

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

**The Holy Trinity as the Source of the Unity of the
Church in the Creative Theological Vision of
Fr Dumitru Staniloae**

Revd VASILE-CIPRIAN BURCA

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2015

This Thesis has been completed as a requirement for a postgraduate
research degree of the University of Winchester

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Abstract for thesis

The Holy Trinity as the Source of the Unity of the Church in the Creative Theological Vision of Fr Dumitru Staniloae

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The aim of this study is to offer a critical presentation of the Trinitarian ecclesiological thought of Fr Dumitru Staniloae, considered to be the most important Romanian Orthodox theologian and a prominent figure of Orthodoxy of the last century. After an overview of the significant aspects of Fr Staniloae's life and work I investigate the way Fr Staniloae's theology is regarded by certain representatives of contemporary Western theology in an attempt to place Fr Staniloae and his work in the wider context of the theology of the twentieth century. I argue that Fr Staniloae's theology is deeply influenced by the theology of the Russian emigration: Florensky, Bulgakov, Florovsky and Lossky. Furthermore I show that despite this obvious influence Staniloae is an independent thinker in his own right, elaborating a personal conception of personhood in which a balance between person and nature is sought at Trinitarian and anthropological level based on a 'Neo-patristic synthesis'. I hold that in Staniloae's theology of personhood the person-nature balance is quite fragile because of its personalist overtone. I also make evident the fact that person-nature synthesis is pivotal for Fr Staniloae's theology in terms of the participation of creation to the divine life. I investigate the particularities of Fr Staniloae's conception of personhood through the lens of his apophatic theology also looking at its anthropological and cosmological implications. I also argue that in Staniloae's cosmology the relation between man and creation is at times seen in ideal terms, not giving any practical indication of what human being should actually do in mediating creation's fulfilment. I show that in terms of methodology Staniloae does not always have an

objective and critical approach on the thought of the Fathers by simply considering their thought axiomatic and hardly questioning it.

In the third chapter I point out that Staniloae's Trinitarian theology is the expression of an ontological communitarian personalism in which the Holy Trinity as supreme personal reality is seen as the only perfect communion and the ultimate meaning of all existence. I evaluate the influence of Russian emigration's theology in the Staniloae's elaboration of his Trinitarian model identifying its strong aspects but also unveiling its limits and speculative character. In connection to that I investigate the consequences of Fr Staniloae's engagement in open dialogue with the personalist and existentialist philosophy of his time and confront his vision on the inner link between the divine and human love.

In the fourth chapter I argue that the ecclesiological conception of Fr Staniloae evinces the distinctive roles and relations of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church with an emphasis on the reciprocity between the Son and the Holy Spirit regarded simultaneously in the context of interpersonal communion and unity of divine being. Furthermore I study whether the ecclesiological vision of Fr Staniloae which seems to be centred on the image of the Church filled with the Trinitarian uncreated energies, as a permanent Trinitarian epiphany, could provide new elements which are indispensable to the contemporary theology in its quest of finding the balance between universal and local, the institutional and charismatic in the Church. I also try to critically assess the potential and ecumenical relevance of Fr Staniloae's concept of 'open sobornicity' and possibility of its application in the Church.

I finally conclude with a critical evaluation of those aspects of the theology of Fr Staniloae presented throughout my thesis and an assessment of the importance of his theological legacy in addressing the problems and concerns of our times.

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List of Abbreviations

- Ambigua (ro) Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul. *Ambigua*. PSB 80, traducere, introd. și note Pr. Dumitru Staniloae (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 1983)
- BC John D. Zizizoulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985)
- BT John Meyendorff, *Byzantine theology: historical trends and doctrinal themes* (NY: Fordham University Press, 1979)
- BUS Dumitru Staniloae, "Biserica Universala si Soborniceasca", *Ortodoxia* 18: 2 (1966)
- CCT Sfantul Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cinci Cuvantari Teologice*, trad. Pr. Dumitru Staniloae [Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *Five Theological Orations*, translation from Greek, introduction and notes by Fr Dumitru Staniloae] (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993)
- CEC John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987)
- CEI Dumitru Staniloae, *Chipul Evanghelic al lui Iisus Hristos* (Sibiu, 1991)
- CND Dumitru Staniloae, *Chipul Nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (Craiova, 1987)
- CO Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in the Personhood and the Church*, Paul McPartlan (ed.) foreword by Archbishop Rowan Williams, (London: T&T Clark, 2006)
- DC Panayotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: the Nature of the Human Person*, translated by Elizabeth Briere, Foreword by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997)
- Deification* Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology. An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (UK: Paternoster Press, 1999)
- EG1 Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 1 (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994)
- EG2 Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 2 (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005)
- EG3 Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 3 (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011)
- EG4 Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 4 (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012)

- EG5 Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 5, "The Sanctifying Mysteries", translated and edited by Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer, Foreword by Alkiviadis C. Calivas (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press , 2012)
- EG6 Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 6, "The fulfilment of Creation", translated and edited by Ioan Ionita, Foreword by Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013)
- EIMBOR Editura Institutului Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane
- EO Nicholas Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology. Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, (Brookline, Mass., US: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010)
- FD Dumitru Staniloae, "Fiul lui Dumnezeu, Fiul Omului" [Son of God, Son of Man], *M.M.S.*, 56 (9-12) , 1980
- FIS Dumitru Staniloae, "Fiinta si ipostasurile in Sfanta Treime dupa Sfantul Vasile cel Mare" [The Being and the Hypostases in the Holy Trinity according to St Basil the Great], *Ortodoxia*, 1, 1979
- GED Ludwig Binswanger, *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins*, [Basic Forms of Knowledge and Human Existence] (Zürich, Switzerland: Niehans Verlag, 1942)
- GOTR *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*
- HTE Dumitru Staniloae, *The Holy Trinity. In the Beginning There was Love*, translated by Roland Clark, foreword by His Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012)
- THE Dumitru Staniloae, *The Holy Trinity. In the Beginning There was Love*, Roland Clark (trans.) (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 2012)
- IHL Dumitru Staniloae, *Iisus Hristos lumina lumii si indumnezeitorul omului* (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993)
- ILG Vladimir Lossky, *The Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985)
- ING Sergius Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, Boris Jakim (trans.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012)
- JBR Journal of Bible and Religion
- Larchet J.C. Larchet, E. Ponsoye, D. Staniloae, *Saint Maxime le Confesseur, Ambigua*

- (Suresnes, Paris: Editions de l'Ancre, 1994)
- LG Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, Boris Jakim (trans.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008)
- MT Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976)
- NPNF A Selected Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1954)
- NS Dumitru Staniloae, "The Nature of Synodicity", *Studii Teologice*, 29: 9-10, 1977
- OR Dumitru Staniloae, *Ortodoxie si Romanism* [Orthodoxy and Romanianism] (Sibiu, 1939)
- OS Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002)
- PC Mircea Pacurariu and Ioan Ica Jr., eds., *Persoana și Comuniune* [Person and Communion] (Sibiu, 1993)
- PG J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66)
- PGT Fr Pavel Florensky, *Der Pfeiler und die Grundfeste der Wahrheit in Ostliches Christentum*, II
- PL J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1844-64)
- Restoration* Dumitru Staniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului* [Jesus Christ or Restoration of humankind] (Craiova: Omniscop, 1993²)
- RT Revista Teologica
- SAS *Sfantul Atanasie Cel Mare. Scrieri (I)*, col. Parinti si Scriitori Bisericesci, 15 [Saint Athanasius the Great. Writings (I), 'The Fathers and Christian Writers Collected Works', 15] Introductory study of Dumitru Staniloae (Bucharest: IBMOR 1988)
- SC Dumitru Staniloae, *Spiritualitate si Comuniune in Liturgia Ortodoxa* [Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy] (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 2004)
- SCF Dumitru Staniloae, "Studii Catolice Recente despre Filioque" [Recent Roman-Catholic Studies concerning Filioque], *Studii Teologice*, 7-8 (1973)
- SD Dumitru Staniloae, "Sobornicitate deschisa" [Open Sobornicity], *Ortodoxia*, 23: 2 (1971)

- SSTS Studies Supplementary to Sobornost
- STC Dumitru Staniloae, "Sfanta Treime, creatorea, mantuitoarea si tinta finala a tuturor credinciosilor" [The Holy Trinity, creator, redemption and the final eternal aim of all faithful], *Ortodoxia*, 38:2 (1986)
- ST Studii Teologice
- STD Dumitru Staniloae, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatica Ortodoxa* (Craiova, 1993)
- STL Dumitru Staniloae, *Sfanta Treime sau La inceput a fost iubirea* [The Holy Trinity: In the beginning there was love], (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 1993)
- SVS St. Vladimir's Seminary Press
- SVTQ St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly
- TBC John Behr, "The Trinitarian Being of the Church", *St. Vladimir s Theological Quarterly* 48 (2003)
- TC Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer, foreword by John Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980)
- TDO1 Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologie Dogmatica Ortodoxa*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 1996)
- TDO2 Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 1997)
- TDO3 Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologie Dogmatica Ortodoxa*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 1997)
- TIS S. Dumitrescu, St. Ionescu (ed.) *Staniloae. O Teologie A Icoanei/ Studii* [Staniloae. A Theology of Icon/Studies], (Bucharest: Anastasia, 2005)
- TMT Lucian Turcescu (ed.) *Dumitru Staniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, (Iassy: Romania, Palm Beach: Florida: Center for Romanian Studies, 2002)
- TR Telegraful Roman
- TL A.M. Allchin (ed.), "The Tradition of Life. Romanian Essays in Theology and Spirituality", *Studies Supplementary to Sobornost*, no.2 (Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1971)
- TLD *The Theological Legacy of Fr Dumitru Staniloae and its Ecumenical Actuality, The Sixth Ecumenical Theological Symposium*, December 6, 1998, The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality (New York, 1999).
- Una Sancta* N. Afanasiev, "Una Sancta" in *Irenikon*, 36: 4 (1963)

Declaration and Copyright Statement

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I. Introduction

I.1. Dumitru Staniloae. Life and work.

Dumitru Staniloae, protopresbyter, professor of theology, historian, patrologist, journalist and member of the Romanian academy is considered one of the most important Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century by some¹ and even the greatest by others². He was born in the village of Vladeni, in Transylvania province known for its denominational diversity because of the multi-secular Catholic and Protestant presence, as the last of the five children of a Romanian pious peasant family. His mother Reveca (Rebecca) was the niece of a Romanian Orthodox priest. The enrolment to the University of Chernovtsy (today in Ukraine) in 1922 marked the beginning of Staniloae's theological instruction with the help of the Metropolitan Nicolae Balan who granted him a Sibiu Metropolitan Center scholarship, after he had studied in the confessional primary school in his native village and in the "Andrei Saguna" high-school in Brasov. The contrast between the patristic tradition and the scholastic method used at Chernovtsy, imported from Western universities, troubled Staniloae who decided to interrupt his theological studies in 1923 and go to Bucharest to study Romanian and Universal literature. One year later he would meet again Metropolitan Nicolae who offered him another scholarship and convinced him to return to Chernovtsy and complete his theological education. He graduated from the Faculty of Theology of University of Chernovtsy with the thesis "The Baptism of Children" under the supervision of Vasile Loichita, Professor of Dogmatics, in 1927. The same year Metropolitan Nicolae offered him another scholarship for specialization in historical theology. During the few months he spent in Athens (1928) he learned patristic Greek and gathered valuable material for his doctoral thesis. The encounter with some renowned professors such as the dogmatists Christos Androutsos and Zicos Rosis or the patrologist Papamichail undoubtedly opened new perspectives for young Staniloae. In 1928 he successfully defended his PhD thesis "The life of work of Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem and his relationship with the Romanian lands" under the supervision of the same professor Loichita who was particularly

¹ Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion*, (London, NY: T&T Clark, 2010), 82-3.

² See Andrew Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology" in M. J. Christensen, J. A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, (Rosemont Publishing, 2007), 32.

interested in the relationship between Orthodoxy and Anglicanism³. The work was immediately appreciated for its originality and was published in the Faculty's journal.⁴ It seems to be the first scientific and systematic presentation, based on some Greek sources of the personality of Patriarch Dositheos, known for his links with the extra-Carpathian Romanian lands and with the prince Constantine Brancoveanu of Walachia in particular who encouraged and sustained Dositheos in his missionary activities in this area. The thesis is rather a historical analysis than a presentation of the Romanian spirituality. Later on Staniloae would avoid referring in his theological argumentation to Dositheos because of the Latinizing tendency of his theology.

In 1928 further financial support from Metropolitan Nicolae enabled the young researcher's access to some of the greatest Western universities and libraries. He travelled to Munich where he attended courses of Dogmatics and Byzantine Studies. As one can see from Staniloae's *Jesus Christ or Restoration of Man* (1943) there he became acquainted with the work of the most important members of "Zwischen den Zeiten" group: Friederich Gogarten (1887-1967), Eduard Thurneysen (1888-1976), Karl Barth (1886-1976), Emil Brunner (1899-1966) and Robert Bultmann (1884-1976). It is the distancing of the German dialectical theology (with its emphasis on the centrality of Christ and the existential character of faith) initiated by Barth's Commentary on Romans completely rewritten second edition (1922) from the German liberal theology of the late nineteenth century, in which Staniloae saw the potential of an Orthodox-Protestant dialogue, a potential which he sought to fructify all his life. Undoubtedly, the encounter with Barth's theology, which reconsidered the reality of faith in terms of the personal contact with the living God and raised the awareness of the human responsibility in front of God as Personal Being who is not indifferent at our sins, was important for Staniloae's theological vision. Interested in Barthian concept of diastasis which proposed a rediscovery of God as the 'Wholly Other' (der Ganz Andere) Staniloae tried to balance it with the Palamite theology of God's energetic presence in creation. But he soon realized that according to Barth's theology God's absolute transcendence could be understood only dialectically and not apophatically as in patristic vision, synthesised by St Gregory Palamas.

During the few months spent in Berlin and Paris he became acquainted with German dialectic theology, German existentialism, French personalist philosophy and copied some manuscripts of St Gregory Palamas' work. Before getting back home he went to Belgrade where he undertook historical and patristic studies. This experience would later

³ Vasile Loichita, *Anglicanism si Ortodoxie* (Cernautzi: 1930).

⁴ An excerpt of the thesis also appeared in *Candela Review*, 40/1929, 208-76.

prove to be decisive for his profoundly personalist theological vision which creatively synthesized the modern philosophical personalism, the patristic legacy and Orthodox philokalic spirituality.

Staniloae returned to Romania in 1929, where he started his prodigious academic career. He was initially appointed 'Substitute Professor' (Lecturer) at the Theological Academy "Andrei Saguna" from Sibiu, receiving, among other duties, the tenure in Dogmatics. He became full-professor in 1935 and was elected rector of the Academy one year later, position which he held until 1946. Some major events took place in his personal life during that time. He got married with Maria Miha on the 4th October 1930. The following year his first children were born, the twins Dumitru (who died prematurely) and Mary. He was ordained deacon on the 8th of October 1931 and priest on the 25th of October 1932. His third and last child, Lidia was born exactly two years later after his ordination as deacon. He was the main editor of the *Telegraful Roman* newspaper between 1934 and 1945. This so called 'Sibiu period' during which his teaching activity went in parallel with an intensive programme of research and translation from the Fathers would be crowned by the publications of books and many studies and articles in secular and ecclesiastical periodicals and newspapers. Metropolitan Nicolae urged him to translate the *Dogmatics* of Androutsos. Fr Staniloae used this translation⁵ in his lectures at Sibiu. However he was quite disappointed with Androutsos' deeply Latinizing approach to theology determining him to focus his attention on the writings of the Greek Fathers. He also started the most important of his life time projects, the translation of the *Philokalia*, translating and publishing the first four volumes between 1946 and 1948.

Staniloae has always been preoccupied of placing the Romanian spirituality deeply connected to the Byzantine theological and spiritual heritage within the Pan-orthodox and modern European context. There is why in his version of *Philokalia* Staniloae added in 8th volume a presentation of 'Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer in the Romanian Orthodox Tradition'. However Fr Staniloae's first major and pioneering work, based on a Palamas' unpublished manuscript which he had discovered in Paris was *The Life and Teachings of St Gregory Palamas* (1938). This study definitively places him alongside others Orthodox theologians as Vladimir Lossky, Basil Krivocheine and John Meyendorff who tried to revive and renew the modern Orthodox theology using the Palamite doctrine. The aim of this research was to offer an objective and positive theological alternative to the extremely negative image of Palamism presented by the Roman-Catholic scholar Martin Jugie. It was

⁵ Hristu Androutsos, *Dogmatica Bisericii Rasaritene* (Sibiu, 1930), XIV+ 478 pp.

preceded by two preliminary studies 'The Path toward the Divine Light according to St Gregory Palamas'⁶ and 'Two Treatises of St Gregory Palamas'⁷ published earlier in Sibiu in *Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreiane*. Thus Staniloae was "among the first Orthodox scholars to see the vital importance of the Palamite controversy for the present day"⁸, his interest in and concern for the implications of Palamite theology growing constantly.

The articles published by Fr Staniloae in *Telegraful Roman* and *Gandirea* magazine coordinated by layman theologian and publicist Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972)⁹ were gathered in the volume *Orthodoxy and the Romanian Spirit* (1938). As exponent of the *Gandirea* movement, Fr Staniloae was involved in controversies with several Romanian philosophers like Lucian Blaga. The volume *Lucian Blaga's standpoint regarding Christianity and Orthodoxy* published in Sibiu in 1942 was the outcome of Fr Staniloae's detailed study of the metaphysics of aforementioned thinker.¹⁰ One year later Fr Staniloae published his Christological synthesis *Restoration*¹¹ in response to the Blaga's agnostic philosophical perspective. This original work of synthesis, still unique in the Romanian Orthodox theology, included an analysis of dialectic theology, an evaluation of Androutsos' dogmatic theology, a detailed critique of Sergius Bulgakov's sophiological theory within the frame of the latest discussions of the relationship between philosophy and theology of the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the last century. Staniloae's philosophical and theological approach on the ontological aspects of Incarnation and Redemption in Orthodoxy closely following the Eastern Church Fathers' thought is the expression of his efforts to find a solution to free the theological discourse from scholastic captivity of the manuals or catechisms dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Forced by the communists Fr Staniloae had to resign from the position of rector of the Sibiu Theological Academy in 1946. This must have deepened the grief caused by the loss of the second child, Mary. A piece of good news and certainly a sign of hope was the publication of the first volume of the *Philokalia* in the same year. In the winter of the next year he had to transfer to the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest where he taught Ascetic and Mystical Theology until this course was eliminated from the curricula by

⁶ *Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreiane*, VI, 1929/30, 52-72.

⁷ *Idem*, IX, 1931/32, 5-7.

⁸ A.M. Allchin, "Obituary. Dumitru Staniloae (1903-1993)" *Sobornost*, 16 (1994), 1.

⁹ Christine Hall, "Spiritual tradition and ecclesiology in the Romanian Orthodox historical and political context", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 11:2-3, 2011, 152-72.

¹⁰ Sandu Frunza, "Aspects of Blaga-Staniloae polemic on the Definition of Religion" in *Revista de Filosofie*, 48 (5-6), 2001, 599-610.

¹¹ *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea Omului* was initially published in *Anuarul Academiei Teologice Andreiane*, XIX (Sibiu, 1942-43), 5-406.

the state authorities in 1949. He continued as professor of Dogmatics mainly for the PhD students until his retirement in 1973. His involvement in the canonization of St Callinicus of Cernica by the Romanian Orthodox Church¹² is noteworthy. His professorship was overshadowed by the censorship and persecution of the communist regime which culminated with his arrest on the 5th of November 1958. After a sham lawsuit he was sentenced to prison for five years under the charge of "attempts against the proletarian Romanian state"¹³ alongside members of the clergy, intellectuals, politicians, students and other prominent Romanian spiritual figures who were members or participated in the activities initiated by the "The Burning Bush"¹⁴ hesychast revival movement¹⁵. He was incarcerated in Aiud prison. Staniloae avoided speaking too much about the period of his detention saying only that it was especially during that period of time he learned how to pray. However the testimony of Petre Tutea who rediscovered the Orthodox faith in prison where he met Fr Staniloae sheds a new light on this episode of Staniloae's life. Although Fr Staniloae in his humbleness did not mention this, it was the experience of 'neo-Hesychasm' which brought prisoners 'schooled in the Romanian Athonite-Serbian tradition and others brought up in the Russian-Ukrainian tradition together'¹⁶ and transformed the Romanian political prisons in a genuine School of prayer despite their subjection to the Soviet experiment of re-education. Guided by Fr Staniloae, Tutea discovered through the Hesychast spirituality of his fellow prisoners that the real freedom of the human person is attainable only in Christ.¹⁷ As for the special spiritual friendship between them Fr Staniloae's dedication on Tutea's copy of *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* says all: "To my master and brother, Petre Tutea, the most authentic Orthodox thinker in Romania, in homage and profound admiration."¹⁸ Lidia, the only living child of Fr Staniloae, had to resign from the Department of Physics of University of Bucharest because of her father's arrest. He was released from prison in 1963 and worked as clerk at the Holy Synod. He was reinstated in the department of the Faculty of Theology in the autumn of the same year. He was allowed to produce articles and studies by the State Department of Religion which had brutally censored all his work until then. Obviously one could find traces

¹² J. A. McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church. An Introduction to its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture* (Malden, Ma: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 65-70.

¹³ Fr. M. Pacurariu, "Parintele Profesor si Academician Dumitru Staniloae: Citeva coordonate biografice" in *PC*, 14.

¹⁴ Alexandru Popescu, *Petre Tutea: Between Suicide and Sacrifice* (England, US: Asghate, 2004), 279.

¹⁵ Athanasios Giocas, Paul Ladouceur, "The Burning Bush Group and Father André Scrima in Romanian Spirituality", *GOTR*, 52: 1-4, 2007, 37-50.

¹⁶ Popescu, op. cit., 284.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 285.

¹⁸ Popescu, op. cit., ii.

of this censorship in all of Fr Staniloae's later works. Having the approval of the State Department of Religion, which wanted badly to change the perception and the image of Romania abroad, he could accept the invitation addressed by Professor Paul Miron to lecture at Freiburg as well as the one of Friedrich Heyer and Adolf Ritter to lecture at Heidelberg in 1968. Thus he finally had the opportunity to travel behind the Iron Curtain.

One year later he lectured at Oxford where he met A.M. (Donald) Allchin. In return, Allchin was invited to give several lectures in theology to the students from Bucharest and Sibiu¹⁹. Fr Staniloae would return to Oxford, enjoying the hospitality of Sisters of the Love of God from the Convent of Incarnation, Fairacres, for two more lectures, one concerning the meaning of Cross²⁰, given in the summer of 1970 and the other about the relationship between eternity and time²¹ presented in the summer of the next year.

A very important moment of Fr Staniloae's activity abroad could be considered his visit to the Vatican as member of the Romanian Orthodox Church delegation in 1971. Fr Staniloae published in 1973 a historical study, considered to be a rather controversial one, on Uniatism in Transylvania before his retirement with the title of emeritus professor. He remained consultant professor for the doctoral students of the Faculty of Theology of University of Bucharest.

In 1976 Fr Staniloae resumed the translation of the *Philokalia* in Bucharest, publishing the next five volumes in less than four years. He published his most important work *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* in 1978. Fr Staniloae's theology became known in the West due to some translations of his works in French, English or Greek. Dr. Daniel Nesser's translation of four of Staniloae's articles on God's attributes, 'Dieu est Amour' appeared in Geneva, the translation one of Fr Robert Barringer *Theology and the Church* in New York and *Prayer, Freedom, Holiness* in Athens, all in 1980. In 1981 there was published *Prière de Jésus et expérience de Saint Esprit*, in Paris, *Orthodox Spirituality* and the second volume of *The Moral Orthodox Theology*, in Bucharest and the tenth volume of the *Philokalia*. The publication of the eleventh volume took place only in 1990 and of the twelfth in 1991.

In the autumn of 1982 Fr Staniloae travelled in United States giving lectures in New York, Boston, Detroit, Chicago and Washington. The memorable encounter between Fr Staniloae and Mircea Eliade in Chicago in the latter's house would be later evoked by

¹⁹ Staniloae, "The Conferences of Rev. A.M. Allchin at the Orthodox Theological Institutes from Bucharest and Sibiu" in *ROC*, 87 (1969), issue 9-10, 925-30.

²⁰ Idem, *The Victory of the Cross* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2001).

²¹ Idem, *Eternity and Time* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2001).

Lidia.²² Fr John Meyendorff assured Fr Staniloae of all his unreserved support.²³ The first volume of the German translation of his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Orthodoxe Dogmatik*, by Dr Herman Pitters was published in 1985 whilst *Genie de l'Orthodoxie* was being published in Paris. The work *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy*, considered to be the last piece of Fr Staniloae's unplanned trilogy, which reminds us about the one of Bulgakov issued in Paris consisting of *The Lamb of God* (1933), *The Paraclete* (1936), and *The Bride of the Lamb* (1945), was published in Craiova in 1986. One year later *The Immortal Image of God* was also published in Craiova followed by the second volume of his translation of St Athanasius the Great's Writings. Fr. Staniloae passed away on the 4th October 1993, on the anniversary of his wedding.

The work of Fr Staniloae is vast, comprising almost ten thousand written pages, many of them still unpublished. Therefore any present attempt of making a list of all his writings can only be partial and preliminary. However, in terms of a systematic approach based on the latest research in this respect, one could see that Fr Staniloae's opus includes almost 90 volumes, 32 translations of his books in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian or Greek, 823 theological studies, articles and journal short articles in Romanian, 111 in English and other foreign languages, 37 written sermons and discourses, 58 interviews and dialogues, 47 introductions, prefaces and postfaces.²⁴ Fr. Staniloae has also left us 59 reviews, mainly of books. Concerning his correspondence there have been published so far 26 letters or messages he sent to friends and only a few he received.²⁵ We could note here in particular Fr. Staniloae's correspondence with Fr. Mihail and Fr. Allchin. To all of these we have Fr. Staniloae's own translations, including the twelve volumes of *Philokalia*, and other books or reviews.

As Fr. Ioan Ica Jr. argues, an objective evaluation of the activity and work of Fr Dumitru Staniloae is decisive for a balanced theological and historical reception of Fr Staniloae whether we are speaking about Romanian Orthodoxy, Romanian culture or the panorthodox and ecumenical context.²⁶ For example the emphasis on the interdependence between persons and communion places Fr Staniloae alongside other Romanian intellectual whether we speak about Mircea Vulcanescu (1904-1952), philosopher, theologian, sociologist, publicist and pedagogue, known at least in the Romanian culture

²² Lidia Staniloae, *Lumina faptelor din lumina cuvântului. Impreună cu tatăl meu, Dumitru Staniloae* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010), 374-76.

²³ Ibidem, 376.

²⁴ Virginia Popa, *Parintele Dumitru Staniloae.*, (Iasi: Trinitas, 2004), 17-98.

²⁵ Ibidem, 92.

²⁶ *PC*, xxiv.

for his masterpiece, *The Romanian dimension of being*²⁷ or the play writer Eugen Ionescu (1909-1994), considered one of the most important dramatists of the last century, whose revolutionary dramatic techniques open the way for the Theatre of Absurd.

The impressive dimensions, the depth, the original personal imprint, the width of the theological, philosophical and cultural perspective required for a proper understanding of Fr Staniloae's thought and work does not make things any easier when it comes to the reception of his work. On the other hand a comparative analysis of his theological vision is indispensable if one attempts to identify his place in Romanian and Universal culture alongside other important theologians of the last century: Florensky, Florovsky, Popovich, Lossky or Barth, Rahner, Bulgakov, von Balthasar. The rediscovery and theological reinterpretation of hesychasm, and Palamism in particular, the avoidance of the extremes of scholasticism and pietism through the cultivation of philokalic spirituality and the original synthesis between the ideas or concepts of the modern personalism and the intuitions of the Fathers, shape the theological vision of Fr. Staniloae.²⁸

His dialogue with the exponents of Romanian culture had an interesting development. The creative tension which characterized the relationship between theology and culture in interwar Romania, the confrontation and public debates concerning the relation between Orthodoxy and the national identity, would eventually be replaced by a new perspective, more flexible and open, which could hardly be suspected of being polemic. The early confrontation between Fr Staniloae and Lucian Blaga, which in fact demonstrated the former's distancing from the anonymous and impersonal pantheism present in the latter's metaphysics, did not prevent Staniloae to eventually appreciate Blaga's valuable theological insights.²⁹

In his reading of Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Louis Lavelle, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Ludwig Binswanger, to name just a few, Fr Staniloae tries to extend the 'philokalic' approach from theology to the relationship between theology and philosophy. One reason might be that the Philokalic Fathers put a great value on metanoia and spiritual discernment which in the context of the necessary dialogue with modern culture could actually refer to one's humbleness of permanently acknowledging the limits of individual thought, searching and appreciating anything that is good in the thought of the others. However even though he is interested in and tries to value the potential of the

²⁷ Mircea Vulcanescu, *Dimensiunea romaneasca a existentei*, (Cluj:Eikon, 2009).

²⁸ PC, xxv.

²⁹ Dumitru Staniloae, *Reflectii despre spiritualitatea poporului roman* (Bucharest: Elion Press, 2002), 71.

philosophical terminology and language of his time the content of his theology remains the expression of a neo-patristic synthesis.

Fr Staniloae prepared his theological synthesis through hundreds of articles and studies. Communist censorship was a permanent threat which sometimes forced him to accept compromises, that is to cut or rephrase certain portions in his writings. However his reluctance to speak too much about his personal life and experience under the communist regime could be firstly seen as a sign of maturity, lucidity and forgiveness.³⁰

Undoubtedly the course of *Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Theology* delivered to the students of Faculty of Theology in Bucharest in 1946 (only two years after the publication of Lossky's essay on the Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church) marked an important moment in the history of the Romanian theological school. This insightful and powerful presentation of "theology of the spiritual life" or "anthropology of the Christian deification" is chronologically speaking the first piece of Fr. Staniloae's final theological synthesis *Dogmatics - Spirituality - Liturgy*.³¹ This is one of those fundamental works that placed Staniloae in the context of the contemporary theology.

He continued the work of Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972), author of the first Romanian course of Ascetical and Mystical Orthodox Theology³², who assured a strong impact of the authentic Orthodoxy on the Romanian culture, especially between WWI and WWII. Fr. Staniloae's intention was from the beginning a new articulation of the main theological disciplines, a new mode of doing theology: while *Dogmatics* and *Moral Theology* would be focused on the objective analysis of the principles of the faith and Christian life, *Ascetical and Mystical Theology* should reflect their synthesis, coronation and the practical concretization. So this part of Staniloae's trilogy, re-edited in 1981 in an improved form, is the materialization of his permanent concern of eliminating the gap between dogma, theology and spirituality.

In his masterwork *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* he aims to leave behind a scholastic, abstract and purely theoretical approach on the dogmas, searching and revealing instead the spiritual significance of the dogmatic teachings and their soteriological value in the context of faithful's personal and communitarian experience of God. His will to emphasize the ecclesial dimension of Orthodoxy and the inner connection between the liturgical ascent of the community and the personal ascent of each believer is

³⁰ A. M. Allchin, loc. cit.

