The Orthodox Neo-patristic Movements as Renewal of Contemporary Orthodox Theology: An Overview

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This study is a synthesis of the author's long-term pursuits which were completed by a doctoral thesis. He has a twofold objective: on the one hand, the first part of the study he will offer a brief review of the main names (respectively works) related to the renewal of Orthodox theology in the 20th century; on the other hand, for a better understanding of the sources of this direction of theological revival, in the second part he will analyse the idea of Sacred Tradition as ecclesial way of life. In the end, he will describe the contributions, in various theological chapters, by Orthodox neo-patristic theologians; he will also signal a series of adverse aspects.

Keywords: *Contemporary Orthodox Neo-patristic Movements, renewal, Tradition, Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Dumitru Stăniloae, Panayotis Nellas, Justin Popović*

Introduction

This study is a synthesis of the author's long-term pursuits, the first phase of which was completed through a doctoral thesis presented at the Faculty of Theology of the Sibiu "Lucian Blaga" University in 2007, under the coordination of Archdeacon Prof. PhD Ioan I. Ică jr.: *Aspecte teologico-spirituale ale Bisericii la Părintele Georges Florovsky (1893-1979) în contextul mișcării neo-patristice contemporane* [Theological-spiritual Aspects of the Church according to Father Georges Florovsky (1893-1979) within the Contemporary Neo-patristic Movement]. To anyone who is even somewhat aware of contemporary Orthodox theology, the names of the theologians treated here – G. Florovsky, Vl. Lossky, D. Stăniloae etc. – are very familiar; this, too, is proof of the importance and impact the Orthodox neo-patristic movement has had within the Orthodox Church, in particular, and within Christianity, in general.

This study has a twofold objective: first, it will offer a brief review of the major figures and their works related to the renewal of Orthodox theology in the 20th century; second, for a better understanding of the sources of this direction of theological revival, we will analyze the idea of Sacred Tradition as ecclesial *way of life*, with everything it means, as defined by the authors cited

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above. In the conclusion, we will describe the contributions, in various theological chapters, by Orthodox neo-patristic theologians. We will also note a number of adverse aspects.

The Orthodox neo-patristic movement – main representatives and their works

In general, the origins of the 20th century Orthodox neo-patristic movement relate to G. Florovsky's contribution through the papers "Western Influences in Russian Theology" and "Modern Patristics and Theology"¹. These papers were presented at the First Congress of Orthodox Theology which took place in Athens, from November 28 to December 6, 1936. In the first paper he denounced the heterodox influences, first Roman Catholic, and then Protestant, exerted on Orthodox theology, in general, and on Russian theology, in particular. In the second paper, the Russian theologian and patrologist specified the necessity of the "return" to the Fathers. This did not mean a return to the "letter" of the patristic documents, as a mere servile and "blind" imitation, but a return to the "patristic spirit", which involves the "homogeneous and congenial" development of the patristic precept. The fact that the Holy Fathers are more than simple theologians (they are the "teachers of the Church", *doctores Ecclesiae*, those who expressed the "testimony of the Church" rather than the mere testimony of personal faith) shows that their main theological achievement, i.e., the baptism of "Hellenism" as a "new philosophy", would become a fundamental element in the life of Church. The continuation: "To some extent, *Church itself is Hellenic*, a Hellenic unit – in other words, *Hellenism is a permanent category of Christian existence*. [...] And thus, each theologian has to experience some spiritual Hellenization (or re-Hellenization). [...] In the measurable future, the creative postulate is that

¹ Hamilcar Alivisatos (ed.), *Procès-Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe*, Athens, 1939, p. 212-231 and 238-242. Cristinel Ioja shows how "the return to the Fathers was decided at Bucharest" where, on 16-18 January 1936, the delegates of the Faculties of Theology in the Orthodox world met and approved the programme of the future Athens congress, also mentioning the topics that would be approached by Georges Florovsky (who had not attended the Bucharest meeting). For this reason, the author asked, "are we too daring to believe that, before Georges Florovsky, other theologians could have thought, in an organized context, about prompting the *return to the Fathers* (author's emphasis)?" See: Cristinel Ioja, *O istorie a dogmaticii în teologia ortodoxă română [A History of Dogmatics in Romanian Orthodox Theology]* vol. 2, Bucharest, 2013, p. 147. For the programme schedule, see: Nicolae Cotos, "Întâiul Congres de Teologie Ortodoxă, Atena, 28 Noiembrie-5 Decembrie 1936" ["The First Congress of Orthodox Theology, Athens, 28 November-5 December 1936"], in: *Candela* 47 (1-12/1936), p. 208.

we should be more Hellenic in order to be truly ecumenical, to be truly Orthodox (author's emphasis)."²

Father Florovsky's idea that, in the post-byzantine age, Russian theology underwent a double, Roman Catholic and Protestant "pseudo-transformation" does not concern the superiority of Orthodoxy as such; it concerns only the fact that, in this troubled age of the history of the Church, theology rarely meant the ideal theology oriented toward the liturgical and ascetic experience of the Fathers (rule and source of future theological creation). Again, Father Florovsky knew and cherished the "patristic rebirths", especially the huge spiritual achievements of Russian theology in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th until the start of the revolution. For example, he places Saint Paisius Velichkovsky (1722-1794) directly in the line of authentic byzantine tradition, in opposition to both Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk – adept at psychologizing monachism in a different tone from the austere byzantine texts – and to Teofan Prokopovici.

The application and implementation of the guidelines Father G. Florovsky had given in Athens was not at all easy. This is normal if we consider the tragic sociopolitical situation of most Orthodox Christians. Therefore, the description of the specific manner in which the other illustrious representatives of Orthodox neo-patristic theology in the 20th century understood and managed to apply Father Florovsky's programme cannot be conclusive without this context. Nevertheless, the historical background that preceded the neo-patristic movement of Russian, Greek, Serbian and Romanian theology will be limited here only to the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church –first, because of the main topic of our work and, second, because of its nature, symptomatic of the entire Orthodoxy. Furthermore, we cannot neglect the fact that the pressure on, and sometimes persecution of, the Orthodox Church were reiterated in the other communist countries as well but at a lower intensity. As a result, we can see in the former Yugoslavian region or in Romania a movement of "neo-patristic" revival, although it took place on different coordinates and sometimes with different outcomes than the one at the heart of the Russian emigration or the one from Greece, which ensured the framework of free intellectual research and religious freedom. (This was evidenced through, for example, the proscription of contact between intellectuals and theologians from the "communist paradise" and those from "foul capitalism").

