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Freedom, Dignity, and Human Responsibility in the Teaching of Saint Priest Confessor Dumitru Stăniloae – Introductory Elements

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Abstract

Saint Priest Confessor Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993), one of the greatest contemporary Orthodox theologians, reflected profoundly on freedom, dignity, and responsibility as essential elements of the image of God in man.

Having lived through the interwar democratic period, the hell of communist imprisonment (Jilava and Aiud, 1958–1963), and the post-1989 context, he showed that these three dimensions are not abstract concepts, but fundamental ontological and moral realities. The freedom of the will, as an inalienable gift, confers dignity upon man and makes him responsible before God, his fellow human beings, and creation. This freedom is authentically fulfilled only in the free choice of communion with Christ – his Archetype.

Dignity springs from man’s creation “after the image of the Image” (Christ); it is both ontological, common to all, and ethical, achieved through likeness, in love and sacrifice. Responsibility arises naturally from freedom: man becomes the priest of creation and takes care of the world through the dialogue of love with God and with others.

The experience of suffering in the communist prisons illustrates how persecution (2 Tim 3,12) does not destroy, but rather strengthens these values, transforming the “tomb” of imprisonment into a place of Life through participation in Christ’s sufferings and glory (Rom 8, 16-17).

In the context of the recent health crisis and the restrictions on fundamental rights, Saint Priest Confessor Dumitru Stăniloae's theology reaffirms that freedom, dignity, and responsibility are inherent to the human condition and cannot be conditioned by the state, calling for a responsible and prophetic Christian witness in the contemporary world.

Keywords

Saint Priest Confessor Dumitru Stăniloae, freedom, human dignity, responsibility, image of God, communist persecution, health crisis, restrictions on fundamental rights

“Father Stăniloae is undoubtedly the greatest contemporary Orthodox theologian. As his work is progressively translated into Western languages, it will establish itself as one of the major creations of Christian thought in the second half of the twentieth century”¹

I. Introduction

The one who would come to be known as the “Patriarch of Romanian Theology”, Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae, was born on 16 November 1903 in the village of Vlădeni, Brașov County. He completed his secondary

¹ Olivier CLÉMENT, “Preface” to Father Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Rugăciunea lui Iisus și experiența Duhului Sfânt*, foreword by Archimandrite Gheorghios Grigoriatou, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1995, p. 11; see also: Olivier CLÉMENT, “In memoriam, Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993)”, in: *Contacts*, no. 164 (1993), pp. 293–302; Fr. Prof. Ion BRIA, “Hommage au Père Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae pour son 75e anniversaire”, in: *Contacts*, no. 31 (1979), pp. 64–74; Kallistos WARE, “Preface” to Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *The Experience of God*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 1994; John MEYENDORFF, “Preface” to Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Theology and the Church*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1980; Andrew LOUTH, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae”, in: *Modern Theology*, vol. 13, no. 2, April 1997, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, pp. 253–267; Rowan WILLIAMS, “Eastern Orthodox Theology”, in: David F. FORD (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edition, University of Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1997, esp. p. 511; Jürgen MOLTMANN, “Preface” to Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik*, Cologne/Gütersloh, 1985 (trans. H. Pitters); P. Maciej BIELAWSKI, OSB, chapter: “Viața și opera părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae” from his doctoral dissertation entitled *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae, o viziune filocalică despre lume*, translation and foreword by Deacon Ioan I. Ică Jr., Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1998.

education at the “Andrei Şaguna” High School in Braşov (1914–1922), followed by higher studies at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest (for one year) and the Faculty of Theology in Cernăuţi (1923–1927), where he earned his doctorate in 1928. **He was awarded a scholarship by** Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania, of blessed memory, and sent for specialized studies in Dogmatic Theology and Church History at the Faculties of Theology in Athens (1927–1928), Munich, and Berlin (1928–1929), complemented by research and study trips to Paris and Belgrade. Upon his return, he was appointed substitute professor (1929), provisional professor (1932), and ultimately full professor (1935) of Dogmatic Theology at the “Andreiana” Theological Academy in Sibiu, where he served until 1946 (he also taught Apologetics in 1929–1932 and 1936–1937, Pastoral Theology in 1932–1936, and Greek Language in 1929–1934). Following the election of Rector Nicolae Colan as Bishop of Cluj, he was appointed Rector of the Academy (1936–1946). He was ordained deacon in 1931, priest in 1932, and in 1940 elevated to the rank of stavrophore protopresbyter; he served as a member of the Eparchial Assembly of the Archdiocese of Sibiu and as archiepiscopal counselor, and as editor of the newspaper *Telegraful Român* (January 1934 – May 1945). Under the directives of the illegally installed communist regime in Romania, he was forcibly transferred in January 1947 to the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest, to the Chair of Asceticism and Mysticism. In 1948, when the Faculty was reorganized as a University-level Theological Institute, he was appointed full professor of Dogmatic Theology. Between 1958 and 1963, he endured the infernal conditions of communist imprisonment. He was reinstated to the faculty and continued teaching in Bucharest from 1965 to 1973; following his retirement, he served as a consultant professor for doctoral courses.

For over six decades, Father Stăniloae carried out an extraordinary pedagogical and research activity, particularly in the field of Dogmatics, and is regarded as one of the foremost theologians and Christian thinkers worldwide. He published monographs, studies in journals, translations, articles, and reviews. He participated in delegations of the Romanian Orthodox Church visiting other Churches: the Federal Republic of Germany (1970), Greece (1971), the Coptic Church in Egypt (1971), the Vatican

(1971); he was a delegate to the Second Congress of Orthodox Theological Faculties in Athens (1976); he took part in numerous consultations and theological conferences organized by various commissions of the World Council of Churches in several countries; and he delivered invited lectures at the Theological Faculties of Athens, Thessaloniki, Paris, Strasbourg, Bonn, Heidelberg, Tübingen, Freiburg, Geneva, Oxford, the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, in the United States of America, and elsewhere. He served on the Romanian Orthodox Commission for theological dialogue with the Evangelical Church in the Federal Republic of Germany, attending various meetings in both countries. His extensive theological work, placed in the service of the Church and of Christian unity, received recognition through numerous honorary titles and distinctions: Doctor honoris causa from the Faculty of Theology in Thessaloniki (1976), the “Saint Serge” Theological Institute in Paris (1981), the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade (1982), and the University of Bucharest (1992); the “Dr. Leopold Lucas” Prize from the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Tübingen; the “Cross of St. Augustine of Canterbury” from the Primate of England (1981); and others; corresponding member of the Romanian Academy (1990), thereafter full member (1992).

