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

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### **Abstract**

The present article (in this second part) attempts to provide an overview of the contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, focusing in particular on his ecumenical proposal. What is meant to be highlighted is Stăniloae's full integration into the international ecumenical movement, highlighting his proposal of open sobornicity, compared to the ecumenical theology of Father Jean-Marie Roger Tillard. All aspects of Stăniloae's and Tillard's ecumenical proposals converge in a new model of ecumenical theology that contemporary interfaith theology certainly cannot ignore.

### **Keywords**

The ecumenical movement, the World Council of Churches, the International Joint Commission for the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Days of Chevetogne, open sobornicity, the ecclesiology of communion.

#### IV. Stăniloae's ecumenical commitment to the ecumenical movement

For Stăniloae, the task of ecumenism is precisely that of contributing to the realization of the full communion not only of the Churches, but also of all broken humanity. As he states:

“The Ecumenical Movement was born from a restlessness and dissatisfaction of the contemporary Christian consciousness, which sees itself confronted with two worrying phenomena of Christianity today: a) with the unsatisfactory way in which it responds to the anxieties and turmoils of modern humanity and b) with the painful fragmentation in its own bosom. It arose from a sense of guilt of the Christian formations for the two mentioned shortcomings and from the will to cure them. That is why it is impossible not to see in its appearance and action the work of God”<sup>1</sup>.

Stăniloae recognizes the existence of a *Christianity* and a *Christian consciousness* that goes far beyond the borders of Orthodoxy, a living, universal consciousness, capable of feeling within itself the pain of fragmentation and at the same time the desire to move in search of unity. In this consciousness, the ecumenical movement was born, recognized by Stăniloae as *the work of God*.

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, as well as at the level of the analysis of the first ecumenical documents produced since 1948. This means that Stăniloae considered interconfessional theological thinking to be of great value.

Precisely with reference to the ecumenical document from New Delhi (the true masterpiece of the *World Council of Churches*), Stăniloae highlights the main elements that should characterize the believers

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<sup>1</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “The ecumenical movement and Christian unity in the present stage”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XV (1963) 3-4, pp. 544-589, here p. 544.

involved in the ecumenical journey, tending towards unity: 1) being in Christ Jesus; 2) to be present in any place; 3) to be baptized; 4) to be open to the action of the Holy Spirit that leads to full communion; 5) to share the same apostolic faith; 6) to share the same Eucharist; 7) to be united in prayer; 8) to be united in the mutual service of humanity<sup>2</sup>.

It should be noted that one of Stăniloae's first ecumenical trips was to Freiburg and Heidelberg in 1968, where he held a series of conferences within the German Reformed world. A year later, invited by the theologian Donald Allchin, he went to Oxford, the place where the first buds of the ecumenical movement appeared, originally called the Oxford movement<sup>3</sup>. There, but also in other parts of England, he later held conferences bringing his ecumenical ideal within the Anglican world. This earned him, in 1971, the Church of England's highest award, the *Gold Cross of St Augustine of Canterbury*, in recognition of what Stăniloae had done for the whole Church of Christ. Stăniloae's interest in ecumenism and his personal theological contribution to the unity of the Church of Christ were so evident in Europe that in 1971 he was chosen as a member of the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church that visited the Vatican.

A few years later, he was invited to Belgium to give ecumenical lectures at the Benedictine Abbey of Chevetogne, where the monks had been organizing the *Chevetogne Ecumenical Days* for about thirty years<sup>4</sup>, attended by numerous theologians and intellectuals from various Christian denominations, including Yves Marie-Joseph Congar (1904-1995) and

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<sup>2</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "The ecumenical movement...", pp. 573-587.

<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford movement* originated within the Church of England in 1833 under the leadership of John Keble (1792-1866), John Henry Newmann (1801-1890) and Richard Hurrell Froude (1803-1836), all three fellows at Oriel College, Oxford, and fond of the writings of the Church Fathers.

<sup>4</sup> The Chevetogne monastery, under the sign of ecumenism by its founder, father Lambert Beauduin, has two churches in its structure: one of the Latin rite and one of the Byzantine rite. The monks who make up the monastic community come from ten nationalities, and among them one group celebrates according to the Western tradition, while another group celebrates according to the Eastern Byzantine tradition. The choice of the coexistence of the two rites is motivated by ecumenical reasons and the living hope of a not-too-distant reconciliation between East and West. The Byzantine Office is celebrated in Slavonic, the ancient Russian liturgical language, and sometimes in Greek.

Jean-Marie Roger Tillard (1927-2000), coming from all over Europe, animated by the desire to live an experience of fraternity, of common prayer and to discuss themes of particular ecumenical importance. The monk Michel Van Parys, then prior and later abbot of the monastery, who had the opportunity to personally meet Stăniloae at Chevetogne, testifies about his presence at the *Ecumenical Days* in the following way:

“Starting from 1968, before these events, Stăniloae was sent abroad as a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church to ecumenical meetings. I also thought of inviting him to the *Chevetogne Ecumenical Days*, which, since 1942-43, have brought together Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Anglican theologians every year to exchange views on topics of interest or of ecumenical relevance [...]. We had become aware that it was important not only to reflect on some theological themes and pray together, but that it was necessary to draw closer to common spiritual sources; that’s why I called father Dumitru with the aim of introducing us to the Fathers of the Desert, as a legacy of both Eastern Orthodox and Catholics, but also because, from a historical point of view, Benedictine monks and Protestant pietism were interested in them<sup>5</sup>“.

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<sup>5</sup> “A partire dal 1968, prima di questi eventi, Stăniloae fu inviato all’estero in qualità di rappresentante della Chiesa ortodossa romena agli incontri ecumenici. Pensai anch’io di invitarlo alle nostre *Journées œcuméniques de Chevetogne*, che ogni anno, dal 1942-43, radunano teologi ortodossi, cattolici, protestanti e anglicani per scambiare le opinioni su temi d’interesse o di rilevanza ecumenica. Negli anni ’70, dopo la svolta ecumenica della Chiesa cattolica, si è assistita a una “primavera ecumenica”, che mutò l’atmosfera delle nostre *Giornate*. Avevamo preso coscienza del fatto che era importante non solo riflettere sui temi teologici e pregare tutti assieme, ma che era necessario approcciarci alle fonti spirituali comuni; per questo convocammo padre Dumitru allo scopo di introdurci ai Padri del deserto, quale patrimonio sia degli ortodossi orientali sia dei cattolici, ma anche perché i monaci benedettini e il pietismo protestante si erano storicamente interessati a loro. Il primo contributo in lingua francese offertoci da Stăniloae nel corso delle *Giornate ecumeniche* fu quello sul valore della tradizione oggi, pubblicato nel 1974 con il titolo *L’accueil de la Tradition dans le monde d’aujourd’hui. Le point de vue de l’Orthodoxie* nella rivista trimestrale *Irenikon*. Padre Stăniloae scelse spontaneamente, anche se era un traduttore erudito dei testi monastici ed esicastici dell’antichità, di offrirci dei riflessi teologici di

Stăniloae's presence was so well received in Chevetogne that, in 1974, he was invited to preach spiritual exercises on the prayer of the heart even to the Benedictine monks, arousing considerable interest, so that the text of the spiritual exercises was also published a few years later, in 1978, in the magazine *Contacts* (an expression of Francophone Orthodox theology) and then, in 1979, in the prestigious magazine of the Chevetogne monastery: *Irénikon*. It can also be added that this text of Stăniloae on the prayer of the heart has been translated into Italy three times, with different titles, in 1981, 1986 and finally in 2023, with enormous success<sup>6</sup>.

