

Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993) and his Contribution to Theology

Recognitions and Commentaries

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This paper attempts to offer a general overview of the contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae to theology, emphasizing recognitions and commentaries (from throughout the entire spectrum of Christian theology) related to this topic. As promoter of the Patristic Tradition, Father Stăniloae successfully elaborated a form of neopatristic theology. His struggle against the scholastic typology, his promotion of Saint Gregory Palama's theology, his support of the spiritual approach to dogmas, the importance of the Philokalic theology, the role of the patristic exegesis and ascetic experience in the dogmatic development of Tradition are just a few aspects of this approach. The final section of the paper provides the perspective of understanding Father Stăniloae's theology as an open dimension to the entire cosmic reality.

Keywords: *Dumitru Stăniloae, Patristic Tradition, neopatristic theology, philokalic theology*

Introduction

The creative energy of Orthodox thought of the last one hundred years has surprised many western scholars¹. Orthodoxy should no longer be viewed as exclusively “eastern”² as it is no longer isolated from the West.³

Beyond any divisions history has enforced upon Europe, the feeling that we all belong to the same Christian heritage is becoming increasingly powerful. Thus, we should mention, that the origins of Christian theology are not only western, but also deeply rooted in the theological thought and Christian experience of the Orthodox East.⁴ This has ceased to be a mere

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¹Rowan Williams, “Eastern Orthodox Theology”, in: David F. Ford (ed), *The Modern Theologians. An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twenty Century*, Volume II, Oxford 1997, p. 168.

² Kallistos Ware, “Eastern Orthodox Theology”, in: Adrian Hastings (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, , Oxford University Press 2000, p. 186.

³ Reginald Michael French, *The Eastern Orthodox Church*, London 1961, p. 163.

⁴ Alexander Golubov, “Introduction: Spirituality in an Orthodox Perspective”, in: Dumitru

theoretical fact, for a great many western voices agree that Orthodox theology was reborn in the 20th century.⁵

A.M. Allchin, one of the most prolific scholars of contemporary Anglicanism, witnesses to the connection between western theology and fundamental Orthodox theology, admitting that Orthodoxy, especially through Father Dumitru Stăniloae, exerted a remarkable influence:

“The meeting with Orthodoxy was enabling me, as an Anglican, to discover things at the heart of my own tradition, which were too often ignored and undervalued.”⁶

The discovery or rediscovery of Orthodoxy in the West corresponds to man’s ontological need for self-knowledge, knowledge which may be accessed only through the Revelation and Patristic theology, and in more recent times, through neo-patristic theology, namely through the thought of some contemporary theologians. In a creative and original way these theologians have managed to provide contemporary man with patristic answers to his complex problems.

In this context, the secularized world needed a theological and spiritual answer.⁷ The model of the Cappadocian Fathers is relevant here. They are today considered great theologians on account of the fact that they managed to preserve the content of the Gospel as it confronted the challenges of Hellenistic philosophy. Similarly, our responsibility today is not only to remain faithful to their thought, but also to imitate them and their openness to the world of their times.⁸ Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s theology appears to us more up-to-date than ever as evidenced by the way in which it is received, disseminated and commented upon in the contemporary theological world. Of course, this way of understanding the relevance of Father Staniloae’s thinking is not always the same (in every ecclesiastical or theological context throughout Europe or in the USA). Sometimes, the “ecclesiastical” identity of the researchers has a certain importance regarding the understanding of

Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, Waymart, PA 2002, p. 4.

⁵ John Behr, “Faithfulness and Creativity”, in: John Behr, Andrew Louth, Dimitri Conomos (ed), *Abba, The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West*, Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, Crestwood, New York 2003, p. 159.

⁶ Arthur Macdonald Allchin, “The Heir of Resurrection: Creation, Cross and Resurrection in Early Welsh Poetry”, in: J. Behr et al., *Abba, The Tradition*, p. 317.

⁷ John Meyendorff, “Orthodox Theology Today”, in: *Sobornost*, Series 6, no. 1 (Summer 1970), p. 12.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

Father Staniloae's works. What seems to be agreed in one part of the world could not be agreed in another part of the same world!

Father Stăniloae – Promoter of the Patristic Tradition

A significant number of theologians undoubtedly believe that Father Stăniloae's main aim was to promote patristic tradition and to provide solutions to modern problems.⁹ Thus, the horizon of his thought is wide enough to encompass all needs and preoccupations of the entire ecumenical Church.¹⁰ That is the reason why Christians in the West, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, may find Father Stăniloae's contribution relevant as long as they are engaged in the quest for an integrated and unifying spirit of faith for the third millennium.¹¹

This up-to-dateness of the patristic spirit present in Father Stăniloae's theology, in the confrontation with man's contemporary problems, is unanimously recognized today as an aspect of the dynamic of eastern Tradition as well as of contemporary neo-patristic theology.

Father Stăniloae's greatness resides in the fact that he transcribed the spirit of the Fathers so as to fit the present-day context and the creative character of Tradition.¹² To G.A. Galitis, he was a contemporary father of the Church, a patristic theologian who brought to us the spirit of the Fathers through his own spirit, in the language of contemporary theology.¹³

The fact that the Church has always had its Fathers and that one of the current problems of Orthodoxy is the weakness of its creative connection with the Tradition is clearly stated by Olivier Clement:

“Orthodoxy's problem today is its tendency to believe that the Parents have said it all and we should just repeat their words, build a wall around the teachings of the Holy Fathers, a closed space around our self. We must not do that, however. There have always been Fathers

⁹ Istvan Juhasz, “Dumitru Stăniloae's Ecumenical Studies as an aspect of the Orthodox-Protestant Dialogue”, in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Volume 16 (winter 1979), no. 1, p. 747.

