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Orthodox Dogmatics and Relevance of Re-Discovering the Holy Fathers in the Romanian Theology of the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

The present study highlights the theological, cultural and social context of the interwar period in Romania. In this respect we will emphasize the influences of the Western theology in the structure of Orthodox theology and the awareness of the Romanian theologians about the importance of the Holy Fathers in the renewal of theology. At the same time, this study highlights the relevance of Orthodox theology for interwar culture and society, as well as three decisive achievements for the renewal of Orthodox Theology and Dogmatics in Romania: a) rediscovering Mystics; b) rediscovering Palamite theology; c) the translation of Philokalia and the awareness of its importance for the Orthodox Dogmatics. Father Dumitru Stăniloae's intuitions on patristic theology and Palamite theology in particular in the first half of the 20th century represent a turning point for the dynamics and renewal of the Romanian Orthodox theology, a stage when it has begun to decisively eliminate the influences of Western theology - not only in a declarative way.

Keywords:

Holy Fathers, renewal of theology, Dogmatics Theology in Romania, influences of Western theology

I. The lights and influences of the West

In the 19th century, the Romanian Orthodox theology inspired, in particular, from the translations of the Western theologians writings, from the “lights” of the West, amid the spread of the Enlightenment ideas and the influences that gradually became intensified in the Orthodox theology after the fall of Constantinople (1453). These writings of the Western theologians constituted a significant source for Romanian theology, especially in the argumentation and proving of the revealed and supernatural character of Christianity in the context of the secularizing challenges of modernity. This dependence on the ideas and translations of the Western writings manifested not only in the 19th century, but also in the first half of the 20th century, though the importance of developing an Orthodox theology stripped of the Western influences was more and more obvious. The influence of Western theology in Orthodox theology was accomplished by the Orthodox theologians’ affiliation to a method and to theological structures detached from the life, experience and spirituality of the Church. The translations or works of Catholic and even Protestant theologians occupied a large part of the Orthodox theology journals, especially in terms of the apologetic dimension of theology, in direct confrontation with the philosophical and scientific conceptions of modernity the West created.

“The Orthodox doctrine is not clearly and systematically crystallized in a large-scale work that is accessible to the general public. Apart from a few school textbooks, official catechisms and sloppy translations, the Romanian theological literature does not know the work of synthesis of Orthodoxy, the defining work which serves as a source of inspiration, a source of argumentation and which constitutes the axis of the Orthodox thinking and life”¹.

The Orthodox Dogmatics in Romanian Theology in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century traversed a sinuous itinerary from the use in teaching of *Mărturisirea de credință* by Petru Movilă or *Dogmatics* of St. John of Damascus, to the translations of the Dogmatics elaborated

¹ I CONSTANTINESCU-BOTOȘANI, “*Recenzie la Nicolae Arseniev, Biserica Răsăriteană*, trad. Tit Simedrea, Cartea Românească, București, 1927, 137 pp.”, in: *Raze de Lumină*, II (1930) 1, p. 49.

by the Russian and Greek theologians, and hence the elaboration of the Dogmatics textbooks by theologians such as the bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu (1823-1892), Alexiu Comoroșan (1842-1881), Iosif I. Olariu (1859-1920), Ioan Irineu Mihălcescu (1874-1948), textbooks bearing the imprint of Russian and Greek theology and implicitly of the West. If in the nineteenth century Orthodox Dogmatics was searching for models, being tributary to the translations of Russian theologians - Macarius Bulgakov, Sylvester of Caneva - in the first half of the twentieth century, we find the transition from the “fashion” of translations to the elaboration of our own textbooks and works of Dogmatic Theology, as well as the gradual delimitation of the Western method and models.

