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# **St. Dumitru Stăniloae's Position Regarding a Possible Dogmatic Development for the Sake of Unity with the Oriental Churches**

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## **Abstract**

Father Dumitru Stăniloae has made in the second half of the last century an important and little-known contribution to the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Eastern Churches. In unofficial discussions between representatives of the two sides, and also in separate studies, the Romanian theologian raised the possibility of developing the Christological dogma in such a way that it would remain faithful to the traditional teaching of the Orthodox Church on the one hand, and on the other hand, would respond to the need to make explicit the formula of Chalcedon in the understanding of Eastern Christians. The Christological formula proposed by Stăniloae is an explication of the Chalcedonian one and is characterized by a terminological balance and could make the two ecclesiastical families, in the first instance, renounce their prejudices about the other side and, at the same time, find themselves in the same confession of faith.

## **Keywords**

Dumitru Stăniloae, Ecumenical Dialogue, Oriental Churches, Dogmatics, 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council, Christology

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<sup>1</sup> The starting point for this study is a paper presented at the International Symposium "The Nicene Creed and the Importance of Its Confession in Today's World. Models of Confessors: Saints Ilarion Felea and Dumitru Stăniloae", 22-23 May 2025, "Ilarion V. Felea" Faculty of Orthodox Theology of "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad.

## I. Contextualization

The period in which Saint Dumitru the Theologian lived and carried out his theological work was not only difficult, but also hard to understand for those who know it only from books. The interference of politics in all spheres of public and private life did not exclude the field of religious life and theology. That is why even in Father Stăniloae's attitude towards the ecumenical movement we can detect fluctuations throughout his academic career. This is easy to understand if we place the great dogmatist in the context in which he theologized throughout a life spanning almost a century, knowing both the flourishing interwar Romania, then the horrors of World War II, followed by the establishment of Bolshevism and communism, to witness, in the last years of his life, the dawn of post-totalitarian freedom.

Thus, in the first part of his career, we can observe enthusiasm and openness towards the Catholic and Protestant worlds – and towards the West in general –, which would either diminish in the period after his detention or become much more restrained, as Stăniloae's attitude adapted to the anti-Western policy imposed, through censorship, by the communist leadership of a post-war Romania ideologically oriented towards the East. However, the same period proved to be particularly fruitful in cultivating interfaith relations with the Oriental Churches, located in geopolitical areas of the Third World, towards which the oppressive authorities in Romania showed a certain openness or interest<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> In Father Stăniloae's writings from the second part of his life, one can even detect self-censorship when compared to those written before his imprisonment, because writers at that time were under constant threat of being censored or even banned if they made statements that did not conform to the ideology of the system. Thus, while in widely disseminated writings such as *Dogmatica* we encounter a rather cautious Stăniloae, in his oral discourse we see him as much more relaxed and even bold, confident in the progress of dialogue between the Churches and – what we might consider a personal theological hallmark – he always comes up with practical theological solutions to resolve the misunderstandings between the Christian traditions that keep them separate. To verify this thesis, it is sufficient to compare his statements on Catholicism in *Dogmatica* with those in the interviews given to Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan in 1988 (Arhimandrit Ioanichie BĂLAN, *Ne vorbește Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae. Nouă convorbiri*, Episcopia Romanului și Hușilor, Huși, 1993, pp. 144-145).

The last meeting between the theologians and representatives of the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches, in 2024, and both the recent canonization of the great Romanian dogmatist Father Dumitru Stăniloae, represent a good opportunity to analyze and bring up to date his theological position regarding a specific issue of the relations between the Orthodox Church and the Miaphysite Churches: the possibility of developing the Orthodox dogma in order to facilitate the understanding of the dialogue partners. All the more so, since the majority of Romanian Orthodox professors of missiology and ecumenism currently agree that, in the general spectrum of current ecumenical discussions, the only one that is likely to succeed and from which practical results can be glimpsed is the dialog with the Oriental Churches.

