The Iconic Structure of Reason, as Confessed by Patristic Tradition - Significant Indicator in the Ecclesial Approach of the Relationship between Orthodox Theology and Science

Adrian Lemeni

Adrian Lemeni
"Justinian Patriarhul" Faculty of the Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest
Email: adrian.lemeni@gmail.com

Abstract

A reality that significantly influences the relationship between faith and reason, between theology and science is the symbolic dimension of thought. Under the conditions of alienation of symbolic thinking, one can observe not only a misunderstanding of the connection between reason and faith but also a distortion of the specific identity of reason and faith. Since I believe that the iconic structure of reason can be a significant coordinator in articulating and developing an ecclesial approach of the relationship between Orthodox theology and science, I will focus on presenting relevant aspects of the past and current context regarding this subject in order to be able to shape and consolidate, for the future, a perspective of cultivating the dialogue between theology and science, assuming the specificity of the Orthodox Tradition.

I. Introduction

As a significant moment in the past, I will refer to the origin of modern science in an attempt to overcome certain ideological approaches in the history of science which state a discontinuity between modern science and the sciences of the Middle Ages, a superiority of modern science to the sciences of medieval tradition and Renaissance, starting from the founding bias of modernists that they invented their own tradition, escaping from the past and ideologically cultivating the myth of progress. The alienation of the iconic dimension of reason through modern science is radicalized in present context by the technological system as an environment for the promotion of technical reasoning. In today's information society there is a risk of believing that information is equivalent to knowledge. Under these circumstances, the highlighting of the limits of computational reason can be an interface in the encounter between the theological and the scientific perspective. At the end of the paper, I intend to emphasize that the iconic structure of reason, consecrated consistently with Patristic Tradition, can be a consistent theme for developing a dialogue between Orthodox theology and science assumed in an ecclesial key.

II. The iconoclastic spirit - the structuring factor of modern science

In order to understand the core of the spirit of modern science, namely the context in which it developed, the ideological perspective of receiving modern science must be overcome. Very often, modern science is considered to be quite different from the Middle Ages and Renaissance sciences. Those who understand the establishment of modernity through a fracture suddenly emerging in the context of mental rebirth, by detaching from everything which medieval and Renaissance Tradition meant to be, risk having a reductive and simplifying approach.

In the rationalist and scholarly ideological approaches (progressively imposed, especially by Enlightenment and positivism), modern science is considered to be superior to the Middle Ages and Renaissance sciences. But looking from a certain angle and taking a closer look at the context in which the vision and practices of modern science in the postmodern

era have emerged, two surprising ascertainments can be made. The first provokes the usual representations of science, as it indicates that modern science is tributary to sciences from the past, taking over many of the considerations and approaches developed by the Middle Ages. This link proves something that usually is not accepted: the fact that the philosophical and scientific concerns of the scholastic period are in no way covered by the shadow of the Christian religious obscurantism.

The second ascertainments is even more surprising, provoking the way of understanding the modern science we have become accustomed to. Many clues lead to the idea that modern science is only a part of medieval science, the only one that survived over time, the rudimentary part, the least elaborate form, which, at that time, received the least consideration of all the meanings and practices of the Renaissance sciences.

It is significant that Ioan Petru Culianu uses the example of the aptera fly in order to express his opinion on modern science. Under normal conditions, such a fly is unlikely to survive. In a similar way, Culianu says, the science we today call modern, with its quantitative aspects, is not the result of a rational approach of detaching the knowledge from the context marked by the Renaissance imaginary culture, but a remnant, which survived historically, philosophically and culturally[1].

Paradoxically, this remaining remnant of the forms of practicing and understanding sciences not only survived over time, but also imposed itself indisputably in the face of other quality sciences of the medieval and Renaissance period.

The Reform should not be analyzed solely from the perspective of explicit religious, political or social factors, but from the perspective of censorship manifested in relation to the whole imagination culture. The iconoclastic spirit of the Reform will materialize not only through a theology in which authority of *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone") becomes a determinant criterion, but also through a certain literary reference, emptied of its iconic significance. Considering the culture of the Renaissance imaginary as idolatrous and pagan, the Reform imposed a drastic censorship on the Renaissance imaginary.