³¹ Last time it was published in a revised form as *Ascetica si Mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe* (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 2002). (1st ed.1981)

³² Nichifor Crainic, *Nostalgia Paradisului*, (Bucharest, 1936).

materialized in the last piece of the trilogy *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* (1986).

Another important aspect of Fr Staniloae's thought is the cyclic-ascendant character of his theological synthesis. His reflections on Trinitarian anthropology developed in particular in *The Immortal Image of God* (1987) deepens the insights from his Christological monograph *Restoration*. The main theme is common to both of them: the soteriological consequences of the Incarnation of Christ, One of the Holy Trinity. In the latter Fr. Staniloae unfolds the implications of the kenosis of the Son of God, starting with the Incarnation until his death on the Cross, engaging himself in an open dialogue with the exponents of the dialectical theology (Barth, Brunner), the Russian émigré theology and religious philosophy (Bulgakov), but also with the ones of the modern personalist and existentialist philosophy. In the former he is more concerned with the spiritual meaning and the implications of the hypostatical union in Christ. For instance, when it comes to the Fr Bulgakov's interpretation of theory of enhypostasis, the early Staniloae is very categorical, arguing that the Russian theologian by declaring, under the influence of the Protestant theologian Thomasius, that the personal principle in human being is divine, has pushed things too far, thus falling in pantheism.³³ In the case of the 'transcendental Christology' of Karl Rahner the later Staniloae feels the need to clarify the arguments of the German Roman-Catholic theologian and to add new ones.³⁴

Fr Staniloae's growing interest in mystical poetical theology, in the ability of theo-poetry of better conveying a mystical experience is another characteristic of his theology. Although he has never written verses Staniloae has translated the hymns of St Symeon the New Theologian including them in *Studies of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1990). *The Gospel Image of Jesus Christ* (1991) and *Jesus Christ light of the world and deifier of humankind* (1993) are a reiteration of Fr Staniloae's Christology from a biblical, respectively philokalical perspective closing the cycle initiated by *Restoration*. The last work of Fr. Staniloae *The Holy Trinity: In the Beginning There Was Love* (1993) is considered his theological testament and a coronation of his permanent effort to reveal the central place the mystery of Trinity holds in the Christian life, theology and spirituality.

The international and national recognition of Fr. Staniloae came rather late, after he started travelling and giving lectures in the West and United States. Thus he is awarded the title Doctor Honoris Causa by the University of Thessaloniki, Greece (1976), the Saint Serge Orthodox Institute, Paris (1981), the Faculty of Theology, Belgrade (1982), the Faculty of

³³ *Restoration*, 109-10.

³⁴ IHL, 147-56.

Theology of Athens (1991), and the University of Bucharest (1992). The Faculty of Theology of Tubingen offered Fr. Staniloae the Dr. Leopold Lukas prize in 1980. He was also invited to London where he received the Cross of St. Augustine of Canterbury for his lifetime achievements in 1981. In 1990 Fr Staniloae became a correspondent member of the Romanian Academy. The second volume of the *Orthodoxe Dogmatik* was published in the same year. He was made a full member of the Romanian Academy in 1991, thus becoming the first Romanian cleric who was granted access to the prestigious institution exclusively for his theological work.

Although we have presented some general biographical and bibliographical information about Fr Staniloae, locating him in his social, ecclesial and intellectual context is a challenge in itself because his life covers almost the whole last century. We are speaking about dramatic events like both World Wars which influenced decisively and irreversibly the history of the Romanian People and the Romanian Church. The emergence of the first Romanian unitary state at the end of the WWI in 1918, the emergence of the Romanian Patriarchate in 1925, the interwar period which actually coincides with the end of monarchism in Romania by the imposed abdication of the young king, Michael I, the Russian Bolshevik domination at the end of WWII, the instauration of the Communist regime which culminated with the dictatorship of Ceausescu and finally the return towards the Western neo-liberalism in the early 90's³⁵ are well reflected in Staniloae's writings. For a balanced and objective approach we will look at Staniloae's contribution to the Modern Romanian Orthodox Theology within the context of his encounter with Western theology and philosophy.

I.2. Dumitru Staniloae and Modern Romanian Orthodox Theology

After the first Congress of the Orthodox Theological Faculties (Athens, 1936) Romanian theologians such as I. G. Savin, Teodor M. Popescu, Nichifor Crainic, became preoccupied with the elaboration of a Romanian conception on Orthodoxy. Crainic was particularly interested in this. He was the ideologue of the Gândirism which placed traditionalism, nationalism and national unity under the aegis of Orthodoxy. They considered that patristic Hellenism which has definitively facilitated an Orthodox universal synthesis should not

³⁵ For a synthetic account of the emergence of Modern Romania see Alexandru Popescu, op. cit., 271-9.

compromise the theological and cultural identity of the local Churches.³⁶ Although they did not agree with Florovsky' plea for a Christian Hellenism as the only solution to counteract the Latin pseudomorphosis of Orthodoxy under the captivity of Scholasticism and German Idealism they were much more interested in his argument for "the necessity of a creative, critical return to the Fathers through a integration of the theological tradition"³⁷, considering the needs and questions of the present. However we can argue that Staniloae has this in mind long before his colleagues and in parallel with Florovsky since he photocopied some of St Palamas' manuscripts while he was in Paris in 1928 and wrote his first important work based on his research on the Palamite theology. Maybe it is not by chance that he actually finished his dogmatic masterpiece as the crowning of his neo-patristic synthesis the same year he attended the second Congress of the Orthodox theological Faculties (Athens, 1928) representing the Romanian Orthodox Church. It was published in 1978 because of the censorship.

The inter-war Romanian society was animated by the so-called 'National debate' focused on the Church-State-Nation relation. This conception was based on some fundamental principles: the Christian Hellenism or the Pan-Slavism could not be considered the only expressions of the Orthodox universalism; despite the fact they indeed facilitated a universal orthodox synthesis they should not obliterate the theological and cultural identity of other local Orthodox Churches. Moreover the active role of the Orthodox Church in the creation of a Christian-inspired culture and civilization in all Balkan countries must be also fully acknowledged and the local-universal relation should be reconsidered according to the dynamic of historical reality. The Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga was particularly interested in placing the Romanian people within the Universal and European historical context. In the study *Byzance après Byzance* published in 1935 he argued the role of meta-cultural concept 'oriental romanity', preserved in the Romanian culture, in supporting the Church's universality. The Romanian theologians of that time considered that they should be more concerned in highlighting the pan-orthodox and ecumenical presence, involvement and contribution of the Romanian Orthodox Church. As a reaction to some Western influences, supporters of traditionalism such as Iorga and Crainic

³⁶ Ion Bria, *Teologia Ortodoxa in Romania contemporana*, (Trinitas: Iassy, 2003), 19.

³⁷ Florovsky, "Patristics and Modern Theology," in Hamilcar Alivisatos (ed.) *Procès-verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes: 29 novembre-6 décembre 1936* (Athens, 1939), 238-42; reprinted in *Diakonia* 4.3 (1969), 227-32.

developed the conception of 'Romanianness'³⁸ as expressing the quintessence of the Romanian soul; its main purpose was to show the fundamental role of Orthodoxy in the definition of the Romanian identity. The Romanian philosopher C. Radulescu-Motru was the one who defined the philosophical concept³⁹ but Crainic in particular tried to elaborate a juridical conception based on a synthesis between Orthodoxy and Romanianness as an alternative to the Western juridical conception. Mircea Eliade, Petre Tutea, Vasile Voiculescu supported the idea and analyzed the social and cultural implications of this synthesis.

Staniloae was a fervent advocate of this conception all his life⁴⁰, trying to construct a theological basis for the Romanian national identity, reflecting constantly on the relation between the Orthodoxy and the identity of the Romanian nation. It is interesting that the Romanian theologians stressed the importance of the nation (as ethnicity) over the State. The apologist I.G. Savin defines nations as organic, constitutive units of humanity, being intimately connected to the order of creation and argues that their unity is possible only within the Church by applying the patristic principle of unity in diversity to his theory of nations: "the plurality of nations is according to creation and the unity of the Christian Church is by divine grace. Only transfigured through their integration in the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church do all nations belong to this unity by divine grace"⁴¹. In the same vein Crainic develops his idea about the 'transfiguration of the Romanian soul'⁴² in the support of an 'Orthodox metaphysics' inseparable from the life and history of the Romanian people. Unfortunately this 'metaphysics' which blurred the distinction between Orthodoxy and Romanianness was interpreted in many ways, being seen by some even as an ideology which endorsed caesaro-papism and utopic nationalism or even ultra-nationalism⁴³. Crainic tried to oppose this metaphysics to the modern Western and autochthonous philosophical systems which he considered to be a menace for the Romanian national identity and the Romanian culture. That is the case with the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga, the only Romanian philosopher who elaborated a complete philosophical system. Partially influenced by Crainic's nationalist ideology Staniloae

³⁸ For a discussion of the relation between Orthodoxy, Romanianness, law and nation in the Crainic's and Staniloae's vision see Cristian Romocea, *Church and State: Religious Nationalism and State Identification in Post-Communist Romania* (London: Continuum, 2011), 77, 97, 122.

³⁹ C. Radulescu- Motru, *Românismul. Catehismul unei noi spiritualități*, 1936.

⁴⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, *Ortodoxie și Romanism* (Sibiu:1939).

⁴¹ I.G. Savin, "Ce este Ortodoxia?" in *Ortodoxia* I, (Bucharest: 1943), 39.

⁴² Nichifor Crainic, "Transfigurarea Romanismului" in *Ortodoxia* II (Bucharest: 1943), 182.

⁴³ Cristian Romocea, op. cit., 72-109.

launched himself in a critique⁴⁴ of Blaga's philosophy which would prove, besides certain positive aspects, to be also counterproductive for the Romanian culture, for the dialogue between the Church and the intellectuals. Obviously the conception of a nationalist Orthodox Church can be harmful favoring the majority whilst leaving no much room for the religious and ethnic minorities. The unilateral identification of Orthodoxy with the Romanian national spirit was a threat for the unity in diversity of different ethnic group within the same state. The sensitive and complicate relation between the Church and the State under the Communist regime, the situation of those who have collaborated with the Political police are still unresolved issues which according to some scholars hinder the credibility of the Church's resistance under the communist dictatorship⁴⁵. The situation of Staniloae himself is problematic if we think that he wrote in a very polemical tone against the Greek Catholics from Romania⁴⁶, although they were not a real menace at that time. Some Romanian scholars consider that Staniloae was forced to make this compromise so to be allowed to write his dogmatic treatise.⁴⁷ There has not been published even one book about the censorship under the Communist regime yet. The scars of the Romanian soul and the mutations in the collective mentality generated by atheistic communist doctrine run very deeply and it might take a very long period of time to heal. The twenty-five years of ongoing transition after the fall of Communism in Romania is a living proof.

To summarize, despite the outstanding role of Fr Staniloae in the development of the Romanian modern theology and culture, he is part of an outstanding interwar generation of theologians and philosophers, also educated in the greatest Western universities, a generation to which Romanians owe very much. However his attitude towards philosophy and culture influenced his theology which is focused more on spirituality, mystical and liturgical apophaticism, an ideal conception of the national history and less on ethics, political theology or theology of politics which implies a close collaboration between theology and philosophy. Staniloae's adoption of a certain type of ethnocentrism and antimodernism specific to a rather traditionalist and romantic-idealist conception of the Romanian history and society is a burden for his communitarian personalism in which openness towards the concerns of the present and ecumenical dialogue hold a central place. Apparently ignoring the harsh historic reality Staniloae's

⁴⁴ Staniloae published 12 polemical editorials in *Telegraful Roman* (TR) in 1940-1942 and many other articles in *Revista Teologica* (RT) and *Gandirea* against Blaga's philosophical conception.

⁴⁵ Cristian Romocea, *op.cit.* 12-44, 109-49, 180-214.

⁴⁶ Dumitru Staniloae, *Uniatismul in Transilvania: O incercare de dezbinare a poporului roman*, (Bucharest, 1975).

⁴⁷ Ica Jr., "Dumitru Staniloae" entry in *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, Trevor Hart (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 2000), 527-31.

nationalist rhetoric takes at times the form of a dangerous mystical nationalism incapable of providing pragmatic solutions to the social problems generated by the communist oppression.⁴⁸

On the other hand he has chosen to fight and help through his writings giving hope and courage to many, especially through his translation of the philokalic texts. Excepting some remote mountain villages, the idyllic image of the 'Romanian village' so cherished by Staniloae does not really exist nowadays. During the last century the Romanian traditional rural community has undergone dramatic and irreversible changes. In the light of 'unity in diversity' principle, Staniloae's concept of Romanian Christianity is opposed to yet no less problematic than Florovsky's apology of 'Christian Hellenism'⁴⁹, the first privileging the theological and cultural contribution of the local Churches and the second favouring an universal Orthodox synthesis. Nevertheless a critical analysis would definitively reveal the positive aspects and the limits of both visions thus contributing to a more balanced approach on the catholicity of the Church. This overemphasis of the ethnic element specific to Staniloae makes the attempt of placing the Romanian theology in postmodernist context quite challenging, especially for those living in diaspora. As theology is not to be identified with the Church, neither is political theology to be identified with the politics. The necessity of the political theology based on the Latin and Greek patristic sources and the reconsideration of the Church-State relationship have not been properly addressed in the Romanian culture until recently.⁵⁰ After all, the profile of the Christian political man cannot be properly sketched outside a theological perspective. The sad truth is that despite this noteworthy attempt it is too early to speak about a Romanian Orthodox political theology.

Overall I think that as the exponent of a distinctive generation Staniloae has done a lot for the Romanian theology and for the spiritual revival of the Romanian Orthodox Church. However this important contribution is somehow overshadowed by his tendency to support and propagate, under the influence of Crainic, the idea of a mystical nationalism which contradicts the Christian ideal of unity in diversity.

⁴⁸ Ioan I. Ică jr., „Dilema socială a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: radiografia unei probleme”, in Ioan I. Ică jr, G. Marani (ed.) *Gândirea socială a Bisericii*, (Sibiu: Deisis, 2002), 545-46.

⁴⁹ Aidan Nichols, *Light from the East. Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 135-36.

⁵⁰ *Teologie și Politică. De la Parintii Bisericii la Europa Unită*, M. Tataru-Cazaban (ed.) (Bucharest: Anastasia, 2004).

I.3. Dumitru Staniloae and Modern Russian Theology

Fr. Staniloae has found in the representatives of the Russian émigré theology and philosophy, such as Nicholas Berdyaev, Fr Sergius Bulgakov, Fr George Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Myrrha Lot-Borrodine or Paul Evdokimov those worthy and necessary partners of dialogue, who constantly challenged and stimulated his theological creativity and imaginative thinking. The ones who influenced him most were undoubtedly Bulgakov and Lossky.

I.3.1. Dumitru Staniloae and Sergius Bulgakov

The great numbers of references to Sergius Bulgakov's *Agnets Bohzii*⁵¹ (The Lamb of God) which is his Christology in *Restoration* shows Staniloae's particular interest in Modern Russian theology. We know that Staniloae learned Russian to read most of Bulgakov's works which he had access to in Russian as well as the 'Put' review edited by N. A. Berdyaev in Paris.

It is my view that in addition to Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church, Staniloae paid special attention only to other three authors: Bulgakov, Blaga and Lossky. Staniloae relied on translations only when the originals were not available. We could also mention here *Ikona i Ikonopochitanie*⁵² (The Icon and its Veneration) or *Kupina neopalimaia*⁵³ (The Burning Bush) which is Bulgakov's Mariology. It must have been during his study trip to Paris when Staniloae first got in touch with Russian theology, Bulgakov's in particular. The first remark we have to do in this context is that Staniloae's Christological synthesis places him close to Florovsky and Lossky, both of them deeply involved in the sophiological controversy despite the fact that Staniloae does not want his work to be approached from such a narrow polemical perspective. He states in the preface that the book is the product of his own meditations and reflections regarding the person and saving acts of Jesus Christ who "is always actual, yet always anticipating actuality"⁵⁴. However there is a hint right there in the preface. He writes: "In Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God are given all restorative powers for human being from any time and implicitly all the

⁵¹ Paris: YMCA Press, 1933.

⁵² Paris: YMCA Press, 1931.

⁵³ Paris: YMCA Press, 1927.

⁵⁴ *Restoration*, i.

treasures of *wisdom* (Colossians 2:3), in Him we have the answers to our problems.”⁵⁵ Right from the start the allusion to Bulgakov’s theory of Sophia is more or less evident.

Undoubtedly Staniloae’s Christological monograph is also an attempt to find answers to the issues raised by sophiology. How, one might ask? The answer is given a little bit later in a way that reminds us of Florovsky’s neo-patristic synthesis, the call for a return to the period of the Christological controversies and the Ecumenical Councils, to the patristic Christology in order to find solutions for the concerns of the present.⁵⁶

The solution offered by Staniloae seems to be a creative neo-patristic synthesis in which the dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity in theology and culture is fundamentally reconfigured. For Staniloae the opposition between tradition and modernity does not mean mutual exclusion but it calls for a permanent effort of reconciliation through synthesis. The fundamental problem Staniloae identifies is that Bulgakov does not actually acknowledge a real distinction between transcendence and immanence.⁵⁷ Staniloae finds Bulgakov’s cosmological antinomy, which introduces the absolute-relative relation in God, highly problematic and ambiguous. It is as if the world were also transcendent, only just the immanent aspect of divinity. The world is therefore not a potential symbol of the divinity but divinity itself. The same divine being which is eternal and unchangeable becomes created and changeable:

On the one hand, God in Himself, who is in the Holy Trinity, abides higher than any relation outside Himself; he is filled with Himself and closed within Himself. On the other hand, God goes out of His fullness outside Himself; He posits Himself as Creator, creating the world and thereby thrusting Himself into the flux of becoming of temporal, emerging being. In virtue of the genuineness of this world and of the world process, God Himself as Creator and Providence to that extent is becoming with the world (cf. Solovyov’s ‘becoming Absolute’).⁵⁸

Staniloae further argues that Bulgakov, by saying that God “is thrusting Himself in the flux of becoming of temporal, emerging being” or He “is becoming with the world”, put the intratrinitarian divine life and God’s relation to the world on the same ontological level making the latter as necessary as the former.⁵⁹ Staniloae concludes that according to

⁵⁵ Ibidem, ii.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, ii.

⁵⁷ Dumitru Staniloae, *O teologie a icoanei/Studii*, (Bucharest: Anastasia, 2005), 106.

⁵⁸ Sergius Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, Boris Jakim (trans.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 30-31.

⁵⁹ *Restoration*, 107.

Bulgakov God is both one and three in essence and not one essence in three divine persons.⁶⁰ There is no separate essence or freedom that belongs to the world. Staniloae is also troubled by Bulgakov's confusing conception of the divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia and their relation which actually contradicts the patristic doctrine of the creation ex nihilo. "Sophia, therefore, is the Divinity of God or the Divinity in God, and in this sense She is also the Divine world prior to its creation [...] the world too is Sophia, but a Sophia who is becoming creaturely, existent in time."⁶¹ According to Staniloae this peculiar process of becoming raises serious problems betraying a pantheistic vision of creation.⁶² Staniloae also argues that Bulgakov's Sophiology is partially influenced by Jacob Bohme's philosophical doctrine of Sophia.⁶³ According to Staniloae, Bulgakov holds that the human I, the human subject, "that mysterious spirit"⁶⁴ is uncreated, and only his nature i.e. his rational soul and body are created. But the human nature is a perfect copy of the divine nature; it is the divine essence in the process of becoming, the creaturely Sophia, the perfect copy of the divine Sophia. Consequently there is no qualitative difference between the human subject which is uncreated (therefore of divine essence) and the divine Logos; there is also a perfect correspondence between the human nature and the divine one. There is only a gradual difference between the human I and the divine Logos. Therefore, for Bulgakov, there is nothing new or unusual in the Incarnation, but rather a natural act takes place: the human I of divine essence is simply substituted by the Supreme divine I.⁶⁵ Staniloae also identifies in Bulgakov's theology the strong influence of the Protestant theologian G. Thomasius (1802-1875) which the former acknowledges in his *The Lamb of God*. However, going beyond the boundary of Thomasius' theory, by considering the human personal principal divine, Bulgakov's theory is characterized by Staniloae as pantheistic and dangerous.⁶⁶

Leaving behind Bulgakov's anthropology which identifies the divine and human, Staniloae turns towards Franz Erdin's considerations on the Word's Hypostasis and von Balthasar's analysis of the nature of the distinction and relation between human essence and human hypostasis based on the Maximian Christology and contrasts them with Bulgakov's approach.⁶⁷ Even if Staniloae considers Bulgakov's theory in the light of

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ ING, 33.

⁶² *Restoration*, 105.

⁶³ Ibidem, 109.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, 109.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, 68, 119.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, 69, 110.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 111-14.

Maximian Christology closer to Monothelism⁶⁸ he agrees with Bulgakov that there is something uncreated in the human being but this is the divine uncreated energy and not its own I, only the divine love can deify the loving human being.⁶⁹

Staniloae argues that Bulgakov's Christology emphasizes the unity of divine and human nature in Christ but almost forgets about the fact that according to the Chalcedon Christological formula One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten is acknowledged in two natures also inseparably.⁷⁰ Staniloae admits that it is very hard to emphasize the relation between the human nature and the human subject because the human being, *imago Dei*, cannot be fully grasped by the mind. Staniloae also agrees that the human I, ego, self is that undetermined, indefinable agent behind all the feelings, states of consciousness, acts and manifestations of human nature, an agent which cannot even be named, forcing us to use a pronoun for it instead. Everything that can be named and determined is nature. However Staniloae and Bulgakov see that relation differently: if Bulgakov considers the human I as a separate, substantially distinct, entity from the human nature, Staniloae tends to considerate it only just a new aspect, a new mode of being, which originates in the potentialities of nature.

In every human being there exist hypostasis and nature, the first as subject, the second as object and instrument, without having the hypostasis being added from outside; it is the form of the nature once nature comes into being.⁷¹

He explains the dual subject-object aspect of the human being:

The same dual aspect I convey in the expression "Ego cogito", because I make a distinction between the subject of cogitation within me and the act of cogitation united with necessary the ideas cogitated by me.⁷²

Trying to be more convincing Staniloae does not hesitate to appeal to the modern imagery of Ludwig Klages who considers the life and the human spiritual nature and the 'I' the subject, not as an exterior entity to nature but the indivisible centre of rotation of life and spirit. Klages refers to this subject-nature relation comparing it with the relation between the Earth and its inseparable, invisible yet real axis of rotation. "The 'I' is neither life nor spirit, yet nor a new essentiality besides them but the point of correlation of their

⁶⁸ *Restoration*, 114.

⁶⁹ *Restoration*, 79.

⁷⁰ *Restoration*, 138.

⁷¹ *Restoration*, 113.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 113.

collaboration without any extension [beyond them].”⁷³ Staniloae considers Klages’s idea that the ‘I’ is the centre of the human nature, a confirmation of patristic Christology of St. Maximus. In his anthropology Bulgakov is partially influenced by Leontius of Byzantium’s anthropological theory although he remarks certain inconsistencies in Leontius’ theory.⁷⁴ Staniloae argues that there is a difference between St. Maximus and Leontius of Byzantium regarding the constitution of the human being. Leontius seems to establish a perfect parallel between the unity of the human body and the human soul in one hypostasis and the union of humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ’s hypostasis. For Leontius, it seems that the body and soul are two perfect substances which can preexist independently and are not made for each other.⁷⁵ Therefore there are two natures in the human ‘I’ which are forming through union as hypostasis. Unlike Leontius, St Maximus contends that the two substances which constitute through their union the human being are not complete and self-sufficient in themselves. They are created to form a whole in the virtue of an internal law; there is an internal necessity which brings them to union. Thus the human nature is a composed nature.⁷⁶ This anthropological perspective allows St Maximus to emphasize what is the fundamental difference between the mystery of Christ’s supernatural Incarnation and the birth of any other human being. Unlike in the case of humans, the union between the human and divine nature in the unique Hypostasis of Christ is the manifestation of an act of absolute divine and free will, and not the outcome of necessity because of an internal, intrinsic law.⁷⁷ Staniloae actually refers to a study of the patrologist V. Grumel on this matter⁷⁸ to back up his point of view. Staniloae’s intention is to argue the fact that the possibility of the union between the human nature and divine nature in Christ, based on a certain ‘creational conformity’ which exists between them, does not necessarily imply their union.

Staniloae considers that Bulgakov’s sophiology is deficient because it makes the Incarnation of the Logos, in which the divine ‘I’ simply replaces or assimilates the human ‘I’, almost a natural act necessary for the restoration and perfection of the relation of divine Sophia and creaturely Sophia.⁷⁹ Staniloae realizes that Bulgakov’s last aim of the

⁷³ Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, II Band, (Leipzig, 1933), 516.

⁷⁴ LG, 68, 70.

⁷⁵ *Restoration*, 119.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 119.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 119.

⁷⁸ “L’union hypostatique et la comparaison de l’âme et du corp chez Leonce de Byzance et Saint Maxime le Confesseur”, (*Echos d’Orient*, 1926), 392-406.

⁷⁹ *Restoration*, 118.

development of the sophiological theory is soteriological.⁸⁰ This is how Bulgakov tries to explain the salvation of the human being and creation in Christ, as a unity between the divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia.

However an anthropological vision in which the human nature and the human subject are substantially distinct, compromises the Incarnation since Christ could not fully have assumed the human nature, and the thesis that the human 'I', subject is a divine particle from the divine nature, is a speculation which prevents one to understand the reality of the Fall or the necessity of Redemption. Staniloae argues that this substantialist philosophical-theological speculation, this bold attempt to go beyond the Fathers, cannot replace or complete the patristic doctrine of Incarnation and Redemption.

The main problem of Bulgakov's soteriology is that by making the creation of the world and the Incarnation of the Logos necessary acts for God it practically nullifies the divine and human freedom. Staniloae considers the doctrine of Sophia pantheistic, ambiguous, confusing and above all superfluous. Instead, in accordance with Florovsky, Staniloae proceeds to a return to Chalcedonian and post-Chalcedonian Christology, to Fathers such as St Maximus, St Sophronius of Jerusalem or St John Damascene for a thorough analysis of the Christ's Incarnation, hypostatical union and their soteriological implications. Based on that analysis he holds that there is 'original conformity', in the virtue of creation of the human being in the image of God, between the human hypostases and the Logos, human nature and divine nature respectively. Without this conformity the human and divine natures could not have been united so much to have a common hypostatical centre. Here Staniloae employs the patristic theocentric anthropology, especially the view of St Maximus which defends the ontological difference between God and creature, to counteract Bulgakov's theory about the uncreated character of the human hypostases.⁸¹ The human nature is restored and reaches its perfection when the divine Logos becomes through incarnation the divine hypostatical centre of the human nature. Consequently human nature can become transparent for the divine nature and it can reveal the divine hypostasis since it properly exists only in human hypostases. Through human nature Jesus Christ reveals Himself not only as human being but as God as well. The identity of Christ's hypostasis implies not only the fact that one and the same subject reveals himself as God through the divine nature and as human being through the human nature but the same subject reveals himself simultaneously as God and man through each one of his natures. Staniloae is keen to emphasize that the hypostatical union and the

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 118.

⁸¹ *Restoration*, 118.

communicatio idiomatum do not compromise the integrity of and the distinction between the human and the divine nature.⁸² The common hypostatical centre initiates all the divine acts and set in motion all the manifestation of the human nature, the divine ones through the human instruments and the human ones imbued and permeated by the divine elements. Consequently the word of Christ is divine and human at the same time. For Staniloae the hypostasis is subject as the director and spontaneous activator of all natural potentialities and the meaning of the subject is its intentionality towards communion.

I consider that Staniloae's concept of humans' conformity with God based on revelation⁸³ is much closer to the patristic theology of the Incarnation (especially to Chalcedonian and post-Chalcedonian Christology) rather than Bulgakov's speculative theological-philosophical substantialist theory although the scheme employed has its own limits. Bulgakov pointed out that defining the content of this conformity and explaining why the divine hypostasis of the Logos can conform precisely to the human nature is the real content of the divine-human problem.⁸⁴ Staniloae's approach is definitively personalist. God and human being are personal realities. He remarks from the start that the Scriptures do not contain any speculation on essence.⁸⁵ The Scriptures reveal the eternal value of person. Presenting salvation as our adoption by God the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit, Staniloae emphasizes the Trinitarian basis of our deification but also the fact that real love cannot exist and be manifested except between distinct persons in communion. Our salvation is our participation through divine grace in the eternal life and joy of the Holy Trinity. Therefore Staniloae considers that Scriptures suggest and the Fathers intuitively affirm the conformity between the human and divine nature and the divine Logos' Hypostasis and the human hypostasis in the virtue of man's creation in the image and likeness of God's Son who is the image of God the Father:

The Word of God, says St Athanasius, came in his own Person, because it was he alone, the Image of the Father, who could create man after the Image.⁸⁶

The human subject is created with the ability to be receptacle of the divine love, to become god by grace but its dynamic actualization is a divine gift which does not hinder however the necessary human effort for deification. Created by the Triune God who is love to love

⁸² Ibidem, 120.Cf. PG 91, 105B.

⁸³ *Restoration*, 70.

⁸⁴ LG, 70.

⁸⁵ *Restoration*, 70

⁸⁶ *De Incarnatione* 13, PG 25, 105B, ET *St Athanasius: On the Incarnation* (London, 1953²), 41 Cf. TC, 190, 230, endnote 18

and to be loved the human being is ontologically defined by its intentionality towards communion.⁸⁷ The original conformity between the divine and the human subject consists also in this ontological intentionality towards communion. But we could have all benefit if he would have unveiled more about the nature of this conformity. He shows that conformity cannot be simply equated with a mere correspondence between natures, hypostases respectively. However it would have been certainly useful if Staniloae had presented and detailed more his own position on Christ's enhypostazation of human nature or the relation between the divine Subject and the human nature or human subject in the light of this intentionality towards communion.

Another important aspect of the doctrine of Incarnation is the kenosis of the Word of God. Staniloae values many of Bulgakov's theological insights but he does not hesitate to present an alternative neo-patristic perspective on certain problems: 'the unity of Christ's work of salvation as Prophet, Teacher and High priest, Risen Lord and King'⁸⁸ the inseparability of the Christ's spiritual and bodily sufferings, the inseparability of human and divine nature of Christ after the Ascension. Recent theology still shows a great interest in the problem of Christ's kenosis.⁸⁹ According to Bulgakov the Logos leaves aside through Incarnation his divine attributes and operations: glory⁹⁰, omnipotence⁹¹, self-consciousness⁹² remaining God only by nature.⁹³ As a reaction against Bulgakov's Christology Staniloae considers that one should ask: how it is possible for the unique divine subject of the Logos to be in every moment simultaneously humble and full of glory manifesting Himself in limited human operations and infinite operations at the same time as Scripture testifies? Staniloae made it clear that he did not agree with Bulgakov's rather liberal attitude toward the Fathers and their writings, especially St Maximus. Indeed the Russian theologian did not consider the patristic theology normative, at least not in a strict sense. One can see this in the fact that Bulgakov actually challenged the theology of the Fathers, for instance in expressing a view that was different from the one of St Maximus over the issue of the gnostic will.⁹⁴ Employing the Maximian Christology Staniloae approached the issue of kenosis systematically responding to most of Bulgakov's

⁸⁷ *Restoration*, 74-76.