II. The awareness of the Holy Fathers' importance

The lack of patristic literature from the preoccupations of the Romanian Orthodox theology and of the Romanian Orthodoxy in general, in the assertion of its own identity, in the context of confessionalism and invasion of the sects, and the use of the same Western “arms”, paradoxical against the West, became an embarrassing and barren fact. Patristic writings were missing at home in Orthodoxy, where they had to be primarily. Although the presentation of the Fathers is done through the “lens” of Western theology, and of patristic treaties written in the West by Joseph Nirschl (1823-1904), *Lehrbuch der Patrologie und Patristik* (3 vol. Mainz, 1881-1885) and Bertram Otto Bardenhewer (1851-1935), *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur* (5 vol., Freiburg in Breisgau 1902-1932), it is remarkable that the Romanian theologians and parish priests have noticed the opportunity of translating and studying patristic works. The opportunity of rediscovering patristic works was supported not only by their richness and by their diversified message, by the poverty of Romanian Orthodox literature, or by the legitimacy of the Orthodox Church upon them. It was also supported by the context that the Romanian Orthodox Church crossed in her confrontation with atheism, indifference and free thinking of more and more people of culture. They understood that “a proper Church literature - healthy and rich - can only be produced on the basis of patristic inheritance”. There was a consciousness that it contains

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“not only a rich treasure of knowledge, but also an armoury completely endowed with the most effective spiritual weapons which were victorious against ancient paganism – multi-millennial and believed invincible - if we finally recognize a certain resemblance between this ancient paganism and today’s paganism fuelled by modern science, largely emancipated by religious belief - and even hostile to it - and by atheist communism, and against which we must arm ourselves more with spiritual weapons, once proven as a winner”².

The Romanian Orthodox Theology as a whole was invited to a deep reflection on the importance of the patristic writings, which were translated somewhat in Romanian but had not been fully valorised, as the sources of Romanian Orthodox theology were mainly the Western or Russian and Greek theological ones.

“It is not a secret for anyone that we the Romanians are missing many works from the field of Church literature. We are still missing both the original writings - many - and especially, for a start, the translations of the great works of ancient Christian literature. We still have many and great gaps in it. Others have taken us long before. Not to mention the Papist Church, which has the works of the Holy Fathers, translated several times and accompanied by significant comments; but even the Protestants - who reject tradition - have translated and researched enormously from this literature of the Church’s golden age. This comes as a harsh reproof for us, who base our teaching and Church practice on this treasure of the Holy Fathers, who fixed for good the Orthodox doctrine as interpretation and sense through deep science and religious inspiration. Moreover, it is from this thesaurus that we Romanians have translated so little that in order to count - the important works - you almost do not need the fingers of both hands. If, for some religious matters, we address - especially after the war - the sources in the West, today perhaps

² Pr. M. PĂSLARU, *Valoarea scrierilor patristice și folosul ce rezultă din studiul și lectura lor*; Tiparul Tipografiei Cozia, Râmnicu Vâlcea, 1933, pp. 50-51.

more than ever we understood the absolute need to know the old patristic literature”³.

There was a lack of a profound and far-reaching theology expressing the identity of Orthodoxy, for which the Romanian theology made a strong appeal - besides the Western sources - to the translations of the Russian and Greek theologians. This consciousness of the lack of own theological literature, of synthesis and theological works as the fruit of a penetrating and original vision of the destiny of Orthodoxy and its spiritual and historical role, generated an intellectual emulation in Orthodox theology schools to fill these gaps. The interwar period in Romania gradually became theologically fertile, but only some of the theologians succeeded, avoiding the arid methodology of the West, to sense the path of Orthodoxy in a unit of thought and feeling with the Fathers of the Church.

In the first half of the 20th century, essential aspects of Orthodox Dogmatics were affirmed in the Romanian cultural and social space. In