The appreciation for Stăniloae, which had matured over the years in the widest international ecumenical context, grew to such an extent that between March 22-26, 1982, at the age of 79, he participated in Vatican at the *International Congress of Pneumology*, at the request of Saint John Paul II<sup>7</sup>, where he personally met Congar and Tillard, with whom he had already had the opportunity to build a relationship during the ecumenical days in Chevetogne.

The ecumenical character of Stăniloae's soul, now well known, meant that, a few months later on July 6, 1982, he was among the few important theologians who had the privilege of participating, in Munich, in the important international joint commission *for the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*, mature fruit of the desire for theological dialogue desired, at that time, by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras<sup>8</sup>. In Munich, the 60-member commission produced its first

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maggior respiro, illustrando il valore di queste fonti della Tradizione, e solamente alla fine dell'articolo si soffermò sui Padri del deserto egiziano" (M. VAN PARYS, *Ricordo di padre Dumitru Stăniloae*, in: STĂNILOAE, *Breviario esicasta*, pp. 28-29).

<sup>6</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "La preghiera in un mondo secularizzato" ("Prayer in a secularized world"), in: *Servitium* 13 (1981), pp. 33-44; "La via esicasta" ("The Hesychast Way"), in: *La preghiera di Gesù e lo Spirito Santo*, pp. 21-66; *Breviario esicasta*.

<sup>7</sup> L.F. LADARIA - C. GRANADO, "Cronica. Congreso teológico internacional de pneumatología, Rome, 22-26 marzo 1982" (Chronicle. International congress of pneumatology, Rome, 22-26 March 1982), in: *Estudios eclesiástico*, 57 (1982), pp. 207-212.

<sup>8</sup> Following the repeal of the excommunications, on December 7, 1965, Paul VI and Athenagoras signed the "Common Catholic-Orthodox Declaration", following which, in 1966 began to function a first joint Commission for dialogue between the two

official document, which was drafted by eminent theologians such as Stăniloae, Zizioulas, J. Ratzinger, Tillard and many others.

When Stăniloae arrived in Munich, he had already developed a clear vision of an *ecumenism of unity in diversity*. Although he considered the Orthodox Church as the true full Church of Christ, Stăniloae was convinced that the other Christian confessions are not worthless before God.

Moved by his ecumenical sensibility, in 1978 he held that there is a gradual relationship between the Orthodox Church and the other Churches. It would be a real relationship, within a real ecclesiology, that takes place between the Orthodox Church and the other Churches, although they are considered “incomplete”. As he claims in his treatise on *Dogmatics*: “there are incomplete churches, some closer to completeness, others further away”<sup>9</sup>.

According to Stăniloae, it is necessary “to consider that unorthodox confessions are separations that were formed in a certain connection with the full Church and exist in a certain connection with it, but they do not share the light and the full power of the sun Christ”<sup>10</sup>. In a certain sense, following this logic, the single Church includes to a certain extent “all the confessions separated from it, since they could not fully separate from the Tradition present in it”<sup>11</sup>, but it also includes every man. For Stăniloae:

“A certain church exists today apart from Christianity, as there are still certain ontological connections of human forces with each other and with the divine Logos. The more this church exists in the other Christian formations, given their connection

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confessions. During a Byzantine Orthodox Liturgy celebrated in Constantinople in the Cathedral of Saint George of Phanar, on November 30, 1979, in which John Paul II participated, the establishment of the specific mixed Commission for theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches was announced from the Byzantine family. In Munich, the Commission drafted its first very important document: *Il mistero della Chiesa e dell'Eucaristia alla luce del mistero della Santa Trinità*, in *Enchiridion Oecumenicum 1. Dialoghi internazionali 1931-1984*, EDB, Bologna 1986, pp. 1028-1039.

<sup>9</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, II, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București 1997, p. 126.

<sup>10</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, II, p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, II, p. 126

by faith with Christ, the incarnate Logos, and given that they share a common faith in Christ with the Orthodox Church, the full Church”<sup>12</sup>.

In this horizon of recognition of the existence of an ecclesiality and outside the canonical borders of the Orthodox Church, Stăniloae develops its relational availability towards all other Christian denominations, an availability that he summarizes, as early as 1971, in the expression “open sobornicity” or “sobornice communion”, to which he dedicates important reflections that will develop in the following years<sup>13</sup>. As father Ioan Tulcan states:

This sobornic communion was the basis of Christian unity in the first millennium and it will also be the basis of future Christian unity, because it constitutes the only model of Christian unity, whose origin we find in the Holy Trinity <sup>14</sup>.

And it is precisely this “open synodality”, this “sobornic communion”, or, in other words, this “ecclesiology of communion”, that Tillard is talking about from a Catholic perspective. Thus, it seems that Stăniloae and Tillard are two theologians who share the same ecumenical ideal and who, with different but converging words, knew how to indicate a possible way to unity.

## **V. “Open sobornicity” by Dumitru Stăniloae**

For Stăniloae, before the Church, understood as a visible institution, the realization of the universal unity of humanity must be recognized in Jesus Christ, even if Jesus Christ associated his Church with Himself as an instrument of unity:

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<sup>12</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, II, p. 126

<sup>13</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Open Sobornicity”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXIII (1971) 2, pp. 165–180.

<sup>14</sup> Ioan TULCAN, *Ecleziologia ortodoxă în teologia românească contemporană. Aspecte, implicații, tendințe*, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad 2010, p. 239.

“Only in Jesus Christ do we see revealed the universal unity of humanity, the plan of recapitulation of humanity and the resurrection to eternal life in God. The Son [...] became [...] a kind of «head posture» of all humanity. Destined to become a theandric subject with all human beings, and thus a being into which all human beings converge, without, however, a loss or confusion of one’s own identity<sup>15</sup>”.

Here we cannot fail to mention a fundamental reflection of Stăniloae following a dialogue with Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan in 1993, shortly before his death, when he was asked, after sixty years of theological studies, university education and publishing of important theological and spiritual works, which is the basis of his thought process:

“It is difficult to make a spiritual assessment of the Theology that I have served for over sixty years, of the main ideas that I have highlighted in my writings. If, however, I would like to show what I thought I should particularly emphasize in my concerns, I consider that this was the value given by God to the person of every man [...]. The person and the communion are the two terms in which I sought to develop what I consider to represent, in its depth, Orthodox Theology. These two values are mutually dependent and valuing one equals valuing the other”<sup>16</sup>.

Stăniloae’s human and theological experience unfolded, therefore, under the sign of the importance of the “person in communion”. If Christian

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<sup>15</sup> “Only in Christ we see revealed the universal unity of mankind and the design of mankind’s «recapitulation» and resurrection to eternal life in God. For the Son did not become an individual human hypostasis, but the hypostasis of human nature in general, and so a kind of «hypostasis-head» of the whole of humanity, destined to become a theandric subject together with all human subjects and thus a subject in whom all human subjects converge, yet without the loss or confusion of them own identities”. (Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Theology and the Church*, trans. R. Barringer, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York 1980, p. 222).

<sup>16</sup> Ioanichie BĂLAN, *Omagiu memoriei Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași 1994, p. 12.



theology, whatever it is, does not place this reality at the center, nothing meaningful can be offered to contemporary humanity.