The name of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is inscribed not only in the diptychs of the Romanian Orthodox Church and theology but, also at the ecumenical level. In 1995, the World Council of Churches published a volume entitled *Ecumenical Pilgrims: Profiles of Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation*², as the ever-memorable Father Professor Ion Bria emphasized, the editors did not hesitate for a moment to include his name among the “Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation” of the twentieth century. Father Stăniloae’s participation and contribution to the ecumenical movement and to bilateral theological dialogue were not always of an institutional or representative character; often, they carried a special spiritual impact. He was discreet in his ecumenical engagements yet remained in constant contact with major theologians of his era. “Ecumenism is misunderstood”, he would say; consequently, there is no chapter in his *Dogmatics* without a commentary on the ecumenical implications of the topic. Confessional divergences are

² Ion BRIA, Dagmar HELLER (eds.), *Ecumenical Pilgrims: Profiles of Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1995, pp. 226–230.

addressed and named directly, with precision and firmness, yet they are situated within the broader circle of an “open sobornicity”, an inclusive patristic Tradition belonging to all. The World Council of Churches solicited his contributions to various conferences and even to its general assemblies, recognizing that his theology altered the portrait of Orthodoxy that had circulated in the West during the first half of the previous century. Ecumenism was misunderstood, in Father Stăniloae’s view, partly because Orthodoxy was communicated deficiently—that is, it had not attained a theological level adequate and relevant to the predominantly Protestant ecumenical community.

In a letter addressed to Father Professor Ion Bria, Father Stăniloae wrote: “To advance Romanian theological thought further! This brings me the greatest joy. A mere listing of quotations from my studies would mark time or even render lifeless what is alive in them”. A decade later (on 24 July 1982), he conveyed the same message: “I rejoice that something is written about my theology, but I shall rejoice even more over the reflections of others that will enrich this theology, for I desire to see my thoughts fertilize the thinking of others, thereby advancing our Romanian theology”³. We believe that here we have a testamentary exhortation from the great priest and theologian Dumitru Stăniloae!

Father Stăniloae profoundly understood what human dignity, freedom, and responsibility entail during the interwar democratic period, under the infernal conditions of totalitarian prisons, and after 1989, as will be succinctly shown below⁴. The theme holds maximum relevance in the context of the recent health crisis, when grave violations of human freedom and dignity occurred.

³ Pr. Prof. dr. Ion BRIA, *Spațiul nemuririi sau eternizarea umanului în Dumnezeu, în viziunea teologică și spirituală a Părintelui Stăniloae*, Trinitas, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași, 1994, p. 44.

⁴ It is evident that this vast theme cannot be treated exhaustively in a limited space. We note an initial comprehensive approach to the topic in Ciprian Mocanu’s excellent doctoral dissertation entitled: *Demnitatea omului în contextul ecumenic actual din perspectiva teologiei ortodoxe: Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa și Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae (Human Dignity in the Contemporary Ecumenical Context from the Perspective of Orthodox Theology: St. Gregory of Nyssa and Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae)*, Sibiu, 2013 (ms).

II. The Special Historical Context in Which Father Stăniloae Experienced the Human Condition

Among hundreds of thousands⁵ of Romanians, Father Stăniloae ended up in the death camps. Having been forced, under pressure exerted by Petru Groza on Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan⁶, to resign from his position as Rector of the Andreiana Academy (3 July 1946), he became a professor in Bucharest through competition. But in 1958, the second wave of terror and arrests was unleashed. Father Stăniloae was taken from his home on 4 September 1958⁷ and imprisoned first at Jilava (November 1958 – March 1959), then at Aiud (April 1959 – 15 January 1963). Concurrently with his arrest, his daughter Lidia Stăniloae was dismissed from her position as researcher at the Institute of Atomic Physics⁸. Aiud operated under the terror regime known as “re-education” under Gheorghe Crăciun (director of the prisons from November 1958 to December 1964), during which, as a result of tortures, Father Ilarion Felea (18 September 1961) and Schemamonk Daniil Sandu Tudor (17 November 1962) perished, while Nichifor Crainic and Petre Țuțea were severely tormented. In those infernal conditions, Father Stăniloae was perceived as a saint. Ilie Tudor, father of

⁵ The total number of victims of communist repression (political prisoners, deportees, those killed during interrogations, in armed resistance, during collectivization, etc.) is estimated at **2 million people directly affected**, of whom **over 200,000 died**, and many others died relatively soon after release due to the tortures and deprivations they suffered. Unfortunately, there will probably never be an exact figure, because of the destruction of evidence and the way many detainees were buried (mass graves, unmarked, as at Periprava, Salcia, Aiud, etc.).

⁶ The content of the resignation request and Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan’s regret at having accepted it and acceded to Petru Groza’s “desire”— to whom he wrote: “I confess that I regret having done so: Father Dumitru Stăniloae left the Andreiana Theological Academy, leaving a void that no one else can fill”— are reproduced by Florin Duțu in his book: *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae 1903-1993*, Editura Floare Albă de Colț, București, 2020, pp. 57–64, drawing on the works of Father Professor Mihai Săsăujan; Groza’s “desire” had been transmitted in writing and through frequent communications via counselors Liviu Stan and Spiridon Cădea.

⁷ F. DUȚU, *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, p. 79.