Culianu shows that although the actions of the Counter-Reform are aimed at a certain offensive against the Reform, both the Reform and

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[1] Ioan Petru CULIANU, *Eros şi magie în Renaştere. 1484 (Eros and Magic in Renaissance.1484)*, Ed. Polirom, Iaşi, 2003, p. 54.

the Counter-Reform meet in the same spirit of attempting to abolish the imagination culture. The iconoclastic spirit of the Reform structures the matrix of the spirit of modernity and of modern science[2]. This spirit was reinforced by the Counter-Reform. Without being aware, the struggle between the Reform and the Counter-Reform was not the struggle between Protestants and Catholics, but their involuntary alliance in the destruction of culture and spirit of the Renaissance. Thus, the spirit of modernity appears as an expression of the iconoclastic spirit.

For Culianu sees a continuity between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the fracture appearing with the spirit of the Reform that crystallizes the patterns of modernity. As Webber identifies the relationship between the spirit of capitalism and the spirit of Protestant ethics, Culianu cleverly demonstrates the structuring of the spirit of modernity through the Reformation[3]. The Counter-Reform fails to fight the Reform, but on the contrary, it becomes a correlative of the same iconoclastic spirit of the Reformation. The true fracture that appears in the history of ideas and mentalities is between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, on the one hand (dominant being the culture of the imaginary), and modernity, on the other, in which the iconoclastic spirit of the Reform and Counter-Reform materializes.

Culianu shows that we cannot speak of an evolution of the medieval and Renaissance spirit that is transforming and growing in the modern one, but a mutation[4]. Under a certain angle, the perspective indicates an overturned relationship. In a certain way, one might even speak of an involution, of a degeneration, not of a qualitative advancement. Practically, modern science loses, in relation to the way to make science available in the Renaissance, the hermeneutical and symbolical dimension of the scientific phenomenon and of the investigated world. Modern science proves uninteresting and insignificant in relation to the Renaissance sciences, precisely because the old ones expressed a vision of the world. On the other hand, precisely because of this absence of symbolic imagery from the preoccupations of modern science, through this hermeneutical silence, which avoids the formulation of an image of the world, modern science can develop, under the censorship of the imaginary imposed by Reform and Counter-Reform.

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[2] Ioan Petru CULIANU, *Eros şi magie în Renaştere. 1484*, p. 68.

[3] Ioan Petru CULIANU, *Eros şi magie în Renaştere. 1484*, p.72.

[4] Ioan Petru CULIANU, *Eros şi magie în Renaştere. 1484*, p. 85.

The victory of the protestant principle *Sola Scriptura* confirms a mutation in modernity: the replacement of thoughts based on images centered thoughts. In the traditional world, the image was a living presence and could better reflect what was connected with the world. In the process of knowledge, the image played a central role too. The Reform moves the emphasis on the word, and especially on the written word. It could be said that *Sola Scriptura* becomes a fundamental principle of modernity. It is no wonder that printers, book index editions first develop in the Protestant world.

From the perspective of Ecclesial Tradition, some nuances are needed. It is clear that the iconoclastic spirit of Reformation and Modernity decisively affects the iconic dimension of theology, thought and spirituality centered on the Incarnation event, as well as the liturgical mystagogy, explicitly related to the ecclesial experience. The Church's Tradition is fundamentally iconic, structuring the gesture of worship in Spirit and Truth. In the context of this way of understanding, the word does not exclude the image, but it transfigures it in the icon. The written word is fulfilled in the Incarnated Word, which is the Icon of God the Father.

In the ecclesial perspective, both the gnostic-hermetic spirit of the magical paradigm (appreciated by Culianu) and the reductive spirit of modernity materialized by confident quantitative science in experiment and analytical reason are overcome. Obviously, the censorship of the imaginary in modernity has irremediably degraded thought and life, excluding the symbolic dimension of the act of knowledge. For this reason, the profound change in the way of thinking and being induced by modernity cannot be compensated by the benefits of modern civilization. Therefore, it is also necessary to be aware of the risk of promoting a magical-gnostical revival legitimated by the culture of the imaginary of the Renaissance, just as it is necessary to develop lucid reflections regarding the spiritual benefits and deficiencies existing in a world dominated by modern sciences.

