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# **The Trinitarian Ecclesiology of D. Stăniloae Compared to That of J.M.R. Tillard. Its Value for Ecumenical Dialogue - First Part -**

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## **Abstract**

This modest article (which will be followed by a second part in the next issue) attempts to provide an overview of Father Dumitru Stăniloae's contribution to theology, emphasizing acknowledgments and comments from the entire horizon of Christian theology, especially Roman Catholic theology. The present study shows how Stăniloae was able to successfully develop a form of neopatristic theology, which served to support not only his spiritual approach of the dogmas, but also his emphasis on the importance of exegesis, philological theology, ascetic experience, of the development of Tradition and, in a very special way, of ecumenism. All these aspects converge in a new model of theology that Stăniloae himself calls „living theology”.

## **Keywords**

Fathers of the Church, patristic theology, D. Veștemean, D. Stăniloae, abstract dogmatics, living dogmatics, existential theology, ecumenical theology

## I. Introduction

Trying to summarize, in brief and partial considerations, the complex spiritual and theological stature of Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) is certainly an impossible undertaking.

Therefore, what will be possible to highlight here will only be a modest attempt to access *a few features*, however obvious, of the genius of a “giant” of theology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, preferring, for this purpose, to highlight only a few significant passages from his writings<sup>1</sup>. In making this attempt, a brief hermeneutical consideration is appropriate.

The basis of Stăniloae’s thinking is a much wider cultural world, there is a much richer multi-confessional and inter-confessional theological horizon, being understood that he is and remains, in this horizon, a Romanian Orthodox theologian.

The proof is the fact that he does not only heavily relies on the reflections of numerous theologians and unorthodox philosophers contemporary with him, but also praises them, without giving up critical considerations. As an example, it is enough to mention one of his writings, well known also in the West, *God is love*<sup>2</sup>, in which he repeatedly quotes Catholic and Protestant theologians, especially his contemporaries (G.W.F. Hegel, H. Küng, P. Tillich, H. Schultz, W. Eichrodt, N. Brox, H. Mühlen, K. Barth, T.J. Altizer, B. Welte, H.U. von Balthasar, H. Ott, K. Kitamori, K. Rahner, W. Elert, C. Capizzi).

Quoting them, he often compares their thinking with that of the Fathers of the Church and Church writers, but only in a few passages does he compare their thinking with that of Gregory Palamas and a few Orthodox authors.

This means, that for Stăniloae, the different contemporary Eastern and Western theologies can dialogue with each other especially starting

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<sup>1</sup> The translation into Romanian of the original texts of Father Dumitru Stăniloae from Italian, English and French was made by Dr. Anca Mariana Nechita.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. STĂNILOAE, „Dumnezeu este iubire”, in: *Ortodoxia*, 3 (1971), pp. 366-402; transl. fr. *Dieu est amour*, Editions Labor et Fides, Geneva 1980; transl. it. *Dio è amore*, Città Nuova, Roma, 1986.

from their common reference to the Fathers. After the Apostles and their writings, the Fathers of the Church, in the richness, diversity and polyphony of their theological thought, constitute the primary cultural and universal background of Christian thought, with which any confessional theology is obliged to confront.

And if it is obvious that there are so many Fathers and so many patristic theologians, it is reasonable and legitimate that there are as many theologians belonging to different Christian denominations who refer to the Fathers. The polyphony of patristic thought justifies the polyphony of contemporary theological thought that strives to achieve a differentiated unity within the ecumenical course of the Churches.

It must be said that Stăniloae's immersion in the cultural and ecumenical horizon of the universal Church makes him a theologian not only of the Orthodox, but of the whole of Christendom. This implies that a correct hermeneutic of his decidedly *irenic* thinking (that is, dedicated to the peace and reconciliation of Churches and peoples), cannot be achieved only by Orthodox theologians, but rather by the input of the theologians of all Christian denominations, from which Stăniloae drew much inspiration to nurture his particular way of thinking about the Christian faith, dogmas, ecclesiality, human communion and the very theology of the Fathers.

On the other hand, the fact that it was necessary for the entire Orthodoxy, at the dawn of the third millennium, to adopt an *irenic theological thought* is recognized by Stăniloae himself, who was its first promoter, together with another Romanian theologian and hieromonk, father Dumitru Veștemean, about whom it is worth saying a few words.

## II. The ecumenical sensitivity of Dumitru Stăniloae and Dumitru Veștemean

Father Veștemean was a member of the community at *Sâmbăta de Sus monastery*, and for years he was a frequent visitor to Mount Athos. He was highly esteemed by Father Arsenie Boca (1910-1989), but more than that he was considered a real talent in philosophy and theology, although he was not a teacher.