⁸ F. DUȚU, *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, p. 114; see also Lidia STĂNILOAE, “Lumina faptei din lumina cuvântului”. *Împreună cu tatăl meu, Dumitru Stăniloae*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2023.

the artist Tudor Gheorghe and himself a prisoner at Aiud, described Father Stăniloae thus:

“He was like a Byzantine saint lost among so many condemned, themselves defenders of the ancient Church and of the nation crucified by atheists. In those conditions, his words were balm, an unexpected heavenly gift for the multitude of martyrs destined to fill the unmarked cemetery on the outskirts of Aiud where the townspeople dumped their garbage. The love pouring forth from his lectures sustained us in our hunger, warmed us...”⁹. Another prisoner wrote that “he is a profoundly faithful man. I observed at Aiud how he performed his prayers regularly and fell almost into ecstasy”¹⁰.

When asked about those imprisoned for political reasons, Ana Pauker¹¹ replied that they were not to be killed because the aim was to instill terror in the country: “Simple death would be too good and too easy; it would not frighten the others sufficiently”¹². The great Romanian theologian suffered a lot, too, though innocent. Although the first page of his arrest file stated that he was “apolitical” this word was crossed out, and, as Dumitru Horia Ionescu, the Father Stăniloae’s nephew, explains, someone “later added in pencil, in clumsy handwriting, that Stăniloae had nevertheless been a legionary”¹³. From all documents related to those terrible times, even those signed by the fearsome commander Crăciun, it is clear that the authorities never regarded him as a legionary¹⁴. Father Stăniloae himself declared at Aiud in 1962: “I could not affiliate myself with the Legionary Movement, despite its protest against the other parties, because I could not reconcile in

⁹ F. DUȚU, *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, p.117

¹⁰ F. DUȚU, *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, p.114

¹¹ Hanna Robinsohn, nicknamed “Stalin in a skirt”, the first woman in the world appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs.

¹² ILEANA, Prințesă a României, Arhiducesă de Austria, *Trăiesc din nou*, Editura Humanitas, 2010, p. 290; Princess Ileana became Mother Alexandra.

¹³ *Cartea Familiei Stăniloae, Trei generații văzute prin ochiul lui Dumitru Horia Ionescu. Dialoguri cu Răzvan Bucuroiu*, Editura Lumea Credinței, București, 2023, pp. 110.

¹⁴ *Cartea Familiei Stăniloae*, pp. 110–111.

my conscience the mission of a priest and its imperatives with the violence that led to a series of horrifying assassinations”, and he further specified that in an article he “condemned the participation of some theology students in the killing of Stelescu, which drew a harsh reply from a Cluj legionary newspaper”¹⁵. In fact, as early as September 1936, after participating in a conference of heads of theological educational institutions (Father had been appointed Rector on 25 May 1936) organized by the Ministry of Education on the theme of “deviant nationalist manifestations”, he wrote in *Telegraful Român*:

“Let us bring to nationalism a contribution of spirituality, for that is what it expects from us and what only we can give. Anyone can contribute throats and striking arms. Let us not sink into the mass, let us not lose our quality as priests and future priests by practicing nationalism in a manner unbecoming to us. Priests at the forefront, but with the cross, not with the rifle”¹⁶.

As Rector, he vigorously opposed attempts by certain professors to conduct legionary propaganda at the Andreiana Academy or to carry pistols and wear green shirts.

It is self-evident that Father Stăniloae’s sporadic participation in discussions at the Burning Bush (*Rugul Aprins*) movement — “of which he was never formally a member”¹⁷—could not in itself constitute a criminal offense. Thus, though innocent, he received an exceedingly severe sentence. In this way, through his life, he inscribed himself within the words of the Holy Apostle Paul: “Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3,12)¹⁸.

¹⁵ F. DUȚU, *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, p. 88.

¹⁶ F. DUȚU, *Viața Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, p. 90.

¹⁷ As emphasized by André Scrima in his book, *Timpul Rugului Aprins. Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană*, Editura Humanitas, 2012, p. 163.

¹⁸ See: Nicolae V. MOȘOIU: “«All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted» (2 Tm 3:12) – An Eastern Orthodox perspective on persecutions and martyrdom”, on: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/213251/201116>.

It is well known that Father Stăniloae never spoke publicly about his sufferings and great torments in prison¹⁹; only in strict confidence, characterizing those years with a “smile”, did he tell Olivier Clément: “An experience like so many others, a little more difficult for my family”. He added that this was the only period in his life when he could practice, almost permanently, the invocation of the Name of Jesus²⁰. Others, however, spoke and wrote extensively—we possess an entire literature on the concentrationary space—out of a desire to reveal how demonized people could torment and kill others, and to ensure it never happens again. Indeed, totalitarianism “filled heaven with saints”²¹ but in those infernal conditions, many prisoners died in gruesome torments or fell into despair, denunciation, and various compromises in prison and after release. In any case, no human being—only the good God—can judge them!

III. Freedom, Dignity, and Responsibility – Elements of the Image of God in Man

Because he followed with complete fidelity the authentic, age-old teaching of the Church, Father Stăniloae understood that dignity, freedom, and

¹⁹ In our country as well, the number of arrests surged massively after 1948, once the communist regime consolidated its power. Anyone could be seen as a potential threat to the usurping communist system, but intellectuals, clergy, professors, and former politicians were especially targeted for investigation. While the penitentiary system overflowed with political prisoners (Christians were frequently accused of political actions, though their deeds merely reflected their Christian identity), forced labor camps and new prisons were established. Several labor camps, where many lost their lives, were set up to dig the Danube–Black Sea Canal. Among the most notorious prisons for their horrific tortures were Sighet, Gherla, Aiud, and Pitești, along with forced labor camps and lead mines in the Danube Delta. The Pitești Prison became the center of a communist experiment known as “re-education”, involving both psychological and physical torture, resulting in the complete nervous breakdown of the individual. The ultimate aim was to force prisoners to confess crimes or abominable acts they had not committed, or to denounce themselves and others. This experiment led to numerous suicides within the prison and was ultimately halted as a demonic endeavor.