² *Ibidem*, p. 240-242. Partial translation and an "interpretive reading" at Ioan I. Ică jr., "«*Patristica și teologia modernă*». Semnificația și actualitatea unui program teologic (G. Florovski)" in: *Mitropolia Ardealului* 27 (10-12/1982), p. 707-714.

Patristic renewal in Russian theology (from the diaspora)

The year 1922 was, apart from the year when the opposition to the Russian Orthodox Church's official hierarchy was defeated, the moment when potential opposition from the Russian intellectuals was also annihilated. It is estimated that, in 1920-1922, between one and two million dissidents opted for exile because of the pressures of the Soviet regime. The most important centers of exile were Sofia, Belgrade, Prague (dubbed "the Russian Oxford"), Berlin, Paris ("capital" of Russian diaspora) or New York³. Representing the Russian intellectual elite, "the first great Russian emigration of the modern age" included largely officers of all grades in the "White Army", completed by a significant number of eminent scholars, professors, legists, writers, theologians, journalists, editors, engineers and clerics⁴ – an active cultural power that, despite all the specific difficulties of a life in exile, made an important contribution in the countries that received them.

We do not insist on the canonical organization of the Russian diaspora and on the divergences amid it on this topic. We will mention that emigration did not mean a complete separation from the Russian cultural and religious life at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. These Western centers fostered the same directions and the same effervescence of ideas as in the pre-revolutionary period in Russia and, "because they had complete freedom, the movements and tendencies that emerged here would be more acute and more polemic, and would attempt to organize in considerably more precise schools and directions."⁵ Thus, on the one hand, they dealt with a Sophiology and Eucharist orientation, represented by theologians from the Paris "St. Serge" Institute – Serghei Bulgakov and Nikolai Afanasiev, and their disciples, Paul Evdokimov and Alexander Schmemmann respectively –and, on the other hand, a "neo-patristic" line represented by Father Georges Florovsky himself (from the Crestwood, New York "St. Vladimir" Institute) and Vladimir Lossky (from the "St. Photius" Association and "St. Denis" Institute).

³ For details see Karl Schögel (ed.), *Der grosse Exodus. Die russische Emigration und ihre Zentren, 1917 bis 1941*, München, 1994.

⁴ See: Alexis Kniazeff, *L'Institut Saint-Serge. De l'Académie d'autrefois au rayonnement d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1974, p. 37-38. The author also shows that "Church had a very important place in the life of Russian emigrants".

⁵ I. I. Ică jr., "Părintele Alexander, mistagogia și teoria mării unificări în teologia ortodoxă" in: Alexander Golitzin, *Mistagogia, experiența lui Dumnezeu în Ortodoxie. Studii de teologie mistică*, transl. and presentation by I. I. Ică jr., Sibiu 1998, p. 8.

Georges V. Florovsky

The life of Georges V. Florovsky, Russian theologian, Patrologia scholar and historian, went through four essential stages: youth and his intellectual and moral training in Russia (1893-1920); emigration to Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, then France. The Paris period started in September, 1926, when Florovsky taught Patrologia with other bright, Russian émigré colleagues, at the “St. Serge” Institute. The study of the history of the Church and of the Father was included in the massive volumes, “The Eastern Father in the 4th Century”, and “The Byzantine Father in the 5th – 8th Centuries”. Participation in the First Congress of the Faculties of Theology (Athens, 1936) and the publication of the opus “Paths of Russian Theology” delineated the methodology Florovsky maintained throughout his life: the “return to the Fathers” and the promotion of Hellenism, as opposed to the speculations and “originalities” of Russian religious philosophy in the 19th century (see slavophilia, Russian messianism, etc.) and at the beginning of the 20th. The final stage began with his 1948 emigration to the United States. The canonical proximity to the Ecumenical Patriarchy was doubled by an intense didactic activity at various American institutes and universities: initially, St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New-York, then the Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, Harvard School of Divinity, and, starting in 1964 at Princeton University (theology and Russian language and literature department).

The scope of the interests and the diversity of the topics addressed by G. Florovsky are eloquently illustrated by simply noting the contents of the 14 volumes in his “Collected Works”⁶ (most of them edited under the Father’s coordination). The above-mentioned consistent works (“Eastern Fathers...”, “The Paths...”) are completed by other collective volumes that group together studies and articles on philosophical (countering the influences of German idealism on Russian ideas), literary (emphasis on the activity of the three great titans of Russian literature: Chekhov, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy) or theological subjects (the Revelation and Tradition, Christology, Mariology, Eschatology, Ecclesiology).

Vladimir Lossky

Descendant of a noble family with Western origins, Vladimir Lossky was born on May 26 (June 8 in the Gregorian calendar), 1903 in Göttingen (Germany), where his father, the well-known Russian philosopher Nikolai Lossky (1870-1964), was attending post-university courses and was accompa-

⁶ *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* vol. I-XIV, Belmont, MS 1972-1989.

nied by his family. Olivier Clément writes that Lossky's childhood and adolescence in St. Petersburg were marked by deep sensitivity, especially as regards the mystery of death, and by his father's "Socratic" presence.⁷ He attended university courses at Petrograd (in 1920-1922), in the middle of the revolutionary period. There, he met historian and philosopher Lev Karsavin (1882-1952) who triggered his interest in medieval history and drew his attention to the major significance of "Filioque".

In 1931, for the sake of canonical rigor and convinced that the Church does not require "normal" conditions for witnessing, Vladimir Lossky and the "Saint Photius" Association rejected the political separation from the USSR Orthodox Church. In fact, when he talked about the "catholic conscience" of the Church, he said it "is an inherent quality, as it has been from the beginning and which will always be specific to the Church, *independent of the historical conditions* (our emphasis) in which its space or number could be more or less limited. No differences of created nature—sex, race, social class, language, or culture—can affect the unity of the Church; no divisive reality can enter into the bosom of the *Catholica*."⁸

Loyal to authentic Orthodox Tradition, Vladimir Lossky became actively involved in the sophiology controversy (1935-1936), which he defined as "Christian pantheism". This involvement shed light on his extraordinary theological training, which was complemented by his refusal to espouse philosophical liberalisms. He sent to the Metropolitan Sergei Stragorodt'ki, vicar of Moscow's Patriarch chair, an extensive report on the polemics with Serghei Bulgakov. As a result, Bulgakov's "sophianism" was condemned as heresy (August 24 and December 27, 1935). In 1936 he defended the decision of condemnation by Moscow's Patriarchy, against Bulgakov's supporting report sent to the Evloghi Metropolitan of Paris ("About Sophia, God's Wisdom", 1936).