³ Pr. D. M. ACSINTE, “Recenzie la Dionisie Pseudo-Areopagitul, *Ierarhia cerească și ierarhia bisericească*”, trad. Pr. Prof. Cicerone Iordăchescu”, in: *Viitorul*, 17 (1932) 3, apud Pr. M. PÂSLARU, *Valoarea scrierilor patristice...*, pp. 7-8. In 1937 at the initiative of the Romanian Patriarchate, Dumitru Fecioru makes up the *Bibliography* of translations in Romanian from patristic literature for two reasons: firstly, the need for such a catalogue to be made on a scientific basis, and secondly, to correct the mistaken opinion that the translations of the Holy Fathers in Romanian theology are few. In this sense, he identifies and presents in the chronological order of their appearance all the Romanian translations from the Holy Fathers and church writers, made between 1691 - when the first edition of *Mărgăritare* Saint John Chrysostom - until 1833, the year of the last prints of St. Grigorie Dascălul. The second volume is expected to cover the period 1833-1874 when the magazine *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* appeared, and the third from 1874 to the end of the first half of the twentieth century. In the preface of D. Fecioru’s paper, he states: “we have translated almost half of the Greek patristic literature”, and has been translated “what was most representative in Christian writing” (See, D. FECIORU, *Biblioteca traducerilor în românește din litaratura patristică*, vol. I, Fascicola I: *Epoca de la 1691 până la 1833*, Bucovina, I. E. Torouțiu, București, 1937, 82 p.). Of course, the question was to what extent patristic thinking was valorised in theological studies, to what extent it was integrated and assumed as an indispensable element of theological interpretations from the perspective of Tradition. It was not the quantitative problem of translations from the Fathers, but the question of the significance of their thinking for the academic education, and the assumption of their method in the approach of the dogmas. In other words, the question was to what extent patristic writings are assumed in theology, making it a living theology, and a theology of the Church and experience.

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this context, Orthodox Dogmatics is asserted from a symbolic, missionary and apologetic perspective. At the same time, in their appeal to the Fathers, theologians such as Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) attempted a balancing of the unilateral tendencies manifested with the emphasis either on the scholastic rationalism or on the Orthodox godliness, specific both to the 19th century and to the first half of the 20th century. Orthodox thinkers such as Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972) denounced the state of Romanian theological education influenced by Western theology, its abstractization by the separation from its patristic and Byzantine foundations⁴.

The beginnings of renewal in Romanian Orthodox theology were timid in the early decades of the twentieth century. We can identify the signs of renewal without a comprehensive view of the whole theological issue and without a well articulated and established program in the orientation to the method and spirit of the Fathers as a criterion for the interpretations of Orthodox theology that oscillated between the influences of Western theology and philosophy and its own limits put by the same influences.

Significantly, at the end of the first half of the twentieth century, theologians such as Nichifor Crainic and especially Dumitru Stăniloae will re-open the theological and cultural debate on the patristic, philosophical, spiritual, and mystical heritage, gradually capitalizing it by developing a coherent, creative, theological vision which will mark the entire 20th century until today.

III. The consciousness of the Orthodox theology relevance for culture and society

In the context of the first half of the twentieth century, a period of dramatic cultural and social changes, through their writings and public positions the Romanian Orthodox theologians illustrated the relevance of theology and of the Orthodox Church for the culture and historical rise of the Romanian people. It was the era of Romania's reunification through the historical act of 1918, but also the expansion of the progressist and autonomous philosophies of the West that were assumed by a large part

⁴ Nichifor CRAINIC, "Irineu Mihălcescu", in: *Studii Teologice*, VII (1938-1939), homage volume dedicated to professors: Arhiepiscop Irineu Mihălcescu și Preot Ioan Popescu-Mălăiești, București, 1939, p. 6.

of the representatives of the Romanian culture and philosophy. They saw the development of the Romanian society through the appeal to these philosophies, considering Orthodoxy as something retrograde and a hindrance to Romania's progress. Faced with these challenges, Father Stăniloae said:

“Our Church can no longer remain just a spectator of the tremendous struggle about the Christian conception: It must intervene decisively in favour of Christ and against His adversaries (...) Christian State or Atheist State, a society founded solely on the basis of materialism! This is the alternative that started the fight with the pen, the speech, the sacrifice of one's own life (...) What does the Church do to clarify the aspects of a Christian state, and of a modern society founded on Christian bases?”⁵.