Through spiritual and ecclesial experience, the image is not abolished by radical censorship, but transfigured. The image becomes an icon. Contemplation in the iconic way through the life of the Church reconfigures the person engaged in liturgical mysticism, structuring it in a gospel and living in fidelity to the iconic Tradition of the Church. Thus, the iconic structure of reason and of the whole creation asserted by Patristic Tradition is recovered and harnessed.

III. The limits of computational reasoning in today's information society

Starting from the centrality of the technological phenomenon in the present society and from the dominant mentality structured by the technocratic type of efficiency manifested in all the fields of activity, the technological system is characterized by the interaction of the component parts within the whole and by the fact that it is open to the interaction with the exterior, while possessing an internal logic. The peculiarity of the technological system is that a technological factor always prefers to join, to be interconnected with another technological element, to the detriment of what is non-technological.

Thus, although the technological system can only be born within a social body, it reaches, through autonomous proliferation, to parasite it and eventually replace it. Communities are replaced by networks. The technological system favors a logic and thought uprooted from the reality of the Incarnation, a gnostic reflection and attitude. Under these circumstances, the emphasis is on an unincarnated mind, an abstract reason and a robotic artificial intelligence.

Given that the accelerated development of the current technological system, which represents a medium of proliferation of technical reasoning, the illusion that the identity of reason is a computational one and that this technical rationality is self-sufficient is accredited. Thus, it is important to emphasize the structural limits of computational reason. The identity of reason is not exhausted in its ability to compute, to process information, to develop demonstrations and algorithms. Gödel, through his theorems of incompleteness, has bluntly underlined the non-computational nature of thought since the last century.

Through the influence of modernity and subsequent ideological tendencies (Enlightenment and Positivism) reason was progressively autonomized in relation to what is assumed as an intuitive and unified knowledge, above discursivity. The profound identity of reason has been distorted, being diminished to discursive knowledge, to the ability of generating and understanding demonstrations. But thought, understood as an action of the mind, does not have a computational structure (computational activity is based on formal logic and discursivity, similar to computer simulated algorithms). Understanding is of a non-computational nature. In other words, thought cannot be reduced to a logical sequence.

Gödel, through his theorems of incompleteness, showing that truth is above demonstration, opens the horizon of assuming understanding as a non-computational mind-work, above the power of computing and demonstrating. Penrose, starting from Gödel's reasoning, shows that human understanding cannot be reduced to an algorithmic activity. Our mind generates a thought that cannot be totally computed, and mathematical understanding cannot be exhausted in computability. Penrose, using Gödel's reasoning, shows that in determining mathematical truth algorithm is not determinant[5].

Gödel's incompleteness theorems, beyond their implications in the philosophy of mathematics, have an impact on the philosophy of the mind. Some specialists assert the Godelian structure of the mind in the sense that thinking cannot be reduced to analytical reasoning. Without challenging the axiomatic method and the requirements of analytical philosophy, Gödel demonstrates that the human subject's thinking has a non-computational structure and that the machine will not acquire an artificial intelligence with the same parameters of the human mind.

In this sense, Gödel states that "[...] mathematics is incomplete. Its obvious axioms can never be contained in a finite rule, *which means that the human mind (including in the sense of pure mathematical thinking) infinitely exceeds the finite power of the machine*"[6].

Gödel's incomplete theorems indicate a more comprehensive and deeper reality than the one illustrated in axiomatic systems built through formal logic. They open the horizon of flashes of thought that go beyond mechanistic reasoning. Thus, we can speak of a Godelian structure of thought that states its non-computational dimension. The work of the mind cannot be exhausted in a representation coded by symbols. Assuming this perspective, however promising the results in the field of artificial intelligence might be, it will not be possible to reach a complete explanation and understanding of the nature of the mind and of the human consciousness.

J.R. Lucas in the work entitled *The Godelian Argument: Turn Over the Page* comes back and responds to the multiple objections raised over

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[5] Roger PENROSE, *Incertitudinile ratiunii* (*The shadows of the reason*), Ed. Tehnica, Bucuresti, 1999, p.94.

