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TO THE READER



THÉOLOGIE HISTORIQUE

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PASCHA NOSTRUM
CHRISTUS

Essays in Honour of Raniero Cantalamessa
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BEAUCHESNE

Pagination : 360 p. [5 p.]

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ISBN numérique : 978 2 7010 3014 2

TO THE READER

It is not easy to find the right words to present a rich and complex personality and an absolutely original academic and religious experience such as that of the Franciscan Capuchin Catholic Priest Father Raniero Cantalamessa, beyond his strictly biographical profile.

He was born on July 22, 1934 in Ascoli Piceno (Italy). Ordained priest in 1958, he earned a PhD in Theology from the University of Freiburg Switzerland, where in 1962 he published his dissertation on Tertullian's Christology in the series « Paradosis » edited by Othmar Perler. In 1966 he became Doctor in classics at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan where in 1967 he published his dissertation on Pseudo-Hippolytus' homily *In Sanctum Pascha*.

At a very young age he held the first Chair of Early Christian Studies in Italy, from 1970 to 1979, and was the first Director of the Department of Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Milan. Among his many achievements, he founded and directed the series « Studia Patristica Mediolanensia » with Giuseppe Lazzati, former Professor of Ancient Christian Literature, and President of the Catholic University, and dedicated much of his time and energy to training and preparing young scholars taking their first steps, for the study of Christian antiquity and launching them on the path of historic research.

Member of the International Theological Commission (1975-1981), and for twelve years Member of the Catholic Delegation for the dialogue with the Pentecostal Churches, in 1979 Father Cantalamessa resigned his teaching position and in 1980 he was appointed by Pope John Paul II Preacher to the Papal Household. In that capacity he continued right up to the present day, preaching every year weekly sermons in Advent and Lent in the presence of the Pope, the cardinals, bishops and prelates

of the Roman Curia, and the general superiors of the religious orders. He was also frequently invited to speak throughout the world, both to Catholic and Protestant audiences. He received an honorary degree in Law from Notre Dame University (Indiana), in Sciences of Communication from the University of Macerata (Italy) and in Theology from the Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio).

This *Festschrift* is far removed from the accustomed academic practice, in the sense that it does not contain a collection of articles by former colleagues and students celebrating the academic legacy of their Master at the end of a normal academic career, that is at the moment of retirement and withdrawal from university life. In other words, it is not, or not simply, a laudatory volume. Cantalamessa's rather singular intellectual and existential experience, first as an eminent scholar and then as a man of religion called for other and more demanding tasks, suggested a different treatment of the issue. The volume has in fact been conceived as a gift to be offered in admiration and gratitude for the contribution he made from his youth to the study of Christian antiquity, by means of his numerous highly qualified scholarly publications, which were the result of intense and impassioned historic and philological research on the most varied aspects and problems of the first centuries of Christianity.

His scientific curiosity and philological scrupulousness never faltered in the face of difficult texts and problems ranging from patristic theology to the history of liturgy, from ancient philosophy to biblical exegesis and ecclesiastical history. His erudite studies profoundly nourished his biblical and patristic spirituality, leaving notable traces in his imposing literary production on strictly theological themes. Actually, in addition to his early academic publications, he also wrote numerous books on spirituality, fruit of his preaching to the Papal Household, which were translated in more than twenty languages. His works have exerted great influence even at an international level and are still valid today, characterised as they are by tact, lucidity and perspicacity, and above all by his rare sense of balance in such delicate and highly controversial matters.

The title of this miscellany is taken from a well-known passage of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians (5,7) : « Get rid of the old yeast in order that you may be a new batch of dough, inasmuch as you are without yeast because *Christ, our passover lamb*, has been sacrificed. » On the one hand, this text clearly indicates the two main themes around which Cantalamessa's historical research was organised, that is, Christology and Easter in the Ancient Church. On the other hand, it aims to give an overall view of the contents of the volume which includes contributions written with great generosity by leading scholars of the most varied cultural and religious orientations. Here the reader will in fact

find a broad array of insights on various issues of ecclesiastical and liturgical history, biblical exegesis and patristic theology. The essays combine traditional scholarship with new approaches, thus reflecting the current dynamics of the field, always with special attention to Christology and the ancient Christian interpretations of the Paschal mystery.

To all the contributors go our unconditional thanks for having offered their fresh and stimulating discussions on various writers, texts and themes, thus making possible the production of an articulated and multifaceted volume, the richness and usefulness of which will hopefully be duly appreciated by scholars and students working in our common field of research.

We cannot end this introductory note without expressing our special thanks to Mr. J.-E. Mittelmann of the publishing house Beauchesne, who encouraged and supported the project without reserve right from the start, sparing no effort to ensure its best possible realization.

And now we leave you to your reading, in the hope that the honoree Father Cantalamessa can continue his profitable activity for many years to come, surrounded by the esteem and friendly affection of all those who have had the fortune to know him personally, to hear him speak or to read his writings.

Pier Franco BEATRICE and Bernard POUDERON