

## Dogmatic Theology and Philokalia in Romania under Communism

In the midst of materialism, atheist communism and the ravages left behind by the Second World War, the emergence of *Philokalia* in Romania is one of the means used so the mystery of man's salvation in Christ is not abandoned. In the Romanian thinking, the Orthodox Dogmatics will benefit from the depths of philokalic thinking in order to gradually assimilate the spirit of patristic theology and to overcome the old scholastic schisms. The proof is that towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Orthodox Dogmatic Theology in Romania had made important steps in the creative assimilation of Patristic Tradition and in gaining a unitary vision on the relation dogma-spirituality-cult. Toward the end of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vision of Father Dumitru Staniloae on the steps to be followed in Romanian theology for renewing it was focused on the translation of *Philokalia*.

The reception of its translation was one of the best, being assimilated to the importance of Scripture and to a special event for the entire Romanian culture. "However it would seem exaggerated, the importance of *Philokalia* for the Orthodox spirituality is equal to the importance of the Scripture for Christianity. *Philokalia* is the Bible of the Orthodox spirituality"<sup>1</sup>. *Philokalia* is a "gift to the Romanian theology", a long-awaited gift, being the "book of spiritual spring", a book of "unique and central value during the centuries of Orthodoxy life", "a treasure of Orthodox spirituality", completely expressing "the essence of Orthodoxy" i.e. "the transfiguration or deification of man (and the cosmos) through grace"<sup>2</sup>.

The translation of the *Philokalia* was considered to be a "decisive step into the depth" and an "epochal work" capable of moving hearts and of guiding souls<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Mariana Em. Vasilescu, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă*, in "Revista Teologică", year XXXVII (1947), nr. 1-2, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Diac. Nicolae Mladin, *Atitudini. Despre Filocalie* in "Revista Teologică", year XXXVI (1946), nr. 7-8, p. 388.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Grigorie T. Marcu, *Recenzie la Filocalia sau culegere din scrierile Sfinților Părinți cari arată cum se poate omul curăța, lumina și desăvârși*, volumul I, traducere Prot stavr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Tipografia Arhidiecezană, 1946, p. XII+408 in "Revista Teologică", year XXXVI

Father Dumitru Stăniloae translated the Philokalia in Romanian using the two volumes of the second edition of the Greek Philokalia published in Athens in 1893 by Panagiot At. Tzelati. He did not follow this text faithfully, but he also used Patrologia edited by J.-P. Migne and the scientific editions of some of the writings contained in Philokalia. The contribution of Father Stăniloae is remarkable not only as a “critical edition”, but also as a “book for all”, a guide for the spiritual growth of man in Christ. He succeeded it by the care for the comparative study of texts, by confronting the data that required a revision of the authors’ chronology and of Philokalia writings, by the frequent interventions in clarifying some difficult passages, as well as by the language appropriate to as many readers as possible. Father Staniloae’s effort to offer a translated work easy to be understood by as many Christians as possible, had the premise that there is only one spirituality, and that “in the Orthodox Church there is no line of firm separation between the life of the monk and the Christian life in general”<sup>4</sup>. The first volume of Philokalia is dedicated to his daughter Mioara, who died in 1945. The author also thanked those who supported him translating and editing the Philokalia, which he hoped to be printed in 4 or 5 more volumes. Thus, in the end of the “Foreword”, Father Staniloae thanked Father Arsenie Boca from the Brâncoveanu Monastery, who “wished to write after my dictation most of the translation at its first editing” and the one who “executed the cover”, as well as to Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan who supported him in editing this volume in times when “there is so little paper”<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the *Romanian Philokalia* appeared in times of great social-religious turmoil, but also of personal trials for the translator, who assumed the way of living philokalically, as we could say, since he translated and revealed the mystery of faith, love, patience, suffering, prayer, and joy that transpires from Philokalia.

Through the translation of the Philokalia, again the Orthodox Dogmatics had the chance of re-centring in the method and spirit of the Fathers of the Church’s thinking. This opportunity was gradually capitalized by the most prominent representatives of the Orthodox Dogmatics in Romania during the communist period, and in this context, Father Dumitru Stăniloae became one of the most important Orthodox theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The lay of the interwar period under the planned blows of the communist

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(1946), nr. 1-2, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> Grigorie T. Marcu, *Recenzie la Filocalia...*, p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Cuvânt înainte la Filocalia sau culegere din scrierile sfinților Părinți cari arată cum se poate omul curăța, lumina și desăvârși*, volumul I, p. V, IX. This first volume was exhausted at the beginning of 1947 and was printed in 1500 copies. A second edition followed at the Institute of Graphic Arts “Dacia Traiană” S.A. XII, 404 p.