²⁰ O. CLEMENT, “Preface” to Father Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Rugăciunea lui Iisus și experiența Duhului Sfânt*, p. 15

²¹ Cristian BĂDILIȚĂ, Emanuel CONȚAC (eds), *Și cerul s-a umplut de sfinți... Martiriul în antichitatea creștină și în secolul XX. Actele colocviului internațional*, Sighet, 2-5 iunie 2011, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2012.

responsibility belong to human being from creation. First, we recall the excellent synthesis of theological anthropology owed to Panayotis Nellas²², which Father Stăniloae reviewed elogiously²³ immediately upon its appearance in 1979. Panayotis Nellas proceeds from the reality that man is the image of the Archetype, “image of the Image” (*eikōn Eikonos*), that is, image of the Son, and develops “the three fundamental anthropological points: the constitution, destiny, and origin of man”²⁴.

III.1. Implicit Biblical References to Human Freedom, Dignity, and Responsibility

In relation to the proposed theme, we consider it important to recall three New Testament references, practically three verbs: “must” (*dei*, Lk 19, 5), “marveled” (*ethaumasen*, Matt 8, 10), and “would”/“willed” (*ēthelēsa*, Matt 23,37), through which human freedom, dignity, and responsibility are highlighted.

a. “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I **must** (*dei, oportet*) stay at your house” (Lk 19,5). At first glance, the use of the verb “must”²⁵ would seem to contrast with God’s absolute freedom. Yet we may say that the very entry of the Savior into Zacchaeus’s house—and into man’s in general—reveals the dignity of the human being, created after the Image of the Image of the Son. But for God to enter the house, man, too must make an effort. Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore, meaning man must rise, elevate himself above daily affairs and cares, petty preoccupations; he must ascend a little, make a minimal effort for God to enter him. Of course, there is also a symbolic sense here. The Savior does not enter only

²² Panayotis NELLAS, *Omul- animal îndumnezeit. Perspective pentru o antropologie ortodoxă*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2009.

²³ A portion of this review by Father Stăniloae is reproduced on the back cover of the Sibiu edition: Panayotis Nellas “has given Orthodox theology the most comprehensive and faithful exposition of patristic anthropology, which has always been and still is the anthropology of the Orthodox Church. Nellas’s book has inestimable value for having brought to light the superior qualities of Orthodox anthropology, the only one that can ensure the unending spiritual growth of human persons through their union with Christ”.

²⁴ P. NELLAS, *Omul...*, p.62,63

²⁵ The Greek *dei* is an impersonal verb translated as “must.” The Latin equivalent is *oportet* (*oportere, oportuit*), also translated as “must”.

Zacchaeus's physical house but actually enters the house of his soul. The sycamore is his awakening, detachment from the world, coming to his senses, rising above the world, climbing onto the battlements of the spirit. Then, it is striking that only after relating to the Savior as his Archetype did he understand how he ought truly to be, the rationale of his existence; hence he imposes upon himself the greatest penance. It is known that according to the old law, if one committed an injustice, one had to repay at most fourfold. In practice, he wishes to uproot the passion of avarice with the contrary virtue: intending to give half his goods to the poor, and desiring to use the other half to repay fourfold those he had oppressed with excessive taxes demanded in the name of idolatrous Romans, meant he would arrive at voluntary poverty. Sincere repentance concretized in deeds creates the premise for the imperative "must". And from here springs the great hope that in similar cases God *must* come, enter also into us.

It is also important to note that Zacchaeus accompanied the Holy Apostle Peter on his missionary journeys. Tradition tells us that Zacchaeus was ordained the first bishop in Caesarea of Palestine by the Holy Apostle Peter²⁶ and he is venerated as a saint on April 20.

b. "When Jesus heard this, He **marveled** (*ethaumasen, miratus est*) and said to those who followed Him: "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith" (Matt 8, 10)²⁷. Here there appears an apparent contradiction with God's attribute of omniscience. He marveled at the centurion's humility, at what He heard, or at the natural and spontaneous way the centurion compared his authority as a sub-officer in the Roman army with the authority of the Word of God's Word. We do not believe the theme can be approached in a Nestorian manner, namely that He marveled as man but not as God. We consider it should be emphasized that there exists an originality of the human person in communion with its Archetype, an originality potentiated by the Holy Spirit Who, as Father Stăniloae wonderfully and originally tells us, infuses Himself as the hypostasis of our hypostases:

²⁶ cf. *Constituțiile Apostolice* 7, 46; <https://www.google.com/search?q=apostolic+constitutions+pdf>.

²⁷ *Ethaumasen* is the aorist indicative active form of the verb *thaumazō* = to marvel, to wonder. The Latin equivalent is the deponent verb *miror, mirari, miratus sum*, meaning to marvel, to wonder, to be surprised. The form *miratus est* is perfect indicative passive, but as a deponent verb, it is translated actively.

“There begins a kenosis of the Spirit, Who descends to our level to raise us to the level of partners of Christ. He is not a hypostasis with a distinct human nature, hence not incarnate like us as Christ is incarnate, and therefore nothing prevents Him from infusing Himself as hypostasis of our hypostases, becoming a kind of hypostasis of our persons. And this makes Him all the more intimate to us. Christ remains forever our partner with Whom we speak, Whom we imitate, from Whom we ask powers and from Whom powers come to us in this dialogue, becoming interior to us in another way. The Spirit is He through Whom we do all this, covering Himself with us without annulling us, yet without appearing before us as a partner in dialogue between us and Christ, partly in the historical plane, partly in the plane of eternity, because we ourselves are accepted and raised to the position of the Spirit or the Spirit accepts our position on the basis of a supreme intimacy. Hence it has been said that the saints are incorporations of the Spirit, of course not in the sense that their human nature has the Spirit as hypostasis in the same sense that Christ is the hypostasis of His human nature; but in the sense that their subjects are realized in supreme intimacy with the Spirit, and not only their knowing and willing subjects but also their bodies, that is, their whole being. This intimacy between the Spirit and the believing man makes the spiritual man not feel the Spirit as a Thou, but whenever he says ‘I’, he hears the Spirit also saying ‘I’ in him. His ‘I’ has become the ‘I’ of the Spirit; the ‘I’ of the Spirit has become his ‘I’, in a perfect union without confusion. There are two interpenetrated ‘I’s: the ‘I’ of the Spirit imprinted in the ‘I’ of man to develop the latter’s ‘I.’ The powers of the Spirit and thereby the powers of Christ have become the powers of man. The Spirit does not affirm Himself in man through the category of Thou, as Christ does, but of ‘I’, in order to strengthen man’s ‘I’, but as an ‘I’ that loves Christ. Descending to the level of the human ‘I’, He makes

Himself humble like man, so that man too may humble himself and through humility be exalted”²⁸.