¹⁰ Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World. An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae*, Edinburg 2000, p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹² Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland, “Avant-propos” to: Dumitru Staniloae, *Le genie de l'Orthodoxie*, Paris 1985, p. 9.

¹³ G.A. Galitis, “Erminia patristică și teologia contemporană”, Lecture on the occasion of Dumitru Stăniloae's centenary (1903-2003), organized by the Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 9-14 November 2003.

within the Church.”¹⁴

The neopatristic aspect of Father Stăniloae’s theology

The interaction of fidelity and creativity required by the particular understanding of Orthodox Tradition as living tradition is one of the favorite themes of twentieth-century theologians.¹⁵ Thus, Father Stăniloae’s approach is not singular, since it is supported by the work of several other contemporary theologians (G. Florovsky, V. Lossky, I. Popovici, P. Nellas, I. Zizioulas, A. Schmemmann), whose joint efforts have given shape to what has been termed as a “neo-patristic synthesis”¹⁶.

According to G. Florovsky the specific character of this synthesis consists in the fact that it does not involve a mere restatement of the Fathers’ teachings, but rather a creative restoration¹⁷, through an existential approach to the authentic Tradition of the Church, in surpassing theological rationalism and speculative romanticism or psychological pietism.¹⁸

Promoting a return to patristic sources, in spite of the appeal to the commentaries in certain theology textbooks, Father Stăniloae recovers the true spirit of Orthodoxy restoring its patristic dimension.¹⁹

Father Stăniloae’s theology serves as an intermediary between the Greek Fathers and contemporary Orthodox theologians. He tries to prove that certain Orthodox theologians of modern times failed to bring justice to the patristic tradition of the Church. This is apparent in the emphasis on the neo-patristic spirit and Philokalic spirituality, in the abandonment of 19th century scholastic systems and the promotion of an innovative return to the patristic and Byzantine tradition, with the spiritual heritage of Hesychasm and Palamism.

By freeing the Orthodox tradition from abusive stereotypes and traditionalist exegeses 20th century dogmatic theology is regenerated. This process completely restores the ecumenical and mystical dimensions of

¹⁴ Μητροπολίτου Πισιδίας κ. Μεθοδίου, “Ολιβιέ Κλεμάν, Μιά Συνέντευξη”, in: *Τόλμη*, 15 (1/2002), p. 38.

¹⁵ J. Behr, “Faithfulness and Creativity”, p. 160.

¹⁶ See: Andrew Blane, *G. Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, Crestwood, NY 1993, p. 154.

¹⁷ See: K. Ware, “Eastern Orthodox Theology”, p. 185.

¹⁸ Ioan I. Ică jr, “Stăniloae, Dumitru (1903-1993)”, in: Trevor A. Hart (ed), *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, Michigan 2000, p. 528.

¹⁹ Emil Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology. An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae*, UK 1999, p. 5.

theological discourse.²⁰

The importance of certain contemporary evidence originating in different sectors of Christian traditions is sufficient and enlightening to the one willing to understand Father Stăniloae's approach within Orthodoxy and in the other Christian traditions: Catholic, Protestant and Anglican, both in Europe and America. Father Stăniloae's theology is being approached and received in the entire realm of contemporary Christian thought.

Every time the West has met Orthodoxy it has expected to face a conservative attitude. Orthodoxy is indeed conservative. This conservatism is not passive and rigid, but truly flexible and willing to listen to the voice of the modern world.²¹ The fact that Father Stăniloae is patristic in spirit does not mean he is trapped in the past. On the contrary, he totally rejects a theology of mere repetition. He sees Tradition as open and creative.²² "To renew" does not mean to replace classical expressions of truth with newer, more explicit and better theologically developed ones.²³

The reception of Father Stăniloae's theology within the framework of the contemporary theology

Greek theologians and those living at Mount Athos, the true spiritual center of Orthodoxy, made note of the reception of the new patristic message that Father Stăniloae offered to the Church. Therefore, we shall refer below in particular to the reception of Father Stăniloae's thought in present-day Greek theology.

To Panagiotis Nellas, Father Staniloae's theology is not a word about spiritual redemption but it is itself a redeeming word, a true spiritual food and a light to man's soul.²⁴

Prof. Nikos Matsoukas used to say that Father Stăniloae's teachings invigorated patristic theology more than the teachings of many Greek or foreign theologians.²⁵

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²¹ R.M. French, *The Eastern Orthodox Church*, p. 165.

²² K. Ware, "Eastern Orthodox Theology", p. 185.

²³ Vladimir Lossky, "Tradition and Traditions", in: Daniel B. Clendenin (ed), *Eastern Orthodox Theology. A Contemporary Reader*, Michigan 2003, p. 140.

²⁴ Παναγιώτης Νέλλας, "Εισαγωγή", in: Δ. Στανιλοάε, *Για ένα Ορθόδοξο Οικουμενισμό, Ευχαριστία-Πίστη-Εκκλησία, (Το πρόβλημα της Intercommunion)*, Εκδόσεις Αθως Πειραιεύς, 1976, p. 17.

²⁵ Νίκου Α. Ματσούκα, "Προλεγόμενα", in: Δ. Στανιλοάε, *Ο Θεός είναι αγάπη*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2000, p. 7.

Prof. Gheorghios A. Galitis identifies Father Stăniloae's theological thought as the synthesis between the logical and the apophatic, between the spirit of the Fathers and contemporary personalistic, social and scientific thought. Orthodoxy is not solely scientific knowledge, but true experience²⁶.