Stăniloae states that: “The Church in its essence is the common experience of people with the Holy Trinity, their common participation in the life of God”<sup>17</sup>. But this shared experience of humanity in the divine unity is only possible because it is gathered and “all is raised on a spiritual plane, through the Spirit”<sup>18</sup> until it ends up forming a single body with Christ. Thus, “Christ’s body is also ours and our bodies are also his”<sup>19</sup>. As Tulcan states:

“We can talk about the presence of Christ in the Church, only if we also talk about the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit is of fundamental importance for the understanding of the Church”<sup>20</sup>.

The reference to a *Christology and a shared pneumatology* allows Stăniloae to overcome both individualism and collectivism, consequently promoting an ecclesiology of a “we” in which the mystery of man is rooted in the mystery of God, in Trinitarian existentiality. In other words, following the characteristic features of the Christian Revelation, Stăniloae will say:

“The Spirit creates communion among us, because He is this unconfused communion of the whole Trinity. It is the Holy Spirit who transforms creation into the Church. He is always between God and people who believe. Through Him the Revelation of Christ becomes effective in men, for through Him faith is produced in them. Through Him Revelation is discovered in all its evidence and effectiveness and in a content that is revealed to be ever richer”<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Sinteză ecclesiologică”, in: *Studii Teologice*, VII (1955), pp. 262-284, here p. 268.

<sup>18</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Sinteză ecclesiologică”, p. 270.

<sup>19</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Sinteză ecclesiologică”, p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Ioan TULCAN, *Ecleziologia ortodoxă în teologia românească*, p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> “L’Esprit crée la communion entre nous parce qu’Il est cette communauté sans confusion de toute la Trinité. C’est l’Esprit Saint qui transforme la création en Église.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives to the “many” the grace to become “one”, allowing everyone to feel that his neighbor is part of himself and that his own person is part of his neighbor. Synodality, according to Stăniloae’s Christological, pneumatological and trinitarian vision, corresponds to a reciprocal and progressive construction of communion that is born in the tension between identity and alterity, between belonging and diversity.

It could be said that, just as any ecclesial community is born on the basis of an “open personalism” towards otherness, so the ecumenical community is born within Christendom on the basis of an “open ecclesiality” towards other ecclesialities. This form of “fulfilled” or “redeemed” ecclesial existence is guaranteed by the acceptance of the grace of baptism which reconfigures and actualizes all human relational potentialities wounded and limited by sin, primarily the relationship with God.

At the ecclesial and ecumenical level, obviously starting with the mutual recognition of baptism, we must affirm an ecclesiological principle analogous to the anthropological one: *just as the communion between the Churches cannot exist with dignity without the recognition and respect of each individual Church, likewise no Church in part it cannot exist with dignity without the recognition and respect of the communion between the Churches*. There can only be “Churches in communion” or “communion between Churches”, which, according to Stăniloae, can only be achieved by the Orthodox Church through “open sobornicity”. As Stăniloae states:

“Sobornicity is the perfect Christian unity in confession, and the living by all Christians in communion of the apostolic heritage; so that it can be said that the one Church that ecumenism must aspire to achieve is the apostolic and sobornic Church. Without apostolicity, sobornicity has no meaning, and without sobornicity, apostolicity, or the Revelation in Christ, cannot be fully known

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Il est toujours entre Dieu et les hommes qui creient. Par Lui la Révélation du Christ devient effective dans les hommes, car c’est par Lui que se produit en eux la foi. Par Lui la Révélation se dévoile dans toute son évidence et son efficacité et dans un contenu que l’on découvre de plus en plus riche” (Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Le génie de l’Orthodoxie*, p. 123).

and valued, cannot fulfill all its purpose, cannot develop all human valences, cannot fully complete any faithful”<sup>22</sup>.

Stăniloae observes that the basis of this synodality or open sobornicity is: 1. In humanity as a whole, identical in nature, but different in the persons who constitute it; 2. In the fact that man was created according to the image of God and called to be like Him; 3. In a wider sense, within the family and the nation; 4. In Christ and in the Church, in the gathering of all in Christ, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of communion”<sup>23</sup>.

Open sobornicity thus acquires a prophetic and universal force, because it emphasizes, repeatedly, the importance of Christian unity not as an end in itself, but as a gift and commitment of all believers with a view to the reconciliation of the world, a fact that can be achieved in proportion to the passing of paschal Christ into human life through the reality of the Church.

As can be seen, this open sobornicity is a very concrete ecclesiological vision, which places the limits of the Church beyond its canonical boundaries. Although Christians belonging to other denominations are members of an “incomplete” Church, nevertheless, through their spiritual experience they can participate in the discernment of the mystery of the world and of man.

In other words, the apostolicity of the faith can be partially found among the members of several “incomplete” churches, since they participate, by virtue of open sobornicity, in the unity of the Church. For Stăniloae, sobornicity is

“the all-encompassing unity of Christian teaching experienced by the universal and free community of Christians [...]; it must be the council of all the world in which all Christians bring their understanding of all divine revealed reality and all human reality seen in the light of integral revelation, in order to share it with all and for each to share in the understanding of all”<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XIX (1967) 4, pp. 494-540, here p. 517.

<sup>23</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Natura sinodicității”, in: *Studii Teologice*, XXIX (1977), pp. 9-10 (605-606).

<sup>24</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Natura sinodicității”, p. 9-10 (605-606).

As can be seen, for Stăniloae, the Church of Christ is not an aggregate of separate individuals, nor the sum of different local or confessional Churches, but is the life of communion of all the baptized who recognize each other's baptism celebrated in the Apostolic Tradition and tend to the fullness the universal and "Catholic/Orthodox" Eucharistic assembly.

This tension towards the celebration of a single Eucharist for all those who are baptized in water and in the Trinitarian formula, presupposes for Stăniloae the full communion of faith, which presupposes the maturation in an agreement that takes into account the different confessional perspectives regarding the way of understanding faith in the Holy Scriptures. Here Stăniloae takes into account the content of the document "Scripture, Tradition and Traditions", issued in Montréal in 1963, by the IV World Assembly of the *Faith and Constitution Commission* of the Ecumenical Council of Churches<sup>25</sup>. In fact, precisely in Montréal, the representatives of the Orthodox Churches showed how the term *sobornost* (which expresses both catholicity and universality) indicates a Church that "is not limited to any place, time or nation, but includes all true believers from any place, time and nation, that is, all believers in the world"<sup>26</sup>. This sobornic Church "is predestined to encompass the whole world, the whole earth, to the farthest edges"<sup>27</sup>; therefore, "*sobornost* postulates a unity that is superior and independent of any fragmentation"<sup>28</sup> not only ecclesial, but also human, a unity that includes diversity, a "universal unity, in the historical multiplicity of cultural and historical forms of life and witness Church"<sup>29</sup>, even when these forms may seem contradictory. For Stăniloae, who understood the Montreal document well,

"This holding together of contradictory aspects is a mystery. And the unity of the parts has a much richer meaning than the sum of the meanings of the parts, an inexhaustible rational meaning. Reason,

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<sup>25</sup> FAITH AND CONSTITUTION, *IV World Conference in Montreal*, in *Enchiridion Ecumenicum* 6, Dehoniane, Bologna 2005, pp. 909-1060, nn. 1870-2197.