When writing about the attribute of “God’s omniscience and wisdom and the participation of rational creatures in them”, Father Stăniloae also addresses the problem of God’s foreknowledge concerning those who will remain definitively far from God. The question arises whether this foreknowledge of their permanent non-return makes their return impossible? Does His foreknowledge close the possibility of manifesting God’s freedom toward these people, or their freedom? Saint John of Damascus gave the answer to this question: “God foreknows all things, but does not predetermine all things”²⁹, taking into account the freedom of creatures. That is, God took into account the freedom of creatures in His foreknowledge concerning them; He foreknows what they will do freely. And yet, the authenticity and spontaneity with which the centurion uttered those words, as a free person—perhaps not the words themselves—could they have surprised the Person of the incarnate Logos after Whose image he too was brought into being?

c. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I **have wanted** (*ēthelēsa, volui*) to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you *were not willing* (*ouk ēthelēste, nolulistis*)” (Matt 23, 37)³⁰.

The Savior tells us: “If anyone **wants** to come after Me” (Matt 16, 24). Likewise, after speaking to them about Himself as the bread that came down from heaven and emphasizing: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6, 53), “many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him” (Jn 6,66). It is important to observe that immediately

²⁸ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, 2003, vol.2, pp. 308 – 309.

²⁹ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, 2003, vol. 1, p.165

³⁰ Here we have the verb *thelō* = to will, to want. The form *ēthelēsa* of the verb *thelō* is aorist first person singular active, and the form *ouk ēthelēsate* is the negated aorist second person plural. The Latin equivalent is the irregular verb *volo, velle, volui* = to will, to want, and its opposite *nolo* (from *ne + volo*), *nolle, nolui* meaning to not will, to not want. The form *volui* is first person singular perfect indicative, and *voluisti* is also perfect indicative but second person singular.

the Savior asked the Twelve: “Do **you** also **want** to go away?” (Jn 6, 67), and we may deduce that if they had said they were leaving, He would have let them. But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (Jn 6, 68–69). A wonderful response: Saint Peter, inspired, utters these words showing that they were right beside the source of life, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14, 6). Also important is the sequence faith–knowledge, not as one might think that one first knows and then believes, but that knowledge comes because of faith.

In the verse from Matthew 23,37 there appears an apparent contradiction between God’s omnipotence, He Who wills, and man’s lack of obedience. But as Father Stăniloae tells us: “God does not use His omnipotence in the face of human freedom, which He does not wish to violate, because it proceeds from God’s very omnipotence”³¹. Yet although man can refuse to fulfill God’s will, the consequences are very grave, as seen in the history of the chosen people, for the good God wills everything for man’s good and salvation. In fact, the great Romanian theologian emphasizes, God “is above omnipotence, but makes Himself omnipotent through descent to relation with all that have a certain power through participation in Him”³².

Father Stăniloae then explains that the formal definition of omnipotence is: the power of a person to do all that he wills. But this definition does not consider a will that self-limits in its acts according to what the subject knows it can do. That would no longer be omnipotence. The power of this person would be limited. At the same time, in God no act is performed independently of His will. And the divine will does not choose its objectives either according to the consciousness of a limited power or arbitrarily, but according to the good, and “in God, the good coincides with being”, as Saint John of Damascus says; God being “subsistent good,” as Saint Dionysius the Areopagite says³³. Furthermore, Father Stăniloae specifies that in the East, omnipotence is seen especially

³¹ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 283.

³² Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p.150.

³³ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p.153.

in connection with God as the All-Sustainer/All-Ruler, He Who brought all from nothing and maintains them.³⁴

Moreover, God waits “with great patience” for our return to Him, our awakening to the love He offers us, as seen in the parable of the prodigal son’s return; “what increases the paradox even more is that the joy of intratrinitarian love coexists with the waiting for the human person’s response and with the sadness of its delay: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him” (Rev 3, 20). Time means for God the duration of waiting between His knock at the gate and our act of opening it. He does not enter by force into human hearts. Time in this sense involves both freedom and the respect accorded by God to conscious creatures. Union with Him in love cannot be realized without the free response of people to His offer of love. But God, while waiting, lives time without forgetting His eternity, without departing from it, whereas we, when we do not hear His voice, live a time without consciousness of eternity”³⁵. In this context Father refers to Matthew 23, 37:

“We could respond more quickly if we wanted to participate more quickly in God through grace. And some do respond more quickly. But others disappoint God’s expectation: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have wanted to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing”³⁶.

III.1. Freedom as an ontological given

Father Stăniloae asserts that: “The freedom of the will represents the possibility of self-determination that God has given to human nature, thereby conferring upon it dignity”³⁷. In this statement, a direct connection is established between *human freedom and dignity*, which also entails *responsibility* toward God, toward fellow human beings, and toward the

³⁴ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p.154.

³⁵ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p.130.

³⁶ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p.131.

³⁷ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova, 1987, p. 51.

whole of creation. Father Stăniloae repeatedly emphasized that an essential element of the image of God in man is the freedom of the will³⁸; man was brought into being endowed with the gift of freedom³⁹, an inestimable gift that God does not revoke. At the same time, the paradox of the human person consists in the possibility of being the decisive authority over one's own actions and decisions, while simultaneously freely acknowledging one's dependence on a supreme Subject to Whom one is accountable for the manner in which the powers granted have been exercised⁴⁰.