In 1945 "St. Denis" Theological Institute was established for the education of the priests of the New French Orthodoxy. Lossky was appointed dean of the Institute, where he taught dogmatic theology and the history of Church. During this same period, in, 1945 and 1946, he taught an important course on "God's View in patristic and Byzantine theology" (published posthumously, in 1962) at École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne).

Despite the relatively small volume of his work – he published only one book during his life, which soon became a contemporary Orthodox theolog-

⁷ See the "Biographic note" by Olivier Clément in: *Contacts* no. 2 (1979), p. 117-123. In fact, this issue is dedicated to Vl. Lossky- in memoriam.

⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, Crestwood, NY 1974, p. 186.

ical “best-seller”, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l’Eglise d’Orient*⁹, expanded by several works published in collaboration¹⁰ or posthumously¹¹ – Vl. Lossky became one of the most influential contemporary Orthodox theologians of the 20th century and one of the promoters of the “neo-patristic” methodology.

Patristic renewal in Greek theology

Although hardly believable, in Greece, the most spectacular “neo-patristic revolution” would take place within the “Zoi” society – a Protestant-inspired lay movement. Archim. Ilia Mastroyanopoulos, leader of the association in 1959–1965, tasked one of his former students, a secular theologian with studies in the Occident, Dimitris Kutrubis (1921–1938), with the theological training and teaching of modern languages to young “zoists”. Kutrubis would go on to promote the neo-patristic theology of the Russian emigrants – Vl. Lossky or G. Florovsky. According to monographs on Saint Gregory Palamas by John Meyendorff and Myrrha Lot-Borodine, in 1959 he published three programmatic articles on the topicality of the theological ideas of Saints Gregory Palamas and Nicholas Cabasilas. Then, through the publisher of “Zoi”, he wrote and edited three anthologies of studies and articles by Russian diaspora theologians: *Theology – Truth and Life* (1962), *Our Liturgy* (1963) and *Monachism and the Contemporary World* (1963). His work was accomplished through a translation into Modern Greek (1964) of the famous “Attempt on the Mystical theology of the Eastern Church” by Vladimir Lossky, an essential step in the release of Greek theology from the clutch of scholastic “academism” and its patristic reorientation. To the same end, from 1960 to 1964, Kutrubis and his followers organized in Athens and Thessaloniki, five congresses of theologians (*Ephesios*), which were attended even by Russian diaspora members, such as J. Meyendorff and E. Behr-Sigel.

The directions followed by modern Greek theology coincide with those of the Russian diaspora, with a conservative and nationalist Orthodox pole, gathered around the journal “Orthodoxos Typos”¹², and with a liberal “non-Orthodox” pole, which included the members of the so-called “The-

⁹ Idem, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Crestwood, NY, 1976.

¹⁰ With N. Arseniev he published: *La Paternité spirituelle en Russie aux XVIII^{ème} et XIX^{ème} siècles*, and with Leonid Uspenski: *Der Sinn der Ikonen*.

¹¹ Some works are university courses, such as: *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, Crestwood NY, 2001, and: *The Vision of God*, Crestwood, NY 1997, or a collection of previously published studies, such as: *In the Image and Likeness of God*, Crestwood, NY 1974.

¹² Vasilios N. Makridis, “Aspects of Greek Orthodox Fundamentalism” in: *Orthodoxes Forum* 5 (1991), p. 49–72. More details in Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, Brookline, MA 2007.

ologikos Syndesmos”, signatories of the Thessaloniki declaration (1984).¹³ We find representatives of academic theology (D. Balanos and especially P. Trembelas), of religious philosophy (Chrystos Yannaras – the Greek “Berdy- aev”), of Eucharist ecclesiology (the Pergamum metropolitan, Ioannis Ziziou- las) or of neo-patristics – the “Synaxi” group, Archim. Vassilios Gondakis, and especially Panayiotis Nellas – the Greek “Lossky”. He was born in 1936 in Makrakomi and, beginning in 1948, he settled in Athens, where he became a member of the “Zoi” society. In Athens, from 1954 to 1959, he attended the Faculty of Theology. When he graduated, he became a preacher of the Athens Archiepiscopacy. At the beginning of the 1960s he was a part of the circle of D. Kutrubis, which stirred his interest in the study of the works of Saint Nikolai Cabasilas and of Orthodox monachism. From 1964 to 1966 he went on a post-university fellowship to Lille and Paris, France where he established a number of contacts with cu P. Evdokimov and the St. Serge Institute. In 1966-1967, he continued his studies in Mariology in Rome, where he was again a fellow researcher.

In the spring of 1966, three former “zoists” – Vasilios Gondikakis, Gheorghios Hatzimanuil and Panayiotis Nellas –, recently returned from study in France, went to the Holy Mountain and contacted the famous Paisios at the Iviron monastery. While the former two settled in Athos, Nellas went back in the world, without, however, marrying, and lived like a real *kosmokalogeros*, always in touch with the Holy Mountain and its spiritually rich “priors”.

In 1974, Nellas became a doctor in theology at the Faculty of Athens with a thesis on *Man’s life in Christ at Nicholas Cabasilas* (1974). In 1979, his “theological masterpiece and testament” appeared (Ioan I. Ică jr.), one of the most important works of Orthodox anthropology, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person (Zoon theoumenon)*¹⁴. Furthermore, seeking to promote neo-patristic theology, Nellas established the quarterly “Synaxi” in 1982, in which the most diverse personalities– Athonite

¹³ The main personality of this movement, which promotes a socially, culturally and politically involved “prophetic”, “living”, “biblical” and “Eucharistic” theology is the Biblicist Savva Agouridis. See: Petros Vassiliadis, “Greek Theology in the Making. Trends and Facts in the 80s. Vision for the 90s.” in: *Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 1 (1991), p. 33-52, who writes: “After we retrieved the essence of our tradition in its dynamic liturgical, threefold, cosmic and, mainly, ecclesiology aspect, it’s time we took the next step, [...] toward the yet open agenda of Orthodox theology: the vast area of the biblical premises that are the basis of our faith” (p. 46-47).

