“Ο Χριστὸς, μυστικῶς ἱεουργούμενος ἐν ταῖς ἁγίαις σκηναῖς”¹

– Fr. Dumitru Staniloae and the Rediscovering and
Reinterpreting St. Cyril of Alexandria’s Teaching About
the State of Perpetual Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

CIPRIAN IOAN STREZA*

Father Dumitru Staniloae’s complex and integral vision on the Holy Liturgy comprises all the dimensions of life in the church; it constitutes the object of this study, which intends to re-interpret, systematize, and evaluate the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria concerning the importance of the Eucharistic Synaxis in the life of the Church. The Eucharistic celebration is only the visible dimension of the eternal Liturgy of love within the Holy Trinity, whose Altar, Oblation and High Priest is Jesus Christ, the slain Lamb, who lives in a state of permanent sacrifice, who was incarnate, who died and arose again, and sent His Holy Spirit in the Church, so as to radiate among those who open up to Him in faith, and thus saturate them with the dynamism of His own surrender to the Father.

Keywords: *Liturgy, Sacrifice, Patristics, Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, St. Cyril of Alexandria*

Many pages have been written on Father Dumitru Stăniloae, yet not one person can truly state that they have exhausted all the defining aspects of the personality and work of this amazing Romanian theologian. His original creative genius, his whole discourse covering an unique mix of all the aspects of theological research – Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Spirituality, Church History, Biblical and Liturgical Theology –, his charism of a tireless translator and commentator of patristic literature, the way he built his entire rhetoric around the mystery of experiencing God; all of these impregnated his work with a value that has profoundly impressed the theological and philosophical realms of the time.² The uniqueness and originality of his broad and complex theological enterprise³ lies, first of all, in that he knew how to break the rigid

* Ciprian Ioan Streza, Professor of Liturgics at the “Andrei Șaguna” Faculty of Orthodox Theology, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Romania. Address: Str. Mitropoliei 31, 550179 Sibiu, Romania; e-mail: ciprian_streza@yahoo.com.

¹ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate*, PG 68, 708C.

² Antonie Plămădeală, “În loc de introducere: Generația Stăniloae” in: Mircea Păcurariu, Ioan I. Ică jr. (eds.), *Persoană și Comuniune. Prinos de cinstitie Părintelui Profesor Academician Dumitru Stăniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani*, Sibiu, 1993, p. XI-XXI.

³ On the defining aspects of Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s work, see: I. I. Ică jr., “De ce Persoană și comuniune?” – Cuvânt prevenitor la un *Festschrift* întârziat in: M. Păcurariu, I. I. Ică jr. (eds.), *Persoană și Comuniune*, p. XXIV-XXVII.

underlying structures of scholastic schemes and then to promote a reinvigorating return to the patristic theological discourse by advancing a spiritual and ascetically mystical approach to orthodox dogmas. In this context, Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae has providentially focused primarily on what he thought was a first rank priority: the theological and spiritual rediscovery and revaluation (or restoration?) of hesychasm, and in particular, of the writings of Saint Gregory Palamas. This was the starting point for the profound philokalic and neopatristic renaissance that this great theologian wanted to assert in Romanian theology as a counterpoint to the negative influences borne by the Scholasticism and Pietism of his age.

What ensued was an enormous and steady flow of labour on his part, designed to bring into the Romanian spirituality the 12 volumes of the *Philokalia*, as well as translations with comments of almost all the fundamental works of Greek Patristics. The writings of Saint Maximos the Confessor, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Athanasius the Great, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, and those of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite were gradually becoming more and more accessible to the Romanian theological world in this Father's novel attempt to creatively restore the patterns of Patristic thinking.⁴

Father Stăniloae's theological maturity would, however, come to light in his theological synthesis between Dogmatics, Spirituality and Liturgy, which he had long thought out and prepared through the profound studies published between the 1950s and the 1970s. This unique trilogy was initiated by the issuance of the *Course in Orthodox Asceticism and Mysticism*, published in 1946-1947, which was seen at that time as an attempt to tackle a "theological mysticism", or as a "theology of the spiritual life"; one that was meant to "fill the void between Dogmatic and Moral Theology" and have them culminate in their praxis.⁵ The second part in Father Stăniloae's theological trilogy is represented by the printing of the three volumes of his *Dogmatic Theology*⁶, wherein the great theologian programmatically set his mind to leave aside "the scholastic method of treating dogmas as abstract statements of a purely theological interest", as he embarked on a quest "to discover the spiritual significance of dogmatic teachings, and to highlight their truth in relation to

⁴ Kallistos Ware, "Eastern Orthodox Theology" in: *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Oxford 2000, p.185.

⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă. Ascetica și Mistica*, București, 1992, p. 5-7. This book is a reprint of the 1946-47 *Course in Orthodox Asceticism and Mysticism*, which had previously been republished in 1981, under the generic title *Orthodox Spirituality*, as the third volume of the course in Orthodox Moral Theology.

⁶ Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, 3 volumes, Bucharest, 1978, vol. I, p. 504, vol. II, p. 380, vol. II, p. 466.

the thorough needs of a soul in search of salvation.”⁷ The book *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy*, published in 1986, was intended to crown Father Stăniloae’s work, as the final part in his theological triptych⁸, which - as the man himself stated - would merge doctrine, spirituality and the liturgical experience into one unique and personal theological discourse.⁹

His complex and integral vision on the Holy Liturgy comprises all the dimensions of life in the church; it constitutes the object of this study, which intends to re-interpret, systematizes, and evaluate the main themes related to the importance of the Eucharistic Synaxis in the life of the Church, as it is depicted in Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s works. The programmatic urge to evaluate the writings of this great theologian - an action launched by Archdeacon Prof. Ioan I. Ică jr., PhD in 1993 in the preface to the memorial volume dedicated to the one who had not long before fallen asleep in the Lord - is still ongoing, for even today Romanian theology lacks an “authentic, solid, systematic reception...” of Father Stăniloae’s practical and theoretical work, a work that is now, just as it was 20 years ago, “more often cited than read and actually analysed”, according to father Ioan Ică jr..¹⁰

Without any doubt, the writings of Father Dumitru Stăniloae on the Holy Liturgy¹¹ are an inestimable treasure still waiting to be discovered, systematized and evaluated. Yet, such an endeavour is a slow process due to the complexity, pluripotentiality and depth of the themes he addressed. In this respect, any attempt to perform a preliminary evaluation of Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s pursuits in the field of Liturgical Theology must start from the premise that this great man was not a liturgist in the classical sense of the word, but a complex and profound theologian who managed to grasp and experience the unity between dogma and spirituality as a spiritual reality in the liturgical life of the Church. His view of the liturgy is fascinating and complete in its depth: the Eucharistic celebration is, in Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s

⁷ Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol. 1, p. 5.