<sup>26</sup> FAITH AND CONSTITUTION, *IV World Conference in Montreal*, p. 1039, n. 2154.

<sup>27</sup> FAITH AND CONSTITUTION, *IV World Conference in Montreal*, p. 1040, n. 2156.

<sup>28</sup> FAITH AND CONSTITUTION, *IV World Conference in Montreal*, p. 1042, n. 2161.

<sup>29</sup> FAITH AND CONSTITUTION, *IV World Conference in Montreal*, p. 1042, n. 2160.

however, has a role in noticing the aspects that are intertwined in this unity, making sure that it is not simplistically reduced to one, to the negation of the others<sup>30</sup>.

We must proceed ecumenically, learning from Scripture and Tradition, a method of understanding the truths of faith that is not exclusive, but inclusive. In particular, it should be noted that in the one Holy Scripture there is a diversity of languages, interpretations, traditions, which reflects, on the one hand, the diversity with which God intervenes in human history, but, on the other hand, also the diversity human responses to God's saving interventions. The faith born of God's revelation is not something monolithic. It also relies on human forms of expression and interpretation, none of which are fully adequate to express the mystery that has been revealed<sup>31</sup>. That is precisely why the document "Scripture, Tradition and Traditions",

"advises exegetes not to attach themselves to a single biblical reflection, even if it seems central, because such a choice would make them lose sight of the diversity of this richness. According to Stăniloae, this recommendation applies not only to exegetes, but also to Christian Churches, because many of the divisions that have arisen within Christianity are due to the one-sided attachment to certain biblical statements, ignoring the others, which are no less important. Therefore, accepting the diversity of meanings found in Scripture can become a path to the true catholicity (sobornity) of the Church and thus to the ecumenical closeness, so much desired by the Christian world"<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Sobornicitatea deschisă*, p. 167.

<sup>31</sup> S. GABURRO, "Il tesoro nella fragilità della creta. Il campo complesso, potenzialmente conflittuale e spesso fecondo dell'ermeneutica ecumenica" ("Treasure from the fragility of clay. The complex, potentially conflictual and often fruitful field of ecumenical hermeneutics"), in: *Esperienza e teologia*, 23 (2007), pp. 55-75.

<sup>32</sup> ZJ BARA, "La sinodalità e l'intercomunione in Dumitru Stăniloae" ("Synodality and intercommunion at Dumitru Stăniloae"), in: *Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana*, 38 (2022), pp. 9-30, here pp. 11-12.

Certainly, the history of ecumenism in the last 40 years has shown that Christian confessions have extraordinary opportunities to live well the ecumenical dialogue starting from the common recognition of baptism and from the common attempt to overcome any one-sided vision that has led to mutual accusations of heresy. Regarding the central issue of mutual recognition of baptism, the 1982 text of the “Commission on Faith and Constitution” of the *World Council of Churches*, entitled *Baptism, Eucharist, Service*, appreciated by Christians of various denominations and with significant public statements, attests that baptism is not only the sacrament of initiation par excellence, but also the most relevant at the level of the current ecumenical dialogue: “The mutual recognition of baptism is considered an important sign and a means of expressing the baptismal unity given in Christ”<sup>33</sup>. Likewise, the documents from Munich (1982), Bari (1987), Valamo (1988) and Balamand (1993), drawn up by the “International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church”<sup>34</sup> recognize the validity of baptisms celebrated in Orthodox and Catholic Churches. They also state very clearly that both Churches have the true profession of apostolic faith and possess the apostolic succession of bishops; they possess the same sacraments (therefore the sacraments are valid in both Churches); the repetition of baptism is excluded between them; and, finally, the so-called ecclesiology of the sister Churches is admitted between Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

The Balamand document was analyzed in December 1993 by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, exactly two months after

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<sup>33</sup> COMMISSIONE FEDE E COSTITUZIONE DEL CONSIGLIO ECUMENICO DELLE CHIESE (COMMISSION FOR FAITH AND CONSTITUTION OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES), *Battesimo, Eucaristia, Ministero*, (*Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*), Lima, 1982, in: AA.VV., *Enchiridion Oecumenicum* n. 1, EDB, Bologna 1986, pp. 1391-1447, here p. 1406, n. 3060. For a deepening of the document, see P. NEUNER, *Teologia ecumenica*, Queriniana, Brescia 2000, pp. 169- 174.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. COMMISSIONE MISTA INTERNAZIONALE PER IL DIALOGO TEOLOGICO TRA LA CHIESA CATTOLICA ROMANA E LA CHIESA ORTODOSSA, *Dialoghi Cattolici – Ortodossi chalcedonesi* (INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, *Catholic-Chalcedonian-Orthodox Dialogues*) in: AA .VV. , *Enchiridion Oecumenicum* n. 1, EDB, Bologna 1986, pp. 1027-1037; Id., *Enchiridion Oecumenicum* n. 3, EDB, Bologna 1995, pp. 777-815.

Stăniloae's passing away. In accordance with the content of the document and in accordance with the ecumenical openness of Stăniloae, the validity of all sacraments of Catholics was confirmed and the practice of rebaptism was excluded. The Holy Synod also ordered the translation, publication and dissemination of the document in Romanian<sup>35</sup>.

The "Holy and Great Orthodox Synod of Crete" from 2016, in the document dedicated to the "*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world*", would seem to hope for a recognition of the sacraments of the other Christian Churches based on the prior discovery in them of a certain degree of ecclesiasticity, exactly in the line of Stăniloae's ecumenical theology. This recognition also seems to emerge from the appreciations expressed towards the documents developed by the "*Faith and Constitution Commission of the Ecumenical Council of Churches*", particularly careful to consider baptism an "ecumenical sacrament". It is no coincidence that reservations are made by the "Synod of Crete" on matters of faith and ordination, but not on baptism<sup>36</sup>.

As Christians, we are called to walk the path of collaboration, to rediscover the grace of baptism and to love the Church of Christ as our mother. Finally, we can say that any Church that preserves in itself the features of apostolicity is the Church of Christ and, as such, is the mother of his children<sup>37</sup>, is the mother of all humanity, as Stăniloae always had the

<sup>35</sup> D. RADU, "Participări ale delegaților Bisericii Ortodoxe Române la întruniri ecumenice: dialogul dintre Biserica Ortodoxă și Biserica Romano-catolică cu privire la uniaticism", in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, Buletinul Oficial al Patriarhiei Române*, 4-6 (1993), pp. 43-69; Also *Biserica Ortodoxă Română, Buletinul Oficial al Patriarhiei Române*, 7-9 (1993), pp. 218-219. Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Uniaticismul, metoda de unire din trecut și căutarea actuală a deplinei comuniuni. Documentul de la Balamand, text, și comentariu*, Editura Mitropoliei Ardealului, Sibiu, 1993, pp. 75-110.

<sup>36</sup> GRANDE E SANTO SINODO DI CRETA, *Relazioni della Chiesa Ortodossa con il resto del mondo cristiano (Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world)* n. 21, in: [http://www.ortodossia.it/w/index.php?option=com\\_content & view =article&id=2306:relazioni-della-chiesa-ortodossa-con-il-resto-del-mondo-cristiano&catid = 316:official-documents-in-italiano&lang=it](http://www.ortodossia.it/w/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2306:relazioni-della-chiesa-ortodossa-con-il-resto-del-mondo-cristiano&catid=316:official-documents-in-italiano&lang=it). (link consulted on 12-09-2023).

