

CLIO AT THE LORD'S SERVICE: HISTORICAL APPROACH IN MODERN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

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Abstract

The article is related to the problem of method in theology. The author introduces Fr Nicholas Afanasiev's draft classification of theologians into "dogmatic theologians" and "historians" and accepts the basic correctness of the classification. The main thesis of the article is that the essence of the historicist approach in theology is creative learning from the past. The two currents of Orthodox theological thought which followed the method that may be called historical are presented. These are, on the one hand, neopatristic synthesis of Father George Florovsky and, on the other hand, eucharistic theology of Fathers Nicholas Afanasiev and Alexander Schmemmann. The article considers the attempt of eucharistic theology to learn from the past more successful. The two theological currents have not exhausted their opportunities. If they follow the path of creative learning from history, each of them is capable of further development.

Key words: Nicholas Afanasiev, Georges Florovsky, Alexander Schmemmann, neopatristic synthesis, eucharistic ecclesiology, theological method, historicist approach

1. "Dogmatic Theologians" and "Historians"

Doing theology is impossible without a method. You can be aware of your method or do theological work intuitively by following a pattern and not realizing that you have a method – as Molière's Monsieur Jourdain did not realize he was speaking prose – and what your method is, but you cannot avoid having it. Theologians reflect on their methods rarely. This article is a piece of such reflection and discusses those currents of modern Orthodox theology which have been following the method I call historical.

Corresponding in the 1960^s with the Catholic theologian Bernhard Schultze, Fr Nicholas Afanasiev conventionally divided theologians into "dogmatic theologians" and "historians". He