Man possesses the capacity for conscious and free reasoning⁴¹, and "the rationality of the world is for man and culminates in man"⁴². In fact, freedom is the greatest dignity and value that God has bestowed upon human nature⁴³. God calls man to an eternal dialogue with Him, offering him the possibility of freely choosing communion with Him, treating him as a subject capable of accepting or refusing this invitation to dialogue. Yet from eternity God has desired for man an eternal life in communion with Him; He desires all to come to Him, He would have His house filled (cf. Lk 14, 22–23). Nevertheless, God tolerates man's freedom to refuse communion with Him, and even to use it in a manner contrary to Him, while at the same time awaiting repentance and man's return. Even in the case of freedom dissociated from responsibility, God does not annul human freedom.

One might ask whether man possesses authentic freedom⁴⁴ given that the only option leading to his fulfillment consists in choosing communion with God. The response must be that, since man was created after the image of God, he naturally tends toward God; true freedom can only consist in

³⁸ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol.1, p. 270; Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor...*, p. 24.

³⁹ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor...*, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, pp. 257-258.

⁴¹ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, pp. 257-258.

⁴² Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 241.

⁴³ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor...*, p. 112-113.

⁴⁴ Free will is questioned today with strange nonchalance by a well-known professor of psychology: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=daniel+david+liberul+arbitru#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:8297cdb2,vid:EFNpclFvOnA,st:0> (accessed 15.03.2025); See also: Robert M. SAPOLSKY, *Determinat. O știință a vieții fără liber arbitru*, Editura Publica, 2024.

alignment with this choice⁴⁵, because human nature remains in accordance with its reason only when it exists in conformity with the divine will. In fact, “sin consists in man’s inclination in the direction opposite to God’s will”⁴⁶, and everything termed sin is so called because it affects man.

Therefore, freedom is an ontological given oriented toward the fulfillment of all that is in accordance with human nature. In an apparent paradox, the freedom of choice was granted by God to human nature precisely so that man might freely choose communion with Him, advancing toward perfection in accordance with the reason after which he was created. For he who wills as God has made God’s will his own, for Father Stăniloae, true freedom reveals itself when we willingly choose what is in harmony with our deepest nature and long for the imperishable life that flows from the Source of all imperishable life. Authentic freedom consists in opening an inner pathway within ourselves so that God’s life-giving action can flow through us. By contrast, freedom in its illusory form appears when we attempt to exist solely through our own strength and resources — powers that inevitably become exhausted. Whoever aligns himself with God’s will opens himself to God’s active work, for the divine will is inherently dynamic and creative. Here lies the paradox: when a person makes God’s will his own, he also makes God’s work his own. In this way, his willing and working remain identical in content with the divine will and work, yet they are not abolished or dissolved. Rather, remaining a true subject together with God, the human person actively participates — as subject — in both the willing and the working⁴⁷.

Furthermore, Father Stăniloae asserts categorically that “God made us in order to know Him”⁴⁸. And Saint Maximus the Confessor teaches that: “if we advance rightly, in accordance with reason and nature, toward that

⁴⁵ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor...*, pp. 241-242; cf. Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1990, pp. 287, 292.

⁴⁶ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Editura Basilica, 2013, pp. 176-177.

⁴⁷ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, footnotes 33-35, in: Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 80, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1983, pp. 75-78.

⁴⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 163.

which we represent in being and reason, we too shall know, by a simple touch — *aplē prosbolē* — without any inquiry (which alone occasions error and delusion), all things divinely — *theoeidōs*, as far as possible for us, no longer persisting in ignorance in movement around them, since we have united our mind and reason with the great Mind — *Nous*, with the Reason — *Logos*, and the Spirit — *Pneuma*, or rather our whole selves with the whole God, as image with its model”⁴⁹. The human mind — *nous*, reason — *logos*, and spirit — *pneuma* must conform to their archetypes: the great Mind — the Father, the Logos — the Son, and the Spirit — the Holy Spirit. This triad of the human soul constitutes an image of the Holy Trinity; man is, in fact, “imago Trinitatis”⁵⁰ inasmuch as the “hands” with which the Father created him are the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the well-known explanation of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons.

IV. Dignity – Inherent Value of the Human Condition

Human dignity means the conviction that all human beings possess an exceptional value by virtue of their very human nature, irrespective of class, race, gender, religion, abilities, or any other factor beyond the fact that they are human; thus dignity pertains to the fundamental rights of man⁵¹. I. Kant stated: “I have no right to refuse even to the vicious man consideration in his quality as a man; this latter is inalienable, though the other makes himself unworthy of “it” because humanity/human nature is in itself a dignity⁵². The term “dignity” evolved over the centuries. For a long time, the words for “dignity” in Latin, English, and French had nothing to do with the inherent value of a person. The meaning was much closer to someone’s “merit”. If someone was “dignified”, it meant he held high status. These belonged to royalty or ecclesiastical hierarchy, or at

⁴⁹ Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ LARS THUNBERG, *Man and the Cosmos - The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1985, p. 47.

⁵¹ See: Nicolae Răzvan STAN (ed.), *Biserica Ortodoxă și drepturile omului; paradigme, fundamente și implicații*, Universul Juridic, București, 2010.

⁵² I. KANT, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 1886, pp. 170-171, trans. J. W. Semples, on: http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1443/0332_Bk.pdf; accessed on 21.02.2025.

least possessed wealth. For this reason, “human dignity” does not appear in the United States Declaration of Independence or Constitution. The expression as we understand it today was recognized only in 1948, when the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵³. The first two articles state that all persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Endowed with reason and conscience, they should treat one another with brotherhood. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without any discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, opinion, origin, property, birth, or other status. No distinctions shall be made on the basis of the political or international status of a person’s country or territory⁵⁴.