<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, following the dramatic events of the schism between East and West, it cannot be said that the two Churches, Orthodox and Catholic, ever separated from the living stream of apostolic succession. Of course, they separated from each other canonically, but not from the apostolic succession that guarantees true ecclesiality and true sacraments.

way to reiterate. Here we can see Stăniloae's affinity with many Catholic ecumenical theologians, first of all with Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, about whom we choose to highlight only a few essential aspects of his thought.

## VI. Ecclesiology of communion in Jean-Marie Roger Tillard

Father Tillard, world-renowned Dominican theologian and ecumenist professor, lecturer at numerous prestigious universities, was a student of Yves Congar at the Faculty of Theology of the Dominican Order in Paris and became a key figure of Catholicism in the dialogue between the different Christian confessions.

“Spokesperson and promoter in numerous ecumenical dialogues between the Catholic Church and other Churches or Christian communities, conciliar expert and vice-president of the Faith and Constitution department of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, Tillard figures as a milestone in the current theological and ecumenical debate”<sup>38</sup>.

It is no coincidence that immediately after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council he became one of the first official Catholic representatives in the ecumenical world.

In 1968, at the age of 41, he attended the Fourth Assembly of the *Ecumenical Council of Churches* in Uppsala (Sweden), working together with Jean Meyendorff and Ioannis Zizioulas on the elaboration of the Ecumenical Text on Worship<sup>39</sup>. The next years of Tillard's life were lived under the sign of ecumenism, so much so that he was one of the

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<sup>38</sup> “Relatore e responsabile primo in molti dialoghi ecumenici tra Chiesa cattolica e altre Chiese o comunita cristiane, perito conciliare e vice-presidente di Fede e Costituzione del Concilio Ecumenico delle Chese. Tillard figura come pietra miliare nell'attuale dibattito teologico” (F. NIGRO, *Il vescovo di Roma. Initium episcopatus, nell'ecclesiologia di comunione di JMR Tillard*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 2011, p. 16

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, “Le document d'Upsala sur le culte” (“The Upsala document concerning the cult”) in: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 90 (1968), pp. 812-833.



most frequent visitors to the monastic community of Chevetogne, which currently holds the most important archive of his writings. He participated in numerous ecumenical symposia and conferences and was a member of numerous bilateral dialogue bodies. On these occasions he also had the opportunity to meet Stăniloae, with whom he shared, albeit with a different approach and language, the ideal of an ecclesiasticism without borders, which Stăniloae called “*open sobornicity*”, while Tillard called it “*ekklesia tou Theou*” (“*Church of God*”).

“Tillard’s ecumenical commitment had a strong impact on his theology and method. He sought to adopt a theological language that would help the separate Churches arrive at a common ecumenical theology. Thus, one can also understand the methodological choice to build his reflection on the ecclesiology of communion starting from the living Tradition of the «Undivided Church», that is, the one from the period before the schism between Constantinople and Rome. By this method, Tillard wanted to demonstrate that the vision of the Church as a communion that originates in the Eucharist is not the result of a compromise with Orthodox theology, but is the common heritage of the undivided Church of the first millennium [...]. In the methodology of Tillardian theological reflection, it is observed that the living Tradition is deepened as a unique reality that comprises two closely related aspects. These two aspects are the Fathers and the liturgy. Regarding the Fathers, one aspect that should be noted is Tillard’s willingness to present the vision of the Fathers, both from the East and from the West, respecting the diversity of their views within the unity of the Tradition. His attention to this diversity became increasingly important in his ecumenical work: on the one hand, Tillard’s knowledge of the Greek Fathers and his ability to put them in dialogue with Latin authors greatly supported the effectiveness of his positions in dialogue with orthodox theologians; on the other hand, the diversity of the views of the Fathers, both taken individually

and traced back to their local Churches, provided a model for the unity in diversity to which the idea of communion refers”<sup>40</sup>.

Tillard’s theological approach certainly comes from a clear Trinitarian spirituality, which recognizes the possibility of communion not “in spite of diversity” but “because of diversity” or, rather, starting from diversity, all aspects current and reiterated by Stăniloae himself.

And for Tillard “recognition of diversity is not a backup solution, a simple concession to an irreversible solution, but, on the contrary, a procedure that responds to divine Providence”<sup>41</sup> that guides human history along the path of unity willed by God, whose supreme expression is the Church.

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<sup>40</sup> “L’impegno ecumenico di Tillard ha avuto un forte impatto sulla sua teologia e sul suo metodo. Egli ha cercato di adottare un linguaggio teologico che possa aiutare le Chiese separate ad arrivare a una comune teologia ecumenica. Così si comprende anche la scelta metodologica di costruire la sua riflessione sull’ecclesiologia di comunione partendo dalla Tradizione vivente della “Chiesa indivisa”, cioè quella del periodo antecedente lo scisma tra Costantinopoli e Roma. Con tale metodo Tillard ha voluto dimostrare che la visione della Chiesa come una comunione originata nell’Eucaristia non è frutto di un compromesso con la teologia ortodossa, ma è patrimonio comune della Chiesa indivisa del primo millennio [...]. Nella metodologia della riflessione teologica tillardiana si osserva che la Tradizione vivente è approfondita come un’unica realtà che ingloba due aspetti strettamente legati tra di loro. Questi due aspetti sono i Padri e la liturgia. Per quanto riguarda i Padri, un aspetto da notare è la volontà di Tillard di presentare la visione dei Padri, sia dell’Oriente che dell’Occidente, rispettando la loro diversità di opinioni nell’unità della Tradizione. La sua attenzione a questa diversità è diventata sempre più importante nel suo lavoro ecumenico: da un lato la conoscenza di Tillard dei Padri greci e la sua abilità di metterli in dialogo con gli autori latini ha molto sostenuto l’efficacia delle sue posizioni nel dialogo con i teologi ortodossi; dall’altro la diversità dei punti di vista dei Padri, sia presi individualmente che ricondotti alle loro Chiese locali ha fornito un modello per l’unità nella diversità alla quale punta l’idea di comunione” (D. IACOBUT, “Lex orandi, lex credendi nell’opera teologica di Jean-Marie Roger Tillard”, (“Lex orandi, lex credendi in the theological work of Jean-Marie Roger Tillard”) in: *Theologia Catholica Latina*, 2 (2017), pp. 31-50, here pp. 37- 38).

<sup>41</sup> “Il riconosca la diversità non è un ripiego, una semplice concessione nei confronti di una soluzione irreversibile, ma, al contrario, un procedimento che risponde alla *divina Providentia*” (Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, “Dal Decreto conciliare sull’Ecumenismo all’Enciclica «Ut unum sint»” [“From the Council Decree on Ecumenism to the Encyclical «Ut unum sint»”], in: *Osservatore Romano*, (21-22 agosto 1995), p. 7).

Also, for both Stăniloae and Tillard, “the Church is not the sum of the baptized, but «their common life», that is, their *communio* in the indivisible Spirit of Christ, their life in communion, through which they immerse themselves in God”<sup>42</sup>. And as God is Trinity, the communion that the Church is called to witness between people can only be understood as an interaction between one and many, between the person and the community. It is fundamental, in Tillard’s ecclesiology, to emphasize the action of the Holy Spirit, which, starting from Pentecost, leads the faithful towards a realization of a universal love and communion that combines “person” and “communion”. In this communion and universal love the Church of God is realized. As Tillard states:

“This Church of Christ manifests its own truth only in so far as it tends to communion with the whole man and with all men; precisely for this reason it does not exhaust itself within its canonical limits, but mysteriously expands beyond them”<sup>43</sup>.