Polemics were soon to appear in the Romanian space divided generally between “Europeanists” and “traditionalists”. In this context, theologians like Nicolae Bălan, Nichifor Crainic, Dumitru Stăniloae, Ilarion V. Felea or philosophers like Nae Ionescu and scientists like Nicolae Paulescu underlined the intrinsic relationship between Orthodoxy and Romanianism, between Orthodoxy and Romanian culture, as well as between faith and reason⁶. The arguments of these polemics were not just historical, cultural and social, but primarily theological. The first half of the twentieth century is the period when the dogma of the Church was engaged in public debates on culture, history and the rise of the Romanian nation. These theologians highlighted the alienation that some people of culture suffered through the Western influences of the 18th-19th centuries, the forgetting of the Byzantine roots and the decisive role that Orthodoxy had for the Romanian nation. The way of manifestation in history of the Romanian

⁵ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Pentru un cotidian creștin”, in: *Cultură și Duhovnicie*, vol. II, ediție îngrijită de Ion-Dragoș VLĂDESCU, Editura Basilica, București, 2012, p. 38

⁶ See Nicolae C. PAULESCU, *Noțiunile de suflet și Dumnezeu în fiziologie*, Editura Cartex, 2016; Alexandru MIRONESCU, *Limitele cunoașterii științifice. Contribuția științelor experimentale la problema epistemologică*, Editura Harisma, București, 1994; Alexandru MIRONESCU, *Certitudine și Adevăr*, Editura Harisma, București, 1994; Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Poziția domnului Lucian Blaga față de Creștinism și Ortodoxie*, Editura Paideia, 2010; Pr. Ilarion V. FELEA, *Religie și cultură*, Editura Episcopiei Aradului, Arad, 1994.

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nation is suddenly Romanian and Christian, a historical *perichoresis* between Romanianism and Eastern Christianity. Over the centuries, this has been proved by the refusal of the Romanian nation to give up faith, identified with its very being. By *law*, the people understood this inner unity between Romanianism and Eastern Christianity, and this means a way of life and dogmatic content, since it refers to the Orthodox faith experienced in dogma, spirituality and worship. Nichifor Crainic speaks of a *theanthropy* achieved and achievable in Romanian existence. Starting from the Person of Christ and from the existence of the human person in grace, he extends this theanthropic vision to the existence of the Romanian people that he sees in a *theandrical* manifestation. In the conception of the voivodes, it is not the religion that is at the service of the nation or state, but the state and the nation are at the service of religious belief, and the nation is understood in ecumenical terms in connection with Byzantium and with all Orthodoxy⁷.

With regard to the comprehensive vision of the relationship between Orthodoxy and culture, we recall work *The Paradise Nostalgia (Nostalgia Paradisului)* by Nichifor Crainic, which was meant to be a reaction to the crisis of modern and autonomous culture, also present in Romania. Nichifor Crainic points out that there is no reason for the Romanian intellectuals to understand the Orthodoxy-culture report by the same means of understanding in the West. The religion-culture conflict existed in the West, being generated by medieval scholasticism, in the way it understood science and the relation theology-philosophy-science. On the other hand, the so-called conflict between religion and science reported in Romanian culture towards the end of the nineteenth century is due to “intellectual mimetism”, which was imported from the West. This situation has generated a considerable effort within the Romanian culture to re-centre it in a natural relationship with Orthodoxy. This effort was initiated and coordinated by the scholar Nicolae Paulescu (1869-1931) who revealed the tendencies towards autonomy of the Romanian culture, being continued by the magazine *Gândirea* which, through its exponents, headed by Nichifor Crainic, “demonetised the exponents of intellectual mimetism” stating “the necessity of the organic connection of the new Romanian culture with the Orthodox tradition”⁸. He criticized the concept

⁷ Nichifor CRAINIC, “Transfigurarea românismului”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, LXI (1943) 10-12, pp. 518-519, 521-524.

⁸ Nichifor CRAINIC, “Modul teandric”, in: *Gândirea*, XIX (1940) 1, p. 7.

of “autonomy of reason” underlining that faith generates culture, and that the worship organized on the basis of a religious doctrine inspires and guides man’s creations⁹.

In the first half of the 20th century, the Romanian Orthodox theologians responded from dogmatic, philosophical and missionary positions to the challenges of a transformed epoch, marked by the two world conflagrations, by the expansion of autonomous science and technology, and by the autonomous philosophies of modernity. This fact illustrates that the development of Orthodox Dogmatics in Romania was also achieved by the critical assumption of the movement of philosophical, scientific, social and confessional ideas.