The possibility of dogmatic reconciliation between the Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine tradition and those of the Cyrillian tradition, i.e. Syriac, Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopian, has stimulated many theologians to find practical solutions to overcome, in the perspective of full communion, fifteen centuries-old obstacles. The fact that the topic was of great concern to Father Stăniloae is shown by the studies he devoted to this issue, which was much discussed in the second half of the last century. As Pr. Prof. Cristinel Ioja asserts, “without any doubt, an essential component of Fr. Stăniloae’s work and thought is the ecumenical one, developed especially in the second half of the 20th century in studies, conferences, theological presentations and positions in response to the ecumenical agenda”, often proposing “concepts and solutions”<sup>3</sup> to overcome theological stalemates. As Fr. Stăniloae himself confessed, the dominant aspiration of the whole of Christianity at the present stage of its history was ecumenical<sup>4</sup>, and the Orthodox Church has directed this concern primarily towards the Miaphysite Churches<sup>5</sup>, “considering them as the closest to it by preserving

<sup>3</sup> Cristinel IOJA, “Prefață”, in: Daniele COGONI, Anca Mariana NECHITA, *La visione ecumenica di Padre Dumitru Stăniloae. Aspetti esistenziali, teologici ed ecclesiali/Viziunea ecumenică a Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae. Aspecte existențiale, teologice și ecleziale*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 2024, pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> A general overview on Stăniloae’s contribution to the Ecumenical Dialogue in Ciprian I. TOROCZKAI, “Father Dumitru Stăniloae and the Ecumenical Dialogue. Between Disproof and Acceptance”, in: *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 5 (3/2013), pp. 1-36.

<sup>5</sup> The fact that the term “monophysite” is unacceptable from a theological point of view

as unchanged as possible the treasury of faith and worship of the original Christianity”<sup>6</sup>. Since Father Stăniloae repeatedly refers to the ecumenical meetings between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we will make a brief review of them from a historical and dogmatic point of view, in order to be able to follow the Romanian theologian’s comments and to trace the evolution of his thinking on this topic.

## II. Fr. Stăniloae’s approach

In brief, there were eight meetings between the two ecclesiastical families: four unofficial: 1. Aarhus, Denmark, 1964; 2. Bristol, England, 1967; 3. Geneva, Switzerland, 1970; 4. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1971, and then four official meetings: 1. Chambesy, Switzerland, 1985; 2. St. Bishoy Monastery, Egypt, 1989; 3. Chambesy, Switzerland, 1990; 4. Chambesy, Switzerland, 1993. Although the only meeting he attended was in Addis Ababa in 1971<sup>7</sup>, Fr. Stăniloae undertook the first and most dogmatically profound approach to the problem in 1965, after the first unofficial meeting. His interest in this question was concretized in his study “The Possibility of Dogmatic Reconciliation between the Orthodox Church and the Ancient

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was demonstrated by Sebastian Brock in his study “Miaphysite, not monophysite!” (*Cristianesimo nella Storia* 37 [2016], pp. 45-52), where he shows that the use of the terms “Miaphysite” and “Miaphysitism” has an important function in distinguishing between two very different Christological positions, thus helping us to avoid serious misunderstandings regarding the christological teaching of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (p. 45).

<sup>6</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Relațiile Bisericii Ortodoxe Române cu Bisericile Vechi Orientale, cu Biserica Romano-Catolică și cu protestantismul”, in: *Ortodoxia XX* (1968)/ 2, p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> The full text presented by the Romanian professor and a report following the meeting were published in Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Perspectivele dialogului cu Bisericile Vechi Orientale. Lucrările comisiei interortodoxe de la Addis Abeba”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 89 (1971)/ 9–10, pp. 978-991. For a summary of the discussions and conclusions of this meeting, see Andrei MACAR, “Addis Abāba as Place of Ecumenical Dialogue between Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches”, in: Stanislau PAULAU, Martin TAMCKE (eds.), *Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in a Global Context*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2022, pp. 169-192.

Oriental Churches”, which appeared in the first issue of the Romanian Patriarchate’s journal *Ortodoxia* in 1965. In this study, Fr. Stăniloae methodically sets out first of all the methodological and dogmatically profound approach to the problem, presenting “with satisfaction”<sup>8</sup> the final results of the discussions, and then gives the floor to the representatives of the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches, recording their main statements with dogmatic implications.

Thus, in accordance with the document of the official Declaration of the Aarhus meeting, Fr. Stăniloae states at the very beginning of the study:

“The separation of the Ancient Oriental Churches from the Universal Church in the 5th century AD was caused by a terminological misunderstanding concerning the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ and by national, political and social tensions between the Byzantine Empire and the peoples of the East”<sup>9</sup>.