¹⁴ Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person* (Contemporary Greek Theologians vol. 5), Translated by Norman Russell, Crestwood, NY, 1987.

fathers and academic theologians, writers and painters, political men – wrote on the most current and not necessarily theological topics: Orthodox Tradition, Nicholas Cabasilas: Orthodoxy and ecumenism, Christianity and the world, Orthodoxy and Marxism, Christianity and socialism, Orthodoxy and unified Europe, Faith and science etc. This impassioned theological and cultural activity of P. Nellas was cut short by his sudden death on April 6, 1986¹⁵.

*Patristic renewal in Serbian theology*¹⁶

In 2003, the Serbian Orthodox Church decided, in a solemn meeting of its Synod, to canonize Father Justin Popović. The reason for this decision can be understood when we read the Introduction to the French translation of Father Popović's book *God and God-man*¹⁷, where he is characterized as: "a pillar, a foundation, a confessor of the real Orthodox faith, Father and Teacher of the Universal Church, hidden conscience of the Serbian Church and of the entire Orthodox Church, a great personality amid the contemporary Orthodox theologians, fierce defender of ancestral piety, oeconomic follower and safe of the Sacraments, enlightened by the uncreated Light of the Three-Sun Deification. Undoubtedly, Father Justin was a *patristic personality*. *He spoke the language of the Fathers in new words* (our emphasis), dictated and inspired by the deep and authentic experience of the Orthodox dogma, which completed the Serbian and Orthodox theological language."¹⁸ It was also said that Father Popović had a love for and special commitment to "the Holy Tradition of the Universal Orthodox Church", especially to the dogmatic and ascetic one; he admired and followed the theological experience and the ascesis of the great Fathers of the Church. To this end, he was especially interested in the theology of the Great Fathers and defenders of Orthodoxy and of the Desert Fathers, while he sought to free contemporary Orthodox theology from the foreign influences of scholasticism and Western rationalism and return it to the pure sources of authentic patristic theology, which is a fight to confess and experience the real faith and redemption in the body of Christ the God-man, «which is the Church» (Colossians 1:24)."¹⁹

¹⁵ See: Chr. Yannaras, *Orthodoxia kai Dyse ste neotere Hellada*, Athens 1992, p. 477-479; Yannis Spiteris, *La teologia ortodossa neo-greca*, Bologna 1992, p. 255-259.

¹⁶ Darko Djogo, "Serbian Neopatristic Theology (Some Aspects of History, Reception and Currents)" in: *Teologia* 16 (4/2012), p. 10-36.

¹⁷ Justin Popović, *L'Homme et le Dieu-Homme*, L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne 1989.

¹⁸ Patric Ranson, "Le Pere Justin Popović ou l'expérience vivante de la Tradition", in: J. Popović, *L'Homme et le*, p. 19-20.

¹⁹ See: Ioannis Karmiris, *Ανθρωπος και Θεοανθρωπος*, Athens 1969, preface to the Modern Greek edition.

Father Justin Popović relates to the revival and promotion of the ideas of the Holy Fathers in Serbia. Born on March 25, 1894, in the village of Branje, on the celebration of the Annunciation, his entire existence and theological work would be marked by the Gospel, by the “Good News” of the Incarnation of the Word and of the Son of God made from man by the Virgin Mary to make man god, to have him as son of God by grace.²⁰

For the inter-war period, we need to note Justin Popović’s contact with his former mentor at the School of Saint Sava in Belgrade, Bishop Nikolai Velimirović (1880-1956). The latter was also known as the “Serbian Chrysostom” and had been the first to attempt a traditional spiritual rebirth in the Serbian Orthodox Church, in line with the Holy Fathers, through the so-called “societies of prayer” (*bogomolje*). In this direction opened up by Bishop Velimirović we find Father Justin’s work of rediscovery and reassessment of the Father and of the *Philokalia*. In 1932 and 1935, respectively, the first volumes of his monumental work, *Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church* were published (the third volume would not be published until 1978). Another important work is *Lives of the Saints* (12 vol., 1972-1977), in the preface of which “dogmatic” was defined as a “philosophy of the Holy Spirit” and the dogmas as a “mosaic” of eternal truths – “The Mystery of Truth is not in beings, in ideas or symbols; it is in one Man, the divine-human Christ, Who said, «I am the Truth».”²¹ On the other hand, the saints are the embodiment of eternal dogmatic truths, “the Savior’s life repeated more or less in this or that way, in each saint.” *The Lives of the Saints* are mere “testimonials regarding the miraculous power of Lord Jesus Christ” which sustains the entire ecclesial life. Therefore, these “applied”, “experimental” dogmatic principles include the “whole Orthodox Moral, in Orthodox Ethos, in its full divine-human splendor”, as well as the “unique pedagogy of Orthodoxy”.²²

Patristic renewal in Romanian theology

While the Serbian neo-patristic rebirth relates particularly to Father Justin Popović, the similar Romanian movement owes almost everything to dogmatic scholar, apologist, historian and Christian philosopher Dumitru Stăniloae. He was born on November 17, 1903, in Vlădeni (Braşov coun-

²⁰ See: I. Ică, I. I. Ică jr., “Părintele Iustin Popovici: lupta cu Protagoras sau criteriologia filosofiei ortodoxe a Adevărului” in: Iustin Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om. Abisurile și culmile filosofiei*, Sibiu, 1997, p. 5-6.

²¹ J. Popović, *Philosophie Orthodoxe de la Vérité. Dogmatique de l’Eglise Orthodoxe* vol. 1, transl. Jean-Louis Palierne, Collection La Lumière du Thabor, L’Age d’Homme, 1992, p. 45-49, here p. 47.

²² Idem, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om*, p. 95-114.

ty)²³. He studied in Cernăuți, and then at the Academy of Sibiu. He taught there until the communist authorities arrested, convicted and sentenced him to five years in prison. After his release, he was active in Bucharest.