He became best known for his articles about Mount Athos<sup>3</sup> and for those about the ecumenical movement and the ecumenical relations of the Orthodox Church with the Anglican Church<sup>4</sup>, which he got to know well during his studies in England. However, he also wrote other theological, spiritual and literary articles, as well as some reviews of some Russian theological texts<sup>5</sup>.

Stăniloae had Veștemean for years, an assiduous collaborator of his magazine *Telegraful Român*; in this magazine Veștemean wrote many articles, addressing themes that would later be very dear to Stăniloae himself. For example, Veștemean wrote about the relationship between priesthood, meditation and prayer<sup>6</sup>, but he also wrote about ecumenical themes, such as prayer for the unity of Christians<sup>7</sup> or the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church<sup>8</sup>. It is significant that Veștemean, at that time a specialist in Anglicanism, was asked by Stăniloae to publish in his magazine, ecumenical reflections precisely on the liturgical-sacramental characteristics of this confessional Church<sup>9</sup>.

Stăniloae always placed Veștemean's reflections after the editorial, giving them primary importance within the *Telegraful Român* magazine.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. D. VEȘTEMEAN, "Situația monahilor români din Sf. Munte Athos", in: *Revista Teologică*, 1-2 (1940), pp. 31-41.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D. VEȘTEMEAN, "Probleme ecumenice", in: *Revista Teologică*, 12 (1939), pp. 481-486.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. D. VEȘTEMEAN, "Atitudini noi față de adevăruri vechi", in: *Revista Teologică*, 6 (1939), pp. 248-250; "Recenzie: N. Gorodetzky, *The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought*, London 1939", in: *Revista Teologică*, 6 (1939), pp. 267-268.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. D. VEȘTEMEAN, "Viața lăuntrică a preotului", in: *Telegraful Român* 6 (1939), pp. 1-2; "Preotul și meditația", in: *Telegraful Român*, 13 (1939), pp. 1-2; "Preotul și rugăciunea" in: *Telegraful Român*, 16 (1939), pp. 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> D. VEȘTEMEAN., "Octave de rugăciuni pentru Unitatea Bisericii", in: *Telegraful Român*, 15 (1939), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. D. VEȘTEMEAN, "Un caz supărător", in: *Telegraful Român*, 25 (1939), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. D. VEȘTEMEAN, "Confirmațiunea în Biserica Anglicană", in: *Telegraful Român*, 35 (1939), pp. 2-3. That Stăniloae particularly valued the desire to make known to Orthodoxy the experience of the students (both Anglican and Orthodox) sent to study at the Anglican Theological College in *Mirfield*, is evident from the articles hosted in his magazine *Telegraful Român* since the beginning of 1938; for example, H.V. GREEN, "Viața la colegiul teologic din *Mirfield*, Anglia", in: *Telegraful Român*, 10 (1938), p. 2; M. PIERCE, "Slujba religioasă de Dumineca într-un colegiu teologic anglican", in: *Telegraful Român*, 13 (1938), p. 2.

Therefore, Stăniloae's connection with Veștemean cannot be considered marginal, and it cannot be denied that the "great theologian of Romania", in the genesis of his thought, fed without any doubt (and also fed the Romanian theological thinking of the time), drawing inspiration from the important reflections of his friend Veștemean. For example, if Stăniloae very succinctly states that: "Romanian theology required [at the beginning of the 20th century] to treat theological themes in an irenic spirit"<sup>10</sup>, it is because Veștemean had signaled to him and to the entire Romanian culture that:

"Our Christian age can rightly be considered as the age most troubled by the idea of the brotherhood of all the worshipers of Christ, of the Unity of all Christian Churches. Never has work been done on the ecumenical field with more enthusiasm, with more daring and with more courage, as in this twentieth century. The conferences held in Stockholm, Lausanne, Oxford and Edinburgh, as well as the various irenic-ecumenical movements [...] are obvious evidence of the universal Christian existence of the feeling of the imperative need for the Unity of the Churches of Christ"<sup>11</sup>.

As far as Stăniloae is concerned, it is actually impossible not to take into account the fact that, as father Michel van Parys states, "Today his theological thought continues to fascinate Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants"<sup>12</sup>. It is a strongly ecumenical way of thinking and devoid of any extreme nationalism. Certainly, each nation has its own indisputable value and its own constructive role in human history. This conviction leads Stăniloae to make very important considerations, in some of his articles, on the mission of the Romanian nation in favor of history and

<sup>10</sup> F. STRAZZARI - L. PREZZI , "Intervista a padre Dumitru Stăniloae", in: *Il Regno-attualità*, 4 (1989), p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> D. VEȘTEMEAN, "Probleme ecumenice", pp. 481 and 485.