Dignity is received by all human beings at birth, and human rights naturally flow from this dignity. The concept of “human dignity” is, in fact, at the center of human rights. In Romania as well, dignity forms part of the law and should always be respected as such. The Civil Code provides in Chapter II – Respect Due to the Human Being and Its Inherent Rights, Section III – Respect for Private Life and the Dignity of the Human Person; Article 72 – Right to Dignity: “Every person has the right to respect for his or her dignity”⁵⁵.

Human dignity is due to man’s constitution as being after the „image of God” and possessing freedom of the will, man being called to become the priest of creation. Father Stăniloae affirmed that “in freedom lies the dignity of man, created after the image of God”⁵⁶, dignity being both an ontological given on the basis of creation and a moral state—that is, attained and maintained through deeds and attitude. In the Orthodox vision, human rights are respected and promoted on the basis of Christian ethics, and the theological distinction between image and likeness is reflected in the distinction made at the level of ontological dignity and ethical dignity with regard to human nature. Thus, according to Orthodox theology, if the gift of

⁵³ E. SOKEN-HUBERTY, *What is Human Dignity? Common Definitions., Human Rights Careers*, <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/definitions-what-is-human-dignity/>; accessed on 4.03.2025.

⁵⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>, accessed on 4.03.2025.

⁵⁵ <https://www.codulcivil.ro/art-72-Dreptul-la-demnitate/>: accessed on 12.03.2025

⁵⁶ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor...*, p. 51.

the divine image in human nature is common to all people, likeness to God (at the ethical level) is realized only by those who remain in communion with Him. Therefore, ethical dignity is understood as a completion of ontological dignity⁵⁷. Professor Ștefan Tobler concluded that:

“1. the dignity of human nature must be regarded as a reality *per se*, independent of empirical achievements or of its respect by society.
2. the distinction between the two empirical dimensions of human dignity carries vital importance for the correct understanding of dignity in relation to human rights and personal ethics”⁵⁸.

Father Stăniloae affirms that fallen man “acquires self-consciousness and the dignity of the human nature, when he is responsible for the other, seeing the eternal dignity of the other”⁵⁹. At the same time, God offers man the dignity of accepting or refusing, exclusively on the basis of his own choice, communion with the Creator. This proof of love is shown even more in the case of refusal of communion with God, inasmuch as the chance is not taken away from him to re-enter through repentance into the state of grace from which he fell⁶⁰.

IV.1. Freedom and dignity in conditions of contagious disease

During the recent health crisis, fundamental human rights were significantly restricted through movement limitations and mandatory injectable medical treatments that offered incomplete protection, carried serious side effects and contraindications, and did not prevent virus transmission. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* affirms in *Article 13* the right to freedom of movement and residence within a state, as well as the right to leave and return to one’s country, and in *Article 12*

⁵⁷ C. MOCANU, *Demnitatea omului...*, p. 35

⁵⁸ Ștefan TOBLER, “Menschenrechte als Kirchentrennender Faktor?“, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 107, 2010, p. 336, apud C. MOCANU, *Demnitatea omului...*, p.30

⁵⁹ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, Marc-Antoine Costa DE BEAUREGARD, *Mică dogmatică vorbită; dialoguri la Cernica*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2007, p. 94.

⁶⁰ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul...*, p.72.

the protection against arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence⁶¹.

The Romanian Patriarchate's press office emphasized that vaccination must be a responsible, informed prophylactic act based on clear information from authorities, underlining its *voluntary character* as a right, not an obligation⁶².

On 27 October 2021, the *Bucharest Court of Appeal* ruled that “the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms cannot be conditioned by absolutely anything”⁶³ It annulled restrictive ordinances, stating that these rights derive automatically from the quality of being human (as a person and citizen) and belong to each individual separately, not to society as a whole. Imposing any condition—even if seemingly justified—constitutes a denial of the right, as it implies state appropriation of rights inherent to human existence and dignity. Such restrictions risk further erosions and altering the ontological status of the individual. The court also highlighted the discriminatory nature of the measures, given the vaccines' novelty, unknown short- and long-term effects, lack of full producer/state responsibility, and the fact that vaccinated/tested/recovered status did not reliably indicate non-transmission of the virus. In summary, fundamental rights to freedom and dignity are inherent to the human condition, not granted by the state, and cannot be made conditional without effectively denying them⁶⁴. Consequently, the court ordered the annulment of the three government decisions.

V. Responsibility –as a natural consequence of freedom and dignity

Human freedom does not represent an isolated aspect of human life; therefore, Father Stăniloae frequently emphasizes that freedom must be

⁶¹ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>, accessed on 4.03.2025.

⁶² <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-24940494-patriarhul-daniel-nu-vaccinat-impotriva-covid-19-vasile-banescu-este-drept-nu-obligatie.htm>; acces. 14.02.2025.

⁶³ <https://www.clujjust.ro/motivare-cab-anulare-3-hg-uri-exercitarea-drepturilor-si-libertatilor-fundamentale-nu-poate-fi-conditionata-de-absolut-nimic/>; acces. 13.01.2025.

⁶⁴ <https://www.clujjust.ro/motivare-cab-anulare-3-hg-uri-exercitarea-drepturilor-si-libertatilor-fundamentale-nu-poate-fi-conditionata-de-absolut-nimic/>; acces. 13.01.2025.

associated with responsibility in every moment of life⁶⁵: “I link freedom to responsibility [...] God demands that I use freedom as is fitting”⁶⁶.

Father Stăniloae underscores responsibility: **a.** toward God: “Man is created by God with the seal of responsibility imprinted upon him [...] I am responsible; I must answer before an unconditioned authority [...] which has imprinted in me this need to respond, this responsibility to respond to His love, to His attention, through my attention, to develop what He has bestowed upon me”⁶⁷; **b.** toward fellow human beings: “Fallen man acquires self-consciousness and the dignity of the human precisely when he is responsible for the other, beholding the eternal dignity of the other”⁶⁸; **c.** and toward the whole of creation: “man carries the world with him”⁶⁹.