⁸ Jürgen Henkel, Îndumnezeire și etică a iubirii în opera părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae, Sibiu, 2006, p. 336.

⁹ Karl Christian Felmy, *Die orthodoxe Theologie der Gegenwart. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt, 1990, p. 6. See the Romanian translation by Ioan Ică: Karl Chr. Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței eclesiale. Înnoirea teologiei ortodoxe contemporane*, Sibiu, 1999.

¹⁰ I. I. Ică jr., *De ce „Persoană și comuniune?”*, p. XXIV.

¹¹ See: D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și Comuniune în Liturgia Ortodoxă*, Craiova, 1986; idem, *Liturgie, participation au sacrifice du Christ, spiritualité*, dans *Liturgie, Spiritualité, Cultures, Conférences Saint-Serge*, 29e semaine d’études liturgiques. Conférences at Saint-Serge, Paris, 29 juin-2 juillet 1982, ed. by Achille M. Triacca and Alessandro Pistoia, Roma, BELS 29, 1983, p. 277-297; idem, “Teologia Euharistiei” in: *Ortodoxia* 21, 1969, p. 343-364; idem, “Dumnezeiasca Euharistie în cele trei confesiuni” in: *Ortodoxia* 5, 1953, p. 46-115.

opinion, only the visible dimension of the eternal liturgy of love within the Holy Trinity, whose Altar, Oblation and High Priest is Jesus Christ the slain Lamb, who lives in a state of permanent sacrifice, who was incarnate, who died and arose again and sent His Holy Spirit to the church so as to radiate among those who open up to Him in faith, and thus saturate them with the dynamism of His own surrender to the Father. Through this dynamism of expiatory love He wants to gather all in Himself, to imbue them with His sacrificial love and then bring them all before the Father. Bound to the flesh in this world, churchgoers can take part in Christ's perpetual Self-giving to the Father, their own sacrifice joining that of the heavenly Lamb in the observed rituals of the Holy Liturgy, through which Christ descends and substantiates Himself, and then extends His expiatory Body and Blood to the faithful, so as to bring all those who believe in Him before the Father, in a state of pure sacrifice. The dynamism of His altruistic love, available to all the faithful through the Holy Mysteries, reaches its efficiency only in the extension and application of the said sacrificial love among people, through a life of asceticism and self-restraint that generates acts of kindness and alms-giving. Thus, the entire human life becomes an exchange of gifts between people and God: the Creator and Maker of all gives Himself to people as a love oblation through the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ, and thus empowers the human person to give himself to the Father with and in Christ, and to extend this love dialogue to all of his neighbours.

The definitions that Father Stăniloae gives to the Holy Liturgy illustrate this profound, complete, and complex vision on the reality of the eternal life that is manifest in this world through the rituals of the church. The Eucharistic Synaxis is thus defined as: "The Kingdom of the Holy Trinity, the intimate godly home that comprises all"¹²; and "the movement of a community in the sacrificial spirit of Christ and its advancement into the love realm shared by the Holy Trinity"¹³; "the ascent of creation en route to perfection and towards the glorification of the Holy Trinity, through the sacrifice of the incarnate Son, and through its partaking of this sacrifice"¹⁴; "the celebration that generates the union and communion between us and God"¹⁵....wherein the Holy Trinity is present "as the consummate structure and source of love that lies at the foundation of the Son's incarnation, sacrifice and resurrection for our salvation, our adoption and eventually, our

¹² D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune*, p. 375.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 299.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 327.

own resurrection”¹⁶; “our act of sacrifice that is synchronous with Christ’s, or His act of union with the community which is done in a state of sacrifice and in order to bring the latter along as a living oblation to the Father, so that the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity would be manifest and mature within all...”¹⁷

With these synthetic definitions of the Holy Liturgy, the current article proceeds to present, analyse and systematize the main themes that make up the foundation of this complex and profound view on the Eucharistic Synaxis.

1. The Holy Trinity, structure of supreme love, and the Liturgy of consummate love.

The Greek term λειτουργία signifies the common ministration of the people, and it is a compound of two nouns, namely: ἔργον, meaning deed, act, work, profession, and λήϊτος, which derives from ληός – or λαός, in the Attic dialect –, which defines any public service or work done for the state or the people. The verb λειτουργεῖν translates as ‘doing something for the people’, while λειτουργία was known to signify an action, or a work done for the benefit of the people.¹⁸ It is this meaning of the word that was utilised in the Old and the New Testaments¹⁹, only they employed it in analogy with the significance that the noun used to have in Antiquity. The Early Christianity used the term “Liturgy” in order to give a blanket name to the sum of all those rituals that men of faith employed so as to express either their gratefulness or gratitude towards God, or God’s sanctifying work for the people.²⁰ In time tough, this notion came to signify exclusively the consecration of the Eucharistic sacrifice.²¹

As a universally renowned theologian of the Holy Trinity, Fr. Stăniloae had a broader and deeper understanding of the λειτουργία notion. He viewed

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

¹⁸ Petre Vintilescu, *Liturghierul explicat*, București, 1972, p. 140.

¹⁹ In the Septuagint, the verb “λειτουργεῖν” is used 42 times and with the exclusive meaning of rituals belonging the church service brought before God. King Josiah tells the Levites: “Now serve (λειτουργεῖν) the Lord your God and His people Israel.” 2 Chronicles 35,3. This very meaning of service brought to God is employed when this verb is used in the New Testament: Luke 1,8-10; Acts 13,2; Hebrews 9,21. The term λειτουργία appears in the Pauline Epistles in connection with the Saviour’s sacerdotal office, such as mentioned in Hebrews 8,2; 5, 1,4. See also: P. Vintilescu, *Liturghierul explicat*, p. 140.

²⁰ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy*, Londra, 1945, p. IX; Daniel Ciobotea, “Liturghie Euharistică și Filantropie creștină - necesitatea unității dintre ele” in: *Candela Moldovei* XII (10/2003), p. 4.