Thus, beyond the rigors of a theological discipline, in the process of delimitation to their own historical alienation, the representatives of Orthodox Dogmatics interfere, react, assume, denounce, and criticize. Thus, they demonstrate fidelity to Revelation and the Church, even though in the way of doing theology some of them have assumed sequentially more than was necessary from Western theology and philosophy. The controversies and disputes from the interwar period, various as approaches and themes, beyond their context and reason, had a last resort to which the theologians recourse and which they fixed their arguments in, namely: the dogma of the Church. The interwar period is a unique period in the history of modern Romanian theology when it managed to assert its argumentative force in dialogue with culture and society.

IV. Three decisive achievements for the renewal of Orthodox Dogmatics

The first half of the 20th century is also the period when Orthodox Dogmatics in Romania laid the foundations of renewal in the method, thought and experience of the Fathers of the Church. The study of Dogmatics, towards the end of this period, was ever closer to the Father’s ascetic-mystical and ecclesial spirit and experience. Dogmatics was increasingly approached in connection with Spirituality and the Church worship. During this period, the foundations of the renewal of the Romanian Orthodox theology in general and of the Orthodox Dogmatics in particular were laid by three decisive achievements, which changed the optics and method in the

⁹ Nichifor CRAINIC, “Modul teandric”, pp. 3-4.

approach of dogmas and Dogmatics. It has so far generated a renewing and creative trajectory, linked to biblical and patristic sources, spirituality, Liturgy, and the experience of the Church. The three achievements are: a) rediscovering mysticism; b) rediscovery of Palamite theology; c) translation and awareness of the importance of the Philokalia for Orthodox Dogmatics.

IV.1. The rediscovery of mysticism

The rediscovery of mysticism by Nichifor Crainic through his contact with Western theology and culture - in 1926 he taught *Modern Religious Literature* at the Faculty of Theology of Chisinau - will be a clear counterpart to formalism, abstraction and historicism that determined the structure and content of different theological disciplines among which Dogmatics was also. Mystics had the role and power to present to the world a living, personal and loving God capable of remaining in communion with man, a God in contrast to the schema of His abstract presentation, lifeless and lacking the possibility of experience. In short, *Mystics* was meant to restore the presence of a personal and living God in theology and in man's heart, offering unity not only to theology but also to the manifestation of Christian life in the world. Through *Mystics*, Crainic's dogmatic reflections became full of substance and life. In the course of 1935-1936, held in Bucharest *Mystics* appears as a "synthesis of dogmatic and moral principles" and "a crowning of Dogmatics and Moral".

Nichifor Crainic highlighted defining aspects and concepts for the Orthodox spirituality and Dogmatics: deification, participation, person, mystic asceticism, experience, uncreated divine light, uncreated energy, the distinction being-energies, transfiguration, contemplation, theology of the heart and of tears, view of light, ecstasy, union, all around the mystics of saints Simeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas. Father Staniloae notices the theological, religious and cultural implications of Crainic's *Mystics* course, the novelty and the creative force that radiates from it, which will influence the trajectory of Romanian theology.

"This work will be a milestone and a spring of great powers and religious impetus in the most authentic bed of Orthodoxy also for the religious orientation and awakening of our priesthood,

for church life and for Romanian theology. It will definitively consecrate Nichifor Crainic as a new and life-creating creator in Church life and culture and as a theologian who has discovered the Spirit and writes for the Spirit's confession, putting an end to the writing full of pedantic, confusing and empty scholastic formulas"¹⁰.

We mention that Nichifor Crainic and Father Staniloae's concerns of Patristic thinking overcame the Congress of Athens (1936) which discussed the influences of Orthodox theology and the importance of returning to the Holy Fathers. Nichifor Crainic explains the itinerary of Orthodox theology estrangement from its Byzantine roots and the importance of rediscovering mysticism.