<sup>12</sup> M. VAN PARYS , *Ricordo di padre Dumitru Stăniloae* (Remembrance of Father Dumitru Stăniloae), in: D. STĂNILOAE, *Breviario esicasta* (Hesychast Breviary), edited by A. BROMBIN, Pazzini Editore, Rimini 2023, p. 36.

humanity. But Stăniloae adds very clearly that the value of the nation and the love for it cannot be greater than the value of Catholic, that is, universal, sobornicist love. Consequently, love of nation must not turn into exaggerated nationalism, and nationalism, whatever it may be, cannot be the prominent feature in the life of a people. Should such a thing happen, as he states: Nationalism is still a sin, because it makes you not love everyone equally. However noble nationalism may be, it still means a greater love of one's own nation<sup>13</sup>.

Of course, Stăniloae does not give up affirming that one's own race must be loved, must be cared for, must be led, with the support of all, towards a continuous spiritual rebirth, but this must happen in the consciousness of its inclusion in universal history, in the universal community of people. Approving and resuming the thinking of Protestant theologian Carl Stange, Stăniloae writes: "It is God's intention that there should be community between people. The meaning of human history is therefore that life in the community comes to expression in all its forms and possibilities"<sup>14</sup>.

In an attitude of great admiration, Olivier Clément does not hesitate to express a very interesting assessment on this topic about Stăniloae, condensed in these short but intense words:

"Father Dumitru's thinking [...] is not only ecumenical, but also «Catholic» in the full sense of the term: *kat'holon*, according to fullness, according to a totality that encompasses, that surrounds. He outlines the prospects of an *open catholicity*, where all Christian denominations can feel at ease with their diversity and their positive elaborations, consuming their limits in the burning pyre of holiness"<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Naționalismul sub aspect moral", in: *Telegraful Român*, 48 (1937), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Principii de renaștere națională", in: *Telegraful Român*, 3 (1939), p. 1. Cf. C. STANGE, *Das Ende aller Dinge*, druck und verlag von C. Bertelsmann, Gütersloh 1930, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> Olivier CLÉMENT, *Préface* (Preface), in D. STĂNILOAE, *Le génie de l'Orthodoxie. Introduction* (Genius of Orthodoxy. Introduction), trans. du roumain par (translated from Romanian by) D. Ilie Ciobotea, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1985, p. 21).

As a confirmation of Clément's observations, it can be noted that when Stăniloae presented in *Telegraful Român* his reflections on a healthy love for the nation to be combined with a Christian love extended to all, he included an important article by News about *Octave of prayers for Christian unity*.

In his article, Veștemean does not only talk about the Octave of prayer, but considers that all confessional Churches belong to the one Church of Christ. Here are his words:

“Between January 18 and 25, in the Church of Christ, fervent prayers rise to the Heavens, for the unity of the Church. Members of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Swedish and French Reformed Church, and other Lutheran churches take part in these prayers”<sup>16</sup>.

After recounting the contents of the circular that explains how to live the week of prayer well, Veștemean speaks about the ecumenical movement and says:

“This unionist movement was born in 1907, in the heart of the Anglican Church [...]. The initial spirit in which it was conceived was a return of this Church to the Roman Catholic Church. With this character it existed until around 1930. From this time it changed its primary objective, transforming itself into a universal Christian movement, its only goal being the realization - through prayer - of the Unity of all Christian Churches, according to God's will, through the ways and at the time desired by Him [...]. Without a doubt, the ideal of Christian unity is one of the supreme ideals of the Church of Christ [...]; the fulfillment of the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in one of the most solemn moments of His earthly life, He addressed with warmth to the Father, saying: «Holy Father, keep through

<sup>16</sup> D. VEȘTEMEAN, “Octava de rugăciuni pentru Unitatea Bisericii”, in: *Telegraful Român*, 3 (1939), p. 2.

thine own name those whom thou hast given Me, so that they may be one, just as we are»” (John 17, 11) <sup>17</sup>.

In the same issue of the *Telegraful Român* magazine, through the will of its director, namely Stăniloae, the love for the revival of the Romanian nation and the ecumenical passion are combined. Stăniloae and Veștemean merge their spiritual and theological genius into one to express from different points of view the passion for national and universal unity.

This is not the place to adequately delve into Veștemean’s thinking. However, the brief exposition under this little-known figure of Romanian Orthodox Theology, helped to highlight the fact that Stăniloae’s ecumenical sensibility was present in various other well-known and well-supported theologians.

Apart from Veștemean, figures such as Teodor Bodogae, Dumitru Călugăr, Grigorie T. Marcu, Nicolae Terchilă, professors of the “Andreiana” Academy, and these collaborators of Stăniloae in the *Telegraful Român* magazine can also be mentioned.