²¹ Robert Taft (ed.), “Liturgy” in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Oxford 1991, p. 1240-1241.

the Liturgy as the communion of eternal love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, which all creatures are called to immerse into through grace, a communion that had been granted to the first people in Heaven and then made available to all Christians through the Saviour's Crucifixion and Resurrection, and through the Holy Spirit's descent and activity inside the Church.²²

The consummate love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, as a perfect communion between three 'I's' who are co-inherent to one another, is in fact a love essentially linked to God, just like its manifestation is, which means that "God has always been a shared act of love, as large as His absoluteness and His unblemished subjectivity. In perfect love, the persons do not merely engage in a reciprocal self-giving; they also affirm themselves reciprocally and personally, and establish themselves in existence through giving and receiving. But the divine love is all efficacious... The acts, via which the divine Persons affirm one another reciprocally in existence through perfect love, are eternal acts with an utterly personal character, although they are acts wherein the divine Persons are co-active."²³

The love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity is perfect and based on the complete self-giving of a divine 'I' to another divine 'I', a self-giving where the 'I' does not offer a part of Himself or of His possessions, but where the 'I' offers His own complete Self. This giving and receiving exchange happening within the Holy Trinity, by which the reciprocal accommodation of the divine 'I's' is done, epitomizes the consummate communion, the ultimate unity. In this completely selfless love, the divine Persons not only give themselves to and accept one another reciprocally, but they also affirm one another in a mutual and personal manner, kindle each other into existence through acts of giving and receiving, in a perpetual and eternal Liturgy.²⁴

Father Stăniloae's greatest merit is that of having highlighted the fact that only a Trinity of divine Persons can experience complete communion of love, as not one of the three divine Subjects sees anything as object in the Persons of the others, nor in himself, but rather experiences the other two within himself as pure Subjects.²⁵ These are the consciousness's of three subjects perfectly interior to one another, and God's divine love and happiness is rooted in the reality that, "within the Holy Trinity, each 'I' who is the all contains the other 'I's' who are themselves also the all, each being the all in this

²² D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol II, București 1978, p. 221. See also: René Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la divine Liturgie du VII-e siècle*, Paris 1966, p. 36.

²³ Idem, "Sfânta Treime. Structura supremei iubiri" in: *Studii Teologice* 5-6 (1970), p. 336.

²⁴ Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 296.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 300.

reciprocal act of containing.”²⁶ Full communion comes about only between Persons who are and make themselves transparent as pure subjects, who mutually give themselves to one another. The completeness of divine love and its unique character make it impossible to have within the Holy Trinity an ‘I’ asserting himself over against another ‘I’; instead, each divine Person sees himself only in relation to the other two Persons, because neither one wants to disclose his own ‘I,’ but two together reveal the other; nor does each pair of Persons disclose their own ‘I’s,’ but they always place the Third ‘I’ in the forefront. Thus, “the Character of the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit is to love by eclipsing Himself, as the Father forgetting Himself loves the Son in Whom He has placed all His joy, and as the Son is beloved because He puts off his own ‘I’ in order that the Father may be made manifest and the Spirit shine forth.”²⁷

Thus, to Father Stăniloae, the Holy Trinity is “the culmination of the humility and sacrifice of love”, for “it represents the continual mortification of each ‘I,’ for it is the self-assertion of these ‘I’s’ that would make the absolute unity of love impossible, and thus give birth to individualism”²⁸. To understand and experience this love, an ascetic effort has to be made, for “it is the sin of individualism that hinders us from understanding fully that the Holy Trinity is a complete identification of ‘I’s’ without their disappearance or destruction.”²⁹

The love of the Holy Trinity is one that excludes any form of ego-centric affirmation, for only because a third divine ‘I’ exists can the other two ‘I’s’ become one, not merely through the reciprocity of their love alone, but also through their common self-forgetfulness in favour of the third.³⁰ It is only through the third that the love between the two proves itself generous and capable of extending itself to subjects outside themselves, and only the existence of a third in God explains the creation of a world of many ‘I’s’ and the fact that these ‘I’s’ have been elevated to the level of partners with God.³¹

It is only through the Holy Spirit, that the generous divine love radiates to other creatures, as well. In this respect, father Dumitru Stăniloae states that, “the name of the Holy Spirit is so closely associated with love,

²⁶ Idem, “Sfânta Treime », p. 342.

²⁷ Eugraph Kovalevsky, “Sainte Trinité” in: *Cahiers de Saint Irénée* 44 (1964), p. 3.

²⁸ D. Stăniloae, “Sfânta Treime”, p. 343.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 346.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

inasmuch as that name is the sign of perfect love in God. Only the third implies complete deliverance of love from selfishness. Through the Holy Spirit, the love of the Trinity proves itself as genuinely holy. ...The Holy Spirit represents the possibility of extending the love between Father and Son to other subjects, and at the same time, He also represents the right which a third has to take part in the loving dialogue of the two, a right with which the Spirit endows all created subjects.”³²

Thus God created the world and all rational beings out of, and for this infinite and self-forgetful love, as He wanted to extend the communion of love existent between the divine Persons to all those conscious creatures that would be able to respond to it in kind.

To father Dumitru Stăniloae, the sacrificial, selfless, generous, and disinterested love of the Holy Trinity, which the Godhead wanted to plant in and communicate to all rational created beings is the principle, the foundation, and the purpose of the entire economy of salvation. “As a work of raising up believers to intimate communion with God, salvation and deification is nothing other than the extension to conscious creatures of the relations that obtain (n.t. ‘are’) between the divine Persons...Only because a triune God exists does one of the divine Persons — namely the One who stands in relationship as Son vis-à-vis the Other and, as man too, can remain within this affectionate relationship as Son — become incarnate, placing all His human brothers within this relationship as sons to the heavenly Father, or indeed placing His Father within a paternal relationship to all men.”³³

Having been created in the image of God and meant to attain perfection as a son of His by grace, through his sampling of the eternal self-sacrificing love of the Holy Trinity, the man has been given the mission to gather the whole cosmos around himself and return it to its Creator, thus becoming a mediator between created and uncreated, heaven and earth, paradise and the world he lives in, and between man and woman.³⁴

However, the fall into sin has brought about a deviation of the man from this synthesizing mission, and he is now bereft of the Heavenly Liturgy, and of the communion with the Holy Trinity. Man’s return to the joy of this communion was accomplished through the Incarnation, Sacrifice and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who brought upon the earth all celestial riches, the whole divine truth, and the entire heavenly joy that the initial disobedience

³² D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol 1, p. 309.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 286.

³⁴ St. Maximos the Confessor, *Answers to Thalassios 1, 20, 22, 42, 49*, Philokalia vol III, p. 16-20; p. 59-62; p. 69-76; p. 146-149; p. 179-195

had lost.³⁵ Only a Sacrifice could restore the man to the communion of love within the Holy Trinity, and that is why the Son of God became the Son of man and by dying on the Cross, He emerged as the eternal High Priest, the perpetual Oblation, and the utmost and eternal Altar. He then entered the Heavenly Tabernacle, and went “behind the veil” (Hebrews 6,19), where He brought Himself as a pure, sweet incensed Sacrifice to the Father, and there He remains forever, celebrating a never-ceasing liturgy.