"This was a time of painful disorientation for us. The ties of traditions are broken. The Church autocephaly, necessary to the development of the Romanian state, had left a sense of isolation from the ancient Orthodox East, which at this time seemed to us to be emptied of any attractive light. The attention of our cultural world is generally oriented towards the Occident with its halo of science prestige. The Romanian theology dismembered from the gorges of historical customs, seeks its springs in this new direction. It is almost superfluous to recall that the fame of the Faculty of Theology of Chernivtsi is based on resources not from the Orthodox East but from the sphere of German culture. Today, when things have changed largely, we find it curious to see that the theological science, professed in the higher education institutes of that time, is nothing more than a loan from the German culture, more or less rectified in the spirit of the Orthodox doctrine. Since then, Romanian theology has felt and still feels the consequences given by this influence of the Western science little related to the essence of our Eastern faith. In some aspects of our doctrine, this paradoxical situation had fatal repercussions. Thus, for example, because in Germany, where our theologians were studying, the Eastern mystic teaching was excluded, or presented with rational contempt, Romanian

¹⁰ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Nichifor Crainic", in: *Cultură și Duhovnicie*, vol. II, p. 83

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theology ignored this branch of education, which is part of the very essence of our Orthodoxy. Today we know theologians who, because Protestantism ignores mystic and ascetic disciplines, are convinced with adorable innocence that this discipline would have nothing to do with Orthodoxy. The occidental current of the time, in addition to the advantages of an undeniable scientific method, has repercussions on the Romanian academic education as a real amputation of the body of the Eastern doctrine. The blunt acknowledgment of this fatal deficiency would have no meaning unless it would serve our orientation to the glorious traditional bases of Orthodox theology”¹¹.

IV.2. Rediscovering the Palamite Theology

The intuitions of Father Dumitru Stăniloae regarding patristic theology and Palamite theology in particular in the first half of the 20th century represent a turning point for the dynamics and renewal of Romanian Orthodox theology, a stage from which it begins to decisively get rid of the Western theology influences, not only declarative. Concerns about palamite theology are early in the thought of Father Stăniloae, who, from the beginning of the 1930s, began to translate parts from the work of Saint Gregory Palamas. When Georges Florovsky drew attention at the Congress of Athens (1936) that it was necessary for the Orthodox theology to return to the Holy Fathers, Dumitru Stăniloae had already assumed this mission by approaching and translating fragments from Saint Gregory Palamas’ work (1929-1933)¹². The work dedicated to Saint Gregory Palamas and the Hesychast Theology (1938) meant a true gap of level in Romanian Orthodox theology, although it was not received in its true perspective, or

¹¹ Nichifor CRAINIC, “Irineu Mihălcescu”, p. 6.

¹² SFÂNTUL GRIGORIE PALAMA, “Calea spre lumina dumnezeiască la Sfântul Grigorie Palama”, trad. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, in: *Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreene* (1929-1930) 6, pp. 55-57; Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Două tratate ale Sfântului Grigorie Palama (Triada 1, 2 și 3)”, trad. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, in: *Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreene* IX (1932-1933), Tiparul Tipografiei Arhiepiscopale, Sibiu, 1933, pp. 5-70. He translates the Second and Third Treaties from the first triad, the Second Treaty being published in PG 150, 1101-1118, the translation being done after cod. Coislin, gr. 100 from the fifteenth century in which the Second Treaty is included in ff. 114 v.-119 r, and the third in ff. 119 r-140r.

in its true spiritual implications. Some of its referents¹³ cited Berdiaev more often with his ideas about the relationship between intuition and discursive thinking than to refer to the renewed message focused on the possibility of God's experience in the light. It is also more noted the conflict between mysticism and rationalism that can be ascertained at the time of the work, rather than the specificity of Orthodox theology. So, it was perceived more as a historical, apologetic or inter-confessional theology work, and less as a work that focuses on the core of Orthodox theology and draws the itinerary and forms to which this theology should tend. The rediscovery of the Palamite theology importance is the premise of changing the method and renewing the content of Orthodox Dogmatics. The Trinity and Christ are no longer captives of a conceptual system. Christ's person is open to the communion and experience of man in the Church and Mysteries.