⁸⁸ EG3, 75-148.

⁸⁹ Paul Gavriilyuk, "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 58 (2005), 251-69.

⁹⁰ LG, 224.

⁹¹ LG, 225.

⁹² LG, 229.

⁹³ LG, 233.

⁹⁴ LG, 245-47.

objections. Moreover synthesizing the Maximian Christology, his doctrine of *logoi*⁹⁵ and the Palamite doctrine of divine energies, he counteracted Bulgakov's radical kenotic theology with a theology of 'loving kenosis'⁹⁶ which "reaches its climax in Christ's death on the Cross"⁹⁷, only sketched in *Restoration* but developed later in his soteriology. He spoke about the double aspect of kenosis as a consequence of hypostatical union:

The incarnation is an astonishing kenosis of the Son of God [...] but the incarnation is also a kenosis of the humanity in Christ which has its own existence, not autonomously in its own hypostasis, but in the divine hypostasis, a kenosis which is holly dedicated to God.⁹⁸

First he gives an overview of the nineteenth century Protestant kenotic theories⁹⁹ based on the Oskar Bensow's book *Die Lehre von der Kenose*.¹⁰⁰ After that he provides an outline¹⁰¹ of Bulgakov's kenotic theology as an integrant part of his sophiology based on extensive passages from *Agnets Bohzii* which in his opinion raises hermeneutical problems. However, Staniloae's dense and complex theological argument which synthesizes biblical hermeneutics, patristic exegesis and modern philosophical concepts is hard to follow because quite often the distinction between citations, paraphrases and his own comments and critical evaluations is not evident.

Bulgakov considers kenosis from three different points of view: that of nature, of hypostasis, and that of the intratrinitarian life and the interrelations of the three hypostases¹⁰² and Staniloae follows him closely in his analysis:

The divine nature of the Logos, as the foundation of hypostatic being and the source of life, remains unchanged and undiminished in Christ [...] Humiliation refers not to the nature (*ousia*) but to the *morphē*, to the divine form, which Christ removed from Himself in the Incarnation. It follows that, although nature and the form are interrelated as foundation and consequence, they can be separated from one another [...]. The 'form' is precisely this glory, which the Son has as God but which He removes from Himself in His humiliation, although He will later once again put on his garment of glory (see John 17:5). The glory in turn is Sophia in the capacity

⁹⁵ TC, 202-3.

⁹⁶ TC, 194.

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ *Restoration*, 127.

⁹⁹ Ibidem, 128-29.

¹⁰⁰ Leipzig, 1903.

¹⁰¹ *Restoration*, 131-35.

¹⁰² LG, 224.

of divine nature manifested, revealed in itself. The glory is the love of the hypostatic God for His divinity [...]. It is precisely this joy that the Son of God deprives Himself of, emptying Himself of [...] The Son of God eternally being God 'comes down from heaven' and abandons, as it were the divine life. His divine nature only the potential of glory, which must be actualized a new, according to the high-priestly prayer [...].¹⁰³

Staniloae points out that in Bulgakov's opinion, in the act of kenosis, the Son of God preserves the divine nature without the divine life and glory. Another consequence is that the kenosis of the nature leads to a kenosis of the divine hypostasis. The divine hypostasis which substitutes the human I reduces itself to the level of a human hypostasis so that this substitution could take place in the most fulfilling and natural way. Practically the divine hypostasis in its kenotic act was the human hypostasis for the human nature.

Bulgakov points out the inner link between the eternal kenosis and the Incarnation: "Sonhood is already eternal kenosis"¹⁰⁴; "And this eternal kenosis of sonhood is the general foundation for the kenosis of the Son that is the Incarnation [...]"¹⁰⁵; "God voluntarily renounced his divine glory. He removed it, bared Himself [...]"¹⁰⁶.

Staniloae also looks at the consequences of kenosis on the intratrinitarian life and intertrinitarian relations according to Bulgakov:

The Second hypostasis emptying Himself of His Divinity - not as the source of the intratrinitarian, interhypostatic life, but as source of His personal divine being: The Son stops being God for Himself, and therefore, in relation to Him, the Father is now not only equidivine hypostasis ('I and my Father are one' [John10:30]), but also His God. The consciousness of being Son is eclipsed here, as it were, by the consciousness of being sent by the Father, of obeying His will and revealing Him [...] That is, the Hypostasis of the Logos ceasing to be a divine hypostasis for Himself while remaining such in His objective being becomes a human hypostasis: His consciousness of self is realized through human consciousness.¹⁰⁷

Staniloae is intrigued by Bulgakov's discussion about of self-consciousness in Christ. He responds, again based on St Maximus Christology that Christ did not renounce to his self-consciousness. Even as child Christ knew he was God. "But while as man Christ grew, the

¹⁰³ Ibidem, 224.

¹⁰⁴ LG, 99, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, 177.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, 217.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, 220.

vessel of his consciousness became increasingly capable of receiving and transmitting the light of the divine knowledge in which it was already bathed.”¹⁰⁸ What grows in Christ is not the divine knowledge which is fully from the moment of incarnation (he has no doubts, nor he reconsiders or retracts any his own affirmations) but the human capacity to grasp and convey it.

Staniloae’s main objection to Bulgakov’s kenotism is the fact that it overlooked the profound implications of the aspect of inseparability of natures in the hypostatical union, Christ doing human things divinely and divine things through His human nature. He builds his theological argument based on this objection. Further, Staniloae unfolds the consequences of inseparability for the life and works of Christ. The first consequence is that Christ did not act separately through his divine and his human natures. Secondly, inseparability extends also to the operations exerted through the natures by the unique hypostasis of the Logos. Thirdly the natures with their corresponding attributes and operations should not be considered two static realities united or kept together like mere physical things in their inseparability, but rather two inseparable yet distinct dynamic realities full of life, active in each operation of unique hypostasis of the Logos. Any operation of the hypostasis of the incarnated Word equally implies the manifestation of the divine nature as well as the manifestation of the human nature. After the Incarnation of the Logos, the divine life is inseparable from his human life. In conclusion, all operations of Christ are theandric.¹⁰⁹ To be more precise, the union in ‘inseparability’ between the divine and human nature in Christ’s hypostasis extends to their wills and operations or energies.¹¹⁰ What really interests Staniloae is the existential and soteriological significance of the mystery of theandric Christ because it is only through and in Him that humans can experience salvation as the fullness of God’s love. He analyzes Christ’s miracle of healing of the blind man from his birth (Cf. John 9: 1-12) to counteract Bulgakov’s radical kenotism. Bulgakov argued that Christ had performed his miracles in the world like the others prophets, not with his own divine power, but receiving instead the power from God.¹¹¹

Staniloae on the other hand argues that Christ performs this miracle and others through an operation of the human nature and an operation of the divine nature which are practically inseparable yet distinct. The movement of the hand, the making of clay from the

¹⁰⁸ *Restoration*, 143-45.

¹⁰⁹ *Restoration*, 121.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 139.

¹¹¹ LG, 333: “Christ’s miracles in the days of His earthly ministry do not manifest “royal” power over the world , for in descending into the world, He had abandoned such power and acquires it again only after His resurrection and glorification.”

spittle, the anointing of the blind man's eyes with the clay is the operation of His human nature. But the flux of healing power, he says, which flow into the blind man's eyes through Christ's hand is the operation and manifestation of His divine nature.¹¹² Actually Staniloae refers to St Maximus¹¹³ and St John Damascene teaching on Christ's theandric energy¹¹⁴ in his argument but also appreciates the position of theologian Karl Adam¹¹⁵ who makes a clear distinction between the prophets' miracles and Christ's miracles and H.U.von Balthasar's approach on kenosis¹¹⁶. Staniloae sees the mystery of kenosis as integrant part of the theandric mystery of Christ, the manifestation of divine freedom and love for humanity through the divine - human hypostasis of Son of God and not as a renunciation, not even temporary, to the divine attributes and powers of the Incarnated Word of God, which would compromise the reality and soteriological implications of the Incarnation. So Staniloae develops a personalist apophatic Christological approach based on the personal reality of the Logos in which the hypostasis of Christ does not brings anything new from outside the natures to find an answer to the problem of kenosis. By arguing that all potentialities and energies belong to the nature he tries to move the centre of weight and focus from nature to a person-nature synthesis. The will and operations would be useless outside the subject's intentionality toward communication with other subjects. The existence of nature is justified and useful only as the means for communication, dialogue and communion from love for love between subjects.

To sum up, Staniloae tried to develop an interesting theology of divine and human personhood without compromising the ontological abyss between the uncreated God and human creature as a reaction to Bulgakov's sophiology in which the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity is compromised and Logos' kenosis pushed to extreme. First of all, starting from Trinitarian eternal communion as the structure of perfect love,

¹¹² Ibidem.

¹¹³ PG 91, 105B, 120B, 104 Cf. *Restoration*, 141.

¹¹⁴ *On the Orthodox Faith*, Book 3: "For just as we saw that His natures were united and permeate one another, and yet do not deny that they are different but even enumerate them, although we know they are inseparable, so also in connection with the wills and the energies we know their union, and we recognize their difference and enumerate them without introducing separation." (XIX) "And so in the connection with our Lord Jesus Christ, the power of miracles is the energy of His divinity, while the work of His hands and the willing and the saying *I will, be thou clean* are the energies of His humanity." (XVI) "For we hold that the energies are not divided and that the natures do not energise separately, but that each conjointly in complete community with the other energises with its own proper energy. For the human part did not energise merely in a human manner, for He was not mere man; nor did the divine part energise only after the manner of God, for He was not simply God, but He was at once God and man. For just as in the case of natures we recognise both their union and their natural difference, so is it also with the natural wills and energies." (XVI) Cf. *Restoration*, 139.

¹¹⁵ *Jesus Christus*, (Augsburg, 1933), 213 Cf. *Restoration*, 140.

¹¹⁶ *Die Kosmische Liturgie* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1941), 250 Cf. *Restoration*, 141.

base of Logos' Incarnation and creation of human in the image of the Son of Good Triune God, he argues that the essential feature of human hypostasis or subject is its intentionality towards communion based on the latter's certain conformity with God, who is perfect communion of Three perfect Subjects totally open to one another in a perfect communion between them. Probably inspired by the etymology of Romanian word 'cuvant' (word) (from the Latin con+ventus=coming together) he pictures this conformity between the divine Subject and human subject as intentionality for communion: the second divine Hypostasis is the Word par excellence and the human hypostases are words in the image of the divine Word who through Incarnation clothed the divine intentionality towards communion in the human intentionality towards communion.¹¹⁷ Staniloae's insistence on communion is due to the fact that he considers that only communion, as mystery of love, can really keep in balance the distinction of hypostases with the unity of being: "The Subject is subject only in communion with other subjects."¹¹⁸ Bulgakov's theology challenged Staniloae to elaborate a person-nature synthesis which eventually comes down to this affirmation: the subject, the person is meant for communion and nature offers the means of the communion. The triune God is perfect love because He is perfect communion of divine persons; true eternal love cannot exist outside communion, therefore love cannot be but personal. On the other side I consider that Staniloae's critique on Bulgakov is quite harsh in certain points.

For instance I think that Staniloae actually misread or misunderstood Bulgakov's antinomy 'Absolute-Relative' since he seems to take the word 'relative' as referring to a certain relativism whilst Bulgakov himself explains in his *Lamb of God* that it is the idea of relation between God and creation he has in mind trying a reinterpretation of the Palamite essence-energies distinction.¹¹⁹ Consequently a consistent part of Staniloae's argument crumbles.

I.3.2. Dumitru Staniloae and Vladimir Lossky

Lossky is one of the contemporary theologians which Staniloae appreciated and cherished very much. The patristic sources they used are pretty much the same whether we are talking about St Basil, St Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius, St Maximus the Confessor, St John Damascene, or St Gregory Palamas. What brings them together is their concern for the

¹¹⁷ *Restoration*, 120.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 75.

¹¹⁹ LG, 121-22.

existential character of humans' experience of God which is not merely intellectual, but pertains to the whole human being. Staniloae considers that Lossky's contribution to the development and progress of contemporary Orthodox theology through his emphasis of the distinction between apophaticism and negative theology is extremely important.¹²⁰ His efforts to argue the fundamental apophatic character of the Orthodox theology and spirituality are also recognized by Staniloae.¹²¹ Staniloae cites and refers to Lossky extensively in his major works such as *The Experience of God or Orthodox Spirituality*. When it comes to the discussion of the relationship between persons and the common nature within the Trinity, the inner link between the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the mystery of the Incarnation and its soteriological significance or the relation between eternity and time Staniloae practically incorporates Lossky's argument in his own theology and tries to deepen Lossky's insight with the help of patristic exegesis.¹²² Perhaps it is Staniloae's anthropological vision that owes the most to Lossky.¹²³ Although he completely agrees with Lossky's argument concerning the Trinitarian basis of the Church, he nevertheless objects to the latter's ecclesiological theory of the separation of the economy of the Son and the economy of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, Christ being exclusively the principle of unity of nature in the Church, and the Holy Spirit being exclusively the principle of personal diversity¹²⁴ and to his epistemology (radical apophaticism)¹²⁵. Staniloae identifies the cause of these shortcomings in the deficiency of Lossky's theology of personhood at a Christological¹²⁶ and an anthropological level¹²⁷ to keep in balance the unity and distinction of nature and person. Their treatments of apophaticism have a lot in common but Staniloae sees Lossky's position somehow unilateral. Staniloae agrees with Lossky that apophaticism is really present at every level of deification but he considers that the Russian theologian has difficulties to keep apophaticism and cataphaticism in balance, actually minimizing the epistemological relevance of the second.¹²⁸ Closely following St. Gregory Palamas, Staniloae claims that in our experience of God the incognoscibility of God is mystically joined with knowledge.¹²⁹ The more we ascend towards God the more we are

¹²⁰ OS, 234.

¹²¹ Ibidem, 188-195, 232.

¹²² EG1, 71, 78 Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 1978), 27-32, 36.

¹²³ EG2, 96-112.

¹²⁴ TC, 64-71.

¹²⁵ EG1, 123, endnote 8.

¹²⁶ TC, 66, 68.

¹²⁷ EG2, 97-99.

¹²⁸ According to Staniloae, Lossky makes that clear in his MT, 23-43.

¹²⁹ OS, 235.

filled with his knowledge, although the divine being remains always above all knowledge. However it should be pointed out that unlike Palamas, Staniloae argues the experience of a certain apophaticism connected to the negative theology. "We mention that St Gregory sees negative theology as unaccompanied by the feeling of the presence of God, but we think that he doesn't refer to it because it is extremely reduced in intensity."¹³⁰ Staniloae does not blindly follow the Fathers but challenges their vision when he considers it necessary. I consider that Staniloae's reading of Palamas is unclear and speculative in this case. Staniloae suggests that the apophaticism of Lossky is at times so dark that it makes almost impossible to see the difference between different levels of incognoscibility of God according to every stage of spiritual ascension. The cause would be that he didn't fully integrate the Palamite essence-energy distinction into his epistemology addressing the unknowability of God only in general terms.¹³¹ It seems that Lossky is focused more on the inaccessibility of the divine nature at the expense of the manifestation of the divine personal reality. In reply Staniloae says that even the fact that we are aware that the divine essence is above any knowledge is something positive about God. Staniloae writes:

Lossky is correct when he says that apophaticism is present on all the steps of the spiritual ascent. But sometimes he gives the impression that he accentuates the incomprehensibility of God so much that he almost excludes the other side of certain types of knowledge, even though, on the other hand, he lets it understood that he does not in essence disdain a knowledge of God through experience, but only conceptual knowledge. But if everywhere we are able to have something positive from God, then we are no longer able to speak of a 'total, absolute incomprehensibility', as he expresses it at other times. This comes perhaps from the fact that, as it seems, he is not preoccupied with different steps of apophaticism.¹³²

Staniloae argues that the Fathers, St Gregory Palamas in particular, are making a distinction between different levels or stages of apophatic experience: first there is the negative intellectual theology, the second one is an "intermediate apophaticism experienced in an existential way by our whole being, in a culminating state of prayer, as a feeling in the darkness of the presence of God and a total quietness of the mind."¹³³ Though by negative theology and this intermediate apophaticism the mind touches the abyss which separates

¹³⁰ Ibidem, 238.

¹³¹ Ibidem, 236.

¹³² OS, 235.

¹³³ Ibidem, 237, 242.

its knowledge from God, it is still on the human side, engaging all the human natural faculties. The next step of apophaticism is the one which accompanies the vision of light which is an experience of God going beyond all human powers.¹³⁴ God carries up the mind on the other side of the abyss. This unfathomable vision of the inexhaustible infinite divine light is a supra-conceptual and beyond words experience. Again Staniloae refers to St Gregory Palamas to argue that the union with God is beyond any knowledge, not as a void or absence but as superabundance.¹³⁵

It is true that Staniloae, pretty much like Lossky¹³⁶, defines apophaticism as an existential attitude, as the consciousness that God surpasses everything which can be understood about Him in concepts and words.¹³⁷ However this surpassing does not end up in a total ignorance but opens to the human spirit the gate of the infinite knowledge and love of God. Lossky does not give much appreciation to cataphatic theology either, while Florovsky and Staniloae have a more balanced approach, arguing that apophaticism and cataphaticism are interdependent and even complementary. Also Lossky's radical apophaticism¹³⁸ fosters his attitude toward philosophy which is more radical than the others. He says that "there is no philosophy more or less Christian. Plato is no more Christian than Aristotle. The question of the relations between theology and philosophy has never arisen in East."¹³⁹

To conclude, in Staniloae's analysis of Lossky's theology we can observe that the most significant difference between them concerns their approaches of the relation between nature and person and the stages of apophaticism. Staniloae's debt to Lossky is undeniable. Although he incorporates Lossky's argument of the implication of the uncreated grace in the creative act itself, of human being in particular in his own theological synthesis, Staniloae is not very clear in his description of relation between the divine Spirit and the human spirit within the act of creation. To argue that "the soul is called into existence through a kind of reduplication of the creator Spirit on the created plane"¹⁴⁰ sounds more like Bulgakov than the Fathers. At least in this case Staniloae's speculation is far-fetched while Lossky's perspective remains in line with the Fathers' thought.

¹³⁴ Ibidem, 243.

¹³⁵ Ibidem, 236.

¹³⁶ MT, 34, 37-38.

¹³⁷ OS, 230.

¹³⁸ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *George Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 239.

¹³⁹ MT, 44.

¹⁴⁰ EG2, 68.

I.4. Dumitru Staniloae and dialectical theology

Becoming aware of the traps of the dialogue between theology and philosophy Staniloae would avoid compromising the epistemological barriers striving to keep the distinction between the theological and the philosophical approach. In *Restoration* Staniloae is rather prudent trying to nuance and improve his conversational method which he had initially developed throughout his numerous articles and contributions in ecclesiastical or secular newspaper and periodicals, through contextualization.

It must be said right from the start that Staniloae's engagement with dialectical theology takes place within the context of his argumentation of the possibility, reality and meaning of the Christian union between the human being and God. He argues that the Orthodox doctrine of deification, of the mystery of union with God grounded in Revelation, avoids the extreme of 'mystical identity', specific to any form of religious or philosophical pantheism, and that of an irreducible separation between God and human being advocated by the dialectical theologians. Appealing to the Athanasian theology of creation *ex nihilo* as expression of God's will and the Palamite doctrine, he holds the uncreated-created ontological distinction and the mystical yet real, intimate and permanent-active presence of God within his creation through his divine operations (Acts 17).

He also identifies some inner contradictions within the dialectical theology in which the affirmation of the word of God as the exclusive means of Revelation raises serious problems to those who defend the existence of a real spirituality based on this theology. If Brunner makes a distinction between the word of Revelation which indicates the Person of God as its source and the abstract pure idea which does not say anything about its source, W. Schmidt tends to simply identify them, stripping the word of revelation from any spiritual significance and power and defining faith exclusively as an act of pure intellectual and abstract knowledge. But how the Apostles could know that Christ who was speaking to them was not simply a human person but a divine one, Staniloae asks. Karl Heim has to rely on the presence and the action of the Holy Spirit for an answer and by doing that he basically confirms the theory that the function of the word in revelation is to prevent any contact or communication between God and humanity. For Staniloae the union with God is the core of the Christian mysticism of love. Revelation is for Staniloae not only strictly a message but a Theophany. In time Staniloae's interest in dialectical theology became much

nuanced oscillating between a general approach and emphasis to the particular. If initially he was impressed by the dialectical theology which made him to see God as a living, Personal Supreme Being somehow resonating with the theology of the Fathers, St. Palamas's in particular, disappointed by the limitations the absolute transcendence imposes to God-human being relationship, he would soon reconsider his position. Although in dialectical theology God was seen as a living and personal Supreme Being, he remained a distant God, separated from the corrupted humanity and the world. Later on after realizing the influence Protestant kenotic theories (tainted by German idealism) had on Bulgakov's Christology, he analyzed them to unveil their strong and weak points. From this point of view Staniloae's *Restoration* is an attempt to identify and analyze the sources of sophiological theory in order to delimitate them from the Orthodox biblical and patristic teachings on Christology. Again his approach parallels those of Florovsky¹⁴¹ and Lossky¹⁴² on sophiology. Lossky's critique of Bulgakov's sophiology is much more harsh and direct than Florovsky's. For example Lossky argues that Bulgakov's Triadology in which 'the nature is given in the character of a common revelation of the persons' is as dangerous as Origenist religious philosophy.¹⁴³ If Karl Rahner argues that "Barth and Brunner fully accepted the Christological dogma of the ancient Church"¹⁴⁴, Staniloae appreciates them for sustaining and advocating the patristic doctrine of enhypostasis¹⁴⁵, a doctrine which keeps in balance the real historicity and superhistoricity of Christ, despite the tendency of their colleagues such as J.W. von Schmidt-Japing or P. Althaus to deny or minimize the significance of the historical reality of the Incarnation of the Logos. In the case of 'Existenzphilosophie' with its turn to the object and its quest for the human being's transcendence, Staniloae prefers to look first at the way it had been approached by certain Protestant theologians such as Ewald Burger in his *Der Lebendige Christus* (The Living Christ) (1934) and built his own argument in conjunction with it. Fr Gogarten and Karl Heim are considered by Staniloae less individualistic in their theological thought than their colleagues.

¹⁴¹ Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood", in *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing, 1976), 43-81.

¹⁴² Vladimir Lossky, *Spor o Sofii: 'Dokladnaia Zapiska' prot. S. Bulgakova I smyl ukaza Moskovskoj Patriarkhii* (Paris: Brotherhood of St Photius, 1936) (The Controversy concerning Sophia) contains Lossky's reports on Bulgakov's theology which had been the primary source of the ukaz of Metropolitan Sergii Stragorodskii of Moscow (1867-1943) and Patriarch from 1943 till 1944 which condemned the Bulgakov's sophiological Christology as presented in *The Lamb of God* (1933)

¹⁴³ MT, 62.

¹⁴⁴ *Encyclopedia of Theology. A concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Karl Rahner (ed.) (Mumbai: St. Pauls 1975), 763.

¹⁴⁵ *Restoration*, 138, footnote 1.

Staniloae's approach on Barth's theology has evolved in a very surprising way: from hope to restraint. Staniloae positively appreciates Barth's firm position concerning the dual nature of Christ. Staniloae even uses Barth's affirmation of Jesus Christ as being simultaneously the subject and object of Revelation as a support for his own argumentation of hypostatical union in Christ. He would distance himself from Barth's dismissal of natural theology (whose interest was to safeguard the separation between God and nature) in which Staniloae saw a negation of the graced nature of reality. In this context it is quite obvious why Staniloae started his Dogmatic Theology with the treatment of Revelation. He wanted to show that the Palamite essence-energies distinction and the Maximian Logos-logoi theory could provide a balanced approach to God-man-world relationship in which epistemology is not separated from ontology. Staniloae strongly disagrees with Barth's extreme position on Revelation seen exclusively as an intertrinitarian action which seems to deny any role to history and the human being, which through the fall has totally and irreversibly compromised the image of God within him. Staniloae even argues that Barth and his colleagues developed their theory of *diastasis*, fearing pelagianism and ended up diluting the significance of Revelation by reducing it to the cold words of an inaccessible God, and separated from God's love and operations. Even Martin Buber saw things in a similar way regarding Barth's theory: "It is not permissible to say that God is the 'Wholly Other' without God also being recognized, at the same time, as the 'Wholly Near', the intimate."¹⁴⁶ It is exactly why Florovsky was also disappointed by the new dialectical theology which although was intended as a solution to the crisis of German idealism returned to the essential crisis of the Reformation. Barth was reluctant towards the concept of theosis. Staniloae also reacts against Barth's pessimistic vision of history reiterated by Helmut Thielicke for whom the world and the history are totally corrupted by human selfishness (*Selbstseinvollen*). On the other hand he appreciates Gogarten and Brunner who consider history the medium of Revelation's propagation. Despite his turn from dialectical to dogmatic theology, eternity and time remain two radically opposed worlds for Barth; although he tries to introduce revelation in history he maintains a dialectical relationship between God and humanity. However Gogarten argues that only human existence is dialectical; there is only the dialectic of creature within history. Therefore theology cannot say anything about God without also saying something about the human being. He stresses the living reality of history and creation based on 'I-thou'

¹⁴⁶ Keneth Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), footnote 102, 85.

relationship.¹⁴⁷ If initially Gogarten, Brunner or Bultmann sustained Barth's thesis that revelation and faith transcend any historical knowledge and religious experience, they would all agree later on, distancing themselves from Barth, that the dialectical character of theology is based on the human existence and not on revelation. I think that Staniloae wrote the chapter on Eternity and Time in his *Neo-Patristic Dogmatic*, having Barth and his colleagues in mind. In his *Orthodox Spirituality* Staniloae refers to Gogarten, Brunner and Heim because they seem to be less individualistic and rationalistic than Barth. Returning to Barth, Staniloae appreciates positively in his Christology the emphasis of the central place that the Incarnation of the Logos holds in revelation. Another strong point of Barth's Christology is the affirmation of the necessity of the Incarnation of the Logos from a Virgin, even if it is for purely Christological reasons, separating Mariology from the mystery of Incarnation. But Mary is at the same time the Mother of God and (with her full humanity) one of us. The mystery of revelation would not have been disclosed without her, she is fully part of that mystery, and only through her we have access to it. Fearing that he would have to accept Mary as mediatrix or co-redemptrix, Barth separates Mariology from Christology¹⁴⁸, the Virgin birth from the Virgin, sacrificing her on the altar of the absolute divine transcendence. Moreover Barth as Androutsos considers Christ's sinlessness as a direct consequence of the hypostatical union. Staniloae considers that Barth's supertemporal eschatology as a reality parallel and opposed to time, is also problematic because it radically diminishes the role of history and the world in the salvation of human being. For Staniloae the Christ of the dialectical theology remains a Christ of words, rather than one "who loving the Father through the Holy Spirit communicates the love of the Holy Trinity to believers"¹⁴⁹. Unfortunately this negative impression determined Staniloae to rather avoid Barth, although he made some important references to him.

I.5. Dumitru Staniloae and Philosophy

Always sensitive to problems of the present, Staniloae has never restricted himself to the patristic tradition. He unpacked his theological thought using new ideas and concepts specific to the modern times. The result was a certain predilection for profound philosophical analysis and commentaries which one could find first of all in his epistemological conception. His discussion of the philosophical notions, principles,

¹⁴⁷ *Encyclopaedia of Theology*, 346-47.

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Louth, *Mary and the Mystery of Incarnation* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1977), 22-23.

¹⁴⁹ HTE, viii.

categories, conceptions and systems are circumscribed by his effort to perceive the dynamics of philosophical approach on the relation between the immanent and the transcendent in order to open channels of dialogue between theology and the secular modern culture. Another reason was the complex, yet necessary, relationship between theology and philosophy in contemporary culture which the Orthodox theologians could not deny or ignore but only try to reconsider it in the light of the neo-patristic vision.

I.5.1. Dumitru Staniloae and Western Philosophy

It is important to mention from the beginning that Staniloae has always been faithful to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, considering the authority of the Fathers almost equal to that of the Scriptures in his dialogue with philosophy, whether he discusses the different aspects of Neo-platonism, German existentialism or French personalism of the twentieth century. His method is actually quite close if not identical to the one the Fathers used in their time, especially St Maximus the Confessor: he is open to the thought of other theologians, philosophers, scholars or scientists, regardless of the period they lived in, retaining what is valuable and synthesizing it in his own theological reflection, and avoiding what is not compatible with the teaching of faith of the Church. For example he considers Lavelle's definition of subject as being only "the mode of appropriation and autonomous activation of a general power of nature without bringing a new entity from outside the nature"¹⁵⁰ echoing the Maximian dyothelite theological insight "willing and willing in a certain way are not the same thing"¹⁵¹ but he does not agree with the French philosopher's rather pantheistic conception, who says that the ultimate reality is an eternal and indivisible Act i.e. the same indivisible divine essence acting in all subjects without distinguishing between the divine and human nature.¹⁵² The Act of divinity is not the same with the Act of human nature.¹⁵³ In other cases he only suggests parallels, analogies or comparisons.

We consider here Staniloae's comparison between the divine revelation as vision of God and the artistic or philosophical human inspiration. Speaking about the act of revelation as vision of God Staniloae refers to St Gregory Palamas' argument (who based on

¹⁵⁰ Louis Lavelle, *De l'Acte* (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1937), 82, 86 Cf. *Restoration*, 125-6.

¹⁵¹ *Opuscula theologica et polemica ad Marinum*, PG 91, 44.

¹⁵² *Restoration*, 126.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*.