[6] Anthony ANDERSON, "Alfred Tarski (1902–1983), Alonzo Church (1903–1995), and Kurt Gödel (1906–1978)", in: Aloysius. P. MARTINICH and David SOSA (eds.), *A Companion to Analytical Philosophy,* Blackwell Publishers Oxford, 2001, p. 136.

the years by several of his critics. In his material, published in 1959 and subsequently published in several editions, he points out, starting from Gödel's incompleteness revealed by the non-mechanic, non-algorithmic character of the mind, that the human mind will always have the last word in relation to the artificial intelligence of the machine. It has been a uncomfortable position, difficult to accept, especially in recent years, in the context of the impressive results obtained in the field of artificial intelligence research.

Lucas points out that beyond the rationale and technical arguments, those who reject Gödel's position as to the fact that the mind can never be exhausted in machine-specific algorithms do so by virtue of their ideological positioning: a reductionism given by trust in an impersonal system structured by rules, codes, schemes; a system detached from the unpredictability of life; a totalitarianism of technocracy in front of the spontaneity and creativity of a living mind, not formed by the technical power of algorithms and procedures.

In this sense, Lucas mentions:

> "The Godelian argument rejects the mechanism in thought and life. He tells us that being reasonable is not to be governed by rules and that actions governed by rules are not necessarily random. Many thinkers had and have another position because they have assumed that rational actions and their corresponding decisions were as such because they were in accordance with some implicit or explicit rules. But Godel has shown that rationality is not limited to technical rules, algorithms [...] True creative thinking is alive and dynamic, not static like the one given by the automatic application of rules [...] So the godelian argument strongly affirms that authentic creativity does not mean an approach reducing the mind, does not imply a formalized automatism by the rules"[7].

Those who consistently support the emergence of a new species (the thinking machine) believe that human intelligence can be substituted by *artificial intelligence* (AI), more powerful in solving the many problems faced by the contemporary world. But computers cannot have internal

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[7] John R. Lucas, "The Godelian Argument: Turn Over the Page", in: *Etica & Politica,* 1 (2003), pp. 74-81, (pp. 7-8).

creativity and cannot develop their own judgment. They operate only within implemented programs, computationally manipulating a series of data based on algorithms. The understanding is far from being able to be exhausted in computational rationality. Computers have no intentionality and this is essential in human understanding.

The difficulty of those who try to explain the nature of the human mind through the AI does not come from both the technological boundaries and Boolean logic, but rather from an inappropriate philosophical perspective in which there is unjustified confidence in the self-sufficiency of analytical reason to explain the world. The perspective of this self-sufficiency is not new, but grows in the contemporary world in the context of philosophy rooted in modernity. Descartes, in the Method Discourse (1637), systematizes a philosophy that believes that the truth of things can be achieved in a way directly proportional to the level of clarity of the method. The universality of the method and the application of its algorithm become criteria of the scientific truth regarding the world. Reason is understood especially from an instrumental and operational perspective. In 1651, Hobbes describes reason as a symbolic calculation. Logic based on syllogisms extends the rules of arithmetic into the process of thinking. Leibniz generalizes the validity of mathematics in the process of knowledge, mathematics being considered universal features by which thought could be replaced by calculus.

The association of intelligence with computational capacity derives from a quantitative understanding of the mind. The quantitative accumulation of information and the speed of processing it are considered assets of intelligence. Going on Bacon's line for which knowledge means power, it is believed that more quantitative information means more power. In this perspective, knowledge is understood as a convenience resulting from the ease with which information is manipulated through the AI. But the mind is qualitatively different from computational capacity and cannot be reduced to aspects determined exclusively by technicalistic efforts.

Terry Winograd (AI specialist), starting from the technicalistic and deterministic perspective existing in the construction of AI, notices the affinity between bureaucracy and computers. For him, AI is a bureaucracy of the mind. He states that "the AI technique is for the mind what bureaucracy represents for the social interactions of people"[8].Prestigious

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[8] John R. Lucas, "The Godelian Argument...", p. 17.

specialists have criticized the belief that the AI way of understanding is similar to that of people. American philosopher John Searle has shown that computers will never be able to acquire the way of understanding, which is common to human beings. Understanding is more than the ability to operate. The meaning of symbols cannot be understood by computers. Man penetrates it by virtue of the fact that it is he who establishes that meaning. The computer operates with symbols without their meaning.