Father Stăniloae’s entire contribution to this dialogue will consist, as we shall see shortly, in clarifying Christological terminology, the main point on which the two Christian families were in conflict, emphasizing that “the division did not deepen further, but has remained until today a surface division, a misunderstanding on questions of terms, not a division in faith”<sup>10</sup>. This conviction has been officially shared by representatives of both traditions. To illustrate this, Fr. Stăniloae first makes a brief diachronic excursion in which he invokes the occasional links that the Orthodox Church had in the past with the Ancient Oriental Churches, especially the Armenian, and then invokes statements by Romanian theologians who either support their orthodoxy (Dimitrie Dan, Nicolae Chițescu, Liviu Stan) or that their return “to the bosom of the Orthodox Church is easy” (I. Rămureanu)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Ciprian I. TOROCZKAI, “Father Dumitru Stăniloae and the Ecumenical Dialogue...”, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice între Biserica Ortodoxă și vechile Biserici Orientale”, in: *Ortodoxia* XVII (1965)/ 1, January-March, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, p. 6.

Presenting to the Romanian theologians the conclusion of the first unofficial meeting with the Orientals, Stăniloae says: "The Orthodox theologians participating in the Aarhus Meeting clearly and unanimously recognized that the distinction between the Orthodox Church and the Ancient Oriental Churches on dogmatic and Christological grounds has only a terminological character."<sup>12</sup> His position is not an isolated one, but is in line with the consensus of other great theologians of the last century who have actively participated in this dialog. Father Stăniloae cites in this regard names such as John Meyendorff, Ioannis Karmiris, Ioannis Romanidis, Ioannis Zizioulas or Dimitri Baranov, and therefore quotes word for word the statements of the first three, the most concise of which belongs to Pr. Prof. John Meyendorff, recorded in his report entitled "Chalcedonians and Monophysites after Chalcedon": "We all believe that a union (between Orthodox and non-Chalcedonians) is possible, since we agree that in the distant past as well as in the near past the difference between us consisted more in terminology than in theology itself"<sup>13</sup>.

### **III. Proposals to overcome misunderstandings**

After presenting the views of Orthodox theologians, Fr. Stăniloae cites the most important statements of theologians from the different Oriental Churches: Armenian, Syriac, Malabar Syriac, Ethiopian or Coptic. Their contributions reveal a difficulty in understanding the Chalcedon formula, despite the repeated efforts of Orthodox theologians, especially Greek, to explain the meanings it contains. Moreover, other non-Chalcedonian theologians (whose spokesman was the Armenian bishop Terenig Poladian) who did not attend the meeting still erroneously considered that the Orthodox were preaching Nestorian teaching, a fact not recognized by the Orthodox Church. Such assertions, the Romanian theologian notes,

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<sup>12</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...", p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...", p. 7. Cf. *Unofficial Consultation between Theologians of Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches. Minutes and Papers of the Consultation Held at the University of Aarhus, Denmark (11-15 August, 1964)*, Part. II, p. 12.

“while they persist, constitute obstacles to any rapprochement between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches”, but they “cannot persist because they are based on a lack of knowledge of the doctrine of the Orthodox Church”<sup>14</sup>.

Synthesizing the divergent positions of the Orientals regarding the Orthodox teaching, Father Stăniloae divides them into three groups: 1. Those who “admit the identity of the non-Chalcedonian teaching with the Chalcedonian one and, consistent with it, admit a merging of their formulas with that of Chalcedon”; 2. Other Oriental theologians “admit the identity of their teaching with orthodox teaching, but hesitate to admit the merging of their formulas with that of Chalcedon”; 3. “The third group does not even admit the identity of the non-Chalcedonian teaching with the orthodox, although from the way in which they expound their teaching we find no distinction between it and the orthodox.”<sup>15</sup>

In spite of these centrifugal theological attitudes, the Romanian theologian is not discouraged, but proposes to the Orthodox Church to adopt some initiatives that would contribute to the theological education of the Orientals, especially those in the last two groups mentioned. Here is what Fr. Stăniloae proposes to our Church:

1. “To convince in theological meetings and through studies all the theologians of the Oriental Churches about the identity of Orthodox teaching with the non-Chalcedonian; 2. To persuade them of the necessity of a common formula in which their own formulas would be merged with the Chalcedonian formula, showing them, from the very fact that the terminological distinction has kept them for so many centuries and continues to keep some even now in the mistaken opinion that between the Oriental Churches and the Orthodox Church there is a real Christological divergence, the harmful effect of a terminological separation”<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, p. 11.