Prof. Stelianos Papadopoulos does not hesitate to declare his admiration for Father Stăniloae's patristic commentaries:

“In his translation of St. Cyril's commentary on the Gospel of John, Father Dumitru provides us with deeper, more analytical and wider interpretations than those of St. Cyril, who was indeed a great theologian. The same is true for St. Maximus the Confessor's Mystagogy. The Mystagogy is an interpretation of the Holy Liturgy and Father Dumitru goes even deeper into the theological perimeter of the Holy Liturgy than St. Maximus himself, which proves Father Dumitru is a great theologian. For a greater theologian is the one who manages to theologize deeper and wider than previous theologians. This is the main distinction which characterizes a great theologian and this defines Father Dumitru Stăniloae as a theologian.”²⁷

To Archimandrite Gheorghios Kapsanis, the hegumen of the Mount Athos Grigorios Monastery, Father Stăniloae's theology is not “rationalistic”, there are no patterns but discovery and participation in the everlasting life. Father Stăniloae makes the Apostles' and Fathers' sermon suitable for the man of our times. He theologizes in a patristic, namely in an Orthodox and contemporary manner. He provides the contemporary man with the everlasting truth of God.²⁸

Archimandrite Vasilios, the former hegumen of the Monastery of Iviron, witnesses to the fact that Father Stăniloae draws the living water of his theology from the Parents, he turns the Fathers' grace and message to good account and assimilates them. He brings us, in a natural and direct manner, their lives and teachings.²⁹ As soon as you enter the perimeter of Father Dumitru's theology you feel confident and safe. You feel well with the

²⁶ Γεώργιος Α. Γαλίτης, “Π. Δημήτριος Στανιλοάε: Ευλαβικό Μνημόσυνο”, in: *Αναπλάσις* 8-10/1994, p. 110.

²⁷ Στυλιανός Παπαδόπουλος, “Ορθοδοξία στον κόσμο, Η μορφή και το έργο του π. Δημητρίου Στανιλοάε”, in: *Τόλμη* 11/2000, p. 76.

²⁸ Αρχιμ. Γεώργιος Καψάνης, “Πρόλογος”, in: Δ. Στανιλοάε, *Προσευχή – Ελευθερία – Αγιότητα*, Αθήνα 1980, p. 7.

²⁹ Αρχιμ. Βασίλιος, “Πρόλογος”, in: Δ. Στανιλοάε, *Η πορεία με το Σωτήρα Χριστό*, Μετάφραση από τα ρουμανικά π. Κωϊστωατίνος Καραϊσαρίδης, Εκδόσεις Το Περιβόλι της Παναγίας, 1984, p. 7.

Patristic climate, which is wide and intimate, clearly Orthodox.³⁰

Archimandrite Elisei, the hegumen of the Simonos Petras Monastery, in an interview which has not yet been published entirely, expresses his admiration for Father Stăniloae's theology, who managed to light the candle of Philokalic piety among the tortures of the communist regime, always witnessing to the experience of belief and personal spiritual experience. The seriousness and depth of his discourse made us, as himself states, love monasticism, the measure of his theology being to us a true discovery, which is seen only in those full of spirit. Father Stăniloae was animated by the wish to make the patristic message and spirit accessible to those living in the present-day world.³¹

Father Stăniloae's calling was – according to Nikos Matsoukas – to root himself in the tradition of Orthodoxy.³² This statement is truly important as it came from one of the most prominent voices of contemporary Greek theology.

Father Stăniloae's testimony is enlightening in this context as he himself admits:

“Our guide was the way in which the Holy Fathers understood the teachings of the Church, but we also considered the contemporary interpretation of the dogmas and the needs of the soul who is seeking redemption these days, after many experiences in life, during those many centuries that have passed since the time of the Holy Fathers. We have tried to understand the teachings of the Church in the spirit of the Fathers and, at the same time, to understand it as we think they would have understood it today.”³³

Father Stăniloae's theological approach – a link between East and West

The fact that in the third decade of the 20th century Father Stăniloae was able to study in several theological centers in the East and the West was a great opportunity for him to analyze the tendencies of the age and, at the same time, to develop his own theological approach. The West was already facing secularization and theology reached the extremes of nihilism, of the death of God, the theology of demythologization, and the liberalism of Protestant thought, which did not know where it was heading. The East

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

³¹ Archim. Elisei, Abbot of the Simonos Petras Monastery, “Athosul și noi”, in: *Învierea*, year XIII, no. 13 (7/2002), p. 3.

³² Ν. Ματσούκας, “Προλεγόμενα”, p. 7.

³³ Δ. Στανιλοάε, “Πρόλογος της Ρουμανικής Εκδόσεως”, in: *Ο Θεός Ο Κόσμος και Ο Άνθρωπος. Εισαγωγή στην Ορθόδοξη Δογματική Θεολογία*, Εκδόσεις Αρμός 1995, p. 16.

was not passive to this state of affairs, as evidenced especially through the emergence of scholasticism, which diminished the dynamic character of the relationship between man and God. It should be said that the phenomenon of scholasticism was not only a “western” reality. The Eastern part of Europe (in the field of theology as well as ecclesiastical life) has already experienced this phenomenon of scholasticism. There was no “paradise” in the context of Father Stăniloae’s daily life, but he was really one of those writing and fighting against scholasticism.