IV. The Iconicity of Reason - Basis for developing an ecclesial approach of the relationship between Orthodox Theology and Science, in the spirit of the Patristic Tradition

IV.1. Incompleteness and inadequacy of the mediation of the dialogue between Orthodox theology and science through a conceptual scheme

Regarding the relations between theology, philosophy and science, it is very important to affirm that no abstract scheme can actually mediate these relations, precisely because of the risk of their leveling and of the dilution of the Christian confession of faith, which is not limited to the field of academic theology, but relates to a revealed and universal vision of the human condition as the "mysterious boundary" between the Trinitarian God and the created nature.

An intellectual scheme is virtually achievable in multiple ways, and this is the illusion, which gives the possibility of falling, of replacing the ability of understanding through grace, with a deformed knowledge with negative consequences regarding the ability to relate on an existential and liturgical level. Christ Incarnate is not only one of the possible achievements of an alleged scheme or of a so called intellectual concept, but the Only mediator between God and creation, true God and true Man, in a single Hypostasis in whose Body or Church the sensitive and intelligible contents of human knowledge beings recapture their original liturgical condition affected by sin, the transcendent sense which guides them towards their unity with and in God, according to the mystery of the Creator who created them. Therefore, a relation between Orthodox theology, philosophy and science within the patristic thinking can be viable, in a spiritual sense, only by

recovering the liturgical valences of philosophical and scientific thinking, overcoming the heterogeneity of metaphysical presuppositions and assuming the revealed Christian vision in order that they make "one body".

In their autonomous sense, detached from the ecclesial body, philosophical and scientific knowledge cannot reach the natural contemplation of the Holy Fathers unless they engage on the path of communion with God. They can incorporate parts of the truth, but their existential purpose is to be integrated into a higher liturgical plan, so that the knowledge of those "from the outside" is turned towards man and directed to transfiguration as a gift from the Godly gift itself. Thus, theology, philosophy and science are required to be realities open to the ecclesial and spiritual life. Thus, man could manifest through them the liturgical attitude of the one who stops at the boundaries and limitations[9] of knowledge with a gesture of worship and doxology, precisely through which he can bring "the many" to the unity and life of that body of knowledge in which the heart of the revealed truth beats.

In the understanding of the Fathers, the ultimate and most comprehensive hermeneutic is that of the Holy Spirit, revealed to man, as a work of grace, through spiritual life. Through this hermeneutic the spiritual meanings of creation, life, and history, can be explained. It is the one by which the experience of life, the experience accumulated through the scientific way of understanding the world or through philosophical reflection gains a spiritual value.

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[9] "Stopping" means, first of all, to recognize your own boundaries honestly, and secondly, to respect the mystery and the word of God, not venturing into speculation with an undue boldness over what goes beyond the powers of understanding. It means to honor with the utmost silence, with thanksgiving to God, by offering oneself and the world to Him. To bring the world and himself to the altar of understanding as a gift of His gift, glorifying Him. Stop is also the way you stand before the icon, when you stop with a gesture of worship and you glorify the Incarnate Lord, the One praised by His saints. It is a cessation of the Luciferic illusion through an act of opening, self-giving, and receiving spiritual transformation. Liturgically, you stop before the altar; you do not come in with unseemliness, but you stop and open yourself from all your being waiting to receive the Holy Sacraments, the cleansing, enlightening and deifying gift... To stop is also a divine commandment, the canon and the spiritual order, as a border, which exists in order to prepare for the encounter with God, Who, according to His own words, does not take part in anything unclean. In spiritual knowledge, stopping sin is a necessary condition. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46), by this pointing out that "stopping" as an expression of humility, is a condition of receiving His knowledge, which is not found in the mysteries and fantasies of the mind. Thus, we see the importance of stopping as a reference to limits, understood by a liturgical, scriptural and patristic basis.