Pseudo-Areopagite, argues that even angels are molded by the divine spiritual patterns), about the reality of spiritual patterns, the impressions imprinted by one spirit on another, the former actually shaping the latter as the Holy Spirit imprinted Himself in the intellect of the prophets. He compares the religious experience of discernment of these 'spiritual patterns' with Edmund Husserl's *Wesenschau* (intuition of essences) which is more properly applied to poets and philosophers. While the inspired artist or philosopher discerns the quintessence of something or someone through sensible forms, the instrument of Revelation discerns it in a formless manner, striving himself to convey the content of what had been revealed to him in forms afterwards.¹⁵⁴ Unlike the artist or the philosopher the instrument of revelation is himself molded by the ethical force of the typos, changing his way of thinking and living.¹⁵⁵ Reflecting on the relation between the symbol, the human spirit's act of transcendence and the symbolic character of the world, Staniloae refers to Karl Jaspers's existentialist philosophy who clarifies some essential aspects of the realm of symbols, distinguishing between two kinds of symbols: one is interpreted and the other is intuited. Jaspers makes a distinction between the 'Deutbare Symbolik' and 'Schaubare Symbolik', the latter concerning exclusively transcendence.¹⁵⁶ The symbol which Schaubare Symbolik deals with is called by Jaspers *cipher*. The cipher is the symbol through which transcendence is contemplated. The cipher is the means of experiencing transcendence. Any phenomenon or thing of the world can be a cipher of transcendence but in that case that certain thing or phenomenon is no longer seen in its causal relations but in its depth, in its mystery as a locus of presence of transcendence. A thing which becomes a cipher of transcendence (*Chiffre der Transzendenz*) is above natural determinism, and is no longer a natural symbol, but becomes a metaphysical symbol.¹⁵⁷ The whole world can be a cipher of transcendence. For the Fathers God is absolute transcendence yet the world appears as a theophany; the world is transparent to divine transcendence, the divine logoi irradiate from all things of the world. For Staniloae, Jaspers' symbolic vision of the world is very close to the religious symbolic vision of the world which culminates in the symbolic realism of Orthodoxy masterly embodied in the Palamite doctrine of the divine uncreated energies and the Maximian doctrine of logoi (Logos-logoi-logikoi). That human being's quest for the discovery of symbolic character of the world brings theology and philosophy closer. Staniloae strongly holds that theology and

¹⁵⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, "Revelation through Acts, Words and Images", in TC, 143.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 143.

¹⁵⁶ K. Jaspers, *Transzendenz*, 146 Cf. Staniloae, *O teologie a icoanei/Studii*, (Bucharest: Anastasia, 2005), 117.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 146.

philosophy have many convergent aspects and he is working hard to prove it: what it is affirmed intuitively and in general terms by the Fathers of the Church based on revelation is confirmed and further unfolded by the later philosophical development. He agrees with von Balthasar who refers to the Chalcedonian formula as a visionary one and considers the Maximian intuition on the distinction between hypostasis and nature (which goes beyond Greek philosophy which did not know anything except nature) a step forward in unveiling the truth behind that formula. Philosophy has gradually realized the distinction between the order of essence and the order of existence and could not avoid the problem of person as a distinct reality from being as a necessary concrete form of the spiritual being. After philosophy identified the subject with conscience the modern existentialist and personalist philosophy rediscover the person as ontological reality distinct from the being and as a concretization of being.¹⁵⁸

For Staniloae the whole history of philosophy is a quest for discovering the reality of person as the necessary instantiation of being. The being cannot really exist except in person. By emphasizing the importance of divine Revelation in the relation between theology and philosophy Staniloae's vision is close to that of Florovsky.¹⁵⁹ There are many similarities and some differences between them. They both are restless apologists of the Christian faith. They both emphasize the central role of Revelation as the spiritual basis for our knowledge of God. Moreover Florovsky's reluctance towards Symbolic Books, seen as the outcome of a Latinizing process of Orthodox theology, is paralleled by Staniloae's approach who scarcely mentions them in his dogmatic theology. If initially, as a reaction to philosophical rationalism, Florovsky sustained a categorical opposition between faith and knowledge, he would later reconsider his position arguing that Christian dogmas, seen in the light of patristic exegesis and reflection are in fact the expression of the only true 'philosophia perennis'. Staniloae on the other hand tried to show that Philokalic spirituality and theology is the highest expression of an authentic Christian philosophy, 'the philosophy of the Holy Spirit' as Florovsky names it. The way theologians deal with the theology-philosophy relationship is perhaps one of the most sensitive and challenging issues of modern theology. Staniloae has always addressed the relation between theology and culture, theology and history, theology and philosophy, theology and the arts, theology and phenomenology, theology and psychology or theology and science in terms of a creative

¹⁵⁸ *Restoration*, 121-22.

¹⁵⁹ George Florovsky, "Revelation, Philosophy, and Theology" (1931), in *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont: Nordland, 1976), 21-42.

tension. To use the language of Florovsky, for Staniloae the Christianization not only of Hellenism but of the whole philosophy is a permanent task of the theologian and it should never stop in order to avoid a Hellenization of Christianity. The most important aspect that distinguishes the revelation from mythology is the firm moral ground the former provides for humanity and its ethical consequences for society. This is the main aspect of Staniloae's critique of Lucian Blaga's philosophy.

I.5.2. Dumitru Staniloae and Lucian Blaga

We will focus on Blaga because Staniloae's evaluation of his philosophical system could be considered somehow paradigmatic for the latter's involvement with contemporary Philosophy. Staniloae objected to Blaga's negation of Revelation, his contestation of divinity of Jesus Christ and his work of salvation replaced with a 'messianic myth' or to Blaga's definition of religion as a product of the human spirit.¹⁶⁰ References to philosophy pervade all of Staniloae's work. The Staniloae - Blaga polemic was not the only such case in the Romanian interwar society within the context of the traditionalism-modernism dispute which divided the Romanian intelligentsia at that time. On the one hand there was the majority group led by Nichifor Crainic from 'Gandirea' review, which supported traditional values whilst emphasizing the central role of Orthodoxy in the Romanian cultural and social life. On the other hand there was Eugen Lovinescu and his group from 'Sburatorul' review who declared themselves supporters of modernism.¹⁶¹ However, the Staniloae - Blaga dispute was by far the most notorious and radical one. From a certain perspective the Staniloae - Blaga polemic parallels the Florovsky - Bulgakov polemic. Revelation is the only one which separates contemplations from speculations, whether there are theological or philosophical. Both Staniloae and Florovsky were concerned with the negative impact their opponents' thought would have inside and outside the Church. Staniloae was aware of the dispute between Florovsky and Bulgakov as one could see from Staniloae's own critique on Bulgakov's sophianic iconology and the few references to Florovsky in his *Restoration*. Staniloae has two central objections to Blaga's philosophy: the latter's negation of revelation through its replacements with style and the relativization of the idea of divinity reduced to the level of a philosophical myth. Although they both were members of the same 'Gandirea' movement alongside Nichifor Crainic and the philosopher Ioan Petrovici,

¹⁶⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, *Poziția d-lui Lucian Blaga față de creștinism și ortodoxie*, (Bucharest: Paideia, 1997), 37, 135-6, 140-5, 149.

¹⁶¹ Emil Pinteia, *Gandirea* (Antologie), (Cluj: Dacia, 1992).

sharing the same ideals, Blaga left the group to found the 'Saeculum' Review in 1944. Actually the split came after the publication of Staniloae's criticism on Blaga's position on Christianity and Orthodoxy and marked a new step in the development of modernism as an alternative to traditionalism in modern Romanian culture. Blaga's philosophical system which aimed to the elaboration of a 'stylistic matrix of Romanian spirituality and culture based on the concepts of 'the Great Anonymous', 'transcendent censorship' or 'divine differentials' established him as the most important Romanian philosopher of the immanent-transcendent boundary.¹⁶² It is exactly the perception of this boundary Staniloae looked at in the philosophy of Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger or Grisebach. The polemic between Staniloae and Blaga has raised many critical issues regarding the nature of the relationship between theology and philosophy in Romanian culture. Is there any place for dialogue between them without compromising their irreducible features? One as theologian was also concerned with philosophy and the other, as philosopher, with theology and religion. What determined Staniloae's reaction was his impression that Blaga's metaphysics dangerously expanded by the annexation of area of theology and religion. In fact one might say that he ended up falling in the trap of the philosopher who 'enchanted' by the spell of its own system would break the epistemological barrier. Staniloae in his attempt to limit the field of philosophy went beyond the boundary of theology. Actually Blaga warns his readers that he approaches the issue of Religion and Spirit within the boundaries of a philosophy of religion:

A work in the field of philosophy of religion is not necessary the work of a philosopher but this must be done within and with the means of philosophy. It can also be the work of a theologian but not with the means of theology. When a theologian addresses religious phenomena he starts from the thesis that a certain religion is superior to the others.¹⁶³

Since in Blaga's case his philosophy of religion is a corollary of his metaphysics and epistemology, he feels free to reflect on religion within the boundaries of his own philosophical system. In the same way, Staniloae as a theologian feels justified to consider Christianity a special religion, "the only one dominated by the concern for a spiritual increase up to the last level of the divine Revelation."¹⁶⁴ However supporting the claim raised by Staniloae that Blaga's philosophy is religious but anti-Christian, would mean to

¹⁶² Michael S. Jones, *Metaphysics of Religion: Lucian Blaga and Contemporary Philosophy* (USA: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 32, 62, 68, 90, 130.

¹⁶³ Lucian Blaga, *Religion and Spirit* in Works, X (Bucharest: Minerva, 1987), 342.

¹⁶⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, *Pozitia Domnului Lucian Blaga fata de Crestinism si Ortodoxie* (Bucharest, 1993), 79-80.

compromise the logic and style specific to Blaga's philosophy of religion. Anti-Christian philosophies are based on the same logic as the Christian ones, yet they are reversed. Maybe the truth is somewhere in the middle: Staniloae reacted against Blaga's frequent incursions in the field of theology with the tools of the philosopher. The philosopher could do that as long he does not compromise the theological importance of the theologoumena. The Philosopher's meditation on revelation could prove to be beneficial for theology as long as he does not try to substitute revelation with his own vision. And even dogma itself could be reconsidered in philosophical terms, from a philosophical perspective, without compromising the truth of faith. In return any philosophical argument is open to theology as long as its primary meanings are not compromised. For instance, had 'the Great Anonymous' remained strictly a matter of metaphysics, it would have been considered an apophatic name of Being specific to the domain of ontology. Once Blaga tried to pass it, with its metaphysical content, to the space of theology, Staniloae responded. Outside its metaphysical context and not accepted by theology 'the Great Anonymous' was reduced at the level of poetic myth. But for Blaga the concept of 'the Great Anonymous' differs from and at same time is similar to the Christian conception of God. This is his way of avoiding the modernism-traditionalism dilemma. On the other hand Blaga's monotheism which seems to keep him close to Christianity is scarcely grounded in Revelation, being actually justified by the need of 'the Great Anonymous', who is at the same time 'the Great Censor', to avoid any kind of filiation. 'The Great Anonymous' is feeling guilty of his fear of filiation, of irremediable limitation of the human being's knowledge and overall of the imperfect state of his own creation. The revelatory moments are actually seen as dissimulative actions, the expressions of the divinity's precautionary measures to remain absolutely inaccessible to humans. Despite this mythological orientation, the natural philosophy of Blaga actually opens the way for theology, by arguing that God remains hidden even in his revelation. An apophatic sensitivity and even a sense of human humility in front of the greatness of God which is converted in a metaphysical selfishness emerge from Blaga's epistemology and metaphysics. Blaga's philosophy is existential because it emphasizes the permanent tension between the Creation and creation which, in order to preserve the mystery, he enshrouds it in poetry. He was no stranger to the Barthian notion of diastasis or the Sophianic perspective in philosophy and arts. Moreover one could argue that his conception of 'the Great Anonymous' is an attempt to extend the Heideggerian concept of 'Sorge' from Dasein to Deus. It seems that his vision is rather against a fundamentalist theology which pretends to know and hold all the truth. The knowledge based on faith

could never exhaust the revelation of the infinite. It all depends on the hermeneutical key: theological, philosophical or poetical. Although Staniloae succeeds in grasping Blaga's thought in its own philosophical terms, he evaluates it strictly from a theological perspective. After all Blaga's philosophical system cannot be equated with a moral system, it is not even presented by the author within an ethical frame. Staniloae's critique of Blaga's philosophy is problematic if we consider the importance of the philosophical schemes and argumentation in Staniloae's thought, especially in his epistemology in which he argues the value of natural theology. Being aware of natural theology's need for philosophical notions and concepts it is hard to understand why Staniloae avoided Blaga's attempt to build certain metaphysical bridges between philosophy and natural theology in the Romanian culture. He characterized the latter's vision as "a new type of agnosticism focused on mystery and the creative sense of knowledge"¹⁶⁵ and tried to point out "the differences between metaphysics and religion"¹⁶⁶. Staniloae imposed his point of view but his demolition of Blaga's philosophy narrowed the field of modern Romanian theology by its alienation from its modern Romanian cultural and philosophical context and refused the former's access to the philosophical material that it needed. In reality Blaga's philosophical perspective on knowledge and culture has much to offer. Like the theologians he was keen on preserving the mystery, although he would give to it a personal philosophical interpretation. He names divinity 'The Great Anonymous' precisely to point out the limits of all methods of rational knowledge although he seems to lean towards an extreme irrationalism which encloses the divinity and human creature within their own separate spheres. This concept of 'the Great Anonymous' "always concerned to preserve its central place, to censure himself, being afraid from the spontaneity of his own thought in any creational act, reproducing himself or thinking only in forms the divine differentials to prevent its own anarchic multiplication or being afraid that the human being might grasp or decipher his mysteries"¹⁶⁷ is the expression of a very pessimistic vision of life and existence. Unwilling to disturb the divinity, Blaga leaves the absolute inaccessible transcendence covered in the mystery unlike Staniloae, who boldly argues a permanent reciprocity and 'unity between the rational and the mystery in both God and creation'¹⁶⁸ by affirming that God is the mystery which explains all mysteries. In Blaga's philosophy the mystery has rather negative connotations hiding an imperfect frustrated God and putting pressure on

¹⁶⁵ Dumitru Staniloae, op.cit., 29.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem, 76.

¹⁶⁷ Lucian Blaga, *Diferentialele Divine* (Bucharest: Fundatia pentru literatura si arta "Carol II", 1940), 29-155.

¹⁶⁸ HTE, 1, 6.

the anxious helpless human creature animated only by a promethean attitude towards divinity. It is also true that is quite difficult to discern, in Blaga's rather pantheistic cosmology, arguments for the value of love or person, for a vertical dimension of human life and culture opened to divine transcendence. His philosophical discourse is motivated by esthetical and stylistic reasons. Eventually Staniloae realized that with respect to Blaga's thought, "the philosophy of Blaga is a poem of a poetic soul aiming to unfold particularly the poetic creation."¹⁶⁹ Blaga's awe in front of the cosmos and the human creation takes the form of poetry and is conveyed in metaphors. As a result of the convergence of the metaphysics of knowledge and the metaphysics of mystery Blaga's doctrine of transcendence seems to aim only to a rehabilitation of subject, of the individual, placing its object on a secondary plane. Doubting the validity of and disappointed by Blaga's highly speculative ontological perspective based on a mythological conception in which the divinity looks more like Zeus and the human being like Prometheus, Staniloae would turn his attention on Nicolai Hartmann's 'critical ontology' and Heidegger's 'fundamental ontology'. The main reason behind this was the impact Blaga's cultural immanentism and moral relativism could have on the young generation. But the question remains: Is there any possibility to find a metaphysical link between these two thinkers considering the convergent epistemological vocations of the philosopher and the theologian? Considering the rationality of the world, a possible answer would be to find a correspondence between the natural contemplation based on the rational, deductive and symbolic method and 'natural metaphysics', since the natural world is the symbol of the supernatural world. How close are the natural revelation of God through the world and human being in the history and the 'natural metaphysics'? Could creativity and imagination provide a common ground? It is a pity that they did not try to reconcile their positions: the absolute transcendence and the revealed transcendence, although they found themselves on the two versants of the same mount: the mystery of God and the mystery of the world. A noble attempt of dialogue which could have been so beneficial for Romanian culture ended up in an unresolved conflict, although Staniloae eventually appreciated in his *Reflections on the Spirituality of the Romanian People*¹⁷⁰ the value of Blaga's philosophy of culture for whom the 'Mioritic space' remains the locus of cosmic encounter between transcendence and immanence and of the tension between Creator and creation. While the necessity of Staniloae's affirmation of the ontological dimension of the divine-human communion as an

¹⁶⁹ Staniloae, *Pozitia D-lui Blaga*, 96.

¹⁷⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc, 1992)

alternative to Blaga's cultural immanentism is undeniable, a critical and constructive approach of the relationship between theology and philosophy in the Romanian culture would necessarily include a reappraisal of the Staniloae - Blaga polemic.

I.6. Dumitru Staniloae in the thought of his contemporaries

One of the first, who facilitated to the English reader the discovery of contemporary Romanian Orthodoxy, was the Anglican theologian Fr Donald Allchin. In his introduction to a supplement of Sobornost dedicated to Romanian theology and spirituality¹⁷¹ Fr Allchin presents the work of Staniloae as deeply grounded in traditional Orthodox thought, yet sensitive to the concerns of West and the "latest developments of the modern thought".¹⁷² According to Allchin, Staniloae succeeds to be fully conversant with personalist and existential philosophy and theology yet remaining faithful to the teaching of Church as expressed in work of Fathers such as St. Maximus the Confessor or St. Gregory Palamas.¹⁷³ Thus Fr Allchin does not simply identify the two Church Fathers who influenced Fr Staniloae more than anyone else, but argues that in the Staniloae's theological thought tradition and modernity are actually complementary, not opposed to one another. He seems to be the first one who senses in Staniloae's deep study and reflection the preoccupation to elaborate a neo-patristic synthesis.

Fr Allchin also remarks a three-step analogical approach 'from below' in Fr Staniloae's treatment of the nature of the God-human being dialogue. From the analysis of dialogue and relationships between humans in ordinary life, he passes to the superior plane of the spiritual dialogue between God and the human being, a dialogue which reaches its heights in the union of God and his created image in Christ, the God incarnated. Fr Allchin discerns here an interesting perspective on two sensitive and difficult issues on the ecumenical agenda: freedom and necessity and nature and grace.¹⁷⁴ More than this, Fr Allchin seems to suggest that in Fr. Staniloae's theological vision, the dialogue between God and human being, seen as a living encounter with the living God is not only an essential aspect of the deification of humankind and the world but a paradigm for a fruitful dialogue among the Churches and Christians. Another important feature of Fr Staniloae's

¹⁷¹ A.M. Allchin (ed.), *The Tradition of Life: Romanian Essays in Spirituality and Theology* (SSTS 2; Oxford: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1971), 6-9.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, 6.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

writing is in Fr Allchin's opinion its "serene and smiling" optimism, an optimism of grace which is the expression of the deepest and unshaken belief in the victory of the cross in the world.¹⁷⁵ Fr Allchin's keen analysis of Fr Staniloae's life and work would later unveil many other interesting aspects which could be considered important pieces of an authentic theological profile of Fr Staniloae. According to Allchin, Staniloae's writings fall into three main interrelated areas. There was the work in the field of systematic and dogmatic theology, the work in the area of spirituality and there were the writings on the dialogue between faith and contemporary culture.

Overall I find Fr Allchin's methodological and thematic considerations on Fr. Staniloae's theology substantial and insightful. His presentation of the work of Fr. Staniloae as a successful attempt to overcome the gap between theology and spirituality by keeping in balance the tradition and modernity provides us an interesting picture of some of the main features of Staniloae's theological thought.

However although I agree with Fr Allchin in that Staniloae could be too critical of certain aspects of Western theology, I cannot completely share his opinion concerning Staniloae's readiness to learn and receive from the traditions of Western Christianity or the inclusiveness of the latter's vision. Another thing which I find quite hard to grapple with, is the romantic overemphasis of a special prophetic mission of the Romanian people in a European Christian context, a sort of mystical nationalism which Staniloae strongly advocates.

Another important figure of the last century Orthodox theology that showed a real interest in Fr Staniloae's work is Fr John Meyendorff. First Fr Meyendorff appreciates the creative potential of Staniloae's theological method in unveiling new expressions of the unchanged truth of faith.¹⁷⁶ Rooted in the thought of the Greek Fathers whilst keeping an eye on the concerns of contemporary Christian thought, his theological synthesis is described by Meyendorff as profound and dynamic. Fr Meyendorff remarks the central place of the Holy Trinity in Staniloae's teaching on the Church or in his reflections on anthropology. On the other hand Meyendorff argues that Staniloae's vision of the Incarnation as the basis of the ultimate and total transfiguration of the cosmos is influenced by St Maximus' doctrine of the creative Logos. Then he considers Staniloae's theology deeply steeped in the soteriology of the Greek Fathers and focused on the multiple dimensions of the divine-human communion and the cosmic transfiguration as a

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁶ Foreword to *Theology and the Church*, Robert Barringer (trans.) (Crestwood, NY: STS Press, 1980), 7.

reaction to Western concepts shaped during Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Meyendorff also argues that the works *The Life and Teaching of St Gregory Palamas, Jesus Christ or Restoration of Man* or the Romanian translation of *Philokalia* impose Staniloae as a pioneer of the theological and spiritual revival in pre-War Romania and of monastic revival in post-War Romania but also as a fighter against routine scholasticism.¹⁷⁷

Analysing the main aspects of the thought of Fr Staniloae, Fr Andrew Louth considers that the twelve volumes of the Romanian translation of the *Philokalia* which included new texts¹⁷⁸ on top of those originally published in Venice in 1782, alongside new introductions, original insights and commentaries, offer a comprehensive picture of what Fr Staniloae has understood by “the return to the Fathers of the Church”.¹⁷⁹ Taking Staniloae’s theological synthesis as an example, Louth argues that the return to the Fathers in the Holy Spirit is going beyond a merely academic return to the sources since “it is the recovery of an understanding of theology that seeks to set men and women on the road to openness to God and experience of his healing grace.”¹⁸⁰ Fr Louth, with his expertise in Maximian theology, explains how Fr Staniloae has gradually taken the commentary to the level of a theological method as a way of re-thinking the Fathers’ thoughts in the context of modern concerns even if they present their thoughts in an “essentially unsystematic way”¹⁸¹. The Fathers’ spiritual experience and legacy is considered to be “the source of insights into our engagement with God in the world, fostered by the Church and the life of prayer: the commentaries are to help the reader benefit from these insights”¹⁸². For him this is the only viable basis to build on a renewed modern Orthodox theology which needs to find its place

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem, 8-9.

¹⁷⁸ Maciej Bielawsky says that Fr. Dumitru Staniloae’s version of *Philokalia*, a lifetime endeavour, is the one of first translations of this impressive monastic anthology in a modern language in the last century thus becoming accessible to the Church and laymen experts and public at large altogether. Besides the important changes he operated in the chronology of texts and authors included in the Greek version by taking in account the conclusion of the latest critical and academic studies, Fr. Staniloae also added for the first time the work of St. John Klimakos and Dorotheos of Gaza (vol. IX), Saint Barsanuphius and John (vol.X), St. Isaac of Nineveh (vol. XI) and Isaiah the Hermit (vol. XII) using the most recent available critical editions. His important introductions, notes, commentaries and contributions to the original texts are elements of an active and creative style in which he sought to render his translation of *Philokalia* to people. Staniloae speaks of a ‘Romanian *Philokalia*’ considering that many of Romanian spiritual and cultural traditions are in fact profoundly philokalic. However what makes this work unique is a certain ‘spiritual synergy, a perichoresis, a mutual, deep and interior inter-penetration between Fr Dumitru and the *Philokalia*, between his spirit and the philokalic one. See Maciej Bielawsky, “Dumitru Staniloae and His *Philokalia*” in *TMT*, 25-53.

¹⁷⁹ Andrew Louth, “Review Essay: The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae”, in *Modern Theology*, 13:2 April 1997, 254.

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem, 255.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, 257.

¹⁸² Ibidem, 258.

in the present by being spiritual and pastoral at the same time. Louth's critical yet balanced analysis of Staniloae's *magnum opus* brings to the surface some very interesting characteristics of the Romanian theologian's penetrating and multi-layered thought. Comparing *The Experience of God* and Barth's *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Fr Louth notices their different approach on anthropology. Staniloae's is open, insisting in the patristic spirit on the centrality of vocation of man to humanize or personalize the world and to encompass in him the whole universe, a vision originally synthesised in the term macro-anthropos.¹⁸³ In Barth's case there seems to be this tendency, for the sake of preserving an absolute transcendence of God, of almost disconnecting the human being from the sphere of spiritual creatures (angels) and rather tightening the human spirit in its own coats of skin. To avoid an absolute separation between God and creation, spirit and matter, Staniloae has always emphasized in his anthropology the deep connection between angels and humans, the angelic and human worlds. On the other hand, Louth fears that a lack of references in the case of certain terms or patristic citations which Staniloae uses, the incomplete or unavailable quotations could puzzle the translators or the readers. Another objection of Louth is generated by Staniloae's preference for Christ's threefold office as Prophet, Priest and King, an idea which seems to be borrowed from Calvin's *Institutes*¹⁸⁴. He also criticises Staniloae for adopting the Western classification of the separate, fragmented seven sacraments, initially accepted by the Orthodox under the pressure of the West in thirteenth century and reinforced a few centuries later by Dositheos, patriarch of Jerusalem, active missionary in the Romanian Lands, and Peter Moghila, Romanian native and Metropolitan of Kiev, also author of a Confession of Faith, in response to the Protestant expansion (but unjustified from an Orthodox practice's point of view as Louth claims). Fr Louth claims that precisely because of this adoption of the neo-scholastic dogmatic structure Fr Staniloae fails to fully grasp Rahner's original and modern perspective on the same matter.¹⁸⁵ In fact Fr Louth considers that Fr Staniloae was harsh when he suspected an exclusive emphasis of the notion of justification in Western soteriology and ecclesiology which would have narrowed down their horizon by giving priority to the justice and honour of God against his love. The controversial paragraph from Staniloae's Dogmatics where Rahner's notion of Church as the primordial sacrament is described as a "logical consequence of the Roman-Catholic doctrine of grace as created effect of grace of death of Christ, of which Church disposes, which is therefore detachable

¹⁸³ Louth, art. cit, 267.

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem, 267.

¹⁸⁵ Ibidem, 261.

from Christ” seems to be, in Louth’s opinion, rather the biased outcome of a superficial encounter with Western theology.¹⁸⁶ Based on these insights Louth initially concludes that Staniloae’s attitude toward the West is rather negative and quite narrow. Moreover, according to Fr. Louth this structure borrowed from the older Orthodox dogmatic manuals deeply influenced by the Western scholasticism, this “strait-jacket”¹⁸⁷ is not the best suited structure to envelop others of Fr Staniloae’s sacramental teachings, such as the one on creation as cross-imprinted God’s gift for man. The fact that Fr Louth does not come with an alternative, shows that this liberation of Orthodox theology from ‘the Babylonian captivity’ is extremely complex and difficult. Louth appreciates Staniloae’s ability to point out the insufficiency of Western theology. Louth also argues that the contemporary philosophy is an important source of Staniloae’s personalist vision. He finds in modern thought concepts and notions which he uses to crystallize and develop the intuitions of the Fathers.¹⁸⁸ In his dialogue with modern thought Fr Staniloae is not far from the Fathers’ approach *illo tempore*, enriching the traditional Orthodox theological discourse with original insights through a creative re-interpretation. As they borrowed terms or concepts from the culture of their time and impregnated them with Christian content, Fr Staniloae also exerts himself to identify the most relevant aspects of modern thought which converge with and deepen the patristic view. His treatment of the concept of personhood is a good example. The originality comes from his manner of enfolding and developing the insights of the Fathers in a new language and images, more accessible to us.¹⁸⁹ Fr Louth points out a particularity of Staniloae’s epistemology in which apophatic and cathaphatic knowledge of God are intertwined and mutually advancing.¹⁹⁰ This allows him to avoid the extreme of radical apophaticism. Actually his apophaticism in all three stages is experiential and personal: from the awareness that God’s reality goes beyond human capacity and the ‘pressure’ of this sense of God which grows in us as we become more open to it through ascetic purification and activation of human gnoseological abilities: sensibility, sensitivity and intuition to a sense of overwhelming intimate mystical and personal presence of God which the Fathers call ‘union beyond knowledge’. Fr Staniloae does not hesitate to speak about the knowledge of God in our daily life, or as Fr Louth puts it, the way “we experience God’s care and guidance in joyful circumstances, in the demands others makes on us, in the

¹⁸⁶ Ibidem, 261.

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem, 259.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem, 261-2.

¹⁸⁹ Fr. John Bria says: “Staniloae remains a great enabler of the communication and reception of Orthodoxy in the contemporary Church and world.” in “The Creative Vision of D. Staniloae. An Introduction to His Theological Thought”, *Ecumenical Review* 33, 1/1981, p. 59.

¹⁹⁰ Louth, art. cit., p. 263.

qualms of conscience when we do wrong”,¹⁹¹ drawing us more and more towards Him if we want to. Fr. Louth’ introduction to the Staniloae’s third volume of *Experience of God*, which is in fact an exposition of Staniloae’s Christology, completes Louth’s previous analysis of the dogmatic synthesis of the Romanian theologian. He finds Staniloae’s approach “deeply traditional and Orthodox”¹⁹² yet “challenging and revolutionary”¹⁹³. He remarks that Staniloae uses the same Maximian doctrine of the logoi in his Christological synthesis to keep creation and redemption together after he previously integrated it in his doctrine of creation. He also employed this doctrine of logoi of creation in connection to Karl Rahner’s notion of ‘transcendental Christology’. Louth identifies the patristic sources of Staniloae’s Christology: St Maximus, St Cyril of Alexandria, Leontius of Byzantium, St Nicholas Cabasilas and St Gregory Palamas but he also points out the influence of the thought of Panayotis Nellas, von Balthasar and Rahner. He continues with an analysis of the most important characteristics of Staniloae’s treatment of Christological doctrine: the emphasis of the cosmic dimension of Christology, the engagement with the biblical and historical issues, especially those concerning Christ’s Resurrection, the creative and fruitful reflection on some of the most technical Christological patristic language or his vision of humanism in the light of the mystery of Incarnation.¹⁹⁴ Louth positively appreciates Staniloae’s discussion of the main aspects of Christological dogma: the consequences of the hypostatical union, Christ’s kenosis and deification of His human nature, Christ’s sinlessness and his divinity or the efficacy of Christ’s work. Louth also values Staniloae’s engagement with Western theologians, especially Hans Urs von Balthasar whose theology of Pascal Triduum is developed and corrected by Staniloae based on the deeper understanding of Triduum as reflected by the Orthodox liturgical texts.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand Louth identifies certain traces of Rahner’s reflections from his own *Theological Investigations* in Staniloae’s discussion on Logos’ incarnation although the latter does not make any specific references.¹⁹⁶ From this presentation one can see that Fr Louth does no longer consider Fr. Staniloae’s encounter with Western theology superficial or his attitude towards the West exclusively negative or polemic. In a phrase Louth characterizes Staniloae’s Christological reflections rich¹⁹⁷ and profound, his theology exciting yet demanding¹⁹⁸ and his Orthodoxy

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

¹⁹² EG3, xi.

¹⁹³ Ibidem, xi.

¹⁹⁴ Ibidem, xiv.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem, xii.

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem, xiii.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem, xiv.

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, xv.