The contribution of Father Stăniloae’s theology to the crisis of 20th century theology must be understood within this framework. His writings are promoted today more than they used to be during his lifetime because they still contain answers to the existential crisis of the contemporary man and his ontological problems. Father Stăniloae was aware of the fact that Orthodoxy did not need secularization, that a secularized Orthodoxy would be unable to answer the fundamental problems of salvation.³⁴

Father Stăniloae was aware of the fact that spirituality could bridge the cultural gap between the East and the West³⁵, and, at the same time, provide a coherent answer to secularization, namely to the relationship between modern culture and Christianity in an age in which the world of culture became independent from Christianity, and religion had lost its direct responsibility for the unity of society.³⁶

This was possible through Father Stăniloae’s involvement in the culture and philosophy of the time. A.M. Allchin states that:

“Fr. Stăniloae asked fundamental theological and philosophical questions revealing his knowledge of the most recent developments in science and technology. Moreover, he remained a man of prayer and humbleness, an unparalleled witness of the eastern spirituality tradition, of the Philokalic tradition which he translated and enriched with his commentaries, a man of simplicity and enthusiasm, of friendship and abnegation. I witnessed the surprise of western academics when they met Father Stăniloae for the first time and ascertained his wit, his thorough knowledge of the 19th and 20th century philosophy. He felt at home in both these worlds, a witness to the reconciliation between

³⁴ D. Stăniloae, “Some Characteristic Features of Orthodoxy”, in: *Hommage to Nicos A. Nissiotis*, Athens 1994, www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/Stăniloae, p. 2, last viewed on 15th August 2013.

³⁵ A. Golubov, “Introduction: Spirituality”, p. 4.

³⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World*, London 1989, Preface, p. VII.

heart and mind.”³⁷

The interaction between Father Stăniloae and European culture surprised Rev. Andrew Louth:

“Father Stăniloae’s involvement in the modern world penetrated his whole existence. Over the year, he wrote in newspapers and journals, commenting about what was going on in the societies of his time. His involvement in the modern world was not compromise or an attempt to identify with it. The fact that Orthodoxy still had its own voice, still had something to say to the modern world without attempting to reach a compromise with it, was important to Father Stăniloae. In fact, Orthodoxy offered something original to contemporary theology through Father Stăniloae.”³⁸

Father Stăniloae’s attitude was extremely original if we are to take into account the fact that the “neo-patristic” revival in the 20th century Orthodox theology would have been impossible outside its intellectual contact with the West; both existential personalism and neo-patristic revival are due to the revivification of Philokalic spirituality, and to the contacts and intellectual exchange with philosophies and similar movements in the western world.³⁹

This aspect was noticed by Greek theologians and that is why, in a time in which Greek theology was facing a severe scholastic and orientation crisis, Father Stăniloae was frequently invited to deliver lectures especially in Athens, but also in Thessaloniki.

Given the fact that the assimilation of theology into modern culture and sciences was still in development in the West, Father Stăniloae’s theology, through its contribution to the dialog with the cultures of the world and through the manner in which it presented the relationship between man and God, was still received as an organic element of the authentic tradition of the Church.

Father Stăniloae – a neopatristic theologian in a country dominated by communism

³⁷ A.M. Allchin, “Preface” to: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ose comprendre que Je t’aime*, Paris 1983, pp. 9-10.

³⁸ Andrew Louth, “Prin pr. Stăniloae Ortodoxia a putut să ofere ceva original teologiei contemporane”, in: *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, year XV, no. 311-312 (5/2003), p. 6.

³⁹ I. I. Ică Jr., “Înnoirea în teologia ortodoxă contemporană”, in: Karl Khristian Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței eclesiale*, Sibiu 1999, p. 29.

Father Stăniloae's dialogue with the entire theological world of the 20th century is truly exemplary because he maintained it from a country dominated by a totalitarian regime. He could be regarded as a martyr if we were to take into account the five years he spent in captivity, between 1958 and 1963, having been sentenced to prison for his "mystical vocation".

He also assumed martyrdom through his position as member of the faculty of the School of Theology in Sibiu. He left this position in 1947 for the School of Theology in Bucharest, not due to professional reasons,⁴⁰ but because of the oppression of the communist totalitarian state. His daughter Lidia Ionescu Stăniloae provides information on this in one of her books.⁴¹

Many divergent opinions on the state of theology during the reign of totalitarian regimes in eastern Europe have been published. However, Father Stăniloae's theological works bear witness to the fact that such generalizing opinion is fundamentally wrong. In spite of all oppression and constraints, his work laid the foundation for an intellectual dialogue with modern society, especially in the humanities. He managed to go beyond a cultural or sociological interpretation of Orthodoxy.⁴²

To Father Stăniloae this exegetic openness of the Tradition was in fact the geniality of Orthodoxy.⁴³

In spite of the fact that the attitude of the Romanian communist regime was clear, i.e., the Church had to disappear from the life of the Romanian people⁴⁴, and the communists were catechizing ordinary people on subjects of Marxist-materialist philosophy,⁴⁵ the churches were not empty.

Marxism looked upon the Church as a vestige of the past, one that was denying the people free access to modernity and a higher standard of living.⁴⁶ In other words, to the leaders of a totalitarian regime, religion had no future, its mere persistence being a dilemma.

Even though the entire activity of the Romanian Church was under the

⁴⁰ Ion Bria, "Hommage au Père Dumitru Stăniloae à l'occasion de son soixante-quinzième anniversaire", in: *Contacts*, no. 31 (1979), p. 66.

⁴¹ Lidia Ionescu Stăniloae, *Lumina fapei din lumina cuvântului. Împreună cu tatăl meu, Dumitru Stăniloae*, Bucharest 2000, 396 p.