### **III. From an abstract dogmatic to a living dogmatic in the style of the Fathers of the Church**

Stăniloae, throughout his entire experience as a believer and theologian, was animated by a constant desire: that of *elaborating, starting from a reinterpretation of the dogmas of faith, a living, existential theology*, capable of stopping the rationalistic drift in which academic Christian theology was at the beginning of the 20th century. As Father Cristinel Ioja states:

“The deep motivation for a theology of experience, capable of transforming the theologian’s way of perceiving and deepening theology, is expressed by Father Stăniloae in 1932, in a speech intended for young theologians. From its pages, published in

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<sup>17</sup> D. VEȘTEMEAN, “Octava de rugăciuni pentru Unitatea Bisericii”, in: *Telegraful Român*, 3 (1939), p. 2.



*Telegraful Român*, we can perceive the inner motivations of the theologian Stăniloae in the service of theology and in the perception of its meaning for the horizon of human knowledge. First, he sees neither theology nor dogma as separate from life, and secondly, he radiates an ardent desire united with freedom, to penetrate the secret meanings of dogma through experience. This method overcomes freezing in concepts and discovers unsuspected nuances and depths of the reality and meaning of theology through an ever-deepening knowledge of the personal God”<sup>18</sup>.

This desire, developed since his youth, to arrive at a living theology, was very clearly confessed by Stăniloae in the introductory volume, in French, to his most famous work, *Dogmatica*:

“In writing this synthesis of dogmatic theology, we have sought to discover the spiritual significance of the teachings of the Church, and to emphasize their truth in its correspondence with the deep needs of the soul, which seeks salvation and progresses on the path of an ever-increasing communion with its neighbor, a communion through which it reaches a certain experience of God, as the supreme communion and source of all communion. Thus, I have abandoned the scholastic way of treating dogmas as abstract propositions of purely theoretical interest and largely outdated, without any connection to the deep life of the soul”<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Cristinel IOJA, *O istorie a Dogmaticii în teologia ortodoxă română: de la începuturile învățământului teologic seminarial în limba română la instaurarea comunismului*, vol. II, Pro Universitaria, București, 2013, p. 343.

<sup>19</sup> “En rédigeant cette synthèse de théologie dogmatic, nous avons tenté de découvrir la signification spirituelle des enseignements de l’Eglise et de mettre évidence leur vérité dans sa correspondance aux besoins profonds de l’âme, qui cherche le salut et progresse sur le chemin d’une communion toujours plus grande avec le prochain, communion par laquelle elle arrive à une certaine expérience de Dieu en tant que communion suprême et source de toute communion. Ainsi, nous avons abandonnée la manière scolastique de traiter les dogmes comme des propositions abstraites, d’un intérêt purely theorique, et en grande mesure dépassé, sans lien avec la vie profonde de l’âme. Une authentique théologie dogmatic orthodoxe signifie une interprétation des

As father Stăniloae expresses it, the teachings of the Church, its dogmas, do not only have a *technical-theological* meaning, subject to scholastic interest, but rather a *spiritual meaning*, whose characteristic is to *correspond to the deep instances of the human soul*. These instances are brought together by it under two great existential demands: *the demand of salvation* and *the demand of communion* with the neighbor and with God.

It is not a matter of past needs, to be answered with past languages, but of present needs, to which can respond a teaching of the Church, faithful to the message of Jesus Christ, adapted to each historical moment, to each culture, to each latitude and longitude, and always able to respond to the human heart<sup>20</sup>.

It is precisely this perennial possibility of updating Christ's teachings by the Church that represents, for Stăniloae, the very force of the living Apostolic Tradition that flows in the teachings of the Fathers. For the Fathers of the Church themselves, who lived over a period of seven centuries, the true preservation of Tradition does not consist in preserving the ashes of the past. The tradition is lived by permanently keeping alive the fire sparked by the Holy Spirit, which the first Apostles, and their successors, knew how to receive, preserve and transmit in their time. Stăniloae understood this well and expressly states it in his introduction to *Dogmatica*:

“In this effort, we immersed ourselves in the way the Fathers understood the doctrine of the Church, but in the interpretation of the dogmas we also took into account the spiritual needs of the man of our days, who knew many new life experiences during the many centuries that they separate us from the time of the Fathers. We have therefore endeavored to understand the

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dogmes pour dévoiler la profondeur liberatrice, infiniment riche c'est-à-dire vivante et spirituelle, que contiennent leurs brèves formules» (D. STĂNILOAE, *Le génie de l'Orthodoxie*, p. 25); there is also an Italian translation: *Il genio dell'Ortodossia*, edited by C. Cozzi, Jaca Book, Milano 1986.

<sup>20</sup> Ioan TULCAN, “Provocări ale contemporaneității la adresa teologiei ortodoxe și posibilități de depășire ale acestora”, in: vol. *The Significance of Theology in Today's Society and Culture. Bicentennial Institute - Academy - Faculty 1822-2022*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad 2023, pp. 262-276.

teaching of the Church in the spirit of the Fathers, but at the same time to understand it as we think they would understand it today. For they would not have ignored our times, just as they did not ignore theirs”<sup>21</sup>.

