Bria or Dieter Brandes are featured. Among the events described here is the celebration of 120 years since the declaration of the Romanian Orthodox Church autocephaly, the 80 years since its declaration as patriarchy, the Lutheran decade for the Reformation Jubilee, etc.

This volume includes the author’s 50 years of ecumenical experience in the Transylvanian context. It is a volume that reflects this experience both during the Communist regime in Romania, when these interfaith relations did not cease to exist, and in the post-Communist period after 1990. In fact, Transylvania has a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic tradition. The greatest merit of the book is that it manages to reveal this fact conclusively. The relevance of this work is very important in the current global context, when some parts of the world are affected by violent ethnic and religious conflicts. Paraphrasing a famous statement of André Malraux, Christoph Klein himself pointed out in a speech delivered in 2001 that “The new century will be ecumenical or it will not be at all”. This sentence ends the book, and opens new horizons for how to do theology today: in an open tolerant spirit of love, as in a “church with others”...