Two important tendencies in the theological work of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae have been identified repeatedly²⁴: first, an openness to Western values, and second, the search for a neo-patristic “experiential theology”. To this end, he translated and edited the Palamite work (*Viața și învățătura Sf. Grigorie Palama [The Life and Teaching of Gregory Palamas]*), and later the *Filocalia [Philokalia]* in 12 volumes. Furthermore, in the collection “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești” [“Church Fathers and Writers”], Father Stăniloae published translations of the main works of authors such as Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint Athanasius the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, completed by the translation of “Hymns” by Symeon the New Theologian, “Theological Orations” by Gregory of Nazianzus and the *Corpus* by Dionysius the Areopagite. Through the active translation of the Holy Fathers’ writings, illustrated by the ample accompanying introductions and notes, Father Stăniloae demonstrated the original, creative manner in which patristic theology can be received today. The largest part of the massive work of the Romanian theologian²⁵ is “imbued” with the thinking of the Fathers, as shown in the three works that creatively synthesize the dogmatic, the spiritual and the liturgical: *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]* 3 vol. (1978)²⁶, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă [Orthodox Spirituality]* (1981)²⁷ and *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia ortodoxă [Spirituality and Communion in Orthodox Liturgy]* (1986) – “result of patristic and dogmatic integration”.²⁸

²³ The main bibliographic source is Mircea Păcurariu, “Preotul Profesor și Academician Dumitru Stăniloae – Câteva coordonate biografice” in: I. I. Ică jr. (ed.), “*Persoană și comuniune*”. *Prinos de cinstire Părintelui Prof. Acad. Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani*, Sibiu, 1993, p. 1-15. See also: Virginia Popa, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae. Biobibliografie*, 2nd edition, Bucharest 2013.

²⁴ See: Emil Bartoș, *Conceptul de îndumnezeire în teologia lui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Oradea 1999, p. 21; Silviu Rogobete, *O ontologie a iubirii. Subiect și Realitate Personală supremă în gândirea părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Iași 2001, p. 20-24; Maciej Bielawski, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae, o viziune filocalică despre lume*, transl. and foreword by I. I. Ică jr., Sibiu 1998, p. 73.

²⁵ See the bibliographical systematization in: Gh. Anghelescu, I. I. Ică jr., “Opera p. prof. Stăniloae. Bibliografie sistematică” in: I. I. Ică jr. (ed.), *Persoană și Comuniune*, p. 20-67. Other foreign commentators of Father Stăniloae’s work talked about its deeply patristic dimension.

²⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* 6 vol., Translated and edited by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, Brookline, MA 2005-2013.

²⁷ Idem, *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*, South Canaan 2002.

²⁸ See: E. Bartoș, *Conceptul de îndumnezeire*, p. 22. I. I. Ică jr. also approached D. Stăniloae’s trilogy as his *opus magnum*, anticipated by the 50s-70s theological studies. See: I. I. Ică jr.,

“Life of the Holy Spirit in the Church”: Orthodox Views of Tradition²⁹

If *lex credendi* requires a completion by *lex orandi*, the comprehension of the nature and meaning of Christianity needs a reference to Tradition as *lex vivendi*, i.e. to the great definition Vladimir Lossky gave: Tradition is “life of the Holy Spirit in the Church”!

When he talked about the appearance of Tradition and its purpose in relation to the Scripture, Father George Florovsky stated that one cannot understand Tradition without connecting it with the Bible; “Tradition was, in fact, the authentic interpretation of Scripture” co-extending it, i.e., “Scripture rightly understood”. The authentic criterion of scripture hermeneutics is none other than the consensus of the Church (since it is an “extension of the Scripture”), the one that holds the *regula fidei*; the heretics, by parting with the Church, do not read correctly the text of the Scripture because they start from their individual opinions rather than from the faith of the Church as a whole. But “the Apostolic Tradition of faith was the indispensable guide in the understanding of Scripture and the ultimate warrant of right interpretation. The Church was not an external authority, which had to judge over the Scripture, but rather the keeper and guardian of that Divine truth which was stored and deposited in the Holy Writ.” Thus, Tradition is no longer the mere transmission of a doctrine, but “rather the continuous life in the truth.”³⁰

Although this perspective is accurate, G. Florovsky does not address the other aspect of Tradition, because Scripture alone is not the basis of tradition; the latter, too, is at the base of the scriptural canon (both of the works, otherwise complementary, being accomplished in and by the Church, with assistance of the Holy Spirit). The idea is that there is not opposition between Tradition and Scripture, even if they are distinct. But “to distinguish does not always mean to separate, nor even to oppose.”³¹ Vl. Lossky demonstrates that

“De ce «Persoană și Comuniune»? – Cuvânt prevenitor la un «Festschrift» întârziat” in: Idem (ed.), *Persoană și Comuniune*, p. XXVI.

²⁹ Ciprian Iulian Toroczka, *Tradiția patristică în modernitate: Ecleziologia Părintelui Georges V. Florovsky (1893-1979) în contextul mișcării neopatristice contemporane*, 2nd edition, Sibiu 2012, p. 246-271; Idem, *Cunoaștere și sfințenie la Vladimir Lossky*, Sibiu 2013, p. 68-95; Idem, “Hellenism and Romanianism: a Comparative Look on the Thinking of Fathers Georges Florovsky and Dumitru Stăniloae” in: *Revista Teologică* 23 (3/2013), p. 130-146; Idem, “Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958) despre Tradiție și tradiții. Actualitatea gândirii sale în contextul teologic contemporan” in: *Mitropolia Olteniei* 64 (5-8/2013), p. 181-209; Idem, “Recurusul creator la Tradiție: concepția Părintelui Georges Florovsky” in: *Revista Teologică* 17 (1/2007), p. 175-193.

³⁰ G. Florovsky, “Bible, Church, Tradition: an Eastern orthodox view” in: *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* vol. I, Belmont, Massachusetts 1972, p. 74-80.

³¹ Vl. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, p. 142.

the issue of the primacy of Scripture or Tradition is in fact a “false problem”, because it is the result of an overstatement. “In opposing Tradition to Holy Scripture as two sources of Revelation, the polemicists of the Counter Reformation put themselves from the start on the same ground as their Protestant adversaries, having tacitly recognized in Tradition a reality other than that of Scripture.”³² Thus, their fundamental *coherence* is destroyed, meaning the coherence which is “passing through them, transforming their letter into ‘*a unique body of truth*’ (our emphasis)”. Christ’s mystical body is the Church – because both of them come from the *pleroma* of the Church, being “two modalities of one and the same fullness of Revelation communicated to the Church.” By juxtaposing Tradition and Scripture, as independent sources, we have, on the one hand, the canon of the Scripture and, on the other hand, the Tradition of the Church, which can also be divided into several unequal sources of the Revelation (*loci theologici*) (acts of ecumenical synods, Holy Fathers’ writings, iconography, canonical rules, etc.). Could we still speak, asks Lossky, of “Tradition” or would it be more appropriate to call it “traditions”, in line with the theologians at the Council of Trent? We will approach this valid question in the next section of our study.