In what he says, Stăniloae is in the same position with authors such as G. Florovsky, V. Lossky, J. Zizioulas, I. Briar, O. Clément, but also with Catholic authors such as H.M. de Lubac, B. Studer, Y. Congar, J. Daniélou, J. Ratzinger, for whom *Tradition* is an inexhaustible torrent of light, vitality and grace<sup>22</sup> and certainly not a lifeless fossil landmark!

For Stăniloae, as for many Orthodox and Catholic theologians, there is a need to rediscover and capitalize on the correct method of doing theology. As Filippo Carcione says:

“The correct method is that of the Fathers, whose teaching is primarily the contemplation of Holy Scripture. From them one learns an imperishable intellectual and spiritual attitude towards various conceptual elaborations. They teach a way of approaching Revelation, before the evidence of individual dogmas”<sup>23</sup>.

This method is also indispensable on the front of ecumenical dialogue, which demands that the richness of the patristic experience of the

<sup>21</sup> “Dans tentative cette, nous sommes pénétrés de la manière dont les Pères ont compris la doctrine de l’Église, mais, dans notre interprétation des dogmes, nous avons tenu compte aussi des besoins spirituels de l’homme de notre temps qui a connu beaucoup de nouvelles expériences vitales au cours des nombreux siècles qui nous séparent de l’époque des Pères. Nous sommes donc efforcé de comprendre l’enseignement de l’Église dans l’esprit des Pères, mais, en même temps, de comprendre tel que nous croyons qu’ils l’auraient compris aujourd’hui. Car ils n’auraient pas fait abstraction de notre temps, de même qu’ils ne l’ont pas fait du leur” (D. STĂNILOAE, *Le génie de l’Orthodoxie*, pp. 25-26).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. S.N. BULGAKOV, *L’Orthodoxie. Essai sur la doctrine de l’Eglise* (Orthodoxy. Essay on the Doctrine of the Church), L’Age d’Homme, Lausanne 1980, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> F. CARCIONE, *Il Vaticano II come “Ritorno ai padri della chiesa”*. *General elements* (Vatican II as a “Return to the Church Fathers”). *General elements*, Annali di Storia Sociale ed Ecclesiastica VI, Edizioni università di Cassino, 2022, article first published online: Anno VI - Gennaio 2023, available at the link <https://www.unicas.it/media/7994961/adis-6-2022-carcione-iaa.pdf> (link consulted on 12-09-2023).

undivided Church of the first millennium be never renounced. This has been repeatedly and unhesitatingly affirmed by the last bishops of Rome.

For Saint John Paul II, the first millennium is that of the unity of the Fathers, and “if we today seek [...] to restore full communion, we must refer to this unity [...]. The structures of unity that existed before the division are a legacy of experience that guides us on our way to rediscover full communion”<sup>24</sup>.

In the Encyclical *Orientale lumen*, which is a sublime eulogy of the Tradition of the Church in the East, Saint John Paul II, as Bishop of Rome, emphasized that the Catholic Church, in its ecumenical reflection, draws its inspiration without hesitation from the experience of the first millennium. During that period, in fact, as he himself states,

“the development of different experiences of ecclesial life did not prevent Christians from continuing to experience, through mutual relationships, the certainty of being at *home in any Church*, because from all of them rose, in an admirable variety of languages and modulations, the praise *of the one Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit*; all gathered to celebrate *the Eucharist*, the heart and model of the community, not only in terms of spirituality or moral life, but also for the very structure of the Church, in the variety of ministries and services under the presidency of the bishop successor of the apostles. The first Councils are an eloquent testimony to this *enduring unity in diversity*”<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, “Decreto sull’ecumenismo *Unitatis redintegratio* (21 November 1964)”, in: *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 1, pp. 286-325 [nn. 494-571]; who nn. 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> “lo sviluppo di differenti esperienze di vita ecclesiale non impediva che, mediante reciproche relazioni, i cristiani potessero continua provare la certezza di essere a *casa propria in qualsiasi Chiesa*, perch   da tutte si levava, in mirabile variet   di lingue e modulazioni, la lode dell’ *unico Padre, per Cristo nello Spirito Santo*; tutte erano adunate per celebrare l’*Eucharistia*, cuore e modello per la communit   non solo per quanto riguarda la spirituality    o la vita morale, ma anche per la structure stessa della Chiesa, nella variet   dei ministri e dei servizi sotto la presidenza del Vescovo successors of the Apostles. I primi Concili sono una testimonianza eloquente di questa perdurante *unit   nella diversit  *”, (GIOVANNI PAOLO II, “Lett. ap. *Orientale Lumen* (May 2, 1995)”, in: *L’Osservatore Romano* (May 2-3, 1995), n.18, p 5).