IV.3. Rediscovering and translating Philokalia

Towards the end of the first half of the twentieth century Father Dumitru Stăniloae's vision of the steps to be followed in Romanian theology with a view to renewing it was focused on the translation of *Philokalia*. The reception of *Philokalia* was one of the best, being assimilated to the importance of the Scripture and to a special event for the entire Romanian culture. "The importance of the *Philokalia* for Orthodox spirituality is, however much it would seem, equal to the importance of Holy Scripture for Christianity. *Philokalia* is the Bible of the Orthodox spirituality"¹⁴. *Philokalia* is a "gift to Romanian theology", a long awaited gift, being the "book of spiritual spring", a book with a "unique and central value in the long life of Orthodoxy", "a treasure of Orthodox spirituality" that completely expresses "the essence of Orthodoxy" that is "transfiguration or deification

¹³ Ștefan BEZDECHI, "Recenzie la Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, «Seria teologică», nr. 10, Sibiu, Arhidiecezania, 1938 250+CLX p.", in: *Revista Teologică*, XXVIII (1938) 3, pp. 124-126. After praising Dumitru Stăniloae's initiative to deepen the so-called "duel" between rationalism and mysticism, Ștefan Bezdechi concludes that if this book "had been framed in a more comprehensive framework that sought to illustrate and elucidate this process through parallels of other times too, and had been transposed into the realm of the present, it would have done even better, with a greater and more effective echo" (pp. 125-126).

¹⁴ Prof. Mariana Em. VASILESCU, "Spiritualitatea ortodoxă", in: *Revista Teologică*, XXXVII (1947) 1-2, pp. 14-30, p. 20.

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of man (and cosmos) by grace”¹⁵. The translation of the Philosophy is the chance to re-centre Orthodox Dogmatics in the method and spirit of the Church Fathers thinking. Also during this period, Father Stăniloae discovers the work of St. Maximus the Confessor, that he translates and comments in the footnotes of *Philokalia*¹⁶. The contact with St. Maximus’ work, amid the discovery of Palamite theology, laid the foundation for the renewal of the Orthodox Dogmatics. This perspective was gradually exploited by the most prominent representatives of Orthodox Dogmatics in Romania during the communist period, in this context Father Dumitru Stăniloae becoming one of the most important Orthodox theologians of the 20th century.

¹⁵ Diac. Nicolae MLADIN, “Atitudini. Despre Filocalie”, în: *Revista Teologică*, XXXVI (1946) 7-8, p. 388. Nicolae Mladin shows that the mystical knowledge of God is superior to God’s knowledge through rational arguments, knowledge that has also been emphasized in Romanian Orthodox theology under the influence of Western scholastic theology. Thus, without denying the importance of rational arguments, he points out that “the evidence of rational arguments about the existence of God is like a shadow over the overwhelmingly evidence that comes out of the mystical experience” (p. 390). He invites Orthodox theology to develop an orthodox apologetic based on *Philokalia* that gives a central place to mystical knowledge and not to rational arguments, since one is an analogous deductive knowledge mediated even from a distance and another is direct, intuitive, experimental knowledge. If in the first we know the author from his work, the second is knowledge through personal communion (p. 390). At the beginning of the 21st century, criticizing the Orthodox apologetics in the interwar period, but also recognizing its merits, Father Professor Dumitru Popescu proposed a rational-spiritual apologetics. Nicolae Mladin realizes this necessity since the appearance of the Romanian *Philokalia*. (See Pr. Prof. Dumitru POPESCU, *Apologetica rațional-duhovnicească*, Editura Cartea Ortodoxă, Alexandria, 2009). Thus, the appearance of *Philokalia* offers the opportunity not only to the Dogmatics to re-center experimentally and methodologically in the great Tradition of the Christian East, but also the Apologetics.

¹⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mystagogia, cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii*, în: *Revista Teologică*, XXXIV (1944) 3-4, pp. 162-181; XXXIV (1944) 7-8, pp. 335-356. At the time of the publication of St. Maximus’ *Mystagogy*, Father Stăniloae - who had earnestly assumed the desire to recover and highlight patristic thinking in Romanian theology - had already translated, ready to print, the following writings: *Răspunsuri către Talasie* PG. 90, 243-786; *Tâlcuire pe scurt la Tatăl nostru*, PG. 90, 871-910; *Cuvântul ascetic*, PG 90, 911-956; *Cele 400 capete despre dragoste*, PG 90, 654-1080; *Cele două sute de capete teologice* PG 90, 1083-1176; *Epistola despre dragoste* PG 91, 392-408.