#### **IV. The living and dynamic character of the Church and Tradition**

Father Dumitru Stăniloae clearly shows that God continues to act continuously throughout history in the Church, and this

“is inevitably reflected in an enrichment of language, which constantly becomes diversified and more delicate, and thus capable of expressing always more subtly the mystery of the redemptive and spiritualizing activity of the Spirit of Christ in human nature and his activity in history. Hence comes the justification and the necessity for employing new words, metaphors and formulas in order to express the mystery”<sup>17</sup>.

As we shall immediately see, Fr. Stăniloae understood that the decisions/statements of the Councils and the writings of the Fathers had once been composed prophetically - that is, responding, at the time of their formulation, to the dogmatic needs of the moment. Fr. Stăniloae, in his turn, creatively assumes the tradition and, inspired by the same prophetic spirit of the Fathers, updates their teaching according to the theological needs of his own contemporary times. Thus, he argues that we should not consider what the Fathers once affirmed “as expressing God in an integral way, as excluding for the future other possible ways of expressing God [...]. We should not cling to any one [in part] nor to all of them together as the ultimate reality”<sup>18</sup>, as the last possible expression of revealed truth.

This is the profoundly theological understanding of Tradition that lies behind the following statements by Fr. Stăniloae. After proposing the adoption of a common formula of faith between the Byzantine and Oriental Orthodox, he asks, “But the question may be asked: is it possible to combine Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian formulas?” Going further, Stăniloae deepens this question with two other interrogations: 1. “Is it formally or principally permissible to supplement a dogmatic definition established by

<sup>17</sup> Father D. STĂNILOAE, “The Orthodox Conception of Tradition and the Development of Doctrine,” in: *Sobornost* 5 (1969), p. 659.

<sup>18</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Sobornicitate deschisă”, in: *Ortodoxia* XXIII (1971)/ 2, p. 173.



an ecumenical council with new terms, apparently even contradictory to the terms of that definition? 2. Is there a concrete possibility of assimilating the content of the non-Chalcedonian formulas with that of the Council of Chalcedon?”<sup>19</sup>

Fr. Stăniloae answers these questions by bringing as arguments the positions of other Chalcedonian theologians present at the Aarhus meeting, reflected in the “Common Declaration”, which states that: “The Council of Chalcedon can only be understood in the light of the subsequent Council of Constantinople (553). All Councils must be viewed with stages in an integral development and no council or document can be studied in isolation.”<sup>20</sup>

In his analysis, however, Stăniloae dissociates himself from the more daring theological position of I. Karmiris, who, trying to go further than the theologians just quoted, states,

“The Church is not obliged to remain rigid and to fight over words and sentences, but it has the right to change them or to replace them with others, leaving untouched or even unchanged the essence of the Orthodox dogmas, which in any case must remain eternally unchanged”<sup>21</sup>.

Although he does not subscribe to the latter’s view that the old conciliar formulas can be changed, Fr. Stăniloae affirms that they can nevertheless be clarified or enlarged, and illustrates this possibility with concrete examples from the history of the Ecumenical Councils<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Unofficial Consultation...*, part I, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Unofficial Consultation...*, part I, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Fr. Stăniloae stated the same thing, in other words, in another study: “The progress of mankind towards unity which is present in men’s fundamental aspirations at every level, obliges the Churches to engage in this search together for new and common expressions of the Christian faith” (D. STĂNILOAE, “The Orthodox Conception of Tradition...”, p. 661).

## **V. Demonstrating the possibility of dogma's development**

Thus, "it is well known that the first eight articles of the Symbol defined at Constantinople represent an improvement of the Nicene text in order to deal with new situations"<sup>23</sup>; that is, the Second Ecumenical Council improved by addition the formulations of the First Ecumenical Council. "Also at the Council of Constantinople the Nicene expression «of the being of the Father» (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς) was eliminated, which seemed to deduct the person of the Son from the divine being, and thus to confuse the persons in the one being"<sup>24</sup>.