“open-minded, rooted in the Tradition but able to take on insights in a thoroughly ecumenical way”¹⁹⁹. Looking at both of Louth’s analysis of Staniloae’s theology we notice a change in approach. Although they are both thorough and balanced, paying much attention to details and nuances of Staniloae’s work, the second one is obviously more positive and favourable than the first. I consider that most of Fr Louth’s remarks and observations in connection to Fr Staniloae are fair and justified and show that the Romanian theologian’s theological synthesis is not perfect, despite its undeniable value. However Louth also says that Staniloae is not by far “marginal, he is not simply a bridge between the East and West, or between Russian and Greek Orthodoxy: he is at the centre of what many would regard as the liveliest and most original movement in modern Orthodox thought”.²⁰⁰ Apart from that I consider that there is still a long way for Romanian Orthodoxy and theology to affirm its distinctiveness in pan-Orthodox context and to become more evident in the eyes of the West. Indeed the discussion concerning the number of sacraments or Christ’s three-fold office is still open and the Western influence on Staniloae is evident in this respect. Fr. Staniloae has borrowed concepts or ideas from theologians and philosophers outside the Orthodox Church as long as these ideas were biblically and patristically grounded or consonant with the patristic vision and Fr. Louth agrees with that. I agree with Fr. Louth’s argument that the Latin designation of seven separate and distinct sacraments adopted also by Staniloae is not fully satisfying because it downplays the importance of other sacramental acts. Moreover their separation is not confirmed, at least in some cases by the present reality of ecclesial life. In the practice of the Orthodox Church the Baptism is never separated from Chrismation, not even at a consecration of a Church when the Church is actually baptized, receiving a name of a feast or a Saint and anointed with Myrrh in the name of the Holy Trinity. The only exception is the reception to Orthodoxy of those Christians belonging to other denominations whose baptism is considered valid. The lack of references mentioned by Louth has also been remarked by the translators of *Orthodox Spirituality*.²⁰¹ Even if Staniloae adopted Calvin’s position on Christ’s three-fold office the way he deals with the subject is totally different from the scholastic one which is based on a sharp distinction between the offices of King, Prophet and High Priest. A possible explanation could be that under the pressure of Communist censorship Fr Staniloae was forced to put the new wine in old bottles and Fr Louth’s analysis shows that is not a viable solution. Despite being too reliant on the structures of the older neo-scholastic Orthodox

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem, xii.

²⁰⁰ Andrew Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae” in TMT, 57.

²⁰¹ OS, p. 24, footnote 8; p. 36, footnote 27; p. 61, footnote 64; p.83, footnote 13; p. 91 footnote 24.

Dogmatics, Louth considers Staniloae's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* "the first attempt to work out in detail" what Florovsky called "neo-patristic" synthesis, work which places him alongside Florovsky, Lossky, Romanides or Yannaras.²⁰² Fr Louth proves a very good knowledge and profound understanding of Fr Staniloae's theology and his essential contribution paves the way for those who want to discover Staniloae's Orthodoxy, especially if we considering his argument regarding the ecumenical dimension of Staniloae's theology. Therefore one must reckon that Fr Louth's presentation and analysis of Fr Staniloae's theological contribution represents indeed a milestone in the reception of the Romanian theologian's work in the West.

Emil Bartos's doctoral research: *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology. An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (1999) carried out under the supervision of Bishop Kallistos Ware (Oxford University) and the Catholic theologian Professor Oliver Davies (now at Kings College of London) is a direct consequence of the rediscovery of the concept of theosis in modern theology within the context of the pressing challenges of secularization. Bartos argues that Fr Staniloae's well-balanced approach on deification is the expression of an original synthesis between St. Athanasius' focus on the participation of man-soul and body, in every stage of deification, St Cyril of Alexandria's integration of sacramental and ecclesiological elements into the ontological aspect of deification, the Cappadocians' emphasis on the detachment from sin-dispassion before the soul's ascent on higher stages towards union with God and the thought of the most creative Fathers of Church, Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. Actually St Maximus's insistence on the twofold relevance of Incarnation of Christ as justification and basis of the transfiguration of the human person and Saint Gregory's highlight of the role of grace-personal uncreated divine energies in this synergistic process shape Fr. Staniloae's theology of theosis.²⁰³ Bartos's thorough analysis of the epistemological, anthropological, Christological and pneumatological aspects of Fr Staniloae's theology of deification is grounded in an extensive bibliography available at that time mainly in Romanian and to which he has full access. He also relies in his study on the introductions, commentaries, scholia, explications and annotations which complete Staniloae's Romanian translation of the Philokalia. However his criticism of innovation and impersonalism against Fr Staniloae raises some problems. Everything starts with Bartos' misunderstanding of the triadology of Cappadocians, Maximus and Palamas by equating the ousia with what is God *in se* and the

²⁰² Ibidem, 69.

²⁰³ Emil Bartos, "The Dynamics of Deification in the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae", in TMT, 208-210.

hypostasis with what is God *ad alios* (in others).²⁰⁴ Thus he relativizes the divine Persons by simply identifying them with their functions, something which compromises dramatically the patristic person-nature synthesis which tries to keep in balance what is common (essence) with what is particular (distinctiveness) in the Holy Trinity. Something similar happens with Bartos' criticism on the Palamite doctrine with its soteriological implications which seems to be built on the same confusion. In the analysis of Fr Staniloae's insights on the Cappadocian Trinitarian theology "the three hypostases do not have a common ousia; they are the divine ousia."²⁰⁵ Bartos seems to miss the distinction between the persons and nature within the Trinity and Staniloae's argument that there is a unity of divine persons distinct from unity of divine essence. Staniloae insists on the existence of an apophaticism of divine Persons distinct from the apophaticism of the common divine ousia. Bartos's persistent suggestion²⁰⁶ that the theology of Fr Staniloae is not biblical enough, by simply neglecting its vigorous and profound patristic foundation, is problematic because we cannot downplay the value of Tradition in relation to Scripture:

Orthodox Theology ought to correctly position its theology of deification in such a way that it can never constitute a danger to those essential Christian doctrines and concepts to which all its advocates adhere unreservedly. This warning is upheld by the Bible, where there is little to justify the over-development of a doctrine that has only indirect biblical support. The lacunas and weaknesses of Staniloae's theology can be seen in his underestimation of the value of biblical texts in sustaining many of his theological affirmations. He owes far more to patristic authors than to biblical ones. I am convinced that Staniloae would reply to such an observation by arguing that the whole of patristic literature is overflowing with biblical citations and exegesis. At any rate, one advantage of making greater use of biblical passages is that it reduces the 'denominational distance' between various theologies. The more dogmatics maintains its proximity to the biblical text, the more it loses its factional, denominational character.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ See Bartos' *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Church. An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae*, (Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs), Foreword by Kallistos Ware, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 70-73.

²⁰⁵ TDO1, p.339 cited in Emil Bartos, op.cit, endote 100, p.155.

²⁰⁶ Bartos, *Deification*, 15-16, 227, 233-238.

²⁰⁷ Idem, "The Dynamics of Deification in the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae", in TMT, 246-47.

Besides the fact that there is a grain of truth in Bartos' remark it seems that Bartos overlooked the biblical studies and books of Fr Staniloae such as *The Gospel Image of Jesus Christ* (1991) to which the Baptist theologian could have access in Romanian. The fact that Fr Staniloae's theological perspective is quite different from Bartos' vision does not necessarily imply that the former's way of theologizing is less biblical. In my estimation despite the objective evaluation of Staniloae's concept of deification, some of Bartos's objections, especially those concerning the biblical base of Staniloae's theology are a little bit exaggerated and unconvincing. However this important study could definitely contribute to a better understanding of Staniloae's theology.

I.7. Research Questions

There have been many studies on the theology of Fr Staniloae addressing various aspects of his thought, especially during the last decades. However we consider that his theology has still much to offer to those who are searching for God. The dialogue for the Christian unity has intensified during the last century without becoming less problematic and this has been accordingly reflected in the work of many theologians who tried to contribute to the advancement of the ecumenical movement. Even if Staniloae, like Bulgakov, Florovsky or Lossky openly affirms the exclusive fullness of the Orthodox Church, his vision regarding Christian unity is quite different. If Florovsky, for instance, speaks about the Christian reunification in terms of a 'universal conversion to Orthodoxy'²⁰⁸, Staniloae proposes a new approach on the exercise of the Orthodox sobornicity by making different Churches fully aware of the possibility of combining "a many-sided and real unity together with a mutual recognition of their diversities in other areas and a mutual respect for their freedom in shared unity"²⁰⁹. To achieve this, the critique of deficiencies at doctrinal, theological, spiritual level must be balanced by the acknowledgement of all valid insights necessary for a symphonic experience and understanding of the whole. All Christians are Christ-bearers in different degrees and all churches and theological systems have something to contribute to the understanding of our relation the living God.

Within this context we are interested in the relevance Dumitru Staniloae's neo-patristic synthesis has for the modern theological discussions especially concerning Trinity and ecclesiology. What is his distinctive contribution to these subjects? How is his

²⁰⁸ Quoted by A. Schemmemann, "Role of Honour" in SVTQ 2 (1954): 9

²⁰⁹ Staniloae, "Problems and perspectives of Orthodox Theology" in TC, 221

theological thought influenced or shaped by his contemporaries, Sergius Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, Vladimir Lossky, George Florovsky or Karl Barth? How does he interact with the Western personalist and existentialist philosophical positions of the twentieth century? What makes his theological vision unique and creative?

The thesis we want to defend is that, despite the scepticism that surrounds the reception of communion ecclesiology, Fr Staniloae develops in his theological synthesis a strong and articulate theological argument in favour of a personalist-communitarian vision of the Church in which a balance between her institutional and sacramental aspects is sought. We will investigate the inner connection between the Trinitarian, Christological, anthropological and ecclesiological apophaticism in Staniloae's epistemology and the way he synthesized the rational and superational knowledge of God within the frame of a dynamic experience of the Triune God.

We will analyze the theological language, the concepts and notions, the imagery Staniloae employs in his ecclesiological apophaticism to reflect the multifaceted relationship between the Triune God on the one hand and humanity, the world and the Church (her nature and task, with a special emphasis on her unity) on the other.

We also intend to critically assess the influence of Greek theologians such as Androustos or Russians such as Bulgakov, Florovsky and Lossky, but also to point out what is his own contribution in the field and how it has developed over time. We hope to show that through the theological vision of Fr Staniloae centered on the dynamic relationship between the inseparable cathaphatic and apophatic knowledge of God at every level of deification, modern theology made a significant step forward in its quest for the needed balance between theologia and economia, by developing a creative theological synthesis as an answer to the dilemma created around their relationship: identity vs. distinction. In Orthodox theology and spirituality the relationship between theologia and economia is extremely important for our knowledge and experience of God, for understanding the possibility and reality of humanity's restoration and deification. For that we hope to convincingly argue that Staniloae, creatively engaging with, and developing the patristic argument i.e. the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians, St Athanasius and St Cyril of Jerusalem, the apophaticism of Pseudo-Dionysius, the Palamite theology of essence-energies unity-in-distinction and Maximian theology of the Logos as the centre of all divine logoi, succeeds in showing that the Holy Trinity which continuously permeates and fills the Church, the mystical body of Christ, through the divine eternal uncreated energies is the infinite living source the Church's being, life and unity.

I.8. Thesis outline

Following a general introduction to Fr Staniloae's life and work otherwise indispensable to locate him in his social, ecclesial and intellectual context and the statement of the research questions in the first chapter, the second chapter we investigate Staniloae's person-nature synthesis within his theology of personhood. To better understand the distinction-in-unity of theologia and economia as the basis of deification in the Church in light of the relationship between God, human being-*imago Dei* and the creation-the God's gift for humanity, we analyze the patristic and modern influence on Staniloae's person-nature synthesis and its application in his Trinitarian, Christological and anthropological apophaticism. We are interested in his efforts to forge a balanced nature-person synthesis because it is fundamental for the understanding of the relationship between love and knowledge in human experience of God as supreme personal reality. We will also pay attention to his approach of the relation and distinction between divine and human love. Divine love is simultaneously an essential divine act and the permanent cause of all Trinitarian interpersonal manifestations i.e. it is always and simultaneously essential and personal. On the other hand this perfect love is the base and aim of our deification and this infinite love it is the only reason of our never-ending ascension towards God which culminates in our union with Him, union open to all those who confess faith in the Triune God, being embraced and loved by God the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the Church. We will investigate if he succeeds to preserve the unity-in distinction of the essential-eternal plane of the Trinity, the plane of eternal manifestation of the divine interpersonal relationships and the plane of God's presence and operations in the world by the way he develops the paradigm of love at both the intertrinitarian and the economical level. We will unfold the ontological, ecclesiological and soteriological consequences of Christ's hypostatical union through Incarnation and assess the validity of Staniloae's communitarian anthropology. For an objective approach on this issue the positions of some of dialogue-partners such as Lossky, Yannaras or Zizioulas are also being considered vis-à-vis Staniloae's opinion to identify the convergent aspects and distinctive points of their visions. We will argue that the way Staniloae emphasizes the distinction between the apophaticism of divine essence, the apophaticism of the divine persons and the one of divine energies is an original characteristic of his theological synthesis. We will investigate whether Staniloae's apophaticism of the uncreated energies could be employed as a valid response to the charges of agnosticism raised against him.

The third chapter deals in detail with Trinitarian apophatic theology of Staniloae. We will investigate his biblical and patristic sources but also the philosophical concepts and notions which have been incorporated by the Romanian theologian in his Trinitarian synthesis. We will focus on Staniloae's insights on the relation between the distinct divine persons and the common divine essence, the intratrinitarian interpersonal relations and their manifestation ad extra. We will also analyze how the Trinitarian thought of other theologians such as Barth, Florensky and Lossky or the theories of the philosophers such as Hegel, Buber, Heidegger or Binswanger have influenced and shaped Staniloae's own Trinitarian vision or language and what is his own personal contribution in this field.

In the fourth chapter we will examine Staniloae's Trinitarian ecclesiology of communion, the expression of his communitarian personalism and synthesized in his conception of 'open sobornicity'. For Staniloae the Trinity is undoubtedly the basis, the living model and principle of the Church and the Church is the living icon of the Trinity. The apophatic character of Trinitarian unity-in-diversity is reflected in the life of the Church. The Church, as body of Christ full of the Holy Spirit is the divine-human communion and the locus of our deification seen as our adoption by God the Father. Considering the distinction of the hypostatic function of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in Church as the 'two hands' of the Fathers is discussed in this regard with a focus on their economical reciprocity in the same divine activity as reflected in Staniloae's view of deification. We will also evaluate his theological argument for the hypostatical equilibrium between the economy of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as a reaction to Lossky's ecclesiological theory and the way Staniloae tackles with the sensitive issue of the filioque or papal primacy and infallibility. We will study the relation between priesthood and the sacraments and their role in the unity of the Church according to Staniloae's ecclesiology. In addition to the patristic influences we will see how the thought of the Russian theologians Florovsky, Bulgakov, Khomiakov or Afanasiev is reflected and integrated in Staniloae's ecclesiological vision. This chapter will also include a discussion of the ecumenical dimension of Fr. Staniloae's ecclesiology. We will further evaluate the actuality and relevance of Staniloae's conception of ecumenism and his opinions regarding the participation and implication of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical dialogue for the Christian unity. We will investigate his understanding of the boundaries of the Church, the relation between the local and universal aspect of the Church or his discussion of salvation of the non-Orthodox and non-Christian.

After a summary of the conclusions of each chapter a final evaluation of Staniloae's contribution to the contemporary discussion concerning the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity or the nature of the relation between the Holy Trinity and the Church, *Una Sancta*, with its soteriological implications would conclude our study. It would become clear that he presents the mystical, active, real and permanent presence of the Holy Trinity in the Church and world based on his epistemology which unfolds the consequences of the antinomic relation between the distinct yet intimately related cataphaticism which always has an apophatic dimension and apophaticism which is never complete unknowing. We will have shown that by extending the apophaticism from God to human being and creation and by developing his gnoseological synthesis through a personalist lecture and interpretations of the Fathers, Staniloae actually proposed a new manner of doing theology which allows him to define theology not as a merely autonomous intellectual exercise but an liberating and deifying experience of the Tri-Personal God of love in the Church and for the Church which does not concern only the human reason but raises and transfigures the merely biological human being into a whole spiritual being, an ecclesial being full of grace of the divine uncreated energies. We will have proved that through his Trinitarian and ecclesial apophaticism, Staniloae introduced a coherent and articulate theological conception on the economic reflection of intertrinitarian relationships, a conception in which the distinction between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity does not compromise but rather balances their ontological unity and continuity. We will also have showed that his Trinitarian theology, in the way it introduced the category of love, is original because it emphasizes in the perichoresis of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit what is characteristic of each divine person in relations with other two and how these eternal intertrinitarian relationships are reflected and extended in the nature and life of the Church - the final saving act of the Trinity after Pentecost, reflection of Trinity, extension of Incarnation, laboratory of resurrection and the inception of the Kingdom of Heaven. We will have proved that despite the tremendous potential of Staniloae's concept of 'open sobornicity' and its theoretical value there is still much to be done in the next generations to argue its practical relevance for the Christian unity and work for an eventual implementation taking everything that is good and necessary from his theology and leaving aside what would jeopardize or delay the realization of this ideal.

II. Person and nature in Father Staniloae's theological thought

II.1. Introduction

Fr Andrew Louth argues that the theology of personhood finds its relevance in the existential context of Christians from Western Europe where the relativization of the character of inter-personal relationships, the diminished capacity of understanding the importance of the human person and the dissolution of traditional communities are real problems.²¹⁰ Metropolitan Kallistos Ware also stresses that a reappraisal of the theology of personhood should be a priority for Orthodox theology at the beginning of the third millennium in order to provide answers or solutions to the new crises of humanity: increasing globalization with its problems, technological domination, ethical issues raised by the recent genetic engineering discoveries or the acute ecological crisis. If the question was until now *what is the Church*, the next question should definitively be *what is the person?*²¹¹ By emphasizing the role of ecclesiology in the development of theological anthropology Metropolitan Kallistos is actually proposing a new perspective, alongside other Orthodox theologians, arguing that Orthodox anthropology cannot be reduced to the level of a theology of personhood derived from a certain of type personalism which dominated especially the early 20th century Catholicism and is associated with a strand of Orthodoxy which is rather philosophical than theological.

Thus the discussion on personhood and its function in bridging the Trinitarian, Christological and anthropological theology is indeed important and necessary because of its epistemological relevance and the role of person in the doctrine of theosis. Within this context, the theology of Fr. Dumitru Staniloae could be seen as the testimony of a theologian who does not hesitate to embark on the quest of drawing everything in the dynamism of an authentic divine-humanism and integral personalism as the appropriate reaction to the challenges of postmodernity.

²¹⁰ *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, no. 31-32/ 2003, pp.6-9.

²¹¹ Kallistos Ware, "Orthodox theology in the new millennium: What is the most important question?", *Sobornost*, 2/2004, p.12 passim.

Through Scripture and revelation we know that the human being was created for communion with God and there has been always a consensus among the Orthodox theologians on that but the attempt to conceptualize this communion became a priority for the Orthodox theology at the beginning of the last century. The Russian sophiologists Soloviev, Berdyaev, Florensky and Bulgakov were the ones who first connected the Trinitarian theology and anthropological theology by discerning the anthropological implications of the revealed truth that God's being is Trinitarian. This process was gradual. Preoccupied by the problem of the connection of divinity and humanity Soloviev initially developed the sophiological conception of personhood in the attempt to correct the German idealist philosophy of the 'transcendental ego'. Florensky and Bulgakov tried to synthesize the philosophical concept of personhood (they practically identified person with the absolute freedom and irreducibility of the 'transcendental ego') and the Trinitarian notion of love and relationality. The challenge was to find the best way to link the divine and human personhood to express the reality of divine-human communion. Bulgakov went through the philosophy of his time to deduce the Trinitarian structure of the divine and human personhood, also emphasizing the potential of notion of *sobornost*. Even if his Trinitarian conception was later criticized by Florovsky and Lossky, Bulgakov's goal was to conceptualize the God-creation relation based more on Scripture and patristic thought and less on (or rather in contrast to) German philosophical idealism. In fact the conception of this relation is the point where the views of theologians such as Bulgakov, Lossky, Yannaras, Staniloae, Zizioulas differ significantly and these differences are reflected in their respective theologies of the person. Lossky tried to correct Bulgakov's theology of personhood through his apophaticism which is also problematic maybe because he actually adopted certain principles from Bulgakov's personhood and identified, somewhat uncritically person with freedom and uniqueness and nature with necessity. Staniloae tried to continue Lossky's work by forging a more integrated person-nature synthesis based on the philokalic tradition. Structuring his theological discourse around the affirmation of divine-human communion in Christ, the incarnate Son of God, through the Holy Spirit, Fr. Staniloae shares much in common with Bulgakov, Florensky, Florovsky and Lossky in particular. In fact Bulgakov, Lossky and Staniloae share this permanent concern to forcibly argue the possibility and reality of human deification and creation's transfiguration although their conception of the relation between theology and philosophy for instance is different. They all made a stand against philosophical rationalism but whilst Lossky was more radical, Bulgakov and Staniloae adopted a milder tone, considering that modern theology could

benefit from using contemporary philosophy, its language and categories, just as the Fathers used the philosophy of their own time. They were definitively more conversant with philosophy than Lossky. On the other hand it is hard not to admit that Bulgakov relied significantly on German idealism, Fichte and Schelling's 'philosophy of identity', in the elaboration of his own 'sophiological antinomism', his deduction of Trinity as the triune absolute subject or his 'two-Sophia Christology'. One could argue that Bulgakov tried to 'Orthodoxize' Solovyov's sophiology, aiming at finding a *via media* between the extreme currents of thinking specific to the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning on the twentieth century: rationalism and materialism, atheism and religious nationalism. As we have already shown in the previous chapter, Staniloae too had to face similar challenges. Bulgakov's sophiology with its complicated and ambiguous relation between the divine and creaturely Sophia is in fact the expression of his own conception of deification which despite its limits includes many valuable insights which have been used by Lossky and Staniloae. Bulgakov tried to overcome the tension between the person and nature by coining the term 'hypostacity'²¹², the capacity of being hypostasized, which is not a person but has personal characteristics in order to defend his theory of Sophia which is not a fourth hypostasis within the Trinity, and yet it possesses personal characteristics, each one of the Trinitarian hypostases being Sophia. The major problem of Bulgakov's substantialist sophiology is, according to Lossky, the identification of a divine energy with the essence of God.²¹³ Both Lossky and Staniloae suspected Bulgakov of falling into pantheism although the latter considered his own theology a form of panentheism. One could even see the detailed and long treatment of God's attributes in the beginning of Staniloae's *Experience of God* as divine energies communicated to creatures as real participations in God an attempt to reconfigure Bulgakov's sophiology so to avoid the confusion between God and his creation. Again the sensitive issue is the relation between oikonomia and theologia because the way a theologian conceives the distinction between the transcendence and immanence of God shapes his epistemology, ontology and the conceptualization of deification.

Fr Staniloae argues that the communion between God and man (and among men) can rest solely on this perfect unity of the divine persons, the perfection of existence. In Christ, humanity is ontologically transfigured, thus offering to each one of us the chance to rediscover our own true humanity by getting personally involved in His sacrifice, through

²¹² Brandon Gallaher, "Protosobor Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light", *SVTQ*, 49:1-2 (2005), 5-46.

²¹³ MT, 76-77.

which He renews, unites and integrates the whole creation in God. Each one of those who confess the true faith, freeing themselves from any form of egoism by positive personal asceticism with God's help in order to be totally open to the other²¹⁴, has a personal and yet inspiring way of showing us that the *lex orandi*, the *lex credendi*, the *lex cognoscendi*, and the *lex vivendi* are tightly inter-related and complementary aspects of spiritual life, always pointing at and reflecting the ecclesial reality. They permanently challenge the 'spirit' of secularization with the light of their life in Christ.

Christ does not reiterate Socrates' exhortation; Christianity is not a mere philosophical system or a moral teaching, since Christ is not just a teacher. He is the Incarnate Word of God who is the source of eternal life, real freedom and authentic knowledge. All Christianity has to offer is the experience of the continuous presence of Christ, one of the Holy Trinity, in the Church and in the world. Through his deified humanity the risen Christ engages us and the whole creation in a cosmic liturgy. He gives Himself to us and the Cross as key of His love which is stronger than death and the only one which can fill up our existential void created by sin and death, becoming the Life of our lives (Cf. John 13:34; 15:12; I John 3:23; Galatians 2:20). Without this love which gives the ultimate meaning of our existence there cannot be any true freedom or knowledge for us.²¹⁵ Love is meaningful as long as it is personal.

However Fr Staniloae does not totally refute Socrates' perspective on human knowledge because he considers there is still a shred of truth in his thought, being aware though that Socratic legacy is rather anthropocentric. Instead he chooses to complete it in the terms of Christian apophaticism. Created in the image and likeness of God, the human being is also a mystery. In the virtue of the fact that the incarnated God is the prototype of human being Staniloae argues that as there is a divine apophaticism, beyond anything that is known about God, there is also a human apophaticism related to the divine one, beyond anything that is known about the human being.²¹⁶ Being aware that the essence/energies distinction could raise some difficulties, Staniloae speaks about three kinds of interrelated divine apophaticism: apophaticism of divine persons, the one of divine essence and the apophaticism of divine energies. He constantly emphasizes this distinction to avoid the pantheism he suspected in the Bulgakovian theology, a pantheism which would compromise the reality of theosis. On the other hand Papanikolaou is right when he says that there is "a lack of integration between Lossky's Trinitarian theology and his

²¹⁴ Christos Yannaras, "Towards a New Ecumenism", in *Contacts*, 179 (1997), 202-206.

²¹⁵ EG1, 5: "We wish to be loved more and more, striving for a love which is absolute and endless."

²¹⁶ STD, 191.

conceptualizing divine-human communion in terms of essence-energies distinction”²¹⁷ in which the emphasis on God’s energies in his relation to the world seems to make his Trinitarian personal existence secondary. What Lossky Lossky might have replied that God as Trinity is simply revealed as fact in not enough to maintain the balance of apophaticism and cataphaticism at every stage of the spiritual ascent toward God and avoid the charge of strictly separating the immanent and economic Trinity. Staniloae noticed that danger and tried to overcome it by integrating his conception of theosis in his Christology and Trinitarian theology by looking closer to the apophaticism of the divine energies in order to define a more clear distinction between the divine energies and the divine attributes. For this Staniloae turns towards Bulgakov whose Trinitarian theology’s strong point is the attempt to demonstrate the inseparable link between divine-human communion and conceptualizing God as Trinity. Referring to Bulgakov’s last work²¹⁸ Staniloae shows that in all divine attributes formulated by humans based on Revelation there is always an apophatic presence of the divine energies. They are not identical. Bulgakov writes:

The Revelation of God in the world is an act of God, a manifestation of Divine energy: not the essential Divinity, transcendent to the world, but Its energy is what we call God. And if the acts of God in the world, and in particular, in man are revealed (as the wisdom of Pseudo-Dionysius expresses it) as Divine names, these Names are manifestations of God’s energy, which speaks itself, which names itself in man through naming. [...] the naming is an act of God in man; it is man’s answer to this act, a manifestation of Divine energy. This manifestation is both different from this energy and inseparable from it. It is different from this energy because it actualized in man and by human means. It is inseparable linked with this energy because, according to the general nature of the word, the Divine energy itself speaks about itself in man, is revealed in the word, and the word, the naming of God, turns out to be the human incarnation of this energy as it were. “And the Word was made flesh” receives here an expanded interpretation: the Incarnation of the Word is accomplished not only in the Divine Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ but also by the namings that are effected by man in answer to God’s act. For this reason

²¹⁷ “Sophia, apophasis and communion: the Trinity in the contemporary Orthodox theology”, *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, Peter C. Phan (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 249

²¹⁸ Sergei Bulgakov, *Filosofija imeni (The Philosophy of the Name)* (Paris: YMCA, 1953)

alone the Names of God cannot be regarded as purely human creations, as names invented by man.²¹⁹

In this passage Staniloae also sees the Bulgakov's first correct formulation of the essence-energies distinction by pointing out their personal character ("the Divine energy itself *speaks* about itself") which in the former's opinion, had Fr. Sergius lived, would have helped him to free himself from the error of his own sophiology. However we don't know what Fr. Sergius might have responded to Fr Staniloae's assertion. Based on Bulgakov's insight Staniloae argues the capacity of the uncreated energies to express the transcendence of the divine being; through the divine attributes humans can sense apophatically the being of God as the source of all divine energies activated and manifested by and through divine hypostases: "If the divine being remains beyond any human thought, the [divine] attributes (names) are like small windows, through which we can contemplate the infinity of the infinite."²²⁰ For Staniloae any manifestation of divine being through the divine energies has always a personal character, because the divine being is sensed only in the personal reality since it has a communitarian structure. It is no surprise that theological reflection and meditation on the divine and human apophaticism eventually led Fr. Staniloae towards St Symeon the New Theologian with his Hymns on divine love, because he realized that poetry is much more capable of suggesting and expressing the mystery of being. Returning to the Greek philosopher he writes:

It is more justified to say: "I know there is an unknown infinity beyond what I know. It is in terms of Dionysius the Areopagite a 'luminous darkness' [...] It is a darkness about which I know that is the unknown and infinite source of light."²²¹

Fr Staniloae further uses Socrates' assertion to indicate the paradox of the human being which knows and does not know at the same time:

When I say "I don't know anything", I acknowledge myself as the "one who knows". As the one who knows, I am above the fact that I know and above what I know, but also above the conscience that I do not know anything. When I say I know I claim as a certain datum my ego which knows or does not know. That does not mean that I am the ultimate reality. Even my

²¹⁹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Name of God*, Boris Jakim (trans.), (Grands Rapids, USA/ Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 117-18.

²²⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, "The Experience of God in St John Hrisostom's vision", in *Ortodoxia* IX:4 (1957), 563.

²²¹ STD, 191.

uncertainty of knowing (relativity) reveals not only the existence of my ego,
but also the dependence of its existence to a supreme being.²²²

Besides emphasizing the limits of knowledge of the created conscious being, in which mystery and rationality cannot be strictly separated and points toward an absolute consciousness which knows everything, this approach to Socrates' thought seems to be paradigmatic for Fr Staniloae's engagement with philosophy. Fr Staniloae argues that the most important thing theology and philosophy have actually in common is their search for the meaning of existence. Fr Staniloae is willing to do everything it takes to help heal that sort of scepticism hidden behind a self-sufficient perpetual perplexity by opening and raising the relative human thought to the heights of the contemplation of the mystery of God, the Supreme Personal Reality whose love gives sense to all beings and explains everything, by helping the others to perceive and enter in the divine order of existence, or in someone's inspired words to 'discern the mystery'.

For Fr Staniloae the paradox does not close but opens instead the horizon of human thought. The holistic approach according to which the things are only apparently opposed one to another characterizes the Fathers' way of embracing and expressing the mystery of faith and life whose unique source is God. One could not pretend that patristic thought is simply dialectical or antinomical because both terms reflected a rather narrow philosophical vision focused on division by opposition and not on unity in distinction.

