



ISSN: 0860-9411

eISSN: 2719-3586

**Marcela Andoková, Čierna som a predsa krásna. Tyconiov výklad
Piesne piesní 1, 5 (I am Black Yet Beautiful. Tyconius's Interpretation
of Song 1:5), Iris, Bratislava 2020, pp. 226**

Ks. Marcin Wysocki, KUL – Lublin

In spite of the enormous potential for patristic research in Central and Eastern Europe, it is regrettable that the publications of scholars from this region rarely find their way into wider international audience, especially if they have been written in one of the national languages. It is therefore all the more important to promote valuable publications written by the young scholars from this part of the world and dedicated to the lesser-known authors, and Tyconius is certainly one of them.

The Slovak classical philologist and patristic scholar Marcela Andoková (born 1976 and currently working at the Comenius University in Bratislava) has been researching for many years in the field of Early Christian and patristic literature. Her primary focus is in the homiletic and exegetical works of Saint Augustine of Hippo to whom she dedicated also her first monograph *The Art of Rhetoric in Augustine's Psalms of Degrees* written in the Slovak language as well. In the presented book entitled *I am Black Yet Beautiful* Andoková turns her attention to one of Augustine's African predecessors, the Donatist lay theologian Tyconius whose seven mystic rules (*regulae mysticae*) of the biblical interpretation are resumed in the third book of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*.

Tyconius's *Liber regularum* is considered the oldest manual of biblical hermeneutics written by a Christian theologian in the Latin West. But until recently, its author has been mostly seen as a kind of enigmatic intellectual of the Donatist church and for centuries, his hermeneutical writing *Liber regularum* remained in the shadow of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. And yet, today an increasing number of experts underscore the importance of examining Tyconius's text as a primary source, independent of how it

was presented by his younger peer, Augustine, as it is pointed out in various parts of Andoková's monograph. The aim of her book was so to introduce this treatise by Tyconius to the Slovak academic community, mainly from the viewpoint of his understanding of the church based on his interpretation of the biblical verse of *Song* 1:5.

Three aspects of Tyconius's exegetical theory in particular make it an original contribution to Christian hermeneutics. Firstly, it is his ecclesiological conception of a spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures which reveals hidden meanings in biblical texts. These are the means used by the Holy Spirit to address specific Christian communities at specific times. Related is also Tyconius's theory of seven mystic rules, rooted in the very nature of divine Scriptures, as well as his theology built on a pneumatological basis. As it becomes clear from Andoková's analysis, Tyconius directs his reader's attention mainly to the manner, in which the Spirit reveals the nature and direction of the church through the Scriptures and so as a theologian and an exegete, he contributes to the discussion of the mysterious presence of evil in the church and the world itself.

Andoková's monograph is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter entitled "Book of Rules or the work of underestimated genius", Tyconius's personality and oeuvre are analyzed against the background of the Donatist church of which he was a member. The main emphasis is placed on the book *Liber regularum* itself. She examines it in the context of Tyconius's entire work and attempts to map the composition of seven rules as presented in his book. Its classical composition does not contradict either linear or concentric structures that can be both observed in this writing, as explained by Andoková (p. 32-37). Moreover, in this chapter she describes the way Tyconius interprets the Scriptures by means of seven mystic rules. He would never invent them as a subjective method of interpretation since their origin lies in the initiative of the Holy Spirit as the divine author of the Scriptures. The interpreter understands and uncovers these rules thanks to relevant hermeneutical tools, one of which is also Tyconius's *libellus regularis*.

These tools are basically terms borrowed from the traditional curriculum of rhetoric to which topic Andoková dedicated Chapter 2 of her book. Even despite a certain distance from the rules of profane eloquence, in the writing of his hermeneutical work Tyconius seems devoted to the long tradition of ancient rhetoric. The author's two-fold interest, theological as well as exegetical, justify the use of rhetoric in this work. The seven mystic rules are characteristic solely of the Bible and constitute a part of the

grammar acquired by the Spirit which reveals the divine truth in the Bible; or expressed in the words of Quintilian, these *Rules* are a form of sevenfold *ratio* or *regula loquendi*, inherent exclusively to the biblical message. Their closeness to Quintilian's term *regula* lies in their objectivity. On the other hand, a thorough analysis has shown that there is practically no literary dependence or similarity between the works of Quintilian and Tyconius's *Book of Rules*. Although the African theologian did borrow some key rhetorical terms from Quintilian, he often combines them with his own content.