The most essential character of the Church consists in the fact that it is “in communion” with the triune God and with all humanity, in the midst of which it is a mystery of unity. This way of being “sacrament of unity” is attested to the highest degree in the Eucharistic celebration.

This interpretative horizon leads Tillard to understand the Church as the *ekklesia tou Theou*, that is, *the Church of God*, the Church of Pentecost,

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<sup>42</sup> “La Chiesa non è la somma dei battezzati ma la loro «comune vita», cioè la loro *communio* nell’indivisibile Spirito di Cristo, la loro vita in comunione, mediante la quale vengono immersi in Dio”. (Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, *Carne della Chiesa, carne di Cristo*, [Body of the Church, body of Christ], Comunità di Bose, Qiqajon, Magnano 2006, p. 83).

<sup>43</sup> “Questa Chiesa di Cristo manifesta la verità di sé stessa solo nella misura in cui tende alla comunione con tutto l’uomo e con tutti gli uomini; proprio per questo essa non si esaurisce entro i suoi confini canonici, ma si estende misteriosamente al di là di essi” Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, “Il sottosuolo teologico della Costituzione: la Chiesa e i valori terrestri” (“The Theological Subsoil of the Constitution: The Church and Earthly Values”), in: G. BARAUNA (ed.), *La Chiesa nel mondo di oggi. Studi e commenti intorno alla Costituzione pastorale Gaudium et spes (The Church in today’s world. Studies and comments on the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et spes)*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1966, pp. 213-250, in particular pp. 225-229.

whose borders transcend only legal and confessional forms, but without canceling them. In any Christian community where the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, the endless miracle of the generation and regeneration of the Church is fulfilled. As Tillard states: “where there is a eucharistic synax, there is the Church of God, which is in all the eucharistic synaxes, as it always was, as it always will be”<sup>44</sup>. Although Tillard recognizes the value of confessional Churches that spring from the Apostolic Tradition and share the same faith and the same mysteries, he nevertheless avoids identifying *the Church of God* with a single confessional Church, considering that the Church, as he understands it, possesses dimensions and depths that transcend borders visible of the confessional Churches. If the confessional Churches certainly manifest and make visible the communion between men in Christ, they do not exhaust the much wider scope of this communion, which mysteriously embraces even those who visibly or institutionally fail to express it. The human creature finds its deepest existential vocation in communion, and when it moves towards communion, in a way, even if it is not aware of it, it moves towards the Church, whose task is to be a sign and an instrument of unity for all humanity. According to Tillard:

“In each of these local achievements, the full reality of the *Ekklesia tou Theou* is manifested and concretely expressed [...]; The Church of God is held together by the Spirit of unity (communion) [...], it exists in every community strengthened by the Spirit of the Lord and of Jesus Christ, thanks to the authentic reception of the apostolic testimony and baptism”<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, *Chiesa di Chiese. L'ecclesiologia di comunione (Church of Churches. Ecclesiology of communion)*, Queriniana, Brescia 1989, p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> “In ciascuna di queste realizzazioni locali la piena realtà della *Ekklesia tou Theou* si manifesta e si esprime concretamente; [...] la Chiesa di Dio è stretta dallo Spirito dell'unità (la comunione) [...] esiste in ciascuna comunità rinsaldata dallo Spirito del Signore e Cristo Gesù, grazie all'accoglienza autentica della testimonianza apostolica e al battesimo”. (Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, *Eglise des Eglises. L'ecclésiologie de communion*, Cerf, Paris 1987; translated in italian *Chiesa di Chiese. L'ecclesiologia di comunione* [Church of Churches. Ecclesiology of communion], Queriniana, Brescia 1989, p. 24).

Throughout the biblical texts of the New Testament, the word communion (*koinonia*) indicates the existential experience through which each baptized person participates in the fruits of reconciliation brought by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. It is about the fruits of *charity* and *unity* that the Holy Spirit reveals in the Christian community and in the life of every person baptized at Pentecost.

More precisely, *koinonia* is, from the divine point of view, the relational and eternal dynamic that characterizes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as the “Supreme Community of love”.

From the ecclesial perspective, *koinonia* is, however, the created reflection of the uncreated communion; it is personal and communal participation in the eternal mystery of communion and love that characterizes the very existence of God.

It is not a coincidence, as Tillard pointed out<sup>46</sup>, that in the New Testament the way Christians are defined is *synkoinonoi* (Phil 1, 7; Ap 1, 9), men and women who, by being a “community of faith and love” in Christ and the Holy Spirit, make visible in space and time the truth of the Church of God.

The term *synkoinonoi* expresses the fact of being “communion” together, of being “communion” in overcoming any exclusivity, both human and ecclesial.

Emphasizing the fact that Christians are *synkoinonoi*, from an anthropological and ecclesiological perspective, constitutes a perennial prophetic invitation. By means of this expression in which Christian identity is configured, the Apostolic Tradition, enshrined in Holy Scripture, addresses to the Churches of all times an inevitable invitation to be inclusive and never exclusive.

The Church of Christ, or the Church of God, as Tillard used to express it, is thus characterized by the fact that it is, and by its continuing need to be, in space and time, the visible sign of reconciled humanity, of unified

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<sup>46</sup> A. CORTESI, *Jean-Marie Roger Tillard: l'ecclesiologia di comunione*. Conference held in Milan on April 19, 2010 in the cycle of studies organized by the Secretariat of Ecumenical Activities - SAE and the Ambrosianum on the topic: *La Chiesa una è possibile?* in <https://saemilano.gruppisae.it/Allegati/Tillard.pdf> (link consulted on October 2, 2023).

diversity. The Church, as Jesus Christ wanted it, is precisely the historical reality that counteracts human division, it is the holy space of unity to which all humanity is called. Precisely for that reason, and for Tillard, as for Stăniloae, ecclesiality, by its very nature, is extended. Constantly, as Father Tillard states, ecclesiality

“open a way in which men and women, taking their vocation seriously, strive to seek the truth, to open themselves to universal love, to promote justice, to guarantee peace, to treat the poor, the despised, the marginalized, the emigrants according to their human dignity. Wherever the powers of evil retreat that shut humanity in a circle of misery and oppression, there the kingdom already rises, because there God already reigns, as the savior of his own creation [...]. The ecclesial community belongs to this seed. It is in it that this seed has all its dynamism and all its power”<sup>47</sup>.

Starting from his vision of an *Ekklesia tou Theou*, i.e. a Church of God in which Christians are defined as *synkoinonoi*, Tillard is particularly committed to finding a solution to one of the most controversial issues in the history of ecumenism: the role of the bishop of Rome in the framework of Christianity. Through this commitment, he sought to respond to the hope of Stăniloae himself who, recalling the thought of Saint John Paul II, said:

“In the same way, I think that a wording will be found in the question of papal jurisdictional primacy and his infallibility that will moderate them, including him in the communion of the Church whose head is Christ. The knowledge that has been progressed in the mystery of each faithful man united with Christ [...] will help to find a formula of primacy accepted by all”<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, *Eglise des Eglises*, p. 78.