After having historically demonstrated the possibility of updating the dogmatic formulas established by the Ecumenical Councils and after having clarified the complementary nature of the dogmatic statements of the two sides, Father Stăniloae comes up with the practical solution of combining them in a balanced formula, in which both theological traditions are expressed:

"It should be confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the Same [consisting] of a rational soul and body; homoousios with the Father as to his Godhead, and the Same homoousios with us as to his manhood; in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of the Father before ages as to his Godhead, and in the last days, the Same, for us and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin Theotokos as to his manhood; One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only begotten, made known of and in two natures, namely of and in two essences, which exist without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of the natures or essences having been in no wise taken away by reason of the union, but rather the properties of each nature or essence being preserved, and both concurring into one Person

<sup>23</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...", p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...", p. 13.

or one hypostasis, or a nature of God the Word incarnated (God the Word assuming and keeping in His hypostasis the human nature in its fullness, but without change and without confusion and without separation in the union with His divine nature and performing through them without separation and without confusion His theandric work, namely those that are human in a divine way, and those that are divine with the participation of His humanity)”<sup>25</sup>.

Commenting on his own definition, Stăniloae points out that it is nothing other than the definition of Chalcedon in which he also introduced expressions of the non-Chalcedonians, thereby achieving a balance that was lacking in the past, when the expressions of the non-Chalcedonians tended exclusively to emphasize unity, and the definition of Chalcedon gave the impression that it unilaterally emphasized duality.

As for the ecclesiastical character of his endeavor, we find it explained in his work, in the study “The Orthodox Conception of Tradition and the Development of Doctrine”, in which Father Stăniloae states that the need to use new expressions, metaphors and terms is precisely due to the new problems, challenges and realities to which the Church must respond in every historical period:

“The fullness of the mystery of redemption, that is to say the divinity in its nearness and most perfect redemptive activity in the course of our earthly life, lived continuously in the Church, is a reality which cannot be fully expressed by words, metaphors or formulas. For this reason, new expressions are justified.”<sup>26</sup>  
However, we must also take into account the fact that “the

<sup>25</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, pp. 26-27. Ciprian Iulian TOROCZKAI’s translation in “Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches in Dialogue: Reception, Disagreement and Convergence”, in: *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 8 (2/2016), pp. 268-269.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Dumitru STĂNILOAE “Conceptia ortodoxă cu privire la tradiție și la dezvoltarea doctrinei”, in: *Ortodoxia* XXVII (1975)/ 1, pp. 5-14; “The Orthodox Conception of Tradition...”, p. 658.

new expressions must be incorporated amongst those by which the mystery of Christ was revealed at the beginning, so that the original expressions may convey the same mystery of the action of Christ as did the original ones [...]. If one uses new expressions, one throws new light onto the content expressed. In fact, by these new expressions, the human mind also wishes to make clear certain vital sides or aspects implied in the divine revelation, elements insufficiently brought to light by the ancient formulas, and apt to reply to new questions raised by the human spirit”<sup>27</sup>.

The Church, however, is a living organism – the Body of Christ whose life is constantly replenished and sustained by the unceasing breath of the Holy Spirit – and not an inert or petrified institution. Therefore “the need for a continual renewal of the good proclamation of the Gospel and its theological expression in the most appropriate and spiritually comprehensive concepts is demanded by the very nature of faith and Tradition”<sup>28</sup>.

This adaptation of the expression of the same faith in contemporary language is also demanded by Fr. Stăniloae on the part of Oriental Christians, when, concluding his study on the possibilities of dogmatic reconciliation with the Ancient Oriental Churches, he expresses his hope that theologians of the Oriental Churches will undertake similar research to his:

“We hope that the non-Chalcedonians will also begin to concern themselves with more concrete ways regarding the desired reconciliation, once the historical obstacles to reconciliation have disappeared and the dogmatic differences between us and

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<sup>27</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, “The Orthodox Conception of Tradition...”, p. 660.