This state of continual sacrifice is considered by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae as the heavenly foundation of the Holy Liturgy that is performed through sensible means within the Church, for “the entire Liturgy that is celebrated in the Church is Christ’s sacrifice intermingled with our own oblation, enlivened by the power of His Sacrifice. Our offer culminates in the Eucharist, representing Christ’s giving of Himself to the Father and to us, which is not done without our prayers that also nourish on the Saviour’s heavenly Sacrifice”, states the great theologian.³⁶

Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s entire work is built on a central leitmotif - the self-sacrificing love of the Holy Trinity, which was uncovered and made accessible to men via the state of perpetual sacrifice that our Saviour Jesus Christ is in. This love is the most important aspect of the sacramental life of the Church - whether or not it is properly understood determines the way the liturgical ritual is received and experienced as “Christ’s sacrifice for us and our participation in it”, as father Dumitru Stăniloae noted.³⁷ The fundamental premise on which he bases his attempt to understand and experience the depths of the Holy Liturgy is that “we cannot bring ourselves as sacrifices to the Father outside Christ, the High Priest who is the original Sacrifice, neither does Christ give Himself as a sacrifice in separation from us, for He has placed Himself in a state of sacrifice solely for our sake.”³⁸

Starting from his translation of the works by Saint Cyril of Alexandria, and delving deep into this great saint’s Christology, father Dumitru Stăniloae highlights throughout almost all of his own work the “positive consequence of self-sacrificing, the state of sacrifice our Saviour is in, without which the man cannot put himself before God, for this state completely excludes selfishness. But only a pure sacrifice, devoid of any egotism, can empower us to

³⁵ Saint Gregory the Theologian, *Omilia 44*, PG 36, 612B; idem, *Cuvânt la Arătarea Domnului 13*, PG 36, 325 AD.

³⁶ D. Stăniloae, “Jertfa lui Hristos și spiritualizarea noastră prin împărtășirea de ea în Sfânta Liturghie” in: *Ortodoxia* 1 (1983), p. 108.

³⁷ Idem, “Legătura dintre Euharistie și iubirea creștină” in: *Studii Teologice* 1-2 (1965), p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

come before God, and such a pure sacrifice could not be rendered except by the Son of God incarnate. And it is only in union with Him that we can bring ourselves as pure sacrifices to the Lord.”³⁹

2. Entering the communion of love within the Holy Trinity through the Sacrifice of the Saviour.

The depths of the theological concept of “state of pure sacrifice”, which is so often employed by father Stăniloae, requires a detailed analysis. Hence the following chapter shall focus on a series of theological themes that are contained in this concept: *the necessity* of the sacrifice in order to reconcile men with God, *the object of the sacrifice*, *the very act of sacrifice*, *the person* being sacrificed, *the dynamism of the sacrificial state* pointed both toward God and toward the human nature and the humankind, *the sampling of the state of sacrifice* that Christ’s human nature experiences in the Eucharistic Synaxis, and *man’s appropriation and synchronous sacrifice* with Christ in the Liturgy after the Liturgy, through a life of ascesis and observance of the holy commandments.

2.1 The substance of the offering: the need for a living, pure and untarnished Sacrifice in order to enter before the Father.

The idea of sacrifice is an essential element of any religion, and it has been understood as the effort men make so as to enter a communion with God, their act of self-giving in response to the Creator’s gift to them, the path towards a freely granted communion with God, and also the expiation and removal of sin, as well as men’s reconciliation with God.⁴⁰

In the Old Testament, the faithful used to offer God animals, and fruits of the earth and of their own labour, by putting before Him as sacrifice the divine gift that yielded in their own gift. The gifts were not mere expiatory substitutes for those who would bring them, but they were a visible sign of the persons’ self-giving and self-sacrificing, which was still imperfect and incomplete, for people could not completely overcome egotism through them alone.⁴¹

The consummate sacrifice would later be brought by Christ, whose complete offering was His very own Person. Father Dumitru Stăniloae writes that His Sacrifice “is a human person of an infinite value, for this human person is also a divine Person”⁴², and it is only His sacrifice that is

³⁹ Idem, “Închinarea și slujirea în Duh și Adevăr” in: *Părinți și scriitori bisericești* 38, București 1991, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Constantin Galeriu, *Jertfă și răscumpărare*, București 1973, p.11.

⁴¹ D. Stăniloae, “Legătura dintre Euharistie”, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

pleasant in the eyes of the Father, because it is holy, pure, unblemished and without sin.

Christ is the true Sacrifice, man's only gateway back into the vast life of love communion within the Holy Trinity. He entered the Holy of Holies from above, and not with a sacrifice that is detached from Him, shedding not the blood of bulls or calves, but His Own precious blood, an offering far more worthy than any other sacrifice ever brought by man. The animal does not consciously experience the pain of shedding its blood like the incarnate Son does. "It was not the blood itself that washed men's sins away, but what Christ experienced while shedding it - says father Dumitru Stăniloae - and that stirred Father's boundless mercy. And it also stirred the love for His Son, Who gave Himself to the Father as a human sacrifice that culminated in His shedding His blood for us and on our behalf. This should lead us to understand the great value the Father assigned to the Son, Who suffered death on the Cross so that we might be granted mercy. Since even the common man experiences the pain of sacrifice in his own blood, when he sheds it for another, even more so does Christ feel this pain in a perpetual manner."⁴³

Father Dumitru Stăniloae insists very much on the fact that the Substance of the sacrifice brought for the forgiveness of sins of all humankind is the forever living Offering, which was not burnt or destroyed by the fire of death, but rather sanctified and rendered worthy to be welcomed by the Father, as a sweet incensed oblation. His sacrifice is unique and of maximum efficiency, for Christ also presented Himself as a complete man to the Father, bringing neither impersonal gifts, nor other people as offering (like the pagans did), but rather He gave Himself for others. Hence, He became the supreme Priest or the High Priest par excellence, one who could graft the vastness of the divine love onto His feeling of solidarity with His fellow men, thus dying only to sanctify Himself and elevate all who believe in Him before the Father.⁴⁴ "Surrendering one's own self to God means infinitely more than surrendering one's possessions - the same great theologian notes in one of his comments to Saint Cyril of Alexandria's *Adoration in Spirit and in Truth*. By sacrificing one's possessions, one preserves oneself through a selfish care or act that is too poorly learned. Only Christ brought Himself as a complete sacrifice. It is only by attaching ourselves to Him Who brought such a sacrifice, that we can also bring ourselves as living sacrifices, by renouncing the false pleasures of egoistic passions. This is a different way of annihilating our