Lossky continues his attempts to delineate the pure notion of “Tradition” by viewing Scripture and Tradition as two modalities of transmitting Revelation by live preaching and by writing, for here the primacy of Tradition over Scripture could be accepted. We can say: the Church could do without Scripture, but it could not do without Tradition (because the oral transmission of apostolic preaching preceded its writing in the New Testament).³³ By citing Saint Basil the Great, who distinguished between *didaskalia* and *kerygma*³⁴, between the “unpublished and secret teaching” and the “open declaration”, Vl. Lossky, showing that we are faced with one of the “antinomies of the Gospel” (see Matthew 7:6 and Matthew 10:26; Luke 12:2), exposes a “secret character of Tradition”, where the opposition between *agrapha* and *eggrapha*, between the oral preaching and the written preaching, is no longer valid. When we reach this “tacit dimension of Tradition” (A. Louth), we see that no human “horizontal” criterion operates here; instead, a “vertical” one does, the one of the Holy Spirit’s work in the Church. “If by the fact of the incarnation of the Word the Scriptures are not archives of the Truth but its living body, the Scriptures can be possessed only within the Church, which is the unique body of Christ. Once again one returns to the

³² *Ibidem.*, p. 142.

³³ *Ibidem.*, p. 144.

³⁴ See Saint Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto* 27, 66, in: P.G. 32, col. 188A-193A.

idea of the sufficiency of Scripture. But here there is nothing negative: it does not exclude, but assumes the Church, with its sacraments, institutions and teachings transmitted by the apostles (hence, with Tradition, our note)".³⁵ The words of the Revelation have a "margin of silence". This does not mean an absence, a necessity of completion. It means a demand for a "conversion towards the vertical plane". This is not a formal opposition between Scripture and Tradition, it is their "indivisible unity which lends to the Revelation given to the Church its character of fullness." Then the Scriptures, like anything the Church may produce (in written or spoken words³⁶), appear as different manners of expressing the Truth, to which Tradition lends the *unique manner* of receiving it, a unique and irregular manner, because nothing is formal in Tradition. "It does not impose on human consciousness formal guarantees of the truths of faith, but gives access to the discovery of their *inner evidence* (our emphasis). It is not the content of Revelation, but the light that reveals it; it is not the word, but the *living breath* (our emphasis) which makes the words heard at the same time as the silence from which it came; it is not the Truth, but a communication of the Spirit of Truth, outside which the Truth cannot be received..."³⁷. This is why Lossky can state firmly that, "the pure notion of Tradition can be defined by saying that it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church", the mirroring of the image of the Holy Trinity in the life of the followers. To be a Christian is not simply to believe something, to learn something, but *to be* something, to experience something. The role of the Church in history then is not simply as the accidental vehicle of the Christian message, but as the community. By belonging to this community, we come in touch with the Christian mystery. "We make contact again with an inarticulate living of the mystery, the tacit dimension, which is the heart of tradition, and from which theology must spring if it is to be faithful to the truth it is seeking to express. For the truth that lies at the heart of theology is not something there to be discovered, but something, or rather someone, to whom we must surrender. The mystery of faith is not ultimately something that invites our questioning, but something that questions us."³⁸

The Bible is written Tradition, and Tradition is the Bible experienced in the Church, in the Spirit. The New Testament was created in the Church and

³⁵ Vl. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, p. 149.

³⁶ See: D. Stăniloae, "Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini" in: *Ortodoxia* 20 (3/1968), p. 347-377.

³⁷ Vl. Lossky, *In the Image*, p. 151-152.

³⁸ Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*, Oxford 1983, p. 95.

it is the “heart of Tradition”, which is the acceptance of the apostolic faith by the Church in the Holy Spirit, i.e. the preservation and the explanation of the meaning of the Holy Scriptures.³⁹

Father Stăniloae has a conception close to Lossky’s regarding the intimate and complementary connection between the Scripture and Tradition in the life of the Church. He also states that, “Tradition is not only the theoretical memory of Christ’s teachings, unwritten in the Holy Book, it is also the *continuous living with and within Him, through the Holy Spirit* (our emphasis). This is what Tradition is first and foremost.”⁴⁰ The living nature of Tradition turns it into a constant *communion* of the generations of followers with the whole Christ, which takes place in the Church: “The Orthodox Church, by keeping and by practicing even now the apostolic Tradition, has kept and has practiced the complete Revelation through the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ By starting from the “inherent dynamism” of the Scripture, Father Stăniloae states that Tradition, “the permanent dialogue of the Church with Christ” updates, by a constant application and diligence in the Church, this dynamism of the Scripture. Therefore, “Tradition is the Church itself as form of Christ’s undiminished efficacy, through the Holy Spirit, or of the Revelation fulfilled in Him, along the centuries.” The complementarity and necessity of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition is obvious, because, without Scripture, faith would weaken. Its contents would diminish in time and they would be uncertain within the Church. Without the Church, Scripture would not have its effectiveness brought to light because it would lack the communication of the Spirit from those who believe to those who receive the faith.⁴² Without Tradition, the Church would not be living and effective and it would separate followers from the purpose of their life, i.e. deification.

The link between Scripture and Tradition also concerns the exclusivity and diversity of tradition, the relationship between various “gears of Tradition”, and mainly the crossing of the vertical and horizontal aspects, the bond between the “renewal” and the unaltered preservation of Tradition. The fact that we need to see Tradition as more than an archive of old writings, as an active way of living with Christ, through the Spirit, in the Church, does not

³⁹ Ion Bria, *Tratat de teologie dogmatică și ecumenică*, Bucharest 1999, p. 75. See: Idem, “Sfânta Scriptură și Tradiția. Considerații generale” in: *Studii Teologice* 22 (5-6/1970), p. 399: “The Orthodox Church is known as a Church of Tradition”.

⁴⁰ D. Stăniloae, “Primirea Tradiției în timpul de azi, din punct de vedere ortodox” in: *Studii Teologice* 27 (1-2/1975), p. 5.

⁴¹ Idem, “Unitate și diversitate în Tradiția ortodoxă” in: *Ortodoxia* 22 (3/1970), p. 333 and 337.