A recent study shows that some theologians, Lossky in our case, interpolated the term 'antinomia' in his translation of a Palamas' text²²³ to argue that apophaticism is an antinomic theology.²²⁴ Gallaher is right to point out that antinomia in Classical and patristic Greek has an ethical meaning while it is Kant who uses the term in an epistemological sense of two equally valid truths in his construction of the rational antinomies. Florensky, Bulgakov and through him Lossky borrowed it from Kant and tried to give it a theological sense.²²⁵ Gallaher argues, based on a letter addressed by Florovsky to Sakharov that Lossky's theological apophaticism is based rather on Florensky's philosophy of antinomies, a development of Kantian antinomism and Bulgakov's dogmatic theology also structured on antinomies under the influence of Florensky.²²⁶

²²² Ibidem.

²²³ Gregory Palamas, *Capita physica, theologica, moralia, et practica*, 150, 121, PG 150.1205A–B, cite in ILG, p. 51.

²²⁴ Gallaher, "The 'Sophiological' Origins of Vladimir Lossky's Apophaticism", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 66:3 (July 2013), 290.

²²⁵ Ibidem.

²²⁶ Ibidem.

Staniloae too used antinomy in his theological thought for instance to characterize the existence of God which is the source of our paradoxical knowledge-experience of God, in which we experience or rather sense his Personal presence and the infinity of his being simultaneously under the divine energies. Staniloae says that we sense God's personal presence as a whole through each manifestation of the uncreated energies although he is infinite in his being.

This sensitivity is a spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit poured on those who open themselves to it. Sharing much with Bulgakov and Lossky, Staniloae has always strived to ground more his metaphysics of personhood in the patristic thought. While Bulgakov and Lossky under his influence described the essence-energy distinction as a 'pure antinomy' Staniloae's Neo-Palamism is attempting to keep in balance the apophaticism of divine persons, essence and energies using antinomies without breaking the boundaries of the patristic principles. For Staniloae patristic apophaticism is the expression of humans' experience of the Trinity as a whole in each one of his operations and participation in God communitarian love and existence through his uncreated energies. This could also help us to understand why Fr Staniloae's relied primarily on the Fathers in his permanent search for better, suggestive images and adequate language in order to bring the love and joy of God into the hearts of his fellowmen in the middle of world's tribulations. The profound language and imagery based on his own living experience of God picture him as the theologian of love and hope²²⁷. We appreciate that his optimism comes as in the case of Bulgakov from the balance between the kenosis of suffering and death and the kenosis of joy of the perfect intratrinitarian life. Actually the latter is the 'source' of the first. Fully committed to a conception of a divine-human communion, he integrates the person-nature synthesis on three interdependent levels: Trinitarian, Christological and anthropological shaping altogether a profound metaphysics of personhood. Basically he wants to help us understand that apart from an eternal, absolute personal reality, any existence, especially ours, would seem senseless:

Communion with Personal reality or with the infinite Persons becomes for men the means of an infinite progress in love and knowledge and it is this which keeps continuously alive our interest of our own consciousness of self [...] Meanings are real and man cannot live without them. He cannot endure to live without a consciousness of meanings and without pursuing them, for

²²⁷ OS, 177-79.

they culminate in a final meaning which man is convinced he will attain beyond death.²²⁸

Based on Fr Staniloae's person-nature synthesis we will further analyse his theology of personhood with a focus on the specific role of the human being within creation as its unifying rational centre, considering its major soteriological consequences and ecclesiological relevance.

We will investigate how the type-archetype paradigm is employed by Fr Staniloae in his apophatical anthropology to argue that the mystery of God is actually reflected by the mystery of the human being and to avoid a simplistic analogy between the divine and human personhood. We are also interested to see how Fr Staniloae integrates and develops the Orthodox patristic perspective on nature and grace in his own attempt of conceptualization of the divine-human communion. Hopefully the analysis of the particularities of the relational and communitarian personalism of Fr Staniloae, highlighting the ideas or concepts he shares with other theologians or philosophers might eventually give us the opportunity to objectively evaluate the relevance of his metaphysics of personhood in the context of postmodernism.

II.2. Method and terminology

Finding the most adequate terms, categories and principles accessible to the post-modern man to give expression to human experience of God yet without breaking up with the patristic thought is a major challenge for modern Orthodox theology. Staniloae also has to deal with the problem of keeping in balance tradition and modernity in his own theology. That is why we are going to investigate what he achieved that with the help of the Fathers.

The main concern of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers was the struggle for a Trinitarian terminological clarification in order to end or at least to diminish the inter-factions tensions and disagreements which obviously affected the Church's unity, factions which suspected one another of dogmatic misconceptions and errors.

The confusion between *ousia* and *hypostasis* or *prosopon* contributed to the emergence of Arianism and Sabellianism or other similar doctrines which failed to keep in balance between the unity of divine being and the diversity of divine Persons, falling

²²⁸ EG1, 7.

whether in subordinationism, modalism or unitarianism.²²⁹ Here enter the scene the Cappadocians with their greatest theological achievement that is the development of the notion of hypostasis, essential in clarifying the distinction between nature and person, thus completing the Athanasian Trinitarian theology that argued the distinction without the separation between the divine nature and will of God the Father in begetting the Son.²³⁰

St Athanasius is the first one who showed that all the actions of the Father are simultaneously personal and essential since the Father's nature is first of all personal. The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) synthesized this subtle reality in the term *homoousios*²³¹ introduced in the Creed. His inspired argument for the creation *ex nihilo* marked the decisive separation of the Christian theology from Platonism.

Fr Staniloae's Trinitarianism follows closely the line of St Maximus' Trinitarian doctrine based on the person-nature distinction. According to St Maximus, "The Holy Trinity of hypostases is a unity without confusion in Its essence, and in Its simple principle (logos); and the holy Unity is a Trinity in Its hypostases and Its modes of existence."²³² Unity and Trinity in God are mutually presupposed, eternally coexistent, being simultaneous ontological and existential realities: "The personal and Trinitarian character of God is not less essential, it is not derived from his being but instead the supreme reality has always a personal and Trinitarian character, from the endless eternity, being simultaneously a unity of being in the utmost sense of the word."²³³

The concept of hypostasis in its Christian theological formulation is crucial for a proper approach on the Patristic doctrine of the Trinity. We will try to show that in the thought of the Fathers, despite the obvious particularities in style, they all seem to suggest that the divine hypostases as modes of real and concrete existence of the identical common essence has rather to do with the manner of being of nature instead of simply possessing it. The risk of confusing the logical determinations with ontological distinctions

²²⁹ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic and Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) in particular xix-xx. See also Franz Dunzl, *Brief History of the Trinity in the Early Church*, with a foreword by Prof. Andrew Louth, and translated by John Bowden (T&T Clark, 2007), pp. 21-71.

²³⁰ Cf. *Contra Arianos*, 3: 3, 4, 10, 41, 59, 66.

²³¹ However even this term was regarded with suspicion for a long time by the Fathers and bishops because of the risk of interpreting it in terms of the Sabellian essentialism. It would be eventually equiposed by the Cappadocians' doctrine of hypostases which clearly states the personal distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Cf. SCF, 497.

²³² EO, p. 94. Cf. *Mystagogy* 23 (PG 91, 701A), *Ambigua* 2 (PG 91, 1036 C).

²³³ *Restoration*, 78. Fr Staniloae grounds his assertion on St. Maximus the Confessor's argument (PG 90, 892).

should be avoided.²³⁴ Fr Staniloae argues that the concept of *mode of existence* does not introduce any new ontological element in God.

First of all we have to note that Fr Staniloae, following St. Dionysius and St. Maximus, uses the different forms of the same word - subsistence - to designate the relationship between the hypostasis and essence in his Trinitarian theology in a formulation equivalent with that of *tropos tes hyparxeos*,²³⁵ although it seems that the equivalence is not completely covered. He argues that hypostasis is the proof of the being's existence.²³⁶ Even St. John Damascene's approach to the mystery of the Holy Trinity in terms of a mystical worship is not very far from those of his predecessors, St. Gregory of Nazianzus in particular:

The Trinity-one essence, one divinity, one power, one will, one energy, one beginning, one authority, one dominion, one sovereignty, made known in three perfect subsistences (hypostases) and adored with one single adoration; believed and worshipped by all noetic creation.²³⁷

We will try to discern the reason behind this preference, to see why Fr Staniloae considers this term to be the one of the most suitable to express the fact that hypostasis, person or subject, is only nature in its real existence.

Fr Staniloae starts from the etymology of the word actually composed from the particle 'hypo' (under) and the word 'stasis' (standing): "The hypostasis is nothing other than the manner of being an independent whole, completed in itself, with its own support, of a substance or a nature."²³⁸ He argues that although the hypostasis cannot exist without the being, the being is in the hypostasis - the only real and concrete reality, and not vice versa.²³⁹ The influence of the Cappadocians' understanding of hypostasis, which J. Kelly also identified in Amphilochius of Iconium's work²⁴⁰ is coupled with the distinction of Leontius of Byzantium implying the self-existence of a completed whole. The words "is nothing other than" may refer to the antinomical character of the hypostasis which is distinct from, yet not separate, added to nature since they have the same content.²⁴¹ Maybe this is the reason why Fr Staniloae synthesizes these insights in his own concept of person.²⁴²

²³⁴ EO, 119.

²³⁵ FIS, pp.53-74.

²³⁶ Ibidem.

²³⁷ St John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.8 (PG 94.832-33), NPNF 2-09, II.52.

²³⁸ Restoration, 111.

²³⁹ SCF, p.495.

²⁴⁰ PG 39,676.

²⁴¹ EG2, 99-100.

²⁴² TDO2, 27.

Although Leontius of Byzantium seems to have taken over the reference to the hypostasis as to a 'who' from previous anti-Nestorian patristic writings, he is more precise about what this 'who' is, i.e. a complete whole which uses energies of nature for itself.²⁴³ This 'who' is later equated with the 'I' (the irreducible spiritual subject).²⁴⁴

Fr Staniloae notes that the definition of hypostasis as *tropos tes hyparxeos* i.e. a mode of concrete existence of an essence is the only one common to the Cappadocians²⁴⁵ and St Maximus the Confessor²⁴⁶. In St Basil's conception the relation between the ὑπόστασις and the οὐσία is similar yet not identical to the one between the particular and the common; what is common is practically manifested in the communion of hypostases.²⁴⁷ The difference between the Cappadocians' concept of particular (St Basil and St Gregory of Nyssa) and the Aristotelian doctrine²⁴⁸ comes from the fact that the latter presupposes some kind of material substrate whilst the former do not. This could explain the effort of the eastern Fathers to purge the notion of hypostasis from its Aristotelian content since in their thought the hypostasis refers rather to the person than to the individual²⁴⁹. The theological synthesis of St. Maximus brought more light on this sensitive matter of person-individual²⁵⁰ distinction by developing a more suitable ontology.²⁵¹ St Basil writes:

My statement, then, is this. That which is spoken of in a special and peculiar manner is indicated by the name of the hypostasis. Suppose we say 'a man'. The indefinite meaning of the word strikes a certain vague sense upon the ears. The nature is indicated, but what subsists and is specially and peculiarly indicated by the name is not made plain. Suppose we say 'Paul'. We set forth, by what is indicated by the name, the nature subsisting. This then is the hypostasis, or 'understanding'; not the indefinite conception of the essence or substance, which, because what is signified is general, finds no 'standing', but the conception which by means of the expressed

²⁴³ PG 86, 1904 ABC.

²⁴⁴ St Gregory of Nyssa and St Gregory of Nazianzus are the first ones to accentuate the character of spiritual subject of the hypostasis but St. Gregory of Nazianzus in particular, Oratio 34, PG 26, 236 cite in SCF, p.496.

²⁴⁵ St Gregory of Nyssa, *Quia tres non sum tres dii*, PG 44, 193 and St Gregory of Nazianzus *Oration 14*; PG 35, 51 cite in SCF, p.495.

²⁴⁶ St Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, PG 91, 701, cite in SCF, 497.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Ep. 38, PG 32, 326-328 cite in SCF, p.495-7.

²⁴⁸ T. Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 125-6. In Letter 236 St Basil speaks about the hypostasis in terms of 'essence with properties'. Essence is the common nature and the properties are particularizing characteristics. Cf. T. Tollefsen, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

²⁴⁹ MT, p. 53. Cite in T. Tollefsen, *op. cit.*, p. 126, footnote 203.

²⁵⁰ Tollefsen, *op. cit.*, p.129.

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p.126 .

peculiarities gives standing and circumscription to the general and uncircumscribed.²⁵²

We notice that, literally speaking, the word hypostasis corresponds to the English word understanding. The general spiritual significance of the term resides in its connection with the faithful's knowledge and experience of God. On a more profound level it could suggest the fact that the relationship between Creator and creature, the Personal God, the Supreme Reason and the human rational being takes the form of a dialogue facilitated by the rationality of the world. Fr Staniloae adds: "One cannot see the spiritual function except in a person [...]. One might say therefore that it is not the being that stands as basis i.e. it is not that lies underneath but the hypostasis or person."²⁵³ Neither is the essence anterior to the divine hypostases nor the hypostases could exist outside the divine nature as their content. Based on St. Basil's insight regarding the personal properties of the persons of the Holy Trinity, Fr Staniloae argues that although the intransmissible personal features of each divine person are not common to the divine essence they play a very important role in the Trinitarian interpersonal communion.

Looking for the reason of the Fathers' predilection for this approach on hypostasis, especially in their Trinitarian conception, he comes to the conclusion that "considering the persons as hypostases or modes of real existence of being is the only conception which can provide a gritty, steady reality to persons without detaching them From the common essence."²⁵⁴ In other words it is only one concept which seems to keep in balance the two complementary aspects of the divine reality which the Holy Fathers found equally real: the aspect of being and the tri-personal aspect.²⁵⁵

It appears that this conception as an expression of the person-nature synthesis²⁵⁶ is employed alongside the Palamite pneumatology which emphasizes the personal character of the Holy Spirit in the relation with the Father and the Son, deepening the conception of Gregory of Cyprus²⁵⁷, according to whom the Holy Spirit proceeds From the Father and shines forth From the Son, "illuminating the Son not only in the sight of the Father, but also

²⁵² St. Basil: *Letters and Selected Works*, Letter 38, 3 (PG 32, 326-328.) in NPNF 2-08, p.137.

²⁵³ SCF, 495.

²⁵⁴ Ibidem, 477.

²⁵⁵ Ibidem.

²⁵⁶ SCF, 498.

²⁵⁷ GOTR, 44: 1-4 (1999), 716-726.

before us”²⁵⁸. Staniloae was particularly interested in the pneumatological conception of Bulgakov’s disciple Paul Evdokimov.²⁵⁹

Nevertheless this could be regarded as an effort in emphasizing a certain relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Son, which is apparently essential for a better disclosure of the inter-personal Trinitarian relationships in terms of *theologia* and *economia*, including the issue of ‘monarchy’, intersubjectivity, particular-general distinction i.e. unity in diversity within Trinity and a pertinent argument against the different formulations of the ‘Filioque’ clause.²⁶⁰

Fr Staniloae strongly suggests that all these aspects are tightly interwoven. The monarchy of the Father and the divine persons’ freedom in the communication and reception of the divine nature (the latter always balancing the former in order to avoid the pitfall of an asymmetrical Trinity) are altogether the fundamental features of the persons of the Holy Trinity which distinguish them from an impersonal essence.²⁶¹ Staniloae argues that ‘Filioque’ is actually a rejection of the reciprocity between the Son and the Holy Spirit *vis-à-vis* the Father failing to make to make a clear distinction between the personal characteristics of the divine persons. He considers that the Father could not simultaneously be the cause, the principle of the Trinity and the divine person through which the other divine persons pass towards each other at the same time.²⁶² However it seems that the rather one-sided approach of Fr Staniloae on the inter-personal Trinitarian relationships contradicts the reality of the Trinitarian perichoresis which himself present it “as the interiorization, the resting of the one in the other, one’s passing through the other, completely transparent to one another”²⁶³.

The Fathers never conceive the divine nature detached from the person; they are simultaneous and inseparable realities. Fr Loudovikos argues that “the Cappadocians did not desire to abandon ‘substance’ or ‘homoousion’; on the contrary, concerning Trinitarian

²⁵⁸ Staniloae, “The Holy Spirit in the theology and the life of the Orthodox Church” in *Sobornost*, 1 (1975) 5.

²⁵⁹ SCF, 471.

²⁶⁰ For Staniloae the fundamental misconception which led to the emergence of Filioque is the placement of love, which is a characteristic of God’s being on the same plane with paternity, which is an attribute through which the person of Father is distinct from the other two divine persons. It is the reduction of the hypostatical feature of the Father to the level of a psychological function. Cf. SCF, 489. Sts. Gregory of Nyssa (*De opificio hominis*; PG 44, 135) and Maximus the Confessor (PG 91, 396-400) preferred instead for the image of the diversity of divine persons and their unity of nature the analogy of the plurality of human persons (which are still one by sharing a unique human nature) within the frame of their actual and virtual communion, an approach which apparently overcomes the serious limits of a psychologizing theology. Cf. SCF, 494.

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 476.

²⁶² ST, 3-4 (1967).

²⁶³ TC, pp.33-39.

theology, they work diligently to tie their ‘personalist’ language with the traditional ‘substantialist’ content.”²⁶⁴

Fr Staniloae identifies this tendency even in the ‘substantialist’ Trinitarian approach of St. Athanasius²⁶⁵ but also in St. Dionysius the Areopagite who seems to place both the Father²⁶⁶ and the Godhead²⁶⁷ as the ultimate principle in God in different places throughout his work, although the preference for the latter is obvious especially in his *On the Divine Names*. Fr Staniloae would eventually overcome a dialectical interpretation of Dionysian treatment of Trinitarian theology and confront de Régnon’s East-West separation in his person-nature synthesis.

Also avoiding the super-naturalism of Father Sergei Bulgakov expressed in his *Lamb of God* Staniloae enters in a constructive dialogue with the German theologian and philosopher, Hans Urs von Balthasar, appreciating his valuable patristic insights regarding the Maximian distinction between the ability and the act²⁶⁸: the ability to will and the act of willing for example. Based on that Balthasar argues that in each operation (not only divine) the fundamental act belongs to the essence and the fulfilment of the act is specific to the person.²⁶⁹ We could say that Staniloae’s definition of hypostasis integrates aspects of Maximian Christology, Maximian critique of monothelism in defending the full humanity and divinity of Christ and Balthasar’s claim. Fr Staniloae stresses the paradox of the hypostasis which is simultaneously a reality distinct from being yet a concretization of being. The hypostasis is not some sort of external ‘appendix’ of the essence but a necessary form that shapes the being as soon as being exists de facto; a mode of being, so to speak, coming from the actualization of the being’s potentialities. Nature tends toward a determined ‘hypostatical state’. The hypostasis is *subject* and it has the role to activate the intentionality toward communion and nature’s potential for relation with God, humanity and the world. The subject is the manifestation of love, but the nature itself tends to this manifestation of love.²⁷⁰ With respect to the human person, he says “the human nature virtually bears the human hypostasis as potentiality.”²⁷¹ I consider that Staniloae tried to come with an alternative by reinterpreting Bulgakov’s concept of ‘hypostacity’, the capacity of being hypostasized, in the light of Chalcedonian and Palamite Christology but he did not

²⁶⁴ Fr Nicholas Loudovikos, article cited., 6.

²⁶⁵ *Against the Arians* 3.66, PG 26:464, NPNF 4.430.

²⁶⁶ *On the Divine Names*, II.5, (PG 3, 641 D).

²⁶⁷ *On the Divine Names*, XIII.3, (PG 3, 980 BC, 981 A).

²⁶⁸ PG 91, 48A-B; 292A.

²⁶⁹ Balthasar, op. cit., 212 Cf. *Restoration*, 113.

²⁷⁰ *Restoration*, 117.

²⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 106.

make fully clear how this natural tendency which rather implied a natural determinism was to be reconciled with the natural absolute freedom. Although Staniloae seems to imply that person and nature are simultaneous ontological categories, his approach does not eliminate completely the tension between them.

II.3. The Trinitarian Apophaticism of Fr Dumitru Staniloae

Father Staniloae considers the patristic thought axiomatic and his apophatic theology is an attempt to synthesise and deepen the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers, St Dionysios Areopagite, St Maximus the Confessor and St Gregory Palamas. With their help he argues that Trinitarian Apophaticism is the source of all others forms of apophaticism. Another important aspect which Staniloae discerns in the patristic thought is apophaticism-cataphaticism unity²⁷², complementarity²⁷³ and interdependence which shape his epistemology. Based on their reciprocity²⁷⁴ apophaticism always presupposes cataphaticism and vice-versa. The most important implication of this conceptual framework is that Staniloae argues an antinomic character not only of apophaticism but also of the cataphaticism.²⁷⁵ They are distinct but never separated, their relation is also antinomic. For Staniloae there is no absolute apophaticism or extreme rationalism. This apophatic-cataphatic complementarity is used by Staniloae to conceptualize the connection between divine apophaticism, anthropological and the cosmological one.

Staniloae sees the subtleness of the Fathers' Trinitarian thought as an expression of God's gift for their efforts to keep in balance the unity of the divine being and the distinction of persons. So the transcendence of God is not given by the unity of his essence only, but also by his personal character.²⁷⁶ That would mean that although the divine persons transcend the attributes, qualities of energies of the divine essence, they never transcend their own nature.²⁷⁷ The person-nature distinction is always preserved since the essence of God can exist only in and as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

²⁷² HTE, 6.

²⁷³ Ibidem, 2.

²⁷⁴ Ibidem, 1.

²⁷⁵ Ibidem, 6.

²⁷⁶ EG1, 260. He also refers to the Holy Trinity as the perfect "intersubjective communion". *Restoration*, 61, 71, 78. TC, 76-77.

²⁷⁷ Kevin M. Berger, *Towards a Theological Gnoseology: The Synthesis of Fr Dumitru Staniloae*, PhD thesis, I, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003), 108.

Fr Staniloae's nature-person distinction is deeply influenced by St. Basil's particular-common distinction²⁷⁸ but doubled by a stronger affirmation of special, particular, specific and above all intransmissible characteristics, at the same time irreducible one to another, of the divine Persons which are not common to the divine essence, instead contributing to the Trinitarian inter-personal communion because each divine person lives for the others. All three divine Persons are in full possession of the same unique essence, but in three distinct modes. Fr. Staniloae writes:

Each divine hypostasis is the subject or the possessor of the whole divine being [...] and consequently each one is the fruit of the total love of the first person, founding an absolute love between all three persons. For this reason each hypostasis can be named with all names proper to the divine being (wisdom, power, life). But they distinguish themselves through the names according to which one is the fundamental giver and the other two the receiver, each one in its proper mode of the whole, total being. (the Unoriginated, Unbegotten, Begetter, Father of the only Begotten Son, Father- the one proceeds the Holy Spirit, the one who proceeds From Father). These names are not interchangeable. [...] the hypostases are not enclosed in themselves but persist in modes of communion and communication totally unchanged. They do not melt one in another either. It is their definition which shows that the first unoriginated person communicates the whole being to the other two, as it originates them as modes of real existence of the same whole content which is the divine being.²⁷⁹

Even more, he does not hesitate even to speak about a certain unfathomable hypostatical reciprocity within the Holy Trinity. Each hypostasis implies the others; it cannot be conceived without the others, yet preserving its own characteristics.²⁸⁰ The eternal and total reciprocal self-giving of each divine person towards the others based on their kenotic love is the expression of the absolute divine freedom which is manifested as transparency. This transparency or total intimacy seen as a personal and existential divine quality is the premise of the perfect communion which is accomplished in an absolute way and from eternity, precisely because the Son and the Holy Spirit are originated by the Father in distinct ways as subjects possessing integrally the same whole being.

²⁷⁸ *Ep.* 38; PG 32, 326-328.

²⁷⁹ SCF, 499.

²⁸⁰ FIS, 60-61.

The Father communicates from eternity, the divine common being to the other two divine Persons – two distinct modes of real existence of the whole and unique divine essence, thus safeguarding them of any confusion or separation as they simultaneously reveal the Father as their source, through their particular names. However, the link between the caused persons and their own act of origin does not imply that they came to existence after the originating uncaused person.²⁸¹ They all are co-eternal.

In fact, each divine person gives and receives the whole divine being in a distinct mode. These names known through revelation indicate and ‘concentrate’ the personal consistence and concreteness of the divine persons which equally and simultaneously contain the whole divine nature. It is not an impersonal divine being but the person of the Father who originates the other two divine hypostases, being their source who communicates them the common divine being above any suspicion of confusion or separation.²⁸²

Nevertheless the eternal, perfect, uncaused-caused relationships within the Trinity are apophatic, beyond any analogy known to human logic. Similarly the possession of the divine nature by the divine persons should be always regarded in the light of Staniloae’s person-nature synthesis.

Nature does not precede person, but Fr Staniloae actually argues that the opposite is also true, i.e. person does not precede nature. Furthermore the divine acts of origin do not compromise the personal characteristics of the divine hypostases or their equality. They actually emphasize not only an essential unity of the Holy Trinity but also a simultaneous interpersonal unity in form of perfect communion. The divine hypostases are pure subjects.²⁸³ Besides their irreducibility, since each one possess the whole unique being in its own unchangeable way²⁸⁴ the pure subjects always involve relation.²⁸⁵ This is one of Fr Staniloae’s ways of saying that there is no passivity within the Trinity. Actually the Son is active in his eternal begetting from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is active in his own eternal proceeding from the Father, yet without placing the Father (who begets the Son eternally and causes the Spirit to proceed from eternity) in a state of passivity which would transform the Son and the Holy Spirit to objects of the Father. Although the divine eternal acts of begetting and proceeding are acts of pure common subjectivity within the Trinity,

²⁸¹ SCF, 499-500.

²⁸² STC, pp. 16-18 passim.

²⁸³ EG1, 261.

²⁸⁴ EG1, 258.

²⁸⁵ Ibidem, 260.

each one of the divine persons as pure subject has its own role and place, thus remaining in their unity distinct from the others.²⁸⁶

Fr Staniloae speaks about the perfect mutual, total self-giving of the divine persons as reciprocal interior interchange of 'I's, while maintaining their irreducible character.²⁸⁷ The essential unity and the inter-subjective communion are simultaneous within Trinity. "The relation of the divine 'I's must be conceived as a communion so perfect that each subject must experience himself as a triune subject, yet without changing his own proper position."²⁸⁸

Due to the theological reflection of the Cappadocian Fathers, the Greek philosophical concept of 'pure essence' was the subject of a very complex metamorphosis²⁸⁹, acquiring new connotations. Some of the key concepts used by the Cappadocian Fathers are: common essence, nature-communion and interpersonal relations.²⁹⁰ The *common Godhead* or *relational coexistence* expresses a certain balanced Trinitarian theology as long the Persons of the Trinity are concrete and suprarational existences which hypostasize the unique divine essence. St Maximus reflects on the consequences of hypostatic union and realizes that a nature cannot stand on its own.²⁹¹ On the other hand the person is much more than a transient manifestation of the essence; actually it is understood as a determinant element of the existence which structures the ousia from inside. The divine and the human nature do not exist *per se*.²⁹² The only way to keep the antinomic distinction between the transcendent and immanent Trinity is to argue that divine persons represent the internal structural principle of the common essence. This dynamic vision laid the foundation for the nature-person scheme of Chalcedon.²⁹³

The divine Logos, the incarnate Son of God, is much more than an impersonal Reason, or "only a supreme reality, full of intelligible meaning, just for the sake of beauty of this intelligibility or the object of knowledge of another person. This supreme Reason is a person who knows and can be known."²⁹⁴ Here Staniloae argues that the human persons are created and endowed with the capacity and have the responsibility to enter in dialogue with God and manifest themselves as dialogical existences as long as everything exists to

²⁸⁶ TC, 77.

²⁸⁷ EG1, 263.

²⁸⁸ TC, 77.

²⁸⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and the Classical Culture. The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*. (US: Yale University Press, 1993)

²⁹⁰ St Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, NPNF5.

²⁹¹ *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 23, PG 91:264.

²⁹² Larchet, op. cit., 375.

²⁹³ *Restoration*, 122.

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 406.

support this dialogue between God and the human persons and among themselves. Man is an interpersonal existence with a dialogical structure which embraces in its depth the vocation of communion with God and the other men.²⁹⁵ The Person of the Word of God, the Logos, is the initiator, the unifying principle and the final goal of this dialogue. This dialogue has an ontological dimension: "We could not exist without the others because we could not exist without God."²⁹⁶ The divine uncreated energies play a crucial role in man's knowledge of God. According to St Maximus the deifying grace is uncreated and eternal in God. This grace is called *en-hypostasised light* and is revealed to the faithful.²⁹⁷ The self-consciousness, the willingness to be open to communication and communion between God and man and his beloved brethren, justify the fact that the person is *light* in a spiritual sense. In a Palamite tone, Staniloae says:

God as a supreme and eternal existence cannot be anything else but personal existence - that is a self-conscious and loving existence. This personal loving existence of the three Persons is complete only in a perfect unity. The perfect love between the three Persons of the supreme existence implies a perfect knowledge among them of their infinite being. For the inferior levels of conscious existence (angels and men) this knowledge of God will be always partial yet an eternal aspiration. This supreme love in three or among three is the *supreme Light* or the source of the whole light and sense of the entire existence. The self-knowledge through the three Persons of this supreme existence, as long as it is an infinite knowledge of Subjects which are also infinite, is a knowledge that embodies the Light and Mystery at the same time because it is unlimited. They experience their boundless mystery as Light, and Light as boundless mystery. The Light of the Trinity is identical to the perfect love among the three Persons. This illuminating love is poured into the mind of the faithful, who is lifted up in the communion of love of God through authentic moral life and ceaseless prayer, when the believer experiences this particular light above the world inside him as gift of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6, 17).²⁹⁸

The greatest challenge for the Fathers was to avoid the temptation of a gnostic-dialectic approach to the distinction between essence and person. There is no categorical, definitive

²⁹⁵ STD, 203.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem, 204.

²⁹⁷ *Ambigua*; PG 91, 1141B Cf. IHL, 183.

²⁹⁸ IHL, pp.184 -87.

separation between the individual and the person, though they are not used interchangeably in the works of the Fathers. The person or the hypostasis is not conceived as a meta-natural category (isolated in the sphere of an absolute apophaticism). Likewise, nature is not merely a necessary and inert datum which should be overcome by the existential freedom of the person. But the person is not captive in nature, in the divine or in the human existence. Fr Staniloae remarks that the Christology of St Maximus makes a first necessary synthesis of the patristic tradition. A very important aspect of the Maximian synthesis is that freedom and love are essential. Staniloae applies this Christological principle to his Trinitarian theology: "The divine goodness, love, knowledge and infinite power are included in divine nature. But these are qualities communicated by a Person to another, based on their self-consciousness."²⁹⁹ Had they belonged exclusively to hypostasis, they would have led to monothelitism or monoenergism in Christology or to tri-energism in Trinitarian doctrine. Action belongs to nature, and the hypostasis configures this action in a concrete and particular manner.

This antinomial relation between nature and person is fundamental for Staniloae's divine and human personhood. Personhood is deeply ontological and ontology is deeply personal. The being refers to the person and the person refers to the being.