The third and, at the same time, central chapter of the monograph, focuses on Tyconius's understanding of the bipartite nature (*corpus bipertitum*) of the church based on his interpretation of *Song* 1:5. The analysis of this topic, however, is preceded by introductory parts pointing to the importance and role the book of Song of Songs plays in the biblical canon and in the early Christian tradition with particular emphasis on the patristic interpretation of *Song* 1:5. Furthermore, Andoková highlights that it is his doctrine of the bipartite body of the Lord that probably inspired the bishop Augustine for further elaboration and deepening of this topic in his conception of the mixed church (*ecclesia permixta*). The consequences of Tyconius's and later of Augustine's biblical hermeneutics influenced the teaching of the church during the subsequent centuries of Christianity.

The influence of Tyconius on Augustine's homiletic oeuvre between 400-411 is also examined in Chapter 4 of the monograph. The bishop of Hippo, among other readers, referred to this Tyconius's work when selecting biblical citations and arguments in the time of his polemic with the Donatists. However, many scholars even today are surprised to see how reluctant he had been to use the work of this Donatist colleague, especially in the beginning of his episcopal career. He may have been disappointed by the fact that Tyconius remained a Donatist even after his excommunication from Donatus's party. Nevertheless, his was not a case of certain inconsistency of behaviour. Andoková presumes that it was probably easier for him to surrender to the suffering of persecution rather than accept that the Catholics, whose standpoint he advocated were so severe in their persecution of their brothers in faith. He believed that the church had two parts, one that is good and another, which is evil, and so just like wheat and chaff grow together until the harvest, identically, in his eyes, it probably would not have made sense to leave Donatus's party and join the Catholics. In his opinion, it was, instead, necessary to patiently tolerate bad Christians, whichever

side one was on, since God's mercy also gives time for penitence to everyone until the end.

By incorporating Tyconius's hermeneutical manual *Liber regularum* into his unfinished work *De doctrina christiana* the bishop of Hippo, more than anyone else, helped to preserve Tyconius's text itself as well as his memory for future generations, although the later reception of the *Liber regularum* was greatly influenced by a certain measure of liberty with which Augustine approached it. The final chapters of Book III of *De doctrina christiana* reveal that the bishop of Hippo left out some of the passages when summarizing Tyconius's work and instead, used his own examples, which he considered as more easily comprehensible when explaining Tyconius's rules. In several places he did not have problem to add his criticism of specific aspects of *Liber regularum* when he thought it important in terms of contemporary Christian orthodoxy. But the space he devoted to it together with his recommendation to students of the Scriptures reflect clearly that by including this treatise into his own exegetical work of key importance, Augustine wished to settle some of the debt he felt he owed to his senior Donatist colleague.

Since the North African hermeneutic tradition that culminates in Tyconius's *Liber regularum* is at least in Central European cultural milieu still a kind of *terra incognita*, the monograph of Marcela Andoková can be considered really beneficial for the history of Roman literature in the period of the late Roman Empire. At least partially it fills the *lacuna* when it comes to Latin literary heritage in North Africa of the first centuries of our era. The monograph is written carefully in terms of both its form and content. In addition, it is presented in a legibly language even though the treated topic is not at all simple. Thus the publication certainly has the potential to engage and educate anyone who will not be discouraged by the complexity of Tyconius's thoughts and discussed topics.

Finally, as Andoková states, by his position of a man standing at the threshold and hesitating about joining the Catholic Church, Tyconius becomes a precursor of many people living today, people who are familiar with the Gospels and approve of Christ's teachings and yet, they are unable to come to terms with the church being black and beautiful at the same time, as well as with the fact that at this time, only the head is perfect on the body of Christ's church, the head being Christ himself (p. 177).