<sup>48</sup> Ioanichie BĂLAN, *Ne vorbește Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae. Nouă convorbiri*, Episcopia Romanului și Hușilor, Huși 1993, pp. 144-145.

It captures here how Stăniloae took over the thoughts of Saint John Paul II, addressed in 1987 to the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrius I. It is important to explicitly mention this thought, to emphasize that Stăniloae did not miss what Saint John Paul II wanted to express in favor of the path to unity:

“May the Holy Spirit grant us his light and enlighten all the pastors and theologians of our Churches, so that we may seek, together obviously, *the forms* in which this [Petrine] ministry can realize *a ministry of love recognized* by some and by others”<sup>49</sup>.

If, on the one hand, as we have seen, Stăniloae tuned in to the thinking of Saint John Paul II, on the other hand we have good reasons to believe that Tillard, in turn, tuned in to the thinking of Stăniloae. Most likely, Tillard did all this when he had the opportunity to accompany St. John Paul II in undertaking a theological search for a “moderate” *formula of Petrine primacy* which, “accepted by all” the faithful, would can find a place within the ecumenical communion of Churches. This approach obviously necessitated the writing of a new encyclical by the bishop of Rome that would put the subject of Petrine service at the center, and in a new way.

In fact, precisely Father Tillard will be called by Saint John Paul II in order to advise him in the drafting of the encyclical *Ut unum sint*<sup>50</sup>. This is the first encyclical that will focus on “rethinking” how the ministry of the bishop of Rome is exercised.

Precisely in the encyclical we notice that the expressions addressed to Patriarch Demetrius I in 1987 are taken up again, expressions noted even by Saint John Paul II in this explicit assumption of responsibility:

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<sup>49</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, “Omelia nella Basilica Vaticana alla presenza di Demetrio I, arcivescovo di Costantinopoli e patriarca ecumenico” (“Homily in the Vatican Basilica in the presence of Demetrius I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch”), December 6, 1987, in: *Acta Apostolica Sedis*, 80 (1988), p. 714.

<sup>50</sup> M. MORTOLA, *Il dialogo cattolico-ortodosso sul primato dal 1995 al 2016. Analisi storica e teologica del suo svolgimento e della sua recezione* (*The catholic-orthodox dialogue about the primacy from 1995 to 2016. Historical and theological analysis of the development and reception sale*), Glossa, Milan, 2019, pp. 69-72.

“I am convinced that I have a special responsibility with regard to [the Petrine ministry], especially in recognizing the ecumenical aspiration of the majority of Christian communities and in listening to the request addressed to me to find a form of exercise of primacy which, without giving up in no way to the essence of his mission, to open to a new situation”<sup>51</sup>.

We also note that the encyclical repeatedly emphasizes the importance of arriving at *theological formulas or formulations* that are suitable to respond to ecumenical expectations<sup>52</sup>. As Saint John Paul II states:

“Ecumenical dialogue, which stimulates the parties involved in it to question, understand and explain each other, allows for unexpected discoveries. Intolerant polemics and controversies turned into incompatible statements what was actually the result of two visions meant to scrutinize the same reality, but from two different angles. Today must be found *the formula* which, understanding reality in its entirety, allows partial readings to be overcome and false interpretations to be eliminated”<sup>53</sup>.

But all this is exactly what Stăniloae was hoping for when he spoke of an opening towards an inclusive hermeneutic of the truths of faith, which would arrive at shared formulations, as the Montreal ecumenical document, well known to him, also predicted.

In full harmony with the Montreal document (and with Stăniloae’s ecumenical hope), Saint John Paul II also hopes, in essence, that a valorization of the interpretation of others can be reached, for the benefit of the convergence of the *theological formula* that “complement rather than oppose” each other<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, Lettera enciclica sull’impegno ecumenico (Encyclical letter on ecumenical commitment) “Ut unum sint”, (May 25, 1995), Città del Vaticano, in: *Acta Apostolica Sedis*, 87 (1995), n. 95.

<sup>52</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, “Ut unum sint”, (May 25, 1995), nn. 38, 59, 62 and 81.

<sup>53</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, “Ut unum sint”, (May 25, 1995), n. 39.

<sup>54</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, “Ut unum sint”, (May 25, 1995), n. 57.



On the same background is the important response to the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, by Olivier Clément, published in 1997 under the title: “Rome otherwise. An Orthodox before the papacy”. Presenting his stimulating study in essay form, Clément states:

“The papacy is undoubtedly the most difficult issue facing ecumenical dialogue today, especially between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. However, there is room for hope: in his encyclical *Ut unum sint*, John Paul II urged a *common reflection on the exercise of primacy*. This short essay is part of this perspective. I will dwell on the history and experience of the undivided Church. I will then recall the contrasting developments in the Christian West and East to conclude with a look at the new commitments that call us to unity”<sup>55</sup>.

Given the great influence of Clément in the ecumenical context, it is not at all surprising that the course of the last 15 years undertaken by the *International Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church* has been based on a similar approach to theological research, namely: 1. the historical analysis of the experience of the first millennium of the undivided Church; 2. the historical analysis of the contrasts that appeared in the second millennium that led to the division; 3. the search for common ecumenical ways to rethink the Petrine primacy.

Obviously, it is not possible to analyze the specific content of the documents produced by *the Commission* in this brief exposition, but it may be enough to recall their titles in order to find in them an approach to the subject of the Petrine ministry in accordance with the research proposal offered by Clément:

*“The ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental nature of the Church. Ecclesial communion,*

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<sup>55</sup> Olivier CLÉMENT, *Rome autrement*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1997; Italian edition: *Rome diversamente. Un ortodosso di fronte al papato (Rome otherwise. An Orthodox before the papacy)* trans. it. edited by G. Cavalli, Jaca Book, Milan 1998, p. 7.

*conciliarity and authority*” (Ravenna, October 13, 20“*Synodality and primacy in the first millennium: towards a common understanding in the service of Church unity*” (Chieti, September 21, 2007).

“Synodality and primacy in the first millennium: towards a common understanding in the service of Church unity” (Chieti, September 21, 2016).

“*Synodality and primacy in the second millennium and now*” (Alexandria of Egypt, June 7, 2023).

There is no doubt that if this ecumenical course of theological research on the Petrine ministry could take place until now, it is also thanks to the openings of Stăniloae, Tillard and Clément. And if Clément, in his essay “Rome otherwise”, quotes exactly a text by Tillard entitled “The Bishop of Rome”<sup>56</sup>, it is certainly not a formality, but a sign of appreciation and harmony of visions between Orthodox and Catholic theology, on to which attention must be focused even today, taking into account the role played by Romanian Orthodoxy in the current ecumenical context.

It cannot be ignored that the representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate have always been present at every plenary session of the *International Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church* and have always been present at the drafting of every document elaborated by it. This must lead us to consider the positive influence that contemporary Romanian theology has offered to the ecumenical dialogue, a theology that recognizes Dumitru Stăniloae as its founding father.

An indication of the important contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Church can also be seen in the fact that the last general secretary of the *World Council of Churches* was Father Ioan Sauca, a Romanian theologian from the Faculty of Theology in Sibiu and later from the Faculty of Theology in Birmingham, UK. Father Sauca, a member of the *World Council of Churches* since 1994, completed his term as secretary general in December 2022.

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<sup>56</sup> Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, *L'évêque de Rome*, Cerf, Paris 1982.