II.4. The Anthropological apophaticism of Fr Dumitru Staniloae

In St Maximus' Christological vision the ontological distance between divinity and humanity is seen within the context of hypostatical union. The difference and relation between divine and human personhood are also seen in apophatical terms. Being created in the image of God who is free by his nature, human being is also free by his nature. The human nature is free because it is rational. Consequently, the hypostasis is the concrete actualization of rationality, freedom and love which are inherent to nature as the virtues are themselves natural.³⁰⁰ The activation of the capacities and energies of nature is specific to the person. Everyone is active as a human being but only as a person can one configure, or rather imprint the mode of action.

The synthetic analysis of Hans Urs von Balthasar of the ontology of St Maximus leads to an important conclusion. Freedom is rooted in nature yet nature is not reduced to freedom. There is no freedom without love and love is always personal.

²⁹⁹ Ibidem, 183

³⁰⁰ Cf. *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG 91, 293BC, 304C, 309A-312A

The importance of the relationship between nature, will, freedom and divine grace within the context of deification is outlined and developed by St Maximus in his theological synthesis which was articulated in the dispute with Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus sees a gap, a categorical distinction between person and nature; the person could not be anything but an irrational concept which goes beyond any natural element. On the other hand St Maximus does not confuse the notions of distinction and separation. Distinct from nature, the hypostasis is neither separated nor opposed to nature or being. Irreducible but inseparable, being and hypostasis ask for each another; being is not a hypostasis but it is hypostatic, while the hypostasis is not being but it is a 'beingly' entity.³⁰¹ The person is the concrete actualization of a rational nature, the centre of action of rational nature in itself and the interior irradiation of being. Having these in mind Staniloae does not redefine a new concept for human personhood, being more interested in pointing out the unity between divine and human personhood. Therefore he practically applies the Maximian Christological principles also to his theocentric anthropology.

Reflecting on the inner, organic relationship between patristic anthropology and cosmology, Fr Staniloae argues that the mysterious relationship between the body and the soul in the human being and the emphasis of the human being's central place in the economy of creation find an appropriate image in the 'definition' of human beings as created conscious subjects.³⁰² He writes:

The conscious supreme Spirit can only have the character of one who is subject (Person). The conscious created spirit is an image of this conscious uncreated Spirit, and as such it, too, has the character of one who is subject (person). But a conscious subject is always in dialogue with another conscious subject or subjects [...] For the subject of the supreme Logos - he who conceives those 'very reasons' (logoi), he molds into material form as units of nature - possesses even within the dialogue he shares with other divine subjects the foundation for a dialogue with created subjects.³⁰³

Fr Staniloae always projects his Christological, anthropological and cosmological insights onto the horizon of a personalist ontological approach in which the human communion mirrors the divine communion. *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology Studies* (1993) could be considered an example of Staniloae's personal creative theological synthesis of the Fathers' insights with an emphasis on St Maximus' Christology, the cosmic dimension of

³⁰¹ *Kosmische Liturgie*, 55-213

³⁰² EG2, 5, 6, 57

³⁰³ *Ibidem*, 68

anthropology and Christocentric cosmology. The presentation of the Christology of St Maximus is structured in three major parts. The first part concerns the general historical framework of the Incarnation of Son of God and deification of the people, the work of the God-Word in history until the moment of his Incarnation and its role in the deification of humankind in history and for eternity; and finally it refers to the work of the Son of God of assuming the human nature through the Incarnation and that of the deification of entire humankind after his Ascension until the end of time. The second part presents the Maximian critique to monophysitism, and the third one the critique of monothelitism. Christ the Logos makes it possible for us to transcend our own self, opening for humanity the channels of Trinitarian love.

Jesus Christ is the eternal person who encompasses everything from the Godhead to unity in connection to material world; he is both God in communion with men and Man, united with men, in communion with God. The human being is in communion with God and the fellow human beings because it is the created, yet immortal image of God. The human beings are communitarian or dialogical beings, because they are created in the Trinitarian image.³⁰⁴

The most important chapter is the one concerned with contrasting features and alternative progress potentialities towards the eternity of the human being. The human being is just a creature, and yet it is made subject to divine life, and therefore can be thought of as a potentially deified creature. The love of a person, especially the person of God, is eternal, dynamic and thus always new.³⁰⁵ The depth of the human personhood reflects God's infinity. The human being is created for the completeness of eternal life in God and for communion with the others. Fr Staniloae writes: "The human being is a mystery because it is an abyss immersed in the luminous abyss of God."³⁰⁶ As St. Irenaeus of Lyons said: "Gloria Dei vivens homo, gloria autem homini vision Dei."³⁰⁷ The world is God's gift to men, meant to be used by them for their spiritual growth as a means of communication and communion with God and among themselves. But the world has a paradoxical character too. It is created for man, and yet it is beyond his power of comprehension. The world cannot satisfy the human covetousness of eternity but still it is beyond his total control and understanding. The human being could never fully grasp the meaning of the world. When

³⁰⁴ STD, 5.

³⁰⁵ SC, 340.

³⁰⁶ CND, 72.

³⁰⁷ *Adversus Haereses* IV.xx.7

Staniloae speaks about this paradox he actually refers to the mystery of creation. The world is the medium of dialogue between God and man. The person finds its own meaning and happiness only in this infinite richness of meanings and consequently in their infinite reciprocal experiencing and communication with other persons and with the Personal Word who is the infinite source of all meanings.³⁰⁸ The person bears in their depths a need for communion. His theological perception of a personal-dialogical existence is linked to the Trinitarian theology of St Gregory of Nazianzus. St. Gregory uses the term *relation* in order to specify the reality of person distinct (but not separated) from its being and its actions. In the relation between the Father and the Son it is not the divine being or the acts but the person of Father who begets the person of Son. A person is distinct from another not through its being or actions but through *relation*. A person could not exist on its own, but only in relation to another person, whether it begat it or through other ways of communion. Christianity is the first one which specifies the sense of person as another person's communion partner, implying the existence of another person and going beyond the pantheist Hellenistic philosophical vision which knew nothing else but the being and the action.³⁰⁹ For Staniloae the weakness of all philosophies comes from their inability to grasp the depth of the most intense, vivid and important relation, i.e. the relationship among persons, which cannot be reduced to one or more of their common or specific qualities. Knowledge of a person is never complete. Likewise, knowing one person does not mean that you know all of them.

In Staniloae's opinion, philosophy needs to accept the reality of the person as the basis of existence with all its aspects and implications and that any person invariably points to other persons. But as the being (at both Trinitarian and human level i.e. the spiritual divine nature and the other created one capable of bearing spirit) exists concretely only in persons since the hypostasis is the only undeniable proof of an essence's existence and only through it we could know and experience that the essence really exists in the most truthful way, there is no person without or apart from being; the being is the substantial content of the hypostasis.³¹⁰ The statement that the existence of one person always implies the existence of other persons reflecting the mystery of the Holy Trinity, leads us to the conclusion that being has concrete existence and meaning only in the interpersonal communion. Where there is a person, there is also a communion of persons because the

³⁰⁸ STD, 169

³⁰⁹ CCT, 151

³¹⁰ Cf. PG 91, 264A in FIS, 62-63

person exists only in communion.³¹¹ This is the foundation of inter-personal relationships. Being does not precede person, and person does not precede communal being either.

At the Trinitarian level, the Person of the Father actualizes being in the begetting of the Person of the Son, in terms of hypostatic ontology, by communicating the being, (without dividing it) to another Person. The divine persons are in perfect interpersonal and essential unity simultaneously. *Relation*, as unity in distinction is the paradoxical answer to the tension between nature and person. The unity of being is not compromised by the personal distinction. Equally, the personal distinction does not negate the unity of being.

The human person is part of the created world but it remains in connection with the transcendent God. Thus, another fundamental paradox of the human being is its inexhaustibility in terms of conceptual thinking, even if it is created.³¹² This person's paradox is experienced in its longing for infinity. This urged Staniloae to argue that the person could never be philosophically 'depleted'. The person cannot be completely defined and limited within a philosophical system. The person is apophatic. It is true that Staniloae integrated creatively some philosophical notions or concepts (not necessarily with their original meaning and significance) in his thought in order to initiate and maintain a constructive dialogue with modern thought, but he did not develop a philosophical system, not even an existentialist one. This method is not something new. The Cappadocians had used something very similar in their apologetic treatises and dialogues with the philosophy of their own time. On this point Fr Staniloae meets Metropolitan John Zizioulas who does not develop a theological justification of philosophy, because the world and philosophy could not have a veritable ontology unless they admit God a priori as the only entity for which existence is identical to personhood and freedom.³¹³ Eventually the peak of philosophy will be to find the person as ontological basis, but only theology will be able to speak about an authentic, veritable, complete person.³¹⁴ Zizioulas' insistence on the Theological character of the person due to the fact that ontology could not be reduced to existence *in se* is noteworthy. Inspired by St Gregory the Theologian who had been engaged in the Eunomian Trinitarian dispute, Staniloae says that theology without the personal experience of God is reduced to the level of rational speculation. A theology without God is just a technology. It has no life in it. The 'ontological orientation' towards infinity defines the human being. Created from nothing, as was also the world, yet in the

³¹¹ FIS, 64

³¹² STD, 175

³¹³ BC, 37-39

³¹⁴ Ibidem, 36

image of God, each human person is unique and spontaneous in its own unending thoughts, feelings or volitional acts showing the capacity of becoming eternal; but it cannot avoid its own identity which both distinguishes it from other beings and limits it. The human person permanently experiences infinity as a permanent yet never fully attainable goal.

Another paradox of the human person is that although it often wants to approach everything through knowledge, it cannot actually do this. The human being could never completely comprehend the Creation, his own being or the other human beings only through knowledge. Paradoxically this 'persisting' mystery is the trigger for man's thirst for spiritual and rational knowledge. The paradox of the human being, seen from a positive point of view, consists of man's capacity of experiencing simultaneously the limits of the human nature and God's infinity and moving toward this infinity without ignoring or forgetting his own creaturely state. God Himself is a unity of contrasts or paradoxes. He is one, yet in three hypostases. Although He has all possibilities of manifestation and all powers, He doesn't have to move toward anything, but He moves by resting in the love which exists among the divine hypostases communicated to the entire creation. He doesn't need anything outside himself, but He can decide to create the world, the angels and the human beings, moving out of love, and not by necessity.³¹⁵ God is the structure of the perfect love. Only in the communion of love we can experience other persons in a mutual interiority which does not compromise the personal integrity, uniqueness and identity. Fr. Staniloae traces a similar intuition at both Binswanger and Vicheslavtsev who also attempt to conceptualize the mutual relation of love as the reception and 'imprinting' of the one who is loved in the one who loves him based on a reciprocal communication of being between them.³¹⁶ Fr Staniloae does not hesitate to make use of the recent results of psychology and anthropology which in their analysis of the relation of love between two beings have come to the conclusion that through love they enter in a reciprocal communion through which they grow towards a resemblance which could reach the level of identification, in order to explain the way in which Jesus Christ through his coming down among human beings took on their responsibility for sin. He also employs this so-called 'imagination phenomena' (Binswanger calls it *Ein-bildung*³¹⁷) in order to explain the manner in which the resurrected and ascended Christ communicates his purity to humanity through

³¹⁵ STD, 193-94

³¹⁶ *Commentary 98 to Ambigua* in Larchet op.cit., 413; *Restoration*, 369

³¹⁷ Ludwig Binswanger, op. cit., 502 cited in *Restoration*, 369

love.³¹⁸ Actually Binswanger insists on the fact that the Ein-bildung between the persons which love each other, far from being only a mere subjective illusion, is a reciprocal communication of being as in communicating vessels.³¹⁹ Prudently accepting the terminology and the argumentation of Binswanger, Fr Staniloae, using an analogy, opens and enlarges them in the higher apophatic horizon of deification:

All you imagine [...] about the beloved person, that person actually gets it, so that, on its turn, it returns upon you [all it has received] as a forming power. In the relation of love, two beings open their deep springs of universal existence. So much more is this true for the relationship of love between the human being and Jesus God which makes that all the purity and deification, which Jesus wants the human being to attain, to become, de facto, a reality [...] for the human being. All Christ imagines as the ideal image of human is communicated to man by Christ himself. The image of Christ is communicated to the human being in a real mode as a power which makes him grow after his norm, and Christ raises up the human being, in that he contemplates with love his image, in the intimacy of infinite space of His heart, in his body, which is the Church.³²⁰

Fr Staniloae turns his attention to St. Athanasius of Alexandria who played a decisive role in setting the boundaries between the Christian faith and Greek philosophy. The latter has nurtured many Gnostic systems which continued under the disguise of a Christian terminology to propagate a pantheistic Greek thought which made no clear distinction between divinity and created nature, leaving the option to man to lose himself in the universal essence, or to become a helpless victim of a monotonous circuit of natural laws.³²¹ Only the Holy Trinity, the perfect structure of the supreme interpersonal love could create the world and save it from an unending senseless monotony. The world could not have any other basis than the absolute free love of the Trinitarian communion. Defending the divinity of Christ against Arianism, in which Fr Staniloae traces a certain type of Aristotelian pantheism, St. Athanasius showed that "Only the eternal Personal Son of the eternal Personal Father assures, especially through his Incarnation, the eternal existence of the human person."³²² It is Christ, the God made man, who gives eternal value to the human being. By assuming what is human he restores and saves humankind. St Athanasius

³¹⁸ Ibidem

³¹⁹ Ibidem

³²⁰ Ibidem

³²¹ SAS, 5

³²² Ibidem

always speaks about God's creation of the world from nothing through the Son, as a way to argue his divinity. Only a transcendent God can save the world and humankind. St Athanasius argues that in the mystery of the Incarnation the full meaning of the human being is revealed, created to be loved and love eternally. Man is created to experience the love of God in an eternal union with the God of love and through him with the whole creation.

According to the Christian doctrine, the Holy Trinity of the eternal, perfect and equal divine Persons is the only one who gives true meaning to existence and eternal value to the human person whilst pantheism transformed the world to a prison for man.³²³ Any form of pantheism envisions ultimately a senseless world in which all creatures come to existence through a blind, impersonal impulse. God as Christianity understands him, on the other hand, is not an impersonal universal essence subject to a fatalist law. St Athanasius' approach on the theme of incarnation of the Word of God is the effect of intertwining subtle commentaries on scriptural texts which provided him with many irrefutable arguments with extensive passages with relevant insights in the profound meanings of the Christian faith.³²⁴ Everything here seems to gravitate around *ομοούσιος*. This theological term makes a categorical distinction between the transcendence of the God and the contingent world. The entire work of St Athanasius is in fact a very strong theological argumentation on the fact that the true God could be only a God of interpersonal love (he insists on the fact that the Son of God is begotten from the being of the Father) who has the power to create from nothing, restore and save humanity and the universe because He is above any law.³²⁵ St Maximus deepened and developed further the insights of St Athanasius regarding the laws of creation in his own theology of the inner principles and laws of the world, the theology of *logoi*. The Logos is above the laws of creation but not against them.

The world is connected to the Tripersonal God through these *logoi* and directed towards an ever fuller union with him. The human being makes use of these laws envisaged as instruments to master nature to a certain degree, to use it creatively and to unify and offer it to the Creator, in an exchange and dialogue of gifts. Later St. Gregory Palamas would use his essence-energies unity-in-distinction to address the issue of God's participation in creation, something extremely important within the Orthodox vision of deification. Only God as the Eternal Father who begets an Eternal Son, each one fully

³²³ Ibidem, 26

³²⁴ Ibidem, 8

³²⁵ Ibidem, 13

possessing the common divine being, is absolutely free from or above any inner or involuntary impulses of emanation or evolution. The Supreme Personal reality of the Holy Trinity prevents any attempt of considering the world as an emanation of a divine essence. The Personal God imprints a sense to it in the act of creation. The reason for the creation of the world is given by the fact that the Father loves his Eternal and consubstantial Son and wants to extend this love in other conscious beings created through the Son in his image, so that through the Son he may pour forth his paternal love also towards the created conscious beings.³²⁶ This interpersonal divine love gives meaning to the whole creation through the Logos of God, the Word of God.

Father Staniloae makes the necessary distinction between the divine and the human consubstantiality ('one-in-being'). Using this term, *homoousios*, St Athanasius managed to keep in balance the transcendence of the essence of God and his active presence and his work in the world; his living unity and internal interpersonal love through which the creation of the world *ex nihilo* could be explained, which could lead the world to the joyful and perfect union with Him in love.³²⁷ St Athanasius employs the idea of creation *ex nihilo* to emphasize that the Son is distinct from the world. He also argues his consubstantiality with the Father, in order to demonstrate that the Son is fully God, the same as the transcendent Father.³²⁸ Only the perfect Persons of the Trinity could sustain the idea and reality of a unique God, emphasizing the existence and manifestation of a perfect love in him, because it is this perfect love which gives sense to the absolute unity of God and to the creation of the world from nothing. In the act of creation God is not constrained by any necessity to extend his life to his creatures; moreover the entire world is imprinted by his perfect, free and endless love. As such, the creation of the world *ex nihilo* is the affirmation of the absolute freedom of the infinite love of God who does not need anything to bring it into existence, but which calls for man's responsibility. This could serve as a spiritual foundation of a balanced theology of creation. We cannot consider nothingness as an absolute ontological category.³²⁹ There is no absolute void that could limit the infinite existence of God. The void should be understood simply as non-existence.³³⁰ The act of Creation is the manifestation of the absolute omnipotence and freedom of God but above all of his infinite love and goodness. The ultimate reason of the contingent world and the preservation of the cosmos are to be found only in the perfect

³²⁶ Ibidem, 18.

³²⁷ Ibidem.

³²⁸ Ibidem, 19.

³²⁹ SAS, 19-21.

³³⁰ Ibidem, 20.

thought, uncreated creative power and grace of Personal God. This reality is the foundation of Christian cosmology as opposed to pantheist conceptions³³¹. The Cappadocians, St Maximus the Confessor or St Gregory Palamas gradually extended this approach to the creation of man to whom the world is offered by God, as a means of inter-personal dialogue. By the very fact that creation has as its purpose to bring about a dialogue between God, the supreme Personal reality and the conscious created persons³³² it proves itself to have been made for the sake of conscious beings, and not the other way around.³³³

II.5. The Cosmological Apophaticism of Dumitru Staniloae

The complex ontology of the human being³³⁴ has always been an important subject of reflection for the Fathers. Some of the Fathers consider that the human being is a microcosm because it summarizes in itself the entire world.³³⁵ St. Gregory of Nazianzus shows his admiration for the human being which, because of the unification within itself of the spiritual and material planes, raises up the creation to a superior level of complexity, by calling it *the macrocosm in microcosm* (world) since man is above the world in the sense of having the capacity to see, to perceive the ideas, reasons and purpose lying behind it³³⁶, to raise up to Creator through the contemplation of creation. Fr. Staniloae reiterates St. Maximus' remark that the human being should rather be considered as a macrocosm since it is man's vocation to gather within him the entire world, being able to comprise it within him without losing himself in it, accomplishing a greater unity than the external world.³³⁷ He writes: "Man's mission is to gather within himself the reasons³³⁸ (logoi) of creation and to give them a rational conception in his own mind in order to the Logos, just as the Logos had already offered them as gift and content accessible to and necessary for the human spirit."³³⁹ The 'conversation' with modern philosophy³⁴⁰, western dialectic theology and even with certain reductionist types of gnostic dualism, the personal witness to dramatic

³³¹ *Commentary 24 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op. cit., 384.

³³² EG2, 69.

³³³ *Ibidem*, 5.

³³⁴ EG2, 65-110.

³³⁵ IHL, 138.

³³⁶ *Commentary 71 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit., 403.

³³⁷ IHL, 138-39.

³³⁸ EG5, 203.

³³⁹ *Ibidem*, 137.

³⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and his concept of 'angst', Martin Buber (1868-1965) with the metaphysical system developed around 'I-Thou' relationship or Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) and his vision of 'Wir-struktur' drew his attention most.

changes which humanity had experienced in the last century, the necessity of underlying the spiritual relevance of personal reality in the complex context of post-modern society, according to the patristic theology of the Church, constitute the framework within which Fr Staniloae's theology of the world was developed.

The mystery of human existence is intimately connected to the mystery of Christ's existence, the God-man. Father Staniloae uses the person-nature synthesis as a 'hermeneutical key' in which the distinctions ousia-hypostasis, person-individual or nature-grace are carefully considered in order to avoid a narrow and exclusively rationalistic perspective. We see here once more the importance of an ontological-analogical view of the relation between the Triune God, man, and the world which is God's free gift for humanity. Now we shall try to analyse Fr Staniloae theology of the world in the attempt to disclose its most relevant aspects regarding human being as the joining link between God and creation and mediator of creation's fulfilment³⁴¹. The first three chapters of his *magnum opus* are treating in detail this issue.³⁴² Fr Bria argues that Fr Staniloae's interpretation of rationality of creation is original because he does not present it in terms of a physical or ethical static order³⁴³ but as a dynamic reality which is moved by God towards its final purpose.³⁴⁴ This dynamism takes the form of a dialogue between God and humanity. Since "the divine uncreated energies bear an inherent relational sense"³⁴⁵ humanity can also return the world as a gift to the Creator, yet imprinted with new meanings and bearing the seal of its own limited creative power. Although Fr. Staniloae is deeply influenced in his conception of salvation and deification by the Maximian perspective on the dynamics of creation³⁴⁶ he tries to develop it further, as we can see especially in his commentaries to the *Ambigua*. St. Maximus argues that all creatures are subject to *kinesis*³⁴⁷ from the moment of their *genesis* as they are not the cause of their own existence and they are not the ultimate reality either. The Cause of all and fulfilment is the Uncaused and transcendent God.³⁴⁸ Only when the creatures reach perfection, their final purpose, the one God intended for them, they experience the stability or *stasis*³⁴⁹. Fr

³⁴¹ EG2, 112

³⁴² Ibidem, 1-111

³⁴³ EG2, viii

³⁴⁴ Ibidem, x

³⁴⁵ Ibidem

³⁴⁶ See *Ambigua* 7 PG 91, 1069A-1072C and *Ambigua* 10 PG 91,1177C. For the latter see Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 111-139

³⁴⁷ Cf. *Ambigua* 7, PG 91, 1069B, 1073B, *Ambigua* 10, 1177A in Larchet, op.cit., 26

³⁴⁸ Cf. *Ambigua* 7, PG 91, 1072B in Larchet, op.cit., 26

³⁴⁹ Cf. *Ambigua* 7, PG 91, 1072C; *Ambigua* 15, PG 1217CD, in Larchet, op.cit., 26 see also Fr. Staniloae's commentaries 24-30 in Ibidem.

Staniloae explains: "The creatures rest in God because their reasons (logoi) are firmly in God [i.e. in God's thought and will], even if the created entities created according to their model do not come to existence simultaneously with their reasons."³⁵⁰ The final aim of all creatures is ultimately God or better said the infinity which surrounds him since God is even above it.³⁵¹ Fr Staniloae writes:

Confining himself [i.e. Maximus] especially to rational beings, he declared that all of these have been brought into existence so as to acquire through their free movement or action the good existence and thereby reach the eternal good existence.³⁵²

Willie Jenkins identifies three major aspects of St Maximus' cosmological thought which serve as basis for Staniloae's and Bulgakov's theology of the world: "creation integrity (logikos) in Christ, the mediatorship of humanity as microcosm and the promise of creative freedom."³⁵³ Fr Staniloae employs the image of the Cosmic Christ (pointing towards Balthasar's *Cosmic Liturgy*) in order to highlight the intimate link between the deification and salvation of the world which find their 'nodal point' in a humanity ontologically connected to nature³⁵⁴, in a humanity which as microcosm (connecting all the distinctive parts of creation) has the vocation to turn creation into macro-anthropos i.e. an enlarged humanity. He argues that "nature depends on man or makes him whole, and man cannot reach perfection if he does not reflect nature and is not at work upon it"³⁵⁵. For Fr Staniloae this ontological connection is so strong and runs so deep so that he does not hesitate to consider each human being as a hypostatization of the entire cosmic nature though only in communion with others.³⁵⁶ Here Fr Staniloae integrates in his theology of personhood his cosmological vision because he wants to argue that the world could find its fulfilment only in the personal communion apart from which it would be meaningless. The world is created for the human being and has an anthropocentric character,³⁵⁷ not the other way round. So besides the fact that humans are responsible for the entire world, it is of a greater importance for us to realize that living with God and in the world are two inseparable aspects of human life. Perhaps this is the reason why Jenkins refers to Fr Staniloae's

³⁵⁰ *Commentary 48 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit., 396

³⁵¹ Cf. *Ambigua 15*, PG 1217C, 1220C in Larchet, op. cit., 26

³⁵² EG2, 18

³⁵³ See Willie Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Enviromental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 197-202

³⁵⁴ EG2, p.1: "Human nature cannot be conceived apart from the cosmic nature."

³⁵⁵ Ibidem

³⁵⁶ See W. Jenkins, op. cit., endnote 56, p.303. EG2, p.2

³⁵⁷ EG2, p. 3

theology to warn that by damaging the world we actually hurt ourselves and the others, also endangering the future.

The cosmology of St Maximos in which the Christological and anthropological insights are synthesized is developed by Fr Staniloae in his theology of “the world as gift and word”³⁵⁸, a synthetic expression of his cosmic anthropology. The Risen Christ, God made man, reinstates the humanity as the unifying cosmic principle. Christ, through Resurrection, liberates and gives to humanity the power to gather all creation and raise it up in the communion with the Holy Trinity. The flexible and contingent character of the rationality of the world proves that it is a necessary means for the development of humanity in solidarity.³⁵⁹ This also implies that nature is ontologically opened to the creative action of human being.³⁶⁰ The human being is superior to the world because it can understand it and master it to a certain extent.³⁶¹ The salvation of the world and the salvation of humanity which in return is also dependent and reflected on nature are always regarded in their interdependence. Fr Staniloae writes:

The whole cosmos is called to deification through the medium of the human being which consists of soul and body [...] It is through the body that soul is united with the cosmos. And God deifies the cosmos through the human soul. The soul has vis-à-vis the body and, through it, vis-à-vis the entire cosmos, the role God has vis-à-vis the soul.³⁶²

Fr Staniloae argues that the anthropological optimism which characterizes St. Maximus lies in his theological interpretation of the consequences of the hypostatical union as a reaction to the pantheistic evolutionism. Fr Staniloae deepens and develops them further. Christ assumed the human nature fully and freely in order to restore and deify it. The Word of God was incarnated precisely because the human being is corporeal. Therefore not only the soul but also the body has an eternal value since it is a means of divine manifestation. The body is not a prison for the soul. Moreover the reality of death proves the intimate interdependence of the soul and body in constituting man as a whole, an interdependence apart from which even the effects of resurrection would be jeopardised. This interdependence is the argument for the fact that soul and body of the human being are

³⁵⁸ Ibidem, 21-63

³⁵⁹ Ibidem, p.3

³⁶⁰ Ibidem, p.4

³⁶¹ *Commentary 71 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit., 403. St Jean Damascene says: “Because in God and in human being the whole creation is unified.” (PG 95, 168)

³⁶² *Commentary 67 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op. cit, 401.

being brought simultaneously into existence and not separated or successively.³⁶³ The personal reality of the human being, which comes to existence through birth, assures its integrity as a union and unity between a certain soul and a certain body. Otherwise the interdependence, the mutual conditioning between the human species and the human being would be also compromised.³⁶⁴ The raising of the son of the widow of Nain From the dead (Cf. Luke 7, 15), even if it was in fact the reanimation of a corpse and fundamentally different from Christ's Resurrection proved not only that the soul although created is immortal but also that the unique relationship between a soul and a body is not destroyed, not even by death.

Fr Staniloae writes: "the soul preserves within itself, even after death, the virtualities of the body."³⁶⁵ All three examples of raising from the dead performed by Christ proves an undeniable truth: each soul belongs with its own body. St. Gregory of Nyssa shows the value human body has for Christians. He is categorical in this respect: the human being without the body is not a whole human being.³⁶⁶ The theory of reincarnation could never be reconciled with the Christian vision according to which the human being is a complete, unique and free person called by God to a perfect and eternal existence.³⁶⁷ The unity between the soul and body in a human being cannot be achieved by an exterior restraining force or an impersonal natural affinity.³⁶⁸ The spiritual forces of the created eternal soul received from God organise the matter of the body which is created capable of receiving and bearing the spiritual energies.³⁶⁹ On the other hand, this unity has, due to its uniqueness, the character of a personal or hypostatical union. In other words it is through the hypostatical union between a certain soul and a certain body that a certain human being comes to existence.³⁷⁰ The latter Staniloae becomes increasingly interested in a constructive dialogue between theology and natural sciences as his theology of the world plainly reflects it.³⁷¹ He compares the ancient Greek perspective, the Fathers' view and modern view concerning the matter, in order to emphasize the evolution and progress but also to explore the limits of cosmological theories.³⁷² He argues that while the Greeks considered the matter to be a uniform, amorphous mass composed by identical atoms, a

³⁶³ *Commentary 72, 73, 74 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit.,403-04

³⁶⁴ *Ibidem*

³⁶⁵ *Commentary 75 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit, 404

³⁶⁶ Cf. *In Christi Resurrectionem*, III, PG 46, 676 in EG3, p. 276 and footnote 232

³⁶⁷ *Commentary 75 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit.,404

³⁶⁸ *Ibidem*

³⁶⁹ *Ibidem*

³⁷⁰ *Commentary 74 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op. cit., 404

³⁷¹ TC, 224-26

³⁷² EG2, 45.

matter opposed to the divine Logos, a conception also accepted by most of the Fathers, the latest discoveries in the field of chemistry and physics contradict the ancient conception proving that matter can be organized in many different ways.³⁷³ The law of gravity or the constant of Planck establish the limits of the material order. The reason why Staniloae is particularly interested in the cosmology of St Maximus is his theology of logoi of all things which originate in the divine Logos because it explains to a certain extent the real possibility of the transfiguration of the matter. According to Staniloae, St Maximus' conception resonates with the modern cosmological theory which acknowledges "the full yet still malleable rationality of the matter, its rational transparency, its capacity to be moulded by conscious human reason".³⁷⁴ For Fr Staniloae the progress of humanity depends on its advancement in a deeper, more profound knowledge and understanding of the relation between spirit and matter; this is the point where theology and science could meet. The responsibility of humans towards creation keeps the balance between the spiritual and technological progress. Staniloae agrees with Heinrich Schulte-Vieting³⁷⁵ who in an analysis of the work *Technik und Verantwortung*³⁷⁶ (Technology and Responsibility) of the German chemist and technology philosopher, Hans Sachsse (1906-1992) argues that this responsibility is meaningful only when it is grounded in the perspective of the absolute.³⁷⁷ Matter has within itself the capacity of *res formanda* and it offers to each soul the possibility of organizing it in its distinct limited body. The fact that matter could be used by the human being for the necessities of the body proves that it exists to form and sustain the body of man. But Fr Staniloae does not stop here. Considering the relation between the soul and the body in a personalist perspective he argues that "the human body persists as a virtuality in the universal matter, even after death"³⁷⁸.