⁴² I. Bria, "Preface" to: Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 2nd vol., Brookline, Massachusetts 2000, p. XIII.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Roman Braga, *On the Way of Faith. Faith, Freedom and Love*, Michigan 1997, p. 171.

⁴⁵ *Idem*, *Exploring the Inner Universe. Joy – The Mystery of Life*, Michigan 2001 p. 61.

⁴⁶ Carnegie Samuel Calian, "Nationalism, Modernization and Orthodoxy in the Balkans", in: *Theology Without Boundaries, Encounters of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Tradition*, Louisville, Kentucky 1992.

constant surveillance of the secret police,⁴⁷ and had to pass through an age of martyrdom, the Romanian Orthodox Church is today the third tradition in Orthodoxy, being the second largest Orthodox Church in the world. It is unique, as the only Orthodox Church in a Latin cultural context⁴⁸. Although it shares in the common Byzantine heritage of all Orthodox Churches, its century-long interaction with the Romanian culture has given birth to a renowned Romanian Orthodox perspective.⁴⁹

Father Stăniloae was aware of Marxism's shortcomings in relation to the diminution of the value of man's personality and dignity and developed his anthropology in a time when it was ignored and integrated into historical materialism.⁵⁰ His insistence upon the fact that the person is first and foremost communion, meeting and answer is probably the most important statement in his entire theology.⁵¹ Fr. Stăniloae developed a theology of the hypostasis and of man as eternal person.⁵² He did this from a patristic perspective, in opposition to modern thought.⁵³

Father Stăniloae – a theologian without “fear”

In his attempt to bring novelty into the 20th century theological discourse, Father Stăniloae “confronted the contemporary Christian and non-Christian West without aggressiveness and fear.”⁵⁴ In the view of John Meyendorff, he “presented the truth of his convictions intransigently, as a liberating solution, rather than judgment of the others.”⁵⁵ Olivier Clement states it even more openly: “Father Stăniloae was free from fear. He was neither afraid of the West, nor of the claims of modern humanism or rationalism.”⁵⁶

⁴⁷ Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1997, p. 168.

⁴⁸ Ronald G. Roberson, *Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Ecclesiology. The Contribution of Dumitru Stăniloae and Younger Colleagues*, Excerpta ex dissertatione ad Doctoratum, Pontificium Institutum Orientale, Rome 1988, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

⁵⁰ I. Bria, *Teologia Ortodoxă în România Contemporană*, Iași 2003, p. 57.

⁵¹ K. Ware, “Foreword” to *The Experience of God*, p. XIX.

⁵² C. Miller, *The Gift of the World*, p. 17.

⁵³ A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae”, in: *Modern Theology*, no. 13:2 (4/1997), p. 262.

⁵⁴ K. Ware, “Foreword” to *The Experience of God*, p. XIV.

⁵⁵ John Meyendorff, “Foreword to: D. Stăniloae, *Theology and the Church*, Crestwood, New York 1980, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Olivier Clement, “Preface” to: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Le genie de l'Orthodoxie*, Paris 1985, p. 13.

This freedom from fear is apparent in his *Dogmatica* published in 1978 in which he insists upon the holiness of matter, speaking fearlessly of a “mystical materialism.” Matter is best defined as open to the spirit. Man’s responsibility, as a cosmic priest, is to spiritualize the material creation without dematerializing it. The creation is still unfinished and our creative work and imagination must make it complete.⁵⁷

In his approach to “mystical materialism,” Father Stăniloae speaks in fact about the sanctification and transfiguration of creation, in response to Marxist materialism.⁵⁸

The struggle against the scholastic typology – the role of Saint Gregory Palama’s theology

To Panagiotis Nellas, Father Stăniloae is the first scholar who worked hard to free theology from scholastic typology,⁵⁹ and, furthermore, the first Orthodox theologian who highlighted and studied the importance of Palamite theology for our times.⁶⁰ As Father Stăniloae himself admitted,

“I have left the scholastic method of treating dogmas as abstract statements, of a purely theoretical and outdated interest, without any connection to the deep, spiritual life of the human soul. If an Orthodox Dogmatic Theology is an interpretation of the dogmas in order to reveal the deep and rich, namely living and spiritual, redeeming content, comprised in their short statements, we believe that an authentic Orthodox Dogmatic Theology is the one engaged in such endeavour.”⁶¹

Stelian Papadopoulos notices as well an evolution in Father Stăniloae’s theological thought:

“At first, Fr. Stăniloae did his training in scholastic theology and that was his first impressive step forward. While he was moving away from scholastic theology, around the mid-thirties, he understood the errors of scholasticism, surpassed them and started to breath in the authentic atmosphere of Orthodox theology. It is not at all accidental that, during

⁵⁷ K. Ware, “Foreword” to: *The Experience of God*, p. XXII.

⁵⁸ Metropolitan Daniel of Moldavia and Bucovina, “Preface” to: Eveque Joachim Giosanu, *La Déification de l’Homme d’Après la Pensée du Père Dumitru Stăniloae*, Iași 2003, p. 5.