Stăniloae also looks towards these structures of unity from the first millennium when he talks about “open sobornicity”, a term with which he presents the Orthodox Church as a welcoming home for all. Stăniloae also refers to these structures when he speaks of “unity in diversity”, of “Irenic vision”, of reconciliation achieved in the light of the Trinitarian model. For Stăniloae, the first millennium is a guide for the rediscovery of communion in the one faith, which, in his opinion, must precede communion in the one Eucharist<sup>26</sup>.

It is impossible not to emphasize that the theological themes to which Stăniloae refers are fundamental themes highlighted in the same way and in similar terms in Saint John Paul II, whom Stăniloae met twice in the Vatican.

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<sup>26</sup> Stăniloae always expressed an obvious difficulty in considering possible intercommunion among the baptized in the absence of full unity of faith. Several theologians believe that this position, which Stăniloae always supported, is based on the conviction that ecumenical unity is not the result of the Eucharist. Rather, the Eucharist is the expression of ecumenical unity in the one faith that Stăniloae identifies, in its entirety, exclusively with the Orthodox faith. By virtue of this fact, for Stăniloae it is impossible that the Holy Eucharist can in any way compensate for the non-communication in faith of the baptized. In this sense, see R. BORDEIANU, “Ospitalità eucaristica: un’analisi fenomenologica della recente teologia ortodossa (Eucharistic Hospitality: A Phenomenological Analysis of Recent Orthodox Theology)”, in: AA.VV., *Il dono dell’ospitalità (The Gift of Hospitality)*. Proceedings of the 25th International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality (Bose, 6-9 settembre 2017), edited by L. Chremaschi - L. D’Ayala Valva - A. Mainardi, Qiqajon, Magnano (BI) 2018, pp. 271-272; T. WARE, “Church and Eucharist. Communion and Intercommunion”, in: *Sobornost*, 7 (1978), pp. 550-567, here p. 558. However, here perhaps a question could be asked: the differences due to various traditions theological, present since the time of the Fathers, can be considered pertinent to justify the assertion of a supposed “non-communication in faith” for those who, although they belong to different confessions, still believe in the Father, in Christ, in the Holy *Spirit*, in the *Most Holy Trinity*, do I believe in the Church of Christ and, even if with different approaches, in its sacraments? But perhaps another question can be expressed: if faith is born from the real encounter with Christ (and if in the Holy Liturgy the baptized meet Christ present in the Word, in the Eucharist and in the gathered community), how can the Eucharist be shared to be considered licit only if it is put according to faith? In other words: how can it be permissible for the Eucharist to be considered *only* the expression of perfectly fulfilled faith and not *the* Holy Reality in which faith is generated every moment in order to tend towards its perfection in unity, whose fulfillment is only in Heaven?

In the same orders of ideas was Benedict XVI, who offered important catechesis on the Fathers of the Church every week, for a whole year, from Saint Clement the Roman to Saint Maximus the Confessor. Last but not least, we must remember that Francis, the current bishop of Rome, during the liturgy for Saint Andrew the Apostle, celebrated in Istanbul in the second year of his pontificate, expressed these words to all the Orthodox Churches:

“I want to assure each of you that, in order to achieve the long-desired goal of full unity, the Catholic Church does not intend to impose other requirements than that of professing the common faith, and that we are ready to seek together, in the light of the teaching of Scripture and the experience of the first millennium, the ways in which we can ensure the necessary unity of the Church in the present circumstances: the only thing that the Catholic Church desires and that I seek as the Bishop of Rome, «the Church that presides in charity», is communion with the Orthodox Churches”<sup>27</sup>.

This idea of “return to the sources”, which clearly belonged to Stăniloae and which was shared by several of his orthodox colleagues in theological teaching and pursuit of the ecumenical ideal, also belongs to Catholicism and recent Catholic theologians. The revival of the patristic spirit is a task for all confessional Churches, none is excluded, a task that must necessarily go through assuming an attitude of mutual love.

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<sup>27</sup> “Voglio assicurare a ciascuno di voi che, per giungere alla meta sospirata della piena unità, la Chiesa cattolica non intende imporre alcuna esigenza, se non quella della professione della fede comune, e che siamo pronti a cercarla insieme, alla luce dell’insegnamento della Scrittura e della esperienza del primo millennio, le modalità, con le quali garantire la necessaria unità della Chiesa nelle attuali circostanze: l’unica cosa che la Chiesa cattolica desidera e che io ricerco come Vescovo di Roma, «la Chiesa che siede nella carità», è la comunione con le Chiese ortodosse” (FRANCESCO, *Omelia durante la divina liturgia (Homily during the Liturgy)*, Chiesa Patriarcale di (Patriarchal Church of) San Giorgio, Istanbul (Sunday 30 November 2014), in: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141130\\_divina-liturgia-turchia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141130_divina-liturgia-turchia.html) (link consulted on 09-20-2023).