The discovery of Christ through the many theological disciplines remains a way of knowing about Christ, insufficient and incomplete. Neither the interdisciplinary approach, as an import method from one discipline to another, does not help on an existential level. In this context, any dialogue between theology and science at the level of discipline merely reduces what could be the living encounter between the theological and scientific approach of the human being. For this it is necessary that the study of the relationship between theology and science should not only bear the imprint of the scientific academical requirements, but above all, to be the direct result of the liturgical life of man.

IV.2. The iconic structure of reason confessed by Patristic Tradition

The reason of the word is revealed in a state of relationship. The Holy Fathers saw in the relationship between mind and reason the icon of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, understanding that Reason is the image of the eternal Mind. Thus, the eternal consciousness of Self is not a solitary existence, but an eternal communion. The light and the joy of existence do not lie in the singularity of such a consciousness, but in communion. In the relationship between the Father and the Son, the word of the Father answers to the Person of Word, the Reason which embodies in Itself all the rationalities of the world. The joy and light of Truth in communion is revealed in this eternal relationship. St Maximus the Confessor highlights the iconic character of reason when calling Christ, the Reason of the Mind, above all thoughts.

In the context of an informational society, where confidence in the power of computational reason has greatly increased, confession the iconic dimension of reason is essential. This dimension leads to the understanding of the fact that the incarnate reason cannot be known and expressed through a succession of algorithms, no matter how efficient they are. Under the condition of a growing fascination for a rationality exercised in a disintegrated logic, where rationality no longer has an image and a direct encounter becomes more and more difficult to accomplish, it is imperative to rediscover and confess the iconic Reason embodied by the Person of the Word.

Father Staniloae's opinion, that people are incarnate words made to know the Son of the Father, the Absolute Word, is also significant. The reason of the Word includes all the rationality of the world and of men. Their unity and harmony can be explained only by understanding that the reason of a person or thing can only be known in relation to another person and to a world whose rationality is not in itself. In other words, the mystery of the Word is not revealed in impersonal information, however refined and varied it might be, but in the light of the communion of life between people.

At the same time, taking into account the iconic nature of reason, one could see a sense of reciprocity between reason and life. The truth of the iconic reason is a living truth, located on an existential level, and not on a conceptual one. Through the rationalities of the world, human reason can reach the supreme reason and thereby to the meaning of life and existence, namely God the Father, the Supreme Mind. St Maximus the Confessor shows that the Mind, which has no natural cause, is the Head of Reason, and states that Reason can be mysteriously contemplated through faith. Thus, we can observe the indestructible relationship between reason and faith. Whoever reaches the contemplation of Reason raises himself to the Mind as a sense of all.

V. Conclusions

Under the influence of unilateral tendencies or ideological directions, reason has been dissociated over time from its deeply anchored structure in religious symbolism. The basis of reason is related to the religious soul, to the experience of the mysterious presence of the sacred, to the disclosure of the Logos in the world. Starting with exclusive concepts, throughout the present era, clichés have been generated and cultivated, and they have come to express various forms of opposition between reason and faith, between the demands of scientific thinking before knowledge as opposed to the ecclesial experience, promoting an artificial antagonism. Reason has been understood only in its instrumental form, being reduced to its discursive and analytical ability of producing demonstrations and algorithms based on ideological schemes.

From the Patristic perspective, we discover the iconic structure of creation. By the Incarnation of the Logos, the image of the Living God, the creation is structured through the Christic image, it is an icon that sends to its Archetype and Telos, Jesus Christ. The rationality of the world and the reason of man are structured by the Ration - Christ, and they have an iconic structure, and this is seen as the Son of God gets Incarnate, being the central icon of the whole creation. Assuming the mystery of worship, of the iconic gesture that shares in the spirit of worship, reason reveals its true identity and vocation. Through the gesture of worship in the Spirit and Truth, both rationalism and pietism are overcome as temptations of foreign attitudes from the fullness of communion of the ecclesial experience.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae offered, in the context of Romanian theology, the freshness of such a perspective, through which human reason finds its profound resources as an expression of man's collaboration with the grace of God. Moving on the line of his theology, discovering and updating patristic thinking in Romanian and Pan-Orthodox context, one can capitalize on an ecclesial approach to the relationship between Orthodox theology and science. Father Stăniloae also points out that spiritual and ecclesial experience strengthens scientific research and philosophical reflection.