⁵⁹ P. Nellas, “Εισαγωγή”, p. 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁶¹ Δ. Στανιλοάε, *Ο Θεός, Ο Κόσμος και Ο Άνθρωπος*, Πρόλογος της Ρουμανικής Εκδόσεως, pp. 15-16.

that time, he came into contact with St. Gregory Palamas' theology. In the late thirties, Father Stăniloae appeared before our eyes as a different theologian.”⁶²

Even though Father Stăniloae's work, “The Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas” was published in Sibiu in 1938, the publication of the first Palamite fragments coincides, we might argue, with that of Hristos Androutsos *Dogmatics*, because in *The Annual of the Andreian Theological Academy*, no. VI (1929-1930), pp. 55-57 he published “Two Treatises of Saint Gregory Palamas” (Triad I, 2 and 3). Father Stăniloae's focus on St. Gregory Palamas was evident as he himself declared in the prologue to his work published in 1938, “We cannot state anything essential about Orthodoxy, without reference to this profound eastern thinker.”⁶³

Father Stăniloae's final orientation towards a theology of experience is also revealed in his lectures on mysticism and ascetics in 1947, in which he criticizes Hristos Androutsos:

“In the East, the revealed belief and truth advance in gnosis, not as Androutsos argues, that even the best theologian is unable to get a better grasp of the dogmas than a mere believer. The dogma becomes for the one spiritually developed a world which he can enter, or a light which invades his soul.”⁶⁴

In his effort to mediate Saint Gregory Palamas' theology in the thirties, Father Stăniloae is compared by Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury and A.M. Allchin with archbishop Basil Krivoshein, a Russian Athonite monk, who came to Oxford to run the Orthodox parish and who, in the thirties, worked on a patristic dictionary, pointing to the importance of rediscovering, through Gregory Palamas, the entire patristic method of perceiving theology as deeply rooted in spirituality.⁶⁵

John Meyendorff's works on Palamite theology, “A Study of Gregory Palamas” (London 1964) and “St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality” (Crestwood, New York 1974) are simply a more recent approach to the subject, as is Vladimir Lossky's “Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient” published in Paris in 1944.

⁶² Σ. Παπαδόπουλος, “Ορθοδοξία στον κόσμο”, p. 74.

⁶³ D. Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, Sibiu 1938, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Idem*, *Ascetică și mistică creștină sau Teologia vieții spirituale*, Cluj-Napoca 1993, p. 58.

⁶⁵ R. Williams, “Eastern Orthodox Theology”, p. 162; Ștefan Toma, “Teologul anglican A.M. Allchin, un prieten sincer al Ortodoxiei românești”, in : *Telegraful Român*, 33-34/2004, p. 3.

Even though at the beginning of the 20th century Gregory Papamihail and Metropolitan Chrysostom Papadopoulos had already stated the importance of St. Gregory Palama's theology, mainstream academic theology was more influential. The interest in Palamite theology was brought back to life by the generation of Professor Panagiotis Hristou who started publishing his works in 1962. A year later, Gheorghios Mantsaridis published his "Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas on Man's Deification," which also meant the beginning of a new stage in Greek theology.

According to the Catholic theologian, Maciej Bielavsky, in spite of the development of Greek theology under the influence of twentieth-century Protestantism it preserved the traditional concept of theology. It did not follow the path of the liberal interpretation of Christian dogmas, which was characteristic of the western theology of those times.⁶⁶

The spiritual approach to dogmas

The scholastic method and the rationalist spirit were apparent in Romanian Orthodox theology as well. They materialized in the tendency to treat the essence of belief in a historical and superficial manner, without a deep analysis of spiritual meaning and without referring to its application in the spiritual life of believers. The use of patristic writings has always been a major preoccupation of Romanian Orthodox theologians, but the initial method did not reveal the patristic ideas relevant to contemporary man's religious thought. This happened when theologians discovered in the Parents' writings the ideas and teachings able to exert a dynamic influence on both the present and the future. The spiritual approach to dogmas makes them relevant to the man of our times. This new method of approach reached its climax in Father Stăniloae's work.⁶⁷

This new approach was characterized by a close relationship between dogma and spirituality, dogma being perceived as the bearer of an infinite spiritual dynamism. That is why the believer was aware of this dynamism not only intellectually and existentially, but with his entire being.⁶⁸

This dynamic of the connection between dogma and spirituality is a feature of Palamite vision, because Saint Gregory Palamas perceived God's presence in the world dynamically through uncreated grace, which is assumed

⁶⁶ Maciej Bielavsky, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae. O viziune filocalică despre lume*, Sibiu 1998, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Fr. Antonie Plămădeală, "Some Lines on Professor Stăniloae's Theology", in: *The Altar* (Bulletin of the Romanian Parish), London 1970, p. 24.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

by the saints and, at the same time, is present in the common life of the Church.⁶⁹

By virtue of this relationship scholasticism was really surpassed; it claimed that it was able to give a complete definition of God and his redeeming work, emphasizing reason, which was in fact unable to go beyond the natural and logical order of things.⁷⁰

Father Stăniloae – Promoter of the Philokalic theology

Father Stăniloae's theological thought remained essentially charismatic through the Philokalic theology he promoted. The 12 volumes of the *Philokalia* translated between 1946 and 1991 are not merely a work of translation, but at the same time, an interpretation of the translated text.⁷¹

The moment Father Stăniloae gave up on scholasticism and entered Saint Gregory Palama's theology, the *Philokalia* naturally became the environment in which he wanted to live.