⁴³ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "Închinarea și slujirea în Duh și Adevăr" in: *Părinți și scriitori bisericești* 38, București 1991, note 338, p. 309

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, note 126, p. 107.

selfishness or our own selves, for we cease living for ourselves and starts living for God, by fulfilling His will that sanctifies us.”⁴⁵

What Christ brings is a living sacrifice, full of life because it is not something one brings as an exchange gift, but rather it is “Someone” who is a price and an offering in and of Himself, who has an inherent supreme value in that He becomes the source of the sweet incense of sacrifice which penetrates all those who abide in Him and engages them toward a personal state of sacrifice: “The burnt offerings of animals were completely consumed by the holy and unextinguished fire, not an organ was spared, but each little part and limb would ascend to God, as a sweet incensed aroma. And those who were slain in order to be brought as a sacrifice for salvation would go through a partial sanctification... It was thus meet that only Christ should bring Himself as a complete burnt offering. For He is truly whole and holy, completely sweet incensed and sanctified. In the meantime, the lack of a thorough holiness and overall cleanness is inevitable in us, for we are also somewhat corrupted by sin”, as Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes.⁴⁶

God could welcome only a pure and unfaltering sacrifice like Christ’s, but the act of bringing it also had to be complete and most pure.

2.2. Christ’s act of sacrifice and the entrance of His humanity into the state of sacrifice.

The bringing of any sacrifice involves the ideas of death and sanctification.⁴⁷ In the Old Testament, to offer God animals, fruits of the earth, objects or even people, meant to have them consecrated by God and separated from their habitual usage; they died and were destroyed for this world, yet they became consecrated and sanctified once they were brought to God. Symbolically, each act of bringing a sacrifice pointed to a desire of transitioning from a material existence to a spiritual one, from an old life of sin to a new and sanctifying life of communion with God. In other words, it indicated that the holiness that results from the relationship between the offering and God is possible only after an inferior lifestyle was terminated. In this respect, Saint Cyril of Alexandria calls the object offered to God either a victim (θύμα), or a sacred object (ἱερεῖον), and the act of bringing it either offering (θύειν), or consecrating

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, note 458, p. 400.

⁴⁶ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate*, PG 68, Paris: Migne, 1857-1866, col. 709B. See also: Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Adoration in Spirit and in Truth*, book X, translation, introduction and notes by D. Stăniloae, *Părinți și scriitori bisericești* 38, p. 362.

⁴⁷ D. Stăniloae, “Legătura dintre Euharistie”, p. 4

(ἱεουργεῖν): “It is just like in an icon, we consecrate our souls to God through victims, and thus we move into a life that is holy and untarnished.”⁴⁸

However, the sacrifices of the Old Testament were mere ante types and symbols foreshadowing the true sacrifice that would be Christ’s. Through these, men could not entirely get over their inferior and selfish modes of being, and their bringing of offerings to God rather showed their wish to be delivered from the debt of a sacrifice they understood as death, or as a complete surrender to God.

In His desire to grant men the possibility to bring a pristine sacrifice and thus put themselves before the Father, the Saviour Jesus Christ became incarnate and assumed into His Hypostasis the whole human nature, which He impregnated with complete availability towards God. This assumed human nature would eventually end in death, the utmost sign of His ineffable obedience. Only in Him could the human nature die out of its obedience and love, and in the faith that God would ultimately resurrect it, thus reviving and moving the love of the Father.

The state of complete self-renunciation and His consummate surrender as a human before God, which He had constantly been under throughout His whole earthly life, ended up in His death on the cross. This was a visible sign of His desire to keep and conclude within His assumed humanity the determination to be completely and freely given to the Father as a man as well, and to be in an eternal communion with all who follow Him in a state of sacrificial love.⁴⁹

Christ, the new Man, experienced His own crucifixion as a visible token of the truthfulness of His death to egoism, as its culmination, and as its absolute manifestation. “It was fit for Christ to go through this total test of authenticity and to accept the consummate form of sacrifice. And the circumstances had Him go through that ordeal.”⁵⁰

His act of sacrifice is eternal and has redemptive efficiency. The Saviour entered before the Father through His precious Blood, and there He remains, in a state of perpetual sacrifice, thus gaining an eternal redemption, as Saint Apostle Paul states in his Epistle to the Hebrews (9, 12). Father Dumitru Stăniloae sees in this Pauline epistle a clear affirmation of the permanence and uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice, and by commenting upon verses 12-14, chapter 10: “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever (εἰς τὸ διηνεκές), sat

⁴⁸ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione*, PG 68, col 769B, cited Romanian transl. p. 405.

⁴⁹ D. Stăniloae, “Jertfa lui Hristos și spiritualizarea noastră prin împărtășirea de ea în Sfânta Liturghie” in: *Ortodoxia* 1 (1983), p. 106.

⁵⁰ Idem, “Legătura dintre Euharistie”, p. 11

down at the right hand of God... For by one offering He has perfected forever (εἰς τὸ διηγεκέξ) those who are being sanctified.”, he notices that the expression εἰς τὸ διηγεκέξ “does not merely mean that Christ’s sacrifice on Golgotha is so valuable that in its name all those who sin will be forgiven, or all those who believe in it will be sanctified, but that it contains and originates a power that can sanctify and therefore grant forgiveness to all those who receive it. The expression εἰς τὸ διηγεκέξ shows a continuity of efficiency, of irradiating power, and not of a simple judicial equivalence with all future sins.”⁵¹

The Son of God is being perpetually surrendered to the Father out of love, and this love - a ceaseless Self-offering - has shown itself as an ensanguined sacrifice, due to the conditions man created by falling into sin. By dying on the Cross, the Saviour gives Himself as a Man to the Father in a consummate manner, and through this, He impregnates His human nature with the intensity of offering Himself to God. This state of perpetual sacrifice that the humanity of Christ is in is no longer connected to death in His eternally living Person. Rather, it is a state of resurrection and holiness of the new deified life, the spring and source “for all the degrees of the state of sacrifice the faithful are in, degrees that would include both the death to egoism, and the holiness of a new life, a life of resurrection.”⁵²

“He who does not give himself entirely and forever, does not give himself completely, writes Father Dumitru Stăniloae, for it is only in this perpetuity that Christ’s sacrifice shows completeness and the power to make others perfect”⁵³ Only Jesus Christ made it possible for man to enter before the Father in a state of pure sacrifice and to remain in it forever, for the eternal power to overcome any human egoism comes solely through Him.⁵⁴

2.3 The person who brings the offering - Christ, High Priest, perpetual Sacrifice and Altar above the heavens

Another defining element for the uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice is His Person, the One Who offers Himself also as a man to the Father. The Saviour is the High Priest, Who does not bring impersonal gifts or other people as offering (like the pagans do), but One Who gives Himself to God for the sake of others, as He is a priest, a sacrifice, and an altar, all at the same time.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae insists that the uniqueness and sublimeness of Christ’s priesthood is given by His perpetual offering of Himself to the

⁵¹ Idem, “Iisus Hristos, Arhiereu în veac” in: *Ortodoxia* 2 (1979), p.218.