⁴² Idem, *The Experience of God*, vol. 1, p. 45-50.

cover the extent of the notion. Lossky “raises the question of whether tradition is capable of being expressed in concepts, or indeed whether, as with all that is «life», it «overflows the intelligence» and would have to be described rather than defined.”⁴³

In a real journey of (re)discovery of Tradition, Lossky emphasizes that, “starting from traditions”, we need to go further and distinguish *Tradition*. “Here the horizontal line of the «traditions» received from the mouth of the Lord and transmitted by the apostles and their successors crosses with the vertical, with Tradition—the communication of the Holy Spirit, which opens to members of the Church an infinite perspective of mystery in each word of the revealed Truth.”⁴⁴ Since Revelation is accomplished through Jesus Christ, we will understand that the Church, through the work of the Spirit, communicates to the followers, through dogma, worship, and canonical discipline, the same communion of life with Him. Dumitru Stăniloae identifies the following elements of the Tradition, through which each limb of Christ’s Body understands, accepts, and knows the Truth in its specific Light rather than “according to the natural light of human reason”⁴⁵:

- a) Tradition is a *precept (a dogma)*, assumed and confessed, about God and about His work of redemption through Christ. The Dogma cannot be separated from faith in it, because it is not theoretical, but practical and redeeming;
- b) The assumed and confessed precept is the basis of a *religion (of worship)* or “of the prayers through which we ask, we thank and we praise god, the One Who, through Christ and through the Holy Spirit, works within us, for our redemption.” Thus, prayer and worship are not divided by the assumed and confessed precept (dogmas), which does not stay unused: “the hymns of the Church are confessions of redeeming dogmas” (hence the necessity of better valuation, dogmatically speaking, of the Church’s religious books, our note);
- c) “Religion (worship) is not memory, it is a present redeeming event”, this is why Tradition is also a “*living relationship* with the same complete Christ, experienced along generations in the Holy Spirit”;
- d) Tradition also includes the *Sacraments (Mysteries)*. Through them we are given the grace of the Holy Spirit (the purpose of the Christian life, said Saint Seraphim of Sarov, is the “acquisition of the Holy Spirit”);

⁴³ V. Lossky, *In the Image*, p. 142.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 147-148.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 152

- e) The final component of Tradition is “the discipline of a life lived in the will and example of Christ”, i.e. *the canonical discipline* of the Church. The “*imitatio Christi*”, although it should be completed by “living through Christ”, cannot be neglected— “you need to live Christ’s life to be able to welcome Him”.⁴⁶ Despite this diversity, Tradition is a whole, through which one can live with and in Christ Himself, within Whom the grace of the Holy Spirit is at work.⁴⁷

Having made the distinction between *what* is transmitted (oral and written traditions) and the *exclusive manner* in which this transmission is received through the Holy Spirit (Tradition as principle of Christian knowledge), two aspects, however, that cannot be separated, we will show which are the characteristics of Tradition. First, Tradition means *freedom*, because we cannot know the Truth, nor can we understand the words of the Revelation unless we receive the Holy Spirit, and His traits are vivification – He is the “life-giving Spirit” – and freedom – “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Freedom, however, will not be taken for theological libertinism, and dogma will not be replaced by theological opinion.

Another characteristic of Tradition is *universality* (by being one it is also universal). Lossky saw in the Tradition of the Orthodox Church the completeness of the Revelation, despite or precisely owing to the diversity of Orthodoxy. “Moreover – says Lossky – *eastern* can mean so many things: from the cultural point of view, the East is less homogeneous than the West. What have Hellenism and Russian culture in common, notwithstanding the Byzantine origins of Christianity in Russia? Orthodoxy has been the leaven in too many different cultures to be itself considered the cultural form of eastern Christianity. The forms are different: the faith is one. The Orthodox Church has never confronted national cultures with another which could be regarded as specifically Orthodox.”⁴⁸

According to these two principles, we understand that the Experience of Truth by all people is possible owing to Tradition, through which the Church gathers together the various gifts of the followers, in line with the synergic image of the Holy Trinity. By living within the same spirit of the Holy Fathers, we can understand better what Tradition is: an existential reality, in which unity does not reside in the word, but in a mystically articulated

⁴⁶ D. Stăniloae, “Primirea Tradiției”, p. 6-7.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7: “Tradition is thus Christ’s reality, experienced and communicated continuously... By grace and by the Holy Spirit, faith is born; it allows the transmission, the acceptance and the constant experience of Tradition.”

⁴⁸ V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, p. 17.

experience of prayer and in a liturgical “view”. It involves kenosis, a specific degree of accepted defeat of reason, a humbling of the mind, an intelligence disrobed of vanity, all attending to “the interpretation of the Sacrament”. By being within the same Tradition as the Fathers of the Church, we will be able to formulate, according to the intellectual requirements of our contemporary environment, the same “expressions of Truth”. “One cannot belong to the Tradition while contradicting the dogmas, just as one cannot make use of the dogmatic formulas received in order to oppose a formal ‘orthodoxy’ to every new expression of the Truth that the life of the Church may produce.”⁴⁹

Final Evaluation: Possibilities and Limits of the Orthodox Neo-patristic Movement

This conception of the meaning and role of ecclesial Tradition was the basis of the most important movement of theological rebirth in 20th century Orthodoxy, the “neo-patristic movement”. Prolific authors, translators and diligent exegetes of the Holy Fathers, the Orthodox neo-patristic theologians we have discussed, have left us a great body of work which is extremely difficult to synthesize. The difficulty of a synthesis is amplified by the fact that the main representatives of the movement – Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), Panayiotis Nellas (1936-1986), Justin Popović (1894-1979) and Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993)⁵⁰ –, while they shared some connections and aspects, they approached the same subject from different perspectives and even evoked explicit criticism. (One reason for this is apparent by examining the historical conditions of their life: for example, regarding the catholicity of the church, two contradictory guidelines can be distinguished, one specific to Russian theologians and the diaspora, the other one to the theologians beyond the “Iron Curtain”.) Nevertheless, the theological guidelines they emphasized can be identified fairly easily:

1. The holistic perspective on theology, its “scholastic” division into various independent sections being opposite to the experiential aspect of a distinctive kerygmatic (preaching) theology. Therefore, there is an indissoluble link between theology and mysticism or, more precisely, any theology. Thus, mysticism is the “peak of the entire theology”,

⁴⁹ Idem, *In the Image*, p. 165.

⁵⁰ We could say these theologians belong to the “first generation” of the contemporary Orthodox neo-patristic movement. To relate to other younger Orthodox theologians, who furthered and developed theological topics and modalities in the Orthodox Churches of Russian, Greece, Romania, Serbia or the diaspora, would be to exceed by far the scope of this study.

theology *par excellence* (Vl. Lossky). Liturgical – dogmatic – spirituality: this was the synthetizing triptych of the theology promoted by the Holy Fathers and by the theologians who theologized in the 20th century by following their “spirit” or “ethos”. The shared belief was that the experience they expressed in a rational-discursive language was not “natural”, nor was it strictly subjective-individualistic; instead, it was the experience of the cooperation (synergy) of man’s free will and God’s grace. Thus, personal communion was committed, i.e., the Church’s community and sacramental environment.