## Conclusions

Also, by comparison with Tillard, we can note that in Stăniloae's reflection multiple themes of an ecumenical nature emerge. Having embraced the ecumenical ideal since the early years of his theological research and then of his teaching, he appropriated from time to time a line of thought which, on the one hand, remained attentive to the various theological positions that emerged within Orthodox Churches, but, on the other hand, he did not hesitate to draw inspiration from the content of the official documents produced in the dialogue with the heterodox Churches<sup>57</sup>.

This explains why Stăniloae's vast thought, of which I could highlight only a few features here, was able to appear, in its development, marked by multiple and increasingly varied expressions, which if on the one hand kept a clear anchoring to the theology of the Fathers from the East and from the West, on the other hand, they did not hesitate to open new horizons towards which contemporary theological reflection could develop, lived within a living Tradition, illuminated by the perennial presence of the Holy Spirit, a Tradition faithful to it itself, but at the same time dynamic, creative, attentive to the present, ecumenical.

Therefore, it must be emphasized that Stăniloae can only be understood correctly in relation to his enormous appreciation for a theological thought cultivated in an ecumenical horizon. Ecumenical thinking fuels his thinking, which, although it is and remains Orthodox, takes seriously the theology of other Christian denominations.

In other words, Stăniloae can only be understood by reference to his conviction that precisely Western, Catholic and Protestant theology constitutes an asset for contemporary Orthodox theology (just as, on the other hand, contemporary Orthodox theology constitutes an enormous wealth for Catholicism and Protestantism). As he himself confesses:

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<sup>57</sup> Several studies of Stăniloae agree on his varied ecumenical openness. Examples include GR ROBERSON, "Ecumenism in the Thought of Dumitru Stăniloae", in: A. MELLONI (ed.), *The Theological Legacy of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae and its Ecumenical Actuality*, New York, 1999, pp. 43-54, in particular p. 51; ZJ BARA, "La sinodalità e l'intercomunione in Dumitru Stăniloae" ("Synodality and intercommunion at Dumitru Stăniloae"), in: *Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana* 38 (2022), pp. 2-30, in particular p. 10.

“The intellectual prestige of the West will strengthen among us [the Orthodox] the conviction that our belief in a God present and working in the world is true, and thus the contemporary way in which the new Western theology expresses this truth will help Orthodox theology in its turn to express, the patristic experience of God in an accessible way and according to the needs of contemporary man [...]. Romanian theology required a new literature, foreign theological writings, as well as the orientation to approach theological themes in an irenic spirit and in a broad perspective”<sup>58</sup>.

The Munich experience, the relationship with Tillard, and even with Ratzinger, will inevitably mark the indelible ecumenical thinking of Stăniloae, as it emerges from a series of reflections that he offered in 1988 in an open dialogue with Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan. To the question: “Do you hope for a substantial progress in the Ecumenical Movement, through Christian dialogues of rapprochement and restoration of the unity of faith of the Church of Christ?” Stăniloae answers as follows:

“I hope that progress will be made in the Ecumenical Movement, of rapprochement between the Churches. This appropriation will first be made between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, which *are not separated by essential differences*. At a meeting in 1982 between

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<sup>58</sup> “Il prestigio intellettuale dell’occidente rafforzerà tra noi [ortodossi] la convinzione che la nostra fede in un Dio presente e operante nel mondo è vera e così la mode contemporanea con cui la nuova teologia occidentale esprime questa verità aiuterà la teologia orthodoxa a esprimere a sua volta l’esperienza patristica di Dio in una maniera accessibile e conforme alle esigenze dell’uomo contemporaneo [...]. La teologia romena esigeva una nuova letteratura, scritti teologici stranieri, così come l’orientamento di affrontare i temi teologici in spirito irenico e in una prospettiva ampia. Ma io sono rimasto legato al pensiero dei Padri della Chiesa indivisa [...]. Conseguentemente ho voluto far uscire la dogmatica da un quadro stretto e rigido di brevi definizioni scolastiche, che era prevalso anche nei manuali dogmatici ortodossi, proponendo il contenuto vivente, profondo e ricco delle definizioni secondo il modello dei Padri, mostrando il contenuto spirituale che in essa era virtualmente incluso” (STRAZZARI-PREZZI, *Interview of Father Dumitru Stăniloae*, pp. 110-111).

the delegates of Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, in Munich, in which I also participated together with Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeala, on behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Church, I had the joy of finding that everything we proposed was immediately accepted by cardinals and Catholic theologians. Thus they admitted in the *Filioque problem* the old formula of the Eastern Fathers, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son or illuminates from Him; also, that *the Eucharistic pretense* takes place at the moment of the invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiklesis), as the culmination of the previous prayer, in which the words of the Lord are also remembered: “Take, eat...”, from the Last Supper. I believe that in the matter of *Purgatory* we will be able to find a formula that gives the important role to the prayers of the living, including priests and hierarchs, in the passage of the souls of the dead from torment to happiness. In the same way, I think that in the question of *papal jurisdictional primacy and its infallibility*, a formulation will be found that will moderate them [...] finding a formula of primacy accepted by all. Protestants also begin to understand the importance of communion (as the Church) between people, as a condition for meeting God, and the verbal character of the sacramental gesture, as well as the Orthodox and Catholics today better understand the dynamic, effective, therefore sacramental, character of the word. And this will help the Protestants to understand the value of the Mysteries (Sacraments), and the Orthodox and Catholics, the importance of the word”<sup>59</sup>.

As can be seen, Stăniloae showed a realistic and convincing ecumenical maturity, reaffirming, for his part, not only the necessity of the union between the Churches, but also the beauty and unproblematic character of the different Christian identities that can be appreciated as a wealth. Certainly, as stated by Father Marius Floricu, archpriest of the Romanian Orthodox parishes in Piemonte:

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<sup>59</sup> Ioanichie BĂLAN, *Ne vorbește Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae*, pp. 144-145.

“In the last century, the theology of the churches has come a long way, it has tried to recover what it had lost in the previous centuries, and the acquisitions cannot be well understood and compared without a strong anchoring in the tradition and life of the churches themselves. Orthodoxy can offer its contribution to the ecumenical movement especially on the front of the practice of “open synodality”, which approaches the Scriptures appreciating the complementarity of interpretations. The synodal method expresses the fruitful and complementary striving of all Christians, in their different identities, towards communion in Christ. I believe that this is the only way to maintain the unity of the Churches. Seeking only one truth (the truth of one without the truth of the others) would not bring unity”<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> “Nell’ultimo secolo la teologia delle chiese ha molto camminato, ha cercato di recuperare ciò che aveva perso nei secoli precedenti, e le acquisizioni non possono essere ben comprese e confrontate senza un forte ancoraggio nella tradizione e nella vita delle chiese stesse. L’Ortodossia può offrire il suo contributo al movimento ecumenico soprattutto sul fronte della pratica della «aperta sinodalità», che si accosta alle Scritture apprezzando la complementarietà delle interpretazioni. Il metodo sinodale esprime la tensione fruttuosa e complementare di tutti i cristiani, nelle diverse identità, alla comunione in Cristo. Credo che questa sia l’unica modalità di mantenere l’unità delle Chiese. La ricerca di una sola verità (la verità di uno senza la verità degli altri) non porterebbe unità. M. FLORICU, “Seguire il metodo sinodale” (“Following the synodal method”), in: *La voce del popolo* (17-01-2016), p. 4.