One should note that the term "philokalism" is broader than "Philokalia" or "Philokalic movement." Saint Macarius of Corinth, for the first time in Turkocracy after the Byzantine age, combined theology and asceticism – ascetic life and mystical life. Father Stăniloae embraced this combination and thus promoted both the *Philokalia* and philokalism. Philokalism is naturally more present in his work than in that of Saint Macarius and his followers.⁷²

Philokalism led Father Stăniloae's thought to another combination: the one between dogmatics and spiritual growth – pastoral theology. Father Stăniloae was not only a dogmatist or only a systematic theologian, as we frequently hear today. Above all, he was the theologian who combined dogmatic thought with theological substantiation of the life-giving gospel. This is extremely important because the pietistic literature, which had been established two centuries before, was leading theology toward moralism. When that literature is not intrinsically connected to mysticism and asceticism and is limited to a "constructive" character, it becomes moralism and pietism. All these were surpassed by Father Stăniloae. His contribution to theology was considerable. In time we shall learn to value it even more than we do today.⁷³

Before Stelian Papadopoulos, Panagiotis Nellas noted Father Stăniloae's

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West. A Study in the Christian Tradition*, Evia 2002, p. 163.

⁷¹ Σ. Παπαδόπουλος, "Ορθοδοξία στον κόσμο", p. 2.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

contribution to theology, emphasizing that in the philokalicism he promoted “the teaching of the Tradition [as] interwoven with contemporary issues and the needs of the present era.”⁷⁴ For Father Stăniloae “was able to listen to the Parents, to the voice of Christian tradition, experiencing and transforming their thoughts.”⁷⁵

That is why, according to Maciej Bielavsky, Father Stăniloae’s theology is a philokalic one or a vision mediated by this current of Christian tradition. All ideas are moving within this tradition in Father Stăniloae’s work. Thus his theology about the world and the cosmos may be defined as a “philokalic vision of the world.”⁷⁶

To Andrew Louth, Father Stăniloae’s philokalic approach “gives a more profound meaning to the cosmic dimension of Byzantine theology than those (approaches) of Macarius or Nicodim in their time.”⁷⁷

By developing a philokalic spirituality, Father Stăniloae proved that the Gospel’s requirements are practicable for every Christian. Each Christian is a mystic.⁷⁸

The role of the patristic exegesis and ascetic experience in the dogmatic development of Tradition

Fr. Stăniloae noted the role of patristic exegesis and ascetic experience in the dogmatic development of Tradition. Thus he “managed to mark time, conjugating dogmatic theology with philokalic spirituality. To him, theology is a dialog with the Tradition, with patristic exegesis, it provides space for new interpretations and formulations. Mystical theology has no meaning unless within the dynamic of the Church, unless it communicates the life of Christ in the life of the world. It is a way out of the prison of history.”⁷⁹ That is why Father Stăniloae’s theology is “a gate open toward the 21st century.”⁸⁰

The best expression of the neo-patristic aspect of Father Stăniloae’s theology is his three-volume *Dogmatic Theology*, which in addition to the *Philokalia*, is his masterpiece.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Π. Νέλλας, “Εισαγωγή”, p. 15.

⁷⁵ M. Bielavsky, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae*, p. 136.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

⁷⁷ A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic”, p. 254.

⁷⁸ I. Bria, *Teologia Ortodoxă în*, p. 57.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

⁸¹ Michael Walsh (ed.), *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Collegeville, Minnesota 2001, p. 1077.

This work inspired Andrew Louth to label Father Stăniloae a neo-patristic theologian:

“Father Dumitru has a special attitude in Orthodox Theology, which counts him with Russian authors, such as Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky, with Greek authors, such as John Romanidis and Christos Yannaras, as a representative of what Florovsky termed «the neo-patristic synthesis». If he is right, then the Orthodox Dogmatic Theology is the first attempt which truly illustrates what this synthesis should actually be.”⁸²

With respect to Father Stăniloae’s triadology, Stelian Papadopoulos stated that in his latest works Father Stăniloae insisted upon the fact that the purpose of theology is a deeper understanding of the attributes of the Persons of the Trinity and experiencing them. Nevertheless, this is impossible without the guidance of the Holy Spirit given the fact that the features of the Persons of the Trinity is His revelation before man, and can be achieved only with God’s help. That is why I said that Father Stăniloae was enlightened by the Holy Spirit.”⁸³

The theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor is the foundation of Father Stăniloae cosmology.⁸⁴ Many western voices among others recognize Father Stăniloae as the most “proficient contemporary interpreter of Saint Maximus”⁸⁵ or the theologian who “restored Saint Maximus to the Christian consciousness,” through his introductions and notes to St. Maximus’ *Mystagogy* and *Ambigua*⁸⁶, and through his Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, the fruit of his life-long encounter with the Greek Parents.⁸⁷ In a recent French edition of the *Ambigua*⁸⁸, Father Stăniloae’s notes are between pages 375 and 539, i.e. 165 pages. The *Ambigua* itself is 272 pages, in large print.

Panaghiotis Nellas praised Father Stăniloae’s commentaries on the works of Saint Maximus the Confessor:

“Father Stăniloae’s studies are characterized by an absolute and

⁸² A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic”, p. 265.

⁸³ Σ. Παπαδόπουλος, “Ορθοδοξία στον κόσμο”, p. 75.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ A.M. Allchin, *Participation in God*, p. 71.

⁸⁶ “Μυσταγωγία του Αγίου Μαξίμου του Ομολογήτου and Φιλοσοφικά και Θεολογικά Ερωτήματα του Αγίου Μαξίμου του Ομολογήτου”, in: *Επί τας Πηγάς*, vol.1, introduction and notes D. Stăniloae, Athens 1973, 1978.

⁸⁷ A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic”, pp. 257-258.