<sup>28</sup> Nikolaos ASPROULIS, Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, “Which Orthodoxy, Whose Heresy? An Eastern Orthodox Comment on the Breach between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches”, in: Christine CHAILLOT (ed.), *The Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches*, Volos Academy Publications, Volos, 2016, p. 264.

them, even according to the opinion of most of them, are are non-essential.”<sup>29</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

The above pages prove that Saint Dumitru the Theologian “not only genuinely renewed the traditional way of thinking based on the authority of the Church Fathers, but raised several points fundamentally significant for the theological discourse of today”, ecumenism being to him one of the “familiar areas for creative theological thinking”<sup>30</sup>. His integral theological approach, which embraces both faith and spirituality, “enables him constantly to challenge the language and images applied to God. Theology for him means freedom from both enslaving passions and intellectual idols”<sup>31</sup>.

This charism of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, a new Holy Father of the Church, of reconciling extremes or divergent sides, although it has been noted by those who knew him in life or read his writings, has not yet been sufficiently valued in academic theology or in interconfessional dialogues. As the Italian theologian Daniele Coghi pointed out,

“Stăniloae was by no means an amateur in the way he approached ecumenical issues, and this is demonstrated by the fact that all his arguments were rigorously documented at the biblical level, at the patristic level, at the level of Orthodox theology in general,

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<sup>29</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice...”, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Ion BRIA, “The creative vision of D. Stăniloae – An introduction to his theological thought”, in: *Persoană și comuniune. Prinos de cinstitie Preotului Profesor Academician Dumitru Stăniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani*, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Ortodoxe Sibiu, Sibiu, 1993, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> Ion BRIA, “The creative vision...”, p. 76. Father Macarie of Simonos Petras also specifies that Saint Dumitru “testified about this presence of God through his writings and conferences, which increasingly acquired the character of meditations, animated by a strong poetic impulse, on the mystery of salvation in Christ and His presence in the cosmos” (*LE SYNAXAIRE. Vie des Saints de l’Église Orthodoxe par le Hiéromoine Macaire de Simonos Pétra*, TOME SEPTIÈME – Suppléments, Simonos Pétra, 2025, p. 44).

as well as at the level of the analysis of the first ecumenical documents produced since 1948”<sup>32</sup>.

He had a deep sense of the unity of all Christians, and one of his most important ecumenical contributions is represented by the study “Open conciliarity”<sup>33</sup>. This concept is for him “crucial to the understanding of the identity and the place of Christian confessions in the framework of the Universal Church”<sup>34</sup>. Thus “open conciliarity is a sacramental space for growing together, each with its specific identity, within an embracing catholicity”<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, to understand his ecumenical spirit, it is important to know his vision of the convergence between theology and spirituality, a perspective with great potential in the search for unity among Christians<sup>36</sup>.

The highlighting of his complex personality, concretized in the orthodoxy of his thought, his Christian life assumed in a sacrificial way and his flexibility in his relationships with others, is of landmark value in the context in which ecumenical dialogue with the Oriental Churches has returned to the attention of Orthodox theologians. One of the major obstacles to the practical application of theological solutions, however, is that, beyond the strictly dogmatic and, by extension, liturgical level, the persecutions to which the Syrians, for example, were subjected by Justinian have overlapped with theological disagreements and a series of resentments and negative emotions that take the form of nationalism and are perceived as an indispensable element for preserving memory and saving one's national identity. Since it involves a not insignificant dose of irrationality, this aspect may be much more difficult to overcome than theological issues, which can be discussed in logical terms.

Despite this, in the view of Saint Dumitru Stăniloae, the Church has a duty to provide a contemporary answer, from a linguistic and terminological

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<sup>32</sup> Daniele COGONI, “Angajamentul lui Stăniloae față de unitatea Bisericii cu referire la mișcarea ecumenică”, in: D. COGONI, A. M. NECHITA, *La visione ecumenica...*, pp. 313-314.

<sup>33</sup> See above, n. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Ion BRIA, “The creative vision...”, p. 78.

<sup>35</sup> Ion BRIA, “The creative vision...”, p. 78.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ion BRIA, “The creative vision...”, p. 78.

point of view, to certain aspects that have been somewhat neglected in the past.:

“Orthodoxy, due to the unfavorable circumstances of historical and ecclesiastical development it has undergone, although it has preserved the formulas of the original maximal vision unaltered, has not refreshed them and has not highlighted the more subtle details of this maximal vision through new expressions capable of responding to more complex needs”<sup>37</sup>,

as is the dialogue between Christians of different traditions, which is essential and unavoidable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>37</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE “Concepția ortodoxă cu privire la tradiție...”, p. 13.