Fr Staniloae explains that by preserving within itself the virtualities of the bodily life and the results obtained through the actualization of these virtualities (potentialities) in life, the soul actually remains in a relation with the universal matter, keeping within the forces of the body's reconstruction in the image of the body it had during the earthly life, at the moment of its resurrection, at the Second Coming.³⁷⁹ Again, through his ontological personalism Fr Staniloae argues the superiority of spirit over matter.³⁸⁰ However, it is only

³⁷³ HTE, 50-51.

³⁷⁴ EG2, 45.

³⁷⁵ See his article in *Herder Korrespondenz*, 27:4 (1973), 203-05.

³⁷⁶ Freiburg, 1972.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 50.

³⁷⁸ *Commentary 75 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit., 404.

³⁷⁹ *Ibidem*

³⁸⁰ *Commentary 76 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op. cit., 404

the soul that is called to fully actualize the rationality of matter in its own body and through it the rationality of the entire universe. The Resurrection of Christ shows that the human body is not simply matter. It is intimately connected to the soul, influences it, and leaves its marks on the soul for ever.³⁸¹

The restoration of the human body and of the world is argued by St. Gregory of Nyssa through the fact that all that God created is fundamentally good, and not condemned to extinction, but called through the collaboration of humanity to eternal communion with him.³⁸² If we consider the Romanian socio-political context of the second half of the last century, we come to realize why Fr. Staniloae fought all his life against the reductionist conceptions and ideologies that closed the door of heaven to the human being (such as dialectical materialism embraced by Communism) by constantly arguing that the material world has a spiritual basis. Our faith in the incarnate and resurrected Christ who ascended to Heaven in his body - in a fully spiritualized body, full of the divine energies of the Holy Spirit and also understood as the Eucharistic, sacramental body - determines Fr Staniloae to unreservedly argue in his presentation of universal eschatology that "Christianity admits a certain type of mystical materialism."³⁸³ As we have already seen above, Fr Staniloae is quite clear in arguing that there is a certain continuity and compatibility between the human body and the universe. This is why he practically identifies the mystery of the resurrected body and of the restoration of the universe with the mystery of the fully spiritualized or transfigured matter. Although it is a mystery he does not hesitate to share his vision almost in poetic terms:

The material of the resurrected universe and the human bodies will be an eternally young, transparent energy, perfectly and utterly graceful, transparent to the beauty of spiritual states and movements, without losing however its capacity for forms and its consistency. The forms will be the finest expression of the spiritual states, and consistency fully elastic, to use some modern terms.³⁸⁴

Although influenced by St Gregory of Nyssa, St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Maximus, Theophanes Kerameus³⁸⁵, Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople (806-815) and Fr P. Florensky,³⁸⁶ Fr Staniloae approaches the mystery of the transfigured matter in a surprising

³⁸¹ Ibidem

³⁸² Cf. PG 46, 881

³⁸³ TDO3, 278

³⁸⁴ Ibidem

³⁸⁵ Cf. PG, 120, 1037, 1040 in TDO3, 276

³⁸⁶ PGT, 264-74

manner. However we consider that Fr Staniloae's theology of the world offers a very convincing³⁸⁷ and necessary testimony for the present, by emphasizing the importance the contemplation of God in creation³⁸⁸.

So far, considering the subtlety and the depth of Fr Staniloae's theology of the world, even if it seems to emphasize more the personal than the natural, could be nevertheless considered as a fresh expression of the modern Orthodox theology.

II.6. Evaluation

The person is not strictly a theological or eschatological category. It also has philosophical, social, ethical, juridical, political and economic, active analogical aspects.³⁸⁹ Theologians cannot ignore this. No one contests the decisive contribution of the Russian theologians and philosophers of the last two centuries in the recovery of the apophatic dimension of the person. Staniloae himself is partially inspired in his own theology of personhood³⁹⁰ by Bulgakov who argues that the transcendence of the hypostasis which cannot be identified with a part of nature being beyond all natural manifestations and energies, yet being always and simultaneously connected to all parts of nature. Staniloae also uses Bulgakov's insight according to which the use of pronoun is more suitable to suggest the apophatic dimension of human personal existence since a name could never fully express the depth or the content of it. In his *Lamb of God* Bulgakov is ambiguous in his definition of hypostasis considering it sometimes uncreated, a 'divine spark', other times created but he would clarify this problem in his later *The Comforter*. It seems that Staniloae was not aware of that. Although Staniloae agrees with Bulgakov that the subjectivity is something beyond the components of the nature he considers that the Russian theologian pushes things too far by implying that hypostasis is something added to and completely different from nature, resulting in a separation between subject and nature. Confronting Bulgakov's conception of subject and subjectivity with the Chalcedonian Christology Staniloae argues that the former diminish the value of nature by considering the subject, instead of nature the source of subjectivity.³⁹¹ The inclination toward a rather sharp philosophical antinomism introduces an irreconcilable tension between person and nature, transforming the person in a meta-ontological category. Staniloae argues that subject is something

³⁸⁷ EG1, xx-xxi

³⁸⁸ OS, 203-23

³⁸⁹ PC, 383-85

³⁹⁰ *Restoration*, 109-111

³⁹¹ *Restoration*, 118

beyond any parts of nature as long as subjectivity is remains grounded in nature. Otherwise the person-nature unity-in-distinction is compromised. Also in the case of Lossky the irreducibility of person to nature isolates the first in some sort of a super-natural meta-ontology introducing a gap between them and this raises problem in his treatment of the relation between the transcendent and immanent Trinity. In his conception of human personhood, under the influence of the philosophical antinomism, initially developed by Bulgakov and Florensky who applied it to Trinitarian theology, Christology, Pneumatology, Lossky tends to equate the uniqueness or irreducibility of human person with ecstatic freedom and essence with necessity.³⁹² Even if in both cases of Staniloae and Lossky the Christological and Trinitarian theology is the base for their theology of personhood, their interpretation of the category of hypostasis and ousia and the relation between them is different in many respects, especially regarding the consequences of the divine-human communion for the Trinitarian theology.

Berdyaev conceives a rather extreme gnostic-dualist existentialist personalism, which is also built on the inextricable contradiction between the person identified with the non-objectifiable spirit and freedom and nature identified with blind necessity-datum. Hence Berdyaev considers the being secondary to freedom.³⁹³ The prestigious exponents of Modern Greek theology, Zizioulas³⁹⁴ and Yannaras³⁹⁵ are also among those who try to find the balance between person and nature, each one of them elaborating a theological ontology of person and communion. The patristic model of Zizioulas seems to follow closely the Cappadocian and Christological/Chalcedonian model, while Yannaras seems more interested in Palamism. Their philosophical references are also different: Yannaras is heavily indebted to the existential 'fundamental ontology' of Heidegger, unlike Zizioulas (a disciple of Paul Tillich³⁹⁶), who prefers the 'relational' ontology of Buber. Though elaborating different theological ontological models with valuable insights, they seem to put forth, as Lossky had done, an absolute concept of person (rather abstract), 'liberated' from nature, in fact against nature, and not determined by it. Apparently this is the unfortunate consequence of equating the proper human nature as created by God in his image with human nature after the fall. In Yannaras' case the unbalanced approach which diminishes the place of nature is caused by the unilateral identification of image of God

³⁹² MT, 122-23

³⁹³ Cf. Georg Nicolaus, *C.G. Jung and Nikolai Berdyaev: Individuation and the Person: A Critical Comparison*, (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.57-8, 79-82 and 148-50

³⁹⁴ Nicholas Loudovikos, "Person instead of grace and dictated otherness: John Zizioulas' final theological position" in *The Heythrop Journal*, XLVIII (2009), 1-16

³⁹⁵ Verna Harrison, "Yannaras on Person and Nature", in *SVTQ*, 33:3 (1989), 287-298

³⁹⁶ OS, 149

with the human person.³⁹⁷ This vision is actually opposed to St. Gregory of Nyssa's position who 'defines' the image as participation at all divine attributes, including freedom, involving the whole human nature with all her energies. Thus essence is reduced to person and person to grace.³⁹⁸ The anthropological vision of Panayotis Nellas³⁹⁹ is tremendously important in this respect as Staniloae⁴⁰⁰ justly admits. Even after the fall the ontological and moral planes are not to be confused. Personal freedom is not opposed to natural virtue. Nature is essentially good. Asceticism is not a moralist, rigid dryness or a fight against our own psychological and physical natural capacities without which the human person could not express its personal freedom, but rather their reorientation towards God so that they may be fully developed and transfigured.⁴⁰¹ Our fight is against the passions as distorted or corrupted means of satisfying our fallen natural needs and not against nature itself. The identification of human nature with death, sin, decay or blind necessity is not consistent with the authentic patristic vision.

As we showed, for Fr Staniloae, nature, understood in general terms, is a positive rather than a negative reality. After all it is also God's gift to us through Creation. Here Fr Loudovikos⁴⁰² meets Fr Staniloae. The work of Fr. Loudovikos confirms what Fr Staniloae so forcibly argues: the person-nature synthesis is essential for a balanced theology whether we speaking about Trinitarian vision, Christology anthropology, cosmology, doctrine of deification or eschatology in particular. In his attempt to recover Eucharistic theology through an interesting recourse to St Maximus' eschatological ontology, Fr Loudovikos distances himself from Metropolitan Zizioulas' theological vision, who under the influence of Berdyaev, seems to identify nature with the fall and the person with the liberation from this nature, equated with necessity. Moreover, Fr Loudovikos argues that the Trinitarian model of Zizioulas, his understanding of intersubjectivity in particular, is actually a reproduction of the Levinas heteronomy in which Metropolitan Zizioulas replaces the ethical priority with an ontological one.⁴⁰³ Thus it seems that in the rather asymmetrical Trinitarian model of Zizioulas, the person of the Father actually precedes the others which

³⁹⁷ Cf. Verna Harrison, art. cit., 289

³⁹⁸ Nicholas Loudovikos, art.cit., 3

³⁹⁹ Panayotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: the Nature of the Human Person*, Elizabeth Briere (trans.), Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia (foreword), (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1997)

⁴⁰⁰ See his study which initially appeared in neo-Greek "P. Nellas: contemporary interpreter of patristic anthropology" in *Synaxi* 21/1/1987, pp. 31-40 being republished in *Ortodoxia* 1 (1988), 148-56

⁴⁰¹ Verna Harrison, art.cit., 292

⁴⁰² Nikolaos Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology. Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, E. Theokritoff (trans.), (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010)

⁴⁰³ *Ibidem*, 9

eventually compromise the reality of reciprocity and dialogue within the Trinity.⁴⁰⁴ Fr Loudovikos, on the other hand, unfolding the ontological implications of St Maximus' Christology, is able to contend that nature is "already a gift, already in the order of grace"⁴⁰⁵ and "nature as gift is already and always personal, already and always reciprocity"⁴⁰⁶ and not a frozen, immutable datum. This seems to be the reason why Fr. Staniloae, preoccupied by the reality of reciprocity, argues that real communion could not be but interpersonal. Based on Fr Loudovikos' objective theological analysis which put in balance the strong points and weaknesses of Metropolitan Zizioulas personalist thought, we would like to point out here the clear distinction regarding the *communicatio idiomatum* treatment in the theology of Fr Staniloae⁴⁰⁷ and Metropolitan Zizioulas' approach on this matter⁴⁰⁸. Simultaneous ontological realities, person and nature are in Fr Staniloae's perspective beyond any separation or dialectical tension. The person exists through nature which is the basis of interpersonal communion. Person and nature are equally open and meant for communion.

The person is the aim of knowledge and nature is the means of it. In the development of his conception Fr Staniloae argues, remaining within the boundary of patristic principles that due to the antinomic reality and analogical character of the person-nature relation, person and nature have the same content even in terms of essence-energy. The hypostasis does not produce any energy; energies are produced by and belong to nature but activated, used and focalised in and by the hypostasis. In patristic sense, by energies Fr Staniloae implies all the abilities, powers, activities or potentials of the nature. A subtle aspect of the person-nature relationship is that the person transcends the energies of nature and exists beyond them, 'personalizing' them, although it never transcends its nature.⁴⁰⁹

The human nature is a whole 'composed' of body and soul, (not soul in body, specific to Origen's unbalanced dominative approach, heavily tainted by Neo-Platonism), which come simultaneously into existence⁴¹⁰. So for Fr Staniloae, the human nature is material and spiritual at the same time as it exists in the double non-dialectical state of subject-object which is viewed through the distinction between the potentiality and the actualization of its energies.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibidem, 10

⁴⁰⁵ Ibidem

⁴⁰⁶ Ibidem

⁴⁰⁷ *Restoration*, 155-8

⁴⁰⁸ CO, 166 sq

⁴⁰⁹ EG1, 101-3; 127-28; 130-35; 184-86 Cf. Berger, op. cit., 186-90

⁴¹⁰ EG1, 71-80. *Commentary 74 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op.cit., 404

Consequently, subjectivity as potentiality belongs to the human nature, but only activated, centred and actualized in a truly existing being, the person. In Fr. Staniloae's theological synthesis, human nature is personal.⁴¹¹ This is an important feature of his 'ontological personalism' which hopefully will open new perspectives for the future studies in personhood. As Fr Loudovikos remarks "it is the very formation and not the escape from nature that makes the person."⁴¹² Fr Staniloae's involvement with philosophy, his appeal to the resources of existential and personalist philosophies is an important aspect of his personhood. Instead of trying to perform a theological adaptation to philosophy or vice versa, knowing that such an endeavour could easily become subject to confusion and misunderstanding, we consider that he dedicated himself to finding in philosophy those elements which could really serve the theology-philosophy dialogue which entered a new stage, especially after positivism had to recognize its own limits. His neo-patristic synthesis which takes the shape of a communitarian personalism could hardly be labelled as a mere personal philosophical speculation. Perhaps the fact that Fr Staniloae's theology as a living and dynamic theology is not only a profound existential comment of the experience of God in the twentieth century, but as it is also sensitive to the problems and concerns of modernity, it could explain the way he approaches certain philosophical concepts and terms.

From his interpretation of the Maximian Christology and cosmology in the language and categories of the personalist and existential philosophy, to the understanding of love as a fundamental interpersonal act and actualization of freedom which defines Louis Lavelle's conception⁴¹³ or Binswanger's 'phenomenology of love'⁴¹⁴ which highlights the intimate connection between love and knowledge to Blondel's considerations on the contradictory and irrational character of human passions and their consequences and the positive value of asceticism⁴¹⁵, all of them are irrefutable arguments for Fr Staniloae's permanent interest in the culture of his time. On the other hand he humbly recognizes the value and potential of the efforts and reflections of those who are really interested not only in searching and discovering the meaning of human life and creation but also to put themselves through their work in the service of the others, as long as they confirm the patristic vision.⁴¹⁶ He, as the one who argues the possibility of and unfolds the meaning of

⁴¹¹ K. Berger, op. cit., 55-7

⁴¹² See Loudovikos, op. cit., 9.

⁴¹³ Louis Lavelle, *De L'Acte*, (Paris: Aubier, 1937), 528-33, cited in *Restoration*, pp. 60-71,74.

⁴¹⁴ *Restoration*, p.188

⁴¹⁵ Maurice Blondel, *L'Action*, II, (Paris, 1937), 192, 245 cited in *SO*, 79-80

⁴¹⁶ *Restoration*, 174-75

the union between the human beings and God⁴¹⁷ and human communion in God in our times, that is the deification of human being and universe, proves through a diligent study and reflection on their work that he considers them prominent partners of dialogue.

I consider that Fr Staniloae's theology of personhood, despite its personalist overtone offers a new perspective of the identity, dialogue, mutual responsibility and communion because he is sensitive to the problems of our age, while remaining in touch with the thought of the Fathers. It is true that Staniloae considers the thought of the Fathers axiomatic. He does not contradict them because for him their spiritual authority is beyond doubt. However his conception of personhood proves that he refuses to remain trapped in the past. Therefore the methodology followed in approaching the patristic texts is extremely important for Staniloae. For him there is no question of going beyond the Fathers but addressing the challenges of the present yet remaining faithful to the patristic and not philosophical principles. For that he worked hard to find correspondences and connections between the patristic and modern thought, to argue that the second confirms more or less the first, being deeply attached to the idea of perennial positive character of 'the mind of Fathers' and its unity.

However I consider that Staniloae's faithfulness to the patristic tradition is the source of his theology's strength and weakness as the same time. Closely following the line of the Fathers his theological argument is strong and well-articulated but I don't think that is always connected to the present. Despite the balance between apophaticism and cataphaticism advocated by Staniloae I think there is an overemphasis of apophaticism in Staniloae's theology which ironically he criticises in Lossky's theology. This overemphasis is the source of Staniloae's tendency to see things in ideal terms without direct, concrete, practical implications for our daily life maybe because he uncritically integrates certain aspects of the Fathers' view, which does not fully correspond to our times, in his own conception. This makes his theology in certain points obscure and hard to approach.

⁴¹⁷ OS, 21-39

III. The Trinitarian Theology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae

III.1. Amo ergo sum

Fr Staniloae considers that the openness of Orthodoxy and its spiritual power to overcome any limitations has its source in the divine, eternal and infinite love which embrace and unifies all things.⁴¹⁸ Ontologically and existentially speaking we could regard the theology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae as an exhaustive argument in favour of the “amo ergo sum” over the Cartesian philosophical individualism synthesized in the dictum “cogito ergo sum”⁴¹⁹ based on a new interpretation and development of patristic thought.⁴²⁰ Only love can transcend any division or separation as offspring of egoism by transforming it in complementarity which leads to communication and communion without which any spiritual progress or salvation would not be possible. For Staniloae, who follows line of the patristic Trinitarian thought but also of people such as Florensky and especially Bulgakov the Holy Trinity, the mystery of perfect unity of distinct divine persons is the structure of supreme or perfect love.⁴²¹ Deeply concerned with the personhood of God and its relation with human personhood one can sense a personalist flavour throughout all of Staniloae’s work. “The Holy Trinity alone assures our existence as persons”⁴²² comes at a premise and a conclusion at the same time of all his theological thought, not only of his Trinitarian vision. Since according to his opinion the Fathers have never thought of the divine essence separately from hypostases⁴²³, he incorporated this patristic principle in his own Trinitarian theology via his Christology.

One of his main concerns was to avoid a gap between the concepts of person and nature within the Trinity, which would have compromised the relation between theologia and economia and hence the realism of divine-human communion. To preserve a transcendent/immanent antinomy he adopted the Dionysian term of the divine ‘super-

⁴¹⁸ Staniloae, “Some Characteristics of the Orthodoxy”, *Sobornost*, 5:9 (1969), 629

⁴¹⁹ CCT, 137

⁴²⁰ TC, 233 and OR, 127 ff. Fr. Staniloae’ ontology is the attempt of a synthesis between St. Maximus’ concept of Logos and logoi and the palamite essence-energy unity in distinction as a reaction against Thomism which sees God as “actus purus” i.e., he claims, completely depleted in His acts. See also Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Orthodoxy, Postmodernity, and Ecumenism: The Difference that Divine-Human Communion makes”, *JES*, 42:4, 2007, 6

⁴²¹ EG1, 245-280

⁴²² EG1, 276

⁴²³ EG1, 257

essence⁴²⁴ but completed it with the Maximian principle⁴²⁵ that there is no unhypostasized nature and Leontius' insight regarding the reality of hypostatical self-existence⁴²⁶. The outcome of this patristic synthesis was the understanding of God as 'Supreme Personal Reality'⁴²⁷ which in Staniloae's doctrine of Trinity pairs the Dionysian divine 'super-essence'. What Staniloae had in mind was to emphasize the person-nature unity-in-distinction in the Trinity by arguing the simultaneous yet distinct essential character and personal character of the Trinitarian apophaticism.

Another challenge Staniloae also had to face is conceiving a God-creation relation that would not compromise the uncreated/created ontological distinction in their union. Unlike Bulgakov who coined Sophia to account for the communion of God with the world, Staniloae considered that the patristic categories of hypostasis, ousia, energeia or logoi used by the Fathers were enough to forge a balanced conception of God's relation of communion with creation, and God who is both transcendent and immanent to the world. This definitively shows that Staniloae, as Lossky and Florovsky before him, constructed his theology in opposition to Bulgakov's theology. As we have shown in the previous chapter, the solution according to Staniloae would be to highlight the personal character of the essential divine energies. Staniloae elaborated his conception of energetic apophaticism around the idea that any manifestation of God is a personal one. Staniloae struggles to defend the equal ultimacy of hypostasis and ousia in the spirit of the Fathers.

Kevin Berger is one of the contemporary scholars interested in Staniloae's neo-patristic synthesis. In one of his recent studies⁴²⁸ Berger follows the thread of Staniloae's methodology and rationale in the latter's synthesis of Dionysius, Maximus and Palamas, arguing the continuity and complementarity of thought of different Fathers of the Church, but inspired by the same Holy Spirit. Since the Palamite doctrine is not enough in this case, it has to be synthesised with the Maximian doctrine of Logos-logoi because both of them concern the God-creation communion in a complementary way. But St Maximus also refers in his *Ambigua* to Dionysius' Divine Names to argue that logoi are divine wills or *thelēmata*.⁴²⁹ The integration of logoi and divine energies is perhaps the most creative and controversial aspect of Staniloae's personalist theological thought. He first remarks that the

⁴²⁴ Mystical Theology, I, PG 3, 997 AB

⁴²⁵ PG 91: 264A

⁴²⁶ PG 86: 1280A

⁴²⁷ EG1, 135-36

⁴²⁸ "A Contemporary Synthesis of St. Maximus' Theology: The Work of Fr. Dumitru Staniloae", RT, 95:1 (2013), 23-38

⁴²⁹ PG 91:1081C; D.N. 5.8 PG 3, 824C in RT, 36

Logos is the personal Logos⁴³⁰ of God and this implies for Staniloae that the logoi have both ontological and personal characteristics. If ontologically the logoi are the “unchanging models and final aims of things based on which God creates, sustains and draws the world toward union with Him”⁴³¹, “pre-existing in an eternal undifferentiated unity in God”⁴³² which is not compromised when “each one becomes distinct and dynamic in the act of creation”⁴³³ Staniloae argues that the logoi also have a personal dimension since they are also seen by Maximus, following Dionysius, as some sort of “divine thoughts or intentions according which God brings to existence the things through his will”⁴³⁴. So the logoi are eternal yet depending on God’s will at the same time, becoming transparent to the divine energies. This antinomy implies the reality of the personal Word who through the logoi is not only related but actually personally present in them without breaking the divine or the human freedom.⁴³⁵ From a personal perspective, the logoi are seen as the vehicle of the personal God’s specific messages in dialogue with each human person, through faith. The most difficult aspect of this synthesis is the distinction between the logoi and the divine energies since both are uncreated. One aspect of this distinction concerns intelligibility: while the logoi are identifiable in created things, or as God’s attributes, and therefore intelligible to a certain extent, the uncreated energies are not connected to specific things being above any intelligibility.⁴³⁶ The distinction becomes more evident in the act of natural contemplation in which the uncreated energies open the mind to see the logoi in creatures and guide it through the logoi of things to the Logos of God, the source of all logoi.⁴³⁷ Even if St Maximus never identified the logoi with energies, Staniloae considers that St Maximus had in mind their hypostatical character when he uses the Dionysian term of *thelēmata*. Concluding in his commentaries on the *Ambigua*, Staniloae says that if the logoi are seen with the mind, their energetic character is experienced by the whole human being through the uncreated energies.⁴³⁸ To point out the personal character of the logoi, Staniloae argues that the logos is addressed primarily to the human reason, while the noēma (the meaning or sense in his understanding) for which God uses the logoi as a vehicle, is perceived through a certain ‘spiritual intuition’ within a more integral personal kind of

⁴³⁰ PG 91, 1077CD

⁴³¹ PG 91, 1077CD- 1081B

⁴³² PG 91, 1080AC, 1081A, 1329A

⁴³³ PG 91, 1081C

⁴³⁴ Staniloae’s commentary to *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91, 1081AB-CD, 1085B, 1080CD) in RT 1 (2013), p.37

⁴³⁵ Staniloae’s commentary to *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91, 1081C) in RT 1 (2013), p.37

⁴³⁶ Staniloae’s commentary to *Ambigua* 22 (PG 91, 1257AB) in RT 1 (2013), p.38

⁴³⁷ OS, 216 in RT, 38

⁴³⁸ RT 1 (2013), p. 37

knowledge and experience of God as absolute personal reality, which includes and transcends human reason and will.⁴³⁹ By integrating the Palamite doctrine of energies and by using Dionysian terms in the Maximian theology of the logoi, he was able to conceive a very interesting and daring synthesis based on the logoi/energies distinction, a distinction which is still largely debated among scholars since St Maximus uses the two terms separately as well as together. According to Gallaher who quotes Olivier Clement, it seems that Lossky intended to point out the positive aspects of Bulgakov's sophiology in a new study exactly by underlying the personal character of the uncreated energy through aligning the 'divine Sophia' with the energies and the 'creaturely Sophia' with the Maximian logoi.⁴⁴⁰

The question is: could we consider Staniloae's logoi/energies synthesis a successful attempt of reworking Bulgakov's sophiology along the lines of the one planned by Lossky? It is hard to give a definitive answer because the relation between the logoi and the energies is not less problematic, but undoubtedly Staniloae's synthesis is an important step forward in this direction. Although we are not going to analyse this matter, another sensitive aspect of this question concerns the evaluation of Florovsky's and Lossky's studies on Dionysian texts since Staniloae refers to them, especially to Florovsky's in his own critique of Bulgakov's sophiology.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the complex issue of the self's role in the person's constitution and the relationship between the 'I' and the self has never been treated in detail by Fr Staniloae, his understanding of the notion of self⁴⁴¹ in terms of an 'active participative communitarian personalism'⁴⁴² definitely opens new epistemological perspectives. He writes:

Christianity knows about a unique principle of all. But this principle is not a unique person. Because a unique person seeking for a variation within itself in order to get rid of boredom cannot avoid its own inner contradiction which leads to its downfall into anarchy i.e. the lack of any principle at all. A unique principle having within Himself love - a perfect love between Persons - is indeed the unique loving principle of all. The person does not want to be alone. The person wants to be with another person, fully loving

⁴³⁹ RT, 36

⁴⁴⁰ Gallaher, art.cit., 297-8, n.93, 94

⁴⁴¹ Staniloae, "Starea primordială a omului în cele trei confesiuni" (The primordial state of man in the three Christian confessions) in *Ortodoxia*, 3 (1956), pp. 323-357 passim.

⁴⁴² Ibidem, pp. 329-31

one another. The Supreme Being is the supreme love, and this love is the supreme unity among persons.⁴⁴³

For Staniloae divine love cannot be but personal. The divine love is experienced only through the agency of divine persons. In God there is a communion of persons among whom love is manifested.⁴⁴⁴ As one can already see Staniloae as Zizioulas adopts a communitarian model in his Trinitarian theology (although their approach is quite different) and emphasizes the Trinitarian persons in their communion of love. Perhaps this is the main reason why some of the most touching and profound pages Staniloae has ever written based on the patristic argument developed in his ontology of love, concern a personal existential experience (always placed in the horizon of the ecclesial one) of God's ineffable reality in His providential action.⁴⁴⁵

Throughout this chapter we shall try to critically approach the particularities of Staniloae's theological method in his distinctive treatment of the Trinity in order to discern the sources, the strength and eventually the weakness of his Trinitarian theology.

III.2. The Epistemology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae

The strong personalist imprint of Staniloae's synthesis comes to surface in his epistemology which can be considered creative precisely because he approaches the issue of human knowledge and experience of God within the framework of the same Maximian theology of Logos-logoi in which integrates the Palamite essence-energies distinction and the Dionysian categories. Spiritual knowledge is the dynamic expression of the God-man interpersonal dialogue of love, whose final aim is deification. The aim of Staniloae's discussion of the relation between the divine and the human personhood is to argue the eternal value of the human being who was created in the image of God in order to be united with God. We already showed that in the attempt to rework Bulgakov's idea of commensurability between God and the human being,⁴⁴⁶ Staniloae introduces the principle of 'hypostatical conformity'⁴⁴⁷ between the divine and the human subject in his epistemology. This allows him to reduce the ontological distance between God and creation and to speak about an anthropological apophaticism which is grounded in and reflects divine apophaticism. Unlike

⁴⁴³ CCT, 183. STL, 23-24

⁴⁴⁴ EG1, 240

⁴⁴⁵ EG1, pp. 117-122. OR, 130

⁴⁴⁶ LG, 112, 138

⁴⁴⁷ *Restoration*, 74 ff

Lossky⁴⁴⁸, Staniloae seems more interested in those convergent aspects of the divine and human personhood relevant for the Christian life. Ultimately to know God is to live in God, in Christ. Thus the role of theology is to help those who want to know how to follow Christ and live according to his commandments. In Christ, theology is life and life is theology. Because of the fall and sin, following Christ is never easy, it requires an unceasing effort for a continuous conversion to Christ, it requires ascesis. Integrating theology and spirituality in a rather philokalic manner, Fr Staniloae argues that there are actually three ways in which Christians experience God. He strongly contends the complementarity between the apophatic and the cataphatic knowledge of God:

There is a reciprocal communication between apophatic and cathaphatic knowledge [...] apophaticism being partially experienced through cataphaticism which [in return] is better understood in the light of apophaticism. Apophaticism is not totally unknown and the cataphaticism is not completely intelligible either, being originated in the absolute apophaticism.⁴⁴⁹

On the other hand, practically inseparable from the apophatic and cataphatic convergent experiences, there is the existential experience of God which stresses even more God's personal character in his dialogue with humans, whilst amplifying a rather intimate character of the latter which in return constantly enriches it.⁴⁵⁰ It is the expression of the continuous abiding care of God for all his creation which always bears within it his distinctive unfathomable, mysterious yet real loving personal presence, greatness and goodness. That is why the most authentic form and content of the dialogue between man and God, which is the mystical union with God, the highest level of deification, after purification and illumination, actually includes all these three kinds of knowledge of God. Fr Staniloae writes:

Through these three kinds of knowledge the personal interest God shows towards man, together with his mystery and greatness that are beyond [human being's] understanding, come into relief. Through all three, God is known as lover according to the measure of our love for him and for our neighbour.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ MT, 114

⁴⁴⁹ STL, 5

⁴⁵⁰ EG1, 122

⁴⁵¹ Ibidem

The synthesis of these complementary forms of knowledge firmly grounded in revelation engenders Fr. Staniloae's metaphysics which unfolds the paradoxical-existential features of personhood. The distinction Staniloae makes between knowledge and wisdom in his discussion on the super-essential attributes of God is a very revealing example.⁴⁵² Due to the subtlety of his synthesis⁴⁵³, Fr Staniloae identifies and points out cataphatic elements in St Dionysius the Areopagite's apophatic theology⁴⁵⁴, which is ultimately liturgical and sacramental, thus reacting against a rather simplistic scholastic approach which seems to unjustly downgrade the mystical theology of Dionysius to