Veștemean, in a reflection made at a conference held at the Anglican Theological College “Mirfield”, said:

“Let us impose an attitude of constructive and disinterested love, ambitiously wanting the highest good for the brother separated from us. Let’s form ourselves spiritually according to the evangelical images of brotherhood, goodwill, kindness, nobility. Let us remember that *the way to the unity of the Church is a way back, to the sources, to the secular foundations of Christianity*. Let us direct our studies towards these sources and foundations, but not only scientifically and not only historically, but also spiritually, so that they can mean a living and creative restoration of us in the fullness of the holy tradition. In the new synthesis of ecumenical work, theology must merge again with piety, scientific concern with prayer. The revival of patristic spirituality is therefore necessary, so that the theological consciousness becomes once again sobornic”<sup>28</sup>.

#### **IV. Stăniloae’s orientation towards an existential and ecumenical patristic theology**

The entire Tradition of the Church cannot but orient itself towards Jesus Christ and towards the Trinitarian life, since inter-human communion, as Stăniloae affirmed, is the reality in which

“God himself is present [...], as the source of love between people [...]. God is the God of communion, a communion made not by mere words, but by gifts and helps. It cannot be maintained and deepened without a sense of responsibility before God towards others and without the love that comes to us from Him”<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> D. VEȘTEMEAN, “Probleme ecumenice”, p. 483.

<sup>29</sup> “Dio stesso e presente [...], come sorgente dell’amore tra gli uomini [...] Dio e il Dio della comunione, una comunione fatta non di semplici parole, ma traverso doni e aiuti. Essa non può essere mantenuta e profundera senza un sentimento di responsabilità

Facilitating the realization of this communion to which man aspires, is the specific task of the Church from all times. As the keeper and witness of Tradition, she has the task of explaining in an intelligible way and of indicating in a concrete, existential way, the ways by which today's man can and is called to live the Trinitarian communion. In a reflection dedicated to *the Reception of Tradition in today's world*, Stăniloae expressed himself as follows:

“The very nature of the Tradition and the way it is perpetuated in Orthodoxy require that its content and its transmission be explained in an intelligible language to our contemporaries, so that they understand its existential character. It is necessary to understand how, even today, they correspond to the deep and permanent demands of the human being. It is necessary for them to understand that without Christ their life remains insipid, sad and meaningless even today; that without Him there is no true creative force, nor that deep and solid communion of which He is the inexhaustible source and which alone can make them happy”<sup>30</sup>.

According to Stăniloae, a theology that does not respond to man's deepest needs cannot even be called theology, since theology is certainly a discourse about God (teo-logos), *but* a God as revealed to man; a God who, revealing himself to man, also reveals man, thus giving rise to a discourse about man, an anthropology (*anthropo-logos*).

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davanti a Dio rispetto agli altri e senza l'amore che ci viene da lui” (STRAZZARI - PREZZI, *Intervista a padre Dumitru Stăniloae*, p. 106).

<sup>30</sup> “La nature même de la Tradition et la façon dont elle se perpétue dans l'Orthodoxie exigent que son contenu et son mode de transmission soient expliqués dans une langue intelligible à nos contemporains pour qu'ils en saisissent le caractère existentiel. Il faut leur faire comprendre comment, aujourd'hui encore, ils correspondent aux requêtes profondes et permanentes de l'être humain. Il faut donc leur faire percevoir que sans le Christ leur vie reste insipide, triste et dénuée de sens même aujourd'hui; que sans lui il n'y a ni force créatrice véritable, ni cette communion profonde et solide dont il est la source inépuisable et qui seule peut les rendre heureux” (D. STĂNILOAE, “L'accueil de la Tradition dans le monde d'aujourd'hui. Le point de vue de l'Orthodoxie”, in: *Irénikon*, 47/4, (1974), pp. 451-466, here pp. 464-465).



What Stăniloae expressed in the introductory lines of his *Dogmatics* and in the text dedicated to *the Reception of Tradition in today's world*, allows us to affirm without hesitation that “theology is anthropology” and “anthropology is theology”. Within the entire Tradition of the Church, “the God of men” and “the men of God” cannot be thought of separately, since the One and the other are united in the *Theanthropic Jesus Christ*. As Ioja expresses again:

“God-man-world are present in the dogmas of the Church, when talking about God, man and the world are involved, and when talking about man and the world, God is also involved. The antinomian structure of dogma has its source in man’s belief in divine Revelation”<sup>31</sup>.