When environmental resources are perceived as gifts from God and people see themselves as hypostases of the same human nature, no room remains for manifestations of egoism: “God gave the world to human beings so that they might help one another and promote love among themselves through concerted efforts, so that they might know it and make use of it in a fraternal manner”⁷⁰. In this way, creation becomes theophanic, and man draws near to God through the meanings he discovers in creation and through the dialogue he establishes with Him on the basis of the divine logoi discerned therein⁷¹. It must then be emphasized that God does not withdraw the gift of freedom from man, even when the latter uses freedom irresponsibly⁷², because human freedom is an ontological given of human nature and a constitutive element of the image of God in man.

⁶⁵ C. MOCANU, *Demnitatea omului...*, p. 139 sq.

⁶⁶ Sorin DUMITRESCU (ed.), *7 Dimineți cu părintele Stăniloae*, Anastasia, București, [s.a.], pp. 191, 193

⁶⁷ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, M.-A. C. DE BEAUREGARD, *Mică dogmatică...*, p. 94.

⁶⁸ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, M.-A. C. DE BEAUREGARD, *Mică dogmatică...*, p. 94.

⁶⁹ Fr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, M.-A. C. DE BEAUREGARD, *Mică Dogmatică...*, p. 178: “Man bears the responsibility of leading nature toward the goal of transfiguration, which will be crowned by Christ”, p. 179.

⁷⁰ Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, M.-A. C. DE BEAUREGARD, *Mică dogmatică...*, p. 56

⁷¹ C. MOCANU, *Demnitatea omului...*, p.190

⁷² Fr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *The Immortal Image...*, p. 77; *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 275, Fr. Prof. Stăniloae expresses plastically the inalienable existence of human freedom by the fact that it was “imprinted” upon human nature by the Creator.

In his work *The Immortal Image of God*, the great Romanian theologian states that human nature is endowed with freedom; therefore, every person possesses dignity and responsibility through freedom—toward God, toward fellow human beings, and toward the whole of creation. This responsibility that flows from freedom is concretized in the sentiment of love; in fact, love and its concrete mode of manifestation constitute the reason why God created man free and, implicitly, responsible. The sentiment of love does not limit his freedom but, on the contrary, potentiates it. Moreover, having known the infernal conditions of totalitarian prisons, Father Stăniloae writes of liberation through love, liberation also from the limits imposed by egoism. By renouncing individualism and personal pride, the human person renounces precisely the boundaries that separate her from other human beings. There occurs a so-called “dilatation” of personal human nature and its reintegration into common human nature and its primordial state, which was created free, dignified, and responsible. In this manner, the self-giving of one’s own person to others through love becomes a giving that liberates and, implicitly, restores authentic freedom. Therefore, love manifested as authentic responsibility creates communion with God, with fellow human beings, and with the whole of creation—a communion made possible through the Incarnation and Sacrifice of the Savior, intended to fill man with love toward Him and to urge him, out of gratitude, to fulfill his responsibility that flows from his freedom⁷³.

Furthermore, out of love the Christian prays for all people, following the exhortation of the Holy Apostle Paul: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (1 Tim 2,1; cf. Acts 1,14). Prayer⁷⁴ has “a great unifying role”⁷⁵. In the study entitled “Prayers for Others and the Sobornicity of the Church”⁷⁶ with its particularly beautiful content, Father Stăniloae affirms

⁷³ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, pp. 77-79; Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, pp. 190-192; pp. 280-281.

⁷⁴ “True prayer is true love [...] to separate prayer from love is to fall into hypocritical and dry formalism”, Fr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, “Comuniune prin iubire”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXI (1963) 1, pp. 52–70.

⁷⁵ Pr. prof. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatica*, vol.2, p. 208.

⁷⁶ Pr. prof. D. STĂNILOAE, “Rugăciunile pentru alții și sobornicitatea Bisericii”, in: *Studii Teologice*, XXII (1970) 1 – 2, pp. 27-42.

that sobornicity is “the opposite of solitude”⁷⁷ and from this he deduces the great theme of responsibility through which “a person experiences the bond in which she stands with the other—a bond that depends neither on her will nor on the will of the other, but on the dialogical structure imprinted in every person”⁷⁸. The Christian’s responsibility toward others, the response to their need, is obligatory because of the response that must be given to God’s claim: “Whoever among us refuses to respond to God while living on earth will answer before God’s judgment in the life to come [...] for his fellow human beings, for whom, unwilling to respond in this life, he wished to escape responsibility toward God as well”⁷⁹. Our neighbor is every human being, all the more so one who calls himself a Christian.

The state of continuous responsibility arising from love and prayer can ultimately lead to holiness—a state that imprints a permanent respect and love toward God, toward fellow human beings, and toward creation as a whole⁸⁰.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, we may affirm that whoever wishes to be forever with the risen Christ must not be ashamed “of the testimony (*martyrian*) of our Lord” (2 Tim 1,8), which entails sufferings and shame, before being glorified with Christ (Rm 8,16–17; 1 Pt 4, 12–13). The sufferings of the innocent must continually inspire Christian witness, especially in these times when, before our eyes, the just hierarchy of values is being overturned, evil is officially called good; when we witness a recrudescence of violence, wars, and various absolutely unacceptable forms of persecution and killing of human beings by fellow human beings who do not live according to

⁷⁷ Pr. prof. D. STĂNILOAE, „Rugăciunile pentru alții...”, p. 29.

⁷⁸ Pr. prof. D. STĂNILOAE, „Rugăciunile pentru alții...”, p. 29.

⁷⁹ Pr. Prof. D. STĂNILOAE, „Responsabilitatea creștină”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXI (1970) 2, p. 186.

⁸⁰ C. MOCANU, *Demnitatea omului...*, p.141.

Christian logic. The prophetic voice of authentic Christians must resound at any risk, and the freedom, dignity, and responsibility of every human being cannot be restricted, being inherent to the human condition created after the image of God.