⁸⁸ Saint Maxime le Confesseur, *Ambigua*, Paris 1994.

unshakeable fidelity to the spirit of the Parents, and many are taking them as the foundation for Orthodoxy's response to the contemporary world."⁸⁹

Father Stăniloae made use of contemporary scientific and philosophical language "as a new bag for the always fresh wine of Revelation"⁹⁰, use which did not alter the traditional aspect of his theology. "The synthesis of the thinking and of the old forms of understanding is performed through an excellent method of assimilation."⁹¹

Father Stăniloae was imbued by this spirit of synthesis, as A.M. Allchin argued:

"Father Stăniloae himself has told me that there are three elements in his way of doing theology: dogmatic theology, philokalic spirituality and the dialog with literature, poetry, culture in general."⁹²

Undoubtedly, Father Stăniloae's neo-patristic synthesis could be achieved only because he was a systematic theologian:

"Father Stăniloae is a systematic theologian. The principle of reasoning in systematic theology is the relationship between an aspect of the mystery of the economy of Christian salvation and all the others. Fr. Stăniloae's theology is built on this principle."⁹³

The way in which Fr. Stăniloae knew how to combine the different aspects of theological research, considering the dynamic dimension of Church Tradition, the relevance of the Parents' message with reference to the contemporary problems of men, and making use of Palamism and philokalic spirituality and culture, in general, placed him among the neo-Palamites⁹⁴, Florovsky, Lossky, Meyendorff, Romanidis, and made his theology neo-patristic.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ P. Nellas, in: *L'Église Orthodoxe Roumaine en 1973*, Bucharest 1974, pp. 115-122.

⁹⁰ N. Ματσούκας, "Προλεγόμενα", p. 10.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² Șt. Toma, "Teologul anglican A.M. Allchin", p. 4.

⁹³ R. G. Roberson, *Contemporary Romanian Orthodox*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ K. Ware, "Eastern Orthodox Theology", p. 186.

⁹⁵ Jürgen Henkel, *Îndumnezeire și etică a iubirii în Spiritualitatea ortodoxă. Ascetica și mistică părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Sibiu 2003, p. 239; M. Bielavsky, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae*, pp. 17, 120, 322; E. Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern*, p. 6; A. Louth, "The Orthodox Dogmatic", p. 258; Lucian Turcescu, "Introduction" to: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, Iași-Oxford-Palm Beach-Portland 2002, pp. 7-14; Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *O*

The currentness of Father Stăniloae's theology in the world in which we are living is the currentness of patristic theology itself, for Father Stăniloae used the Parents of Florovsky's neo-patristic synthesis, i.e. Athanasius the Great, Gregory of Nissa, Gregory the Theologian, Basil the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, and Simeon the New Theologian.⁹⁶ But what can patristic theology offer our humankind standing on the threshold of the third millennium?

Father Stăniloae's theology – an open perspective to the entire cosmic reality

Knowing the Holy Parents helps us understand the tradition to which we belong and stay on the right track amidst the multiple currents of the modern world. It helps us to understand ourselves and one another, build a strong relationship with God, and fulfil our spiritual life. The works of the Holy Parents shall always be relevant, since they deal with answers that are fundamental to the present and future of humanity.

Father Stăniloae tells us the same thing: "Tomorrow's theology must be open to the entire historical and cosmic reality but it must also remain spiritual."⁹⁷

It is painful that man has overthrown all values and that he wants to live only as a biological being, that he has become a gadget of technology, that he is the slave of consumption, that he is the prisoner of his old self.⁹⁸ Within this framework, speaking about the relationship between technology and theology, Archbishop Hristodoulos refers to Father Stăniloae's theology as one that could be of much help in the crisis man is facing today. "Theology must help man sacrifice his domination over technology, as the Gospel and the teaching of the Holy Parents helped him self-determine against nature, creating thus, in fact, sciences and technology."

Father Stăniloae continues: "Man must aim at the highest targets even when using technology because technology was made for man, not man for technology. Moreover, it is known that the danger that man might be

ontologie a iubirii. Subiect și Realitate Personală supremă în gândirea teologică a părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae, București 2001, Prolegomena, p. 11; I. I. Ică Jr, "Stăniloae, Dumitru (1903-1993)", p. 528.

⁹⁶ A. Louth, "The Orthodox Dogmatic", p. 256.

⁹⁷ D. Stăniloae, *Theology and the Church*, pp. 224-226.

⁹⁸ Ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνών κ. Χριστόδουλος, "Η ζωή δώρο του Θεού. Θεολογία και Βιοηθική, Ομιλία προς τιμή του αειμνήστου π. Δημητρίου Στανιλοάε (Ιάσιο, Δευτέρα 13 Οκτωβρίου 2003)", in: *Ορθόδοξος Τύπος* (10/2003), p. 2.

enslaved, brutalized, and even destroyed by technology is greater than the previous one, i.e. to be subjected and destroyed by nature. In the face of modern technology, humankind is today experiencing, more avidly than ever before, the possibility of choice, given to them by their Creator.”⁹⁹

Conclusion

Father Stăniloae’s theology is a bridge between scientific and technological advancement and the moral and spiritual progress of today’s world, the latter being, unfortunately, not at all impressive. This is evidence that a theology rooted in the works of the Holy Fathers can always answer the challenges of our times.

It is a fact that Father Stăniloae’s theology, through its neo-patristic message, is still drawing attention in a world in which concepts such as “post-Christian era” are fashionable, in a world in which it is fashionable to speak of a decline in the interest of the young in traditional Christianity, of a “Christianity without a future,” of the absorption of Christianity into Islam.

Therefore, Father Stăniloae is one of the Orthodox theologians whose names are well known in the West. He is not marginal, he is not just a bridge between the East and the West, or between the Russian and Greek Orthodoxy; he is the core of what many would define as the most spiritual and original movement in modern Orthodox thought.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁰ A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic”, p. 256.