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regime, breaking with the past of science and culture, was done according to plans; theology was “down” under the pressure of the control organs and the Marxist-Leninist propaganda, the spirituality of the doctrine was not approved, and a multitude of hierarchs, priests and faithful confessed their faith in the material and spiritual darkness of prisons. A world was sinking and a lofty one was rising on the horizon. But as a seed buried in the earth waiting for the Resurrection, the closed, dark and concentrationist frame of this period contained the hopeful light of Philokalia, the lively power of the Church worship, and the explosive force of Tradition<sup>6</sup>.

Father Stăniloae gave a great importance to the philokalical writings as he not only translated them, but also managed to integrate most of them in the extraordinary expression of his Dogmatics and of the entire theological work elaborated in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The reason for translating Philokalia was expressed in 1975 at a conference in Belgium, as he anticipated the re-editing of the other 8 volumes of Philokalia interrupted in 1948 at Sibiu.

“Since the language of these translations had become more difficult to be understood for its age, and most of these writings were found in manuscripts, many kept in central libraries, over the last decades the need for a new translation and printing of the philokalical writings arose. Such partial translation and printing actually took place in the years 1946-1948 and this translation is about to be printed further. Since, in the meantime, the spiritual life of the Church’s faithful has also turned to other cultural contents, more different from the contents of the ancient spiritual writings, we felt that these writings, in their new translation, should be provided with introductions and notes to bring the spiritual notions of the life described by these writings closer to their contemporary cultural horizon. In general, publishing these writings enjoyed a favourable reception. The philokalical writings have proven capable of responding to some spiritual problems and demands of the believers from today”<sup>7</sup>.

Indeed, if we carefully look at the contents of the 12 volumes of the Philokalia translated by Father Stăniloae, we will observe the abundance of footnotes in the 8 volumes published in the communist period and immediately afterwards. In the first 4 volumes published in Sibiu, the footnotes are extremely rare, sometimes even missing.

The translation of Philokalia by Father Stăniloae represented a great success for the Romanian Orthodox theology, enjoying multiple

<sup>6</sup> See these issues broadly: Cristinel Ioja, *O istorie a Dogmaticii în Teologia Ortodoxă română*, editura Prouniversitaria, București, 2013, p. 546-549.

<sup>7</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Primirea Tradiției în timpul de azi din punct de vedere ortodox*, in “Studii Teologice” year XXVII (1975), nr. 1-2, p. 10.

appreciations both in the country and abroad. For example, at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Orthodox Congress of Western Europe held in Amiens (France) in 1977, Father Stăniloae enjoyed a wide appreciation among the Orthodox theologians who spoke about the importance of Philokalia translation into Romanian and the footnotes accompanying it, as the father presented them. In this respect, the appreciation of the Orthodox theologian Olivier Clement - recorded by theologian Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, a doctoral student in Strasbourg and a participant in this Congress - are eloquent. Father Staniloae was seen as

“one of the greatest Orthodox theologians who exceeded the limits of the Orthodox Church by his reputation. He is also a spiritual father in the whole Orthodox world, and many theologians consider him an inspiration. He also enjoys the respect and love of theologians of other confessions. He participated in the elaboration of the neo-patristic and neo-palamite synthesis (...) He is the builder of one of the greatest philokalic enterprises, as never existed in the Romanian Orthodox Church and which concerns the theological education, social service and deepening of spiritual life. Father Stăniloae’s translation updates the philokalic message for the believer of today”<sup>8</sup>.

The appreciations for Father Stăniloae’s translation of Philokalia and for the footnotes that updated its content continued at St. Serge Institute and at the Catholic Institute in Paris, where the father was invited by prof. M. J. Le Guillou to speak to the students, being accompanied by Olivier Clement and Dan-Ilie Ciobotea<sup>9</sup>. In the conferences Father Stăniloae presented abroad, we can notice that he made a special emphasis on the Orthodox spirituality inspired by the great Fathers of the Church, especially St. Gregory Palamas and the Hesychasts, on the presentation of the Romanian Orthodoxy and on the connection between theology and spirituality. We believe that this emphasis on the connection between theology and spirituality largely irradiates from the translation of Philokalia and from his familiarity with the unitary and experimental thinking of the Philokalic Fathers, which his Dogmatics is largely based on.

Through this theological, spiritual and ecclesial approach, the Orthodox Dogmatics has regained the method and spirit of the Fathers of the Church, renewing its content, without thereby asserting that we have reached the end of the road of renewal in Dogmatic Theology. Paradoxically, this was done in the context of communist Romania.

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<sup>8</sup> Drd. Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, *Al treilea Congres Ortodox al Europei Occidentale*, in “Ortodoxia”, year XXX(1978), nr. 3, p. 572

<sup>9</sup> Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, *Al treilea Congres...*, p. 575.