Communion *with* Jesus Christ, true God and true man, but also communion with any man *in* Jesus Christ, is precisely, as Stăniloae states, that “communion through which the soul reaches a certain experience of God as the supreme communion and source of all communions”<sup>32</sup>.

Only by emphasizing the centrality of the mystery of the Incarnation can one understand why the theological and communion path preferred by Stăniloae is the one that leads from the human to the divine, from the experience of *human communion* to the experience of *divine communion* shared by man who has become able to follow Christ as a true disciple, supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, the very revelation of Christ testifies thus: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13,35); “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one In us: that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17, 21-22).

<sup>31</sup> Cristinel IOJA , *O istorie a dogmaticii*, p. 352.

<sup>32</sup> “... communion par laquelle elle arrive à une certaine expérience de Dieu en tant que communion suprême et source de toute communion” (D. STĂNILOAE, *Le génie de l'Orthodoxie*, p. 25).

Therefore, not the abstract theological language, but that of love and unity, constitutes the main way of evangelization and of knowing God as relational communion, as interpersonal unity. In this perspective, we can affirm that the attention paid to the ecumenical ideal represents for Stăniloae a true “existential theology” that unites theology and anthropology. Ecumenical theology is, indeed, for Stăniloae, an *existential theology of unity* and, at the same time, an *existential anthropology of unity*. The meaning of existence is communion; that is precisely why Stăniloae states:

“I learned that God is not closed in on Himself and that people are not separated from Him and from each other, abandoned to their own strength, but that God works in them and sustains their strength so that they become more and more like Him. I learned that [...] God wants to unite all people in communion with Him and thus with each other [...]. I have learned that if God works in men, and man is created in His image, man also has a work to do, rooted in his nature, a work which is normally related to God's, a work through which man aspires to rise to an ever closer union with Him and to deify himself. As a result, I also understood the truth of what phillocalia says about man's efforts to progress towards his deification”<sup>33</sup>.

Therefore, personal growth towards communion is nourished by the encounter with the other, therefore, “each conscious subject being in an ontological and active relationship with another conscious subject, has

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<sup>33</sup> “Ho appreso che Dio non è chiuso in se stesso e che gli uomini non sono separati da Lui e fra loro, abbandonati alle proprie forze, ma che Dio opera in essi e che sostiene le loro forze perché diventino sempre più simili a Lui. Ho appreso che tra Dio e gli uomini si realizza una comunione che non confonde questi con Dio e che Dio vuole unificare tutti gli uomini in comunione con Lui e quindi fra loro. Ho appreso che Dio non resta né separato da noi, né si confonde con noi nel mondo del panteismo. Ho appreso che se Dio opera negli uomini e l'uomo è creato a sua immagine, anche all'uomo compete un'opera, radicata nella sua natura, un'opera che normalmente si ricorda con quella di Dio, un'opera per cui l'uomo aspira ad elevarsi verso un'unione sempre più stretta con Lui e a deificarsi. Consequently, he also understood the truth of what the filocalia says about the efforts of man to progress towards his deification” (STRAZZARI-PREZZI, *Intervista a padre Dumitru Stăniloae*, p. 110).

within itself a dialogic dynamism, a dialogic tension, through which the subjects support each other in a spiritual process of perfection”<sup>34</sup> which, when it involves the presence and transforming action of God, is precisely what the tradition of the Fathers calls *deification*.

In this sense, solitude, understood as the exclusion of the other, as opposition to relationship, is a dehumanization in every sense, a counter-ontology. Only in opening to the community, where God’s communal love is confessed, can *the solitary* heal from the dehumanizing power of solitude, rediscovering himself in a renewed way as a “person”.

The very consciousness of being a person, of being called to relationship, is the fundamental existential dimension of man; but this dimension is revealed to consciousness only in the real experience of the neighbor, be he divine or human.

It might be interesting to note that Stăniloae defines the Christian faith itself as living in community, living in common nourished by the Holy Liturgy, which in its essence is a common banquet where one feeds on Christ. Thus, the liturgical life of believers in divine worship becomes, for Stăniloae, the exemplary place of human coexistence, to the extent that it achieves the perfect and reciprocal communion of believers with God the Trinity and with each other, it achieves that communion that makes humanity a participant in life the Holy Trinity and therefore the people of God. It is the Holy Trinity, as Stăniloae states,

“the force of spiritual attraction to the communion of conscious beings, and She gave him the nature which feels happy only by the realization of communion. Her force of attraction is experienced perfectly in the holy Liturgy, and this experience is prolonged in the life of Christians as a church community, meant to extend Her force of attraction throughout human society to perfect it as communion”<sup>35</sup>.

*To be continued in the next issue*

<sup>34</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Responsabilitate creștină”, in: *Ortodoxia*, 2 (1970), p. 184.

<sup>35</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia Ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2004, p. 623.