⁵² Idem, “Legătura dintre Euharistie”, p. 11.

⁵³ Idem, “Jertfa lui Hristos”, p. 108.

⁵⁴ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Închinarea și slujirea*, note 567, p. 512.

Father, and particularly by the fact that His sacrifice is personal, profound, mystical, and abundant in sacrificial love and delicate sensitivity. The Saviour did not want to bring to the Father some lifeless and senseless object, but He brought Himself, with His human sensitivity intact and untempered with and by transgressions, whereby He was able to experience the human sin as His own and then open-heartedly receive death for it, in a way nobody else could. "By this, a wave of love has sprung from Him, a love that unites all to Christ Who tramples death by dying, says Father Stăniloae. For in loving us so, He received death for us and destroyed it inside of Him and then in all those who were attached to Him... Through such a love as His, stronger than death, He overcame the care for Himself, as there was no shadow of sinful egoism in Him. In the complete and voluntary acceptance of death for others lies the power to defeat death. He conquered death not because it had invaded Him without His permission, but He welcomed it, for His death was an act of perfect love for all humankind."⁵⁵

His pure sensibility and sensitive delicacy gives Him the power to experience Himself simultaneously as a consummate sacrifice and an eternal High Priest, and also as the highest place where the sacrifice is suffered, i.e. the Altar above the heavens, for He could not raise His sacrifice closer to God than in His own Self. He has been and still is experiencing Himself completely as offering and offerer, and as the highest place wherein the sacrifice is brought. He was and is the closest to God, always in a state of sacrifice, always willing to radiate in those who open up to Him in love the dynamism of His Self-offering to the Father.⁵⁶

In Christ, the status of High Priest is inseparable from that of sacrifice. Yet He is the eternal altar before the Father, the place that is most spiritually charged, closest to God and to His holiness. He is the sempiternal Altar and the enduring sacrifice that needs not be repeated. He is the Altar of the whole creation par excellence. He enters the Holy of Holies not upon certain occasions, but only once [ἀφ'αἵ] (Hebrews 8,1) and there He remains forever, celebrating a perpetual Liturgy as the eternal High Priest.

He is the One and Only High Priest, the eternal sacrifice and the absolute Altar, Who is able to lead His human brethren to the state of perfection. He does not enter before the Father in any random state, but He brings to Him the most pure offering, that is Himself. In this respect, Saint Cyril of Alexandria states in his comment on the setting of the golden altar in front of the One Who stands above the Cherubim: "Christ placed the one who

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, note 125, p. 106.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, note 312, p. 292.

had turned away from God and had upset Him through disobedience and sinful acts, before the Father just as [he is] in Him, and just as [he was] in the former man [ὥς ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ πρώτῳ]. For He has entered heaven as our forerunner, so that He may now present Himself before God for us, just as wise Paul wrote (Cor. 9, 24). He who is forever with His Father reveals Himself now, and presents the human nature – as [it] is in Him, [and] as [it] was in the former man [ὥς ἐν ἑαυτῷ γε καὶ πρώτῳ] –, along with all our affects before the Father, thus changing the old lapse.”⁵⁷ Also, the act of placing the manna that was kept in the golden chalice into the Holy of Holies is, for the great Alexandrian saint, a symbol of the way in which humanity was placed in and with Christ before God, “for Christ is and shall always remain incorrupt, always universally known, Saint Cyril writes. And He sits before the Lord, thus in the sight of the Father. For when He became First-Born and donned the human flesh like us, He also trod into the Holy of Holies through the great and consummate Tabernacle, that is, He entered Heaven, so as now to appear in the presence of God for us, as it is written (Hebrews 9, 24). For it is not Himself that He brings before the Father, but us, just as [we are] in Him [ὥς ἐν ἑαυτῷ], people who have fallen from His sight, since we have let disobedience and sinfulness rule our lives.”⁵⁸ Likewise, the waving of the sheaf before the Lord is for Saint Cyril a symbolic sign of the way Christ is brought before the Father, because, “After Emmanuel, the new incorruptible fruit of humanity had risen from the dead, He ascended into heaven so as to appear in the presence of God the Father on our behalf. And it was not Himself that He brought before God, for He is always together with the Father and is never separated from Him as God, but He brought us in the sight of the Father, just as we are in Himself [ὥς ἐν ἑαυτῷ], humans who were away from His face and banished by His wrath, due to Adam’s disobedience and to the sin that coerced us into unrighteousness. Therefore, in Christ we gain the power to come before God. For He deems us worthy of His sight, as we are now sanctified.”⁵⁹

It is remarkable how Saint Cyril viewed the uniqueness of Christ’s High Priesthood. The only man who came closest to God as a loving Father was His Son. No man can get nearer to God than His incarnate Son. Still, He did not go there randomly, but He entered before the Father not as the simple man nor as the one and only God, but rather He brought Himself as a sacrifice to

⁵⁷ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu*, PG 68, 620C-621A. Romanian transl. quoted p. 337.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, PG 68, 671B. Romanian transl. quoted p. 305.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 1096B. Romanian transl. quoted p. 593.

the Father, and offered His sheer humanity just as it was manifest in Him and as it was destined to be from the very beginning - completely available to the divine love, which is most pure, delicate and full of sacrificial compassion for all mankind. And it is only in this manner, ὡς ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ πρῶτῳ, in the way He is and always was within Himself, as Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes, that the human nature was granted admission into the infinite vastness of the supreme existence, for it is perpetually presented in Christ, the eternal High Priest, as a sweet incense fragranced sacrifice before the Father. "Solely Christ, the wholly pure God made man, was worthy of bringing such a sacrifice - father Dumitru Stăniloae notes - for as He was completely surrendered as a man to the Father, His sensitivity ran so deep, that His perceptive faculties became equal to the absolute godly sensitivity and purity. Along these lines, He was able to make that very paternal sensitivity vibrate to the sacrificial love of the human nature, now saved from the unfeeling thickness of sinful egoism."⁶⁰

2.4. The dynamism of Christ's state of sacrifice and its movement towards God the Father, the human nature, and towards all men

To Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the state of perpetual sacrifice that Christ's human nature abides in is the heavenly foundation to any sacramental act of the Church, and thus he insists that "the most complete understanding of Christ's sacrifice is that which sees its movement both toward God and toward the human nature that was embraced by Christ and, through it, toward all human beings."⁶¹ Therefore, the Saviour's state of conscious and perpetual sacrifice envelops both His state of complete surrender before the Father, and His state of human compassion that he has for all of those who open up to Him in faith. "He remains in this state of sacrifice permanently united with the Father and always ready to unite Himself with a constantly refreshing string of people through commiseration and by extending His sacrificial state towards them, so as to draw them to the Father."⁶²

a. The Saviour's sacerdotal office- a state directed to the Father before all else

In the Patristic tradition, the two aspects of the Saviour's sacrifice are inseparable. The death on the Cross that the Son of God incarnate suffered is not perceived as a mere satisfaction made to atone for the debt incurred by men through sin and owed to God's honour, such as the Western theologians state, but it is primarily an act of restoration of the human nature through sac-

⁶⁰ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Închinarea și slujirea*, note 390, p. 346.