2. We note, with all the neo-patristic theologians, the centering of ecclesiology on Christology and the emphasis on the symbol of Church and the Body of Christ. We need to say that the symbol is not metaphorical, but completely real: Christ is the Head of the Church, and the followers are “living stones” that build this Body of His. They are limbs that are awarded, through the Sacraments (and especially through the Eucharist) the feeling and the spiritual functions of the Head. This is how, starting from Baptism, the beginning of “living through Christ” is established and followed by growth toward the full age of Christ, i.e., “deification” (*theosis*) or Christification. This process, which starts in this world, is not natural, necessary or ontological. On the contrary, it is personal, i.e. it involves man’s free and conscious will reflected in synergy (man’s cooperation with divine grace). Therefore, without undertaking Lossky’s idea of “double oiconomy” – from which Florovsky or Stăniloae explicitly delineated– we need to also recognize the Holy Spirit’s work in the ecclesial life. The Sacrament of the Pentecost offers the possibility of obtaining the grace required for Christification or deification. In fact, Church is an “icon” of the entire Holy Trinity: the follower is embraced by the Father through the Spirit in Christ.
3. One of the typical characteristics of Orthodox theology is the “definition” (the presentation) of the being of the Church based on its four attributes listed in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Their only source is the Holy Trinity, hence their close relationship. Nevertheless, one divergent aspect is the meaning ascribed to “catholicity”. In unanimous agreement that it does not mean universality (see the reserve regarding the Vincentian canon), neo-patristic Orthodox theologians decided whether the ethnical (national) principle is or is not relevant in the Church. The decision was antagonistic. On the one hand, Russian theologians from the diaspora considered being Chris-

tian a supranational condition. Father Florovsky stated that “Christian Hellenism” is an eternal parameter of Christianity (hence his criticism of Russian philosophy and theology), while Lossky identified and denounced phyletism in Orthodoxy. Two theologians “behind the Iron curtain” took an opposite stand: Father Popović developed the concept of *svetoslavje* of his predecessor, Bishop Nikolai Velimirović, and declared that the Serbians have a Messianic assignment in the contemporary world (he was opposed to the Western world’s “humanism”, the God-Man and the culture, theology, society etc. specific to Him). On the other hand, Father Stăniloae emphasized the Romanians’ exceptional position as “bridge between the East and the West” and the identity of Romanianism with Christianity specific to this “spiritual matrix” (see the ethno-genesis of the Romanians, which coincided with their baptism).

4. Sacramental theology has an important part in Orthodox neo-patristic ecclesiology, even if it does not wear the same “clothes” as Western theology (which also influenced the “didactic” handbooks of some Orthodox authors). The main idea is that the *whole* life of the Church is a Sacrament, that man is not consecrated by the seven Mysteries alone. Another essential idea is that, at the core, the being of the Church is given by the so-called “initiation mysteries” and particularly the Sacrament of the Eucharist – the supreme union with Christ in this world. With the exception of I. Popović and of D. Stăniloae, the other authors limited their presentation to these three Sacraments alone – Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist –, while emphasizing (in line with Saint Nicholas Cabasilas) the centrality of Eucharist as Sacrament (Stăniloae and Florovsky illustrated most eloquently the relationship of all the other Mysteries with the Eucharist).
5. One of the attempts of neo-patristic theology was to “declericalize” the Church, i.e. to reconsider and reevaluate the laymen’s function and role within it. Without relativizing the sacramental hierarchy – established by Christ Himself, the Great Bishop, rather than by a human authority, and transmitted by the apostolic succession that has its sources in the Mystery of Pentecost –, all the authors emphasized that there is no opposition between clerics and laymen. This had several consequences, including the following: although the bishop leads the local Church, by presiding, in the name of Christ, over the Eucharist, laymen do not have a mere decorative role; they are co-participants. If the Church cannot be without the bishop, the bishop cannot be

without the whole Church, clerics and laymen. Moreover, not even a synod (be it ecumenical or otherwise) has power without being accepted by the whole Church (laymen included).

6. By ceaselessly proclaiming the Good News (the Gospel) as Tradition, the Church has a decisive role in the world. (The latter is not, in fact, demonized, but receives the proper value, as it is God's creation). The antinomian tension of the Church – found “in the world”, while it is not part “of the world” – does not exclude the missionary journey. On the contrary, it relates to its core. It is required to unmask evil unremittingly, to fight against social injustice without, however, using anything other than its own unique means. Thus, the outcome can be seen (and here, Father Florovsky's merit is higher) in ambiguous situations, in (failed) attempts to bring the Church and the world together, or, on the contrary, to have the Church leave the world completely. In the end, both of the irreconcilable solutions are false, and the Church should be an active, socially committed presence which works for the promotion of Christian values (not as charity, but as the inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven starting from here and from now).
7. The same mission category also includes ecumenism. In general, Orthodox neo-patristic theologians did not oppose the dialogue with brothers and sisters of other faiths, but they did support, uncompromisingly, several standards: the Orthodox Church is the real and sole Church of Christ, as successor of the primary Church; the division of Christians is real (as schism) rather than merely apparent or superficial; the wholeness of grace is held only by the Orthodox Church, which does not mean the Charismatic boundaries are the same with the canonical ones; the union of all Christians should not minimize or exclude the precept of faith in favor of intercommunion; for the Orthodox, the only possible union is reintegration into the Tradition of the Holy Fathers, the retrieval of their ethos. Father Popovich's position is even more radical: the only Church is the Orthodox Church – all the other faiths are heresies, and the canons forbid any dialogue with heretics. Ecclesial union (suffering especially because of contemporary neo-Arianism and of the Pope's “fall”, comparable with the fall of Judas) is the immediate and unconditional return to Orthodoxy, which means the retrieval of God-Christ the Man as the only criterion of Truth.

There are, however, limitations or subjects insufficiently explored by the 20th century Orthodox neo-patristic movement. We will only briefly list

them here, while we note that contemporary Orthodox theologians are tasked with sounding and seeing the emergence of the paths paved by this formidable movement of theological and ecclesial renewal: a specific dissociation between dogmatic theology and exegesis, between the patristic and systematic studies and the biblical ones; a series of nationalist, idealized extremes or an anti-ecumenical exclusivism; and finally, the deficient development of a social Orthodox philosophy adapted to contemporary man's requirements.