⁶¹ D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol 2, p. 131.

⁶² Idem, "Jertfa lui Hristos", p. 113.

rifice, which was first carried out in Christ and then extended through Him in all of those who believe in Him. Furthermore, father Dumitru Stăniloae formulates an Orthodox point of view on the satisfaction theory of atonement, which rests on the idea that, through the Saviour's sacrifice, God takes the initiative and reconciles the man with Himself, thus restoring and deifying the human nature that He assumed in His divine-human Person, for "God could not love man's state of sin, which is his state of enmity toward God. Christ as man earns God's love for the human nature by rectifying through sacrifice its state of enmity toward God. Or vice versa: by manifesting through sacrifice the will to be totally dedicated to God, the human nature is thus restored from its unhealthy state. These are the two undivided aspects of the sacrifice. A parent rejoices in the child who goes back to respecting him not because he sees in this his honour re-established, but because through this respect that the child gives him again he sees the moral and even ontological resources as being restored in the child's being."⁶³

Therefore, the Saviour's sacrifice is understood by the Patristic tradition as "a ransom" paid by Christ for men to God the Father, yet only in the sense that it was a necessary compensation for men, and not for God. That ransom did resolve the human nature's liberation from under the tyranny of the opaqueness that the egoism of passions engendered, and thus allowed the sacrificial love of the Holy Trinity to permeate it and endow it with all of its gifts and graces. Christ is the "Oblation" brought to the Father, and the means by which the reconciliation between man and God was effected. By entering the heavenly Holy of Holies, or before the Father, in a state of sacrifice, Christ did not only secure a juridical ransom for us, but He reaped a holy ransom, one that sanctifies and cleanses us (Heb. 9, 12 - 13), states Father Dumitru Stăniloae. The juridical satisfaction theory of atonement shared by Anselm of Canterbury and Luther is inconsistent with this «holy ransom» that «sanctifies». This fills the humanity of Christ with the entire loving and sanctifying presence of God, for His sacrifice is not a simple juridical settlement to account for the offences men have given God, but rather it is the Father's way of opening Himself up in love. The love of the Father permeates this sacrificed humanity and thus transforms and sanctifies it, prompting it to extend this loving and sanctifying presence of God into all who abide in Christ through faith.⁶⁴

God rejoices in the human nature that has become a sacrifice able to sense the delicate presence and sensitivity borne by His sacrificial love and that urges the Creator of all to feel a certain "satisfaction". By giving Himself to the

⁶³ Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică*, p. 131.

⁶⁴ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Adoration in Spirit*, note 570, p. 516.

Father as a man as well, thereby dying to the worldly life, Christ is, as Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes, “our first and all-transcending offering, for He has brought Himself as a sacrifice before God the Father not for Himself, as the flawless Law required, but for us, His people who were under the oppression and disgrace of sin. And in the measure that we bear His likeness, we too are consecrated sacrifices, for we are those who have died to sin, insofar as sin has been put to death within us, and we live for God a life of holiness and piety.”⁶⁵

Christ is the most precious gift that could have ever been brought to the Father, because He offers Himself as ransom for all, and therefore the Son secures the love of the Father for all of His brothers in humanity. “His sacrifice is both gift and ransom. It is a ransom presented as a gift - states Father Dumitru Stăniloae - and a gift is the sign of love. He is the complete gift or perfect sacrifice, who brings Himself to the Father for us and with us, and not as an object, but as a Subject.”⁶⁶ His sacrifice is consciously made, because it is the self-offering of a Person; therefore this self-bringing has nothing passive in it, but rather it possesses an irradiating dynamism that is capable of drawing others into acts of self-offering, for “its most intense subjectivity coincides with its fullest value for others.”⁶⁷ Christ’s sacrifice is dynamic and completely spontaneous, and that makes it rise to the Father as a sweet-smelling fragrance, and cluster around itself the sacrifices of all the faithful. Its vertical dynamism is able to attract and unite all in its advancement towards the Father, so that “the union with Christ in the state of sacrifice is not the union with a passive Christ, but with *the* Christ who is fuelled by an immense love for the Father and for all human beings as well.”⁶⁸

This idea is beautifully expressed by Saint Cyril of Alexandria when he writes about the sweet-smelling aroma of sacrifices that he sees as the antetype of Christ’s sacrifice: “The sweet fragrance of the Holy Tabernacle is abundant, the sweet-incensed aroma of the churches and of the saints in them unfathomable. For the church is whence Emmanuel ascends to heaven as a sweet fragrance, where the mystery of Christ is celebrated and where God is offered the bloodless sacrifice. Therefore, from the beginning and through to the very end, the sweet-incensed fragrance dwells in the churches through Christ the Lamb.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Idem, *De adoratione et cultu*, PG 68, 708BC. Romanian transl. quoted, p. 362.

⁶⁶ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Adoration in Spirit*, note 415, p. 361.

⁶⁷ D. Stăniloae, “Legătura dintre Euharistie”, p. 14.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu*, PG 68, 1092B, Romanian transl. quoted p. 590.

b. The Saviour's sacrifice restores the human nature and fashions the communion between people

God decided that only a man bearing a sacrifice of the most pleasant kind was to come near Him, and the most pleasant man could be no other than His incarnate Son, and the most pleasant sacrifice could only be the Son's life and generous Self-sacrifice. Therefore, by dying on the Cross, the Saviour sanctified the human nature He had assumed, He deified it and filled it with all of His gifts and with His undivided sacrificial love. As Father Dumitru Stăniloae notes, Christ's human nature was not "individualistically confiscated by an ordinary person, for it was assumed by a divine Hypostasis and thus it became the core whereby the divine energies irradiate and are communicated to all. Through it, Christ intends and is able to saturate all people and nurture them into His likeness, and eventually bring all who believe in Him to unity."⁷⁰ "He was born as a man and He sacrificed Himself for our sake, and it is again for us that He remains in this state of sacrifice. The vertical intention manifested through sacrifice is combined with the horizontal intention, which is marked by communion... His sacrifice ascends to the Father with the determination to open the gates of heaven for everybody, and to draw all people in there with Him."⁷¹

The sacrifices in the Old Testament did not have the power to attract and incite people to self-sacrificing, such as the sacrifice of Christ now does. Father Dumitru Stăniloae writes about the spontaneity and dynamism of the oblation brought by the Saviour, which has the power to attract the personal sacrifices of the faithful in a community. His live, spontaneous and perpetual Self-offering to the Father "is the only one that can draw all of His believers into the act of spontaneous sacrifice, thus having them unite with it and with one another. Therefore, all the faithful are replenished with the sensibility and disposition of the universal High Priest, who sacrifices Himself for all."⁷²

This double horizontal and vertical dynamism of the Saviour's sacrifice represents the power of the consummate love by which Christ, the new Adam gathers all within Himself and pierces them with the generosity of His offering, only to be able to present them in Himself as gifts and sacrifices to the Father, in an act of total obedience and self-sacrifice. "Being as He is - God the Word, He wants and is able to be all in all, only to offer all to the Father, writes Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Yet, in order to do this He has to imprint

⁷⁰ D. Stăniloae, "Legătura dintre Euharistie", p. 13.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 15.

the state of sacrifice in them. And that is why He donned the human flesh, so that He would not have to require this state from persons outside of Him, who would be unable to anchor themselves in it, but that He might irradiate this state in others from within His own Self.”⁷³

The sweet fragrance of His sacrifice is a state of continual Self-giving to the Father and of unending commiseration with all people. Christ wants to identify Himself with His fellow human brothers through the intensity of His Self-offering to God the Father, He wants to go through all of their inner strife, to assume the irreproachable effects of their nature, and ultimately to suffer death out of love for them, and out of the desire to liberate them from under the tyranny of sin and Satan. As He wanted to bring Himself before the Father in the form of a compassion-filled sacrifice for all people, He chose to die for them and so He was able to gain their love, which He then turned into a love that was directed to the Father as well as to the rest of the people, thus uniting all in the communion of perfect love.

Christ’s sacrifice is the bonding agent that works through men to bring together the entire creation, and that places it within the sacrificial love of the Holy Trinity, in the never-ending Liturgy of love between the divine Persons. The Saviour has elevated the human nature to the highest place before the Father and, by imbuing it with the sensitivity and delicacy of His complete surrender and self-renunciation; He converted it into the quintessential Oblation. This humanity, sanctified by sacrifice, is full of compassion for all people, and that prompts the vastness and generosity of the divine love to morph into the feeling of sacrificial solidarity with those who share the same human nature with Christ, a kind of solidarity that is plenary experienced in His visible offering of His Body and Blood during the Holy Liturgy.

To Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the mystery of salvation is the Mystery of Person and communion. There is no communion in the absence of persons, and the person is genuinely asserted only through sacrifice and self-giving.⁷⁴ In his opinion, everything in the relationship between man and God is personal, and full of sensibility and delicacy. The Creator of all took the initiative to sensitize the human nature and raise it to the capacity to sense His complete and most pure love, and gave it the chance to sample the life of communion that is in the bosom of the Holy Trinity. Only Christ could ac-

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ “I have emphasized the idea of person, yet only in connection with communion”... “Person and communion. That is not only the communion, but also the person”, Father Dumitru Stăniloae declared in the dialogues conducted by Sorin Dumitrescu in 1992, and published in: *Șapte dimineți cu Părintele Stăniloae*, București 1992, p. 22 and 151.

comply that through His consummate sacrifice, for He infused the human nature He had assumed with a piercing sensitivity and with the sentiment of total Self-giving, by which He allowed it to experience its meeting with God and with its fellow people in a plenary or unconditional way. The Saviour's Self-sacrifice lifted the human nature to a level of sensitivity where it was able to sense the delicate presence and sensitivity of the divine, and filled it with compassion for people, and thus He transformed all people into sons of the Father and brothers of His by humanity.

The material symbols utilized in the rituals of the Church make the entire mystery of salvation accessible to all people while they are still in the flesh. At the Holy Liturgy, Christ, the High Priest remains in a permanent state of sacrifice while He amasses the sacrifices of all the faithful in order to put them together with His own before the Father, and makes this mystical reality visible via the liturgical acts celebrated by the hierarchy of the Church who serve as intercessors, through which He offers His sacrifice before the eyes of the congregation, a sacrifice that is bloodless and delicately vested in the robe of the liturgical symbol.

Conclusions:

1. In father Dumitru Stăniloae's theological universe the doctrine, spirituality and liturgical experience are synthetically intertwined in a personal and unique theological discourse. His view of the Eucharistic Synaxis is simultaneously undiluted, all-encompassing and complex: there is but one Liturgy, the Liturgy of consummate love within the Holy Trinity, of which all creation is called to partake.
2. To father Dumitru Stăniloae, the sacrificial, selfless, generous, and disinterested love of the Holy Trinity, which the Godhead wanted to plant in and communicate to all rational created beings, is the celestial Liturgy itself, the eternal Banquet of divine love, which the man cannot partake of unless in a state of pure sacrifice, and by reiterating Christ's whole life both sacramentally and ethically in the Church.
3. The concept of 'state of sacrifice' is essential and pivotal in father Dumitru Stăniloae's theological discourse. Its primary goal is to define the economical revelation and manifestation in the world of the selfless love that is within the Holy Trinity. Christ the Saviour was incarnate so as to become the slain Lamb, who remains in a state of permanent sacrifice; Who died and arose again, and sent His Holy Spirit in the Church, so as to radiate among those who open up to Him in faith and ascesis, and thus saturate them with the dynamism of His own

surrender to the Father. Through this dynamism of expiatory love, He wants to gather all in Himself, to impregnate them with His sacrificial love, and then bring them all before the Father.

4. Bound to the flesh in this world, the churchgoers can take part in Christ's perpetual self-giving to the Father with their own sacrifice joining that of the heavenly Lamb by way of the visible rituals of the Holy Liturgy through which Christ descends and substantiates Himself and then extends His expiatory Body and Blood to the faithful so as to bring all those who believe in Him in front of the Father in a state of pure sacrifice. The energy of His altruistic love, made available by the Holy Mysteries to all the faithful, reaches its efficiency only in the extension and application of the said sacrificial love among people, through a life of asceticism and self-restraint that moves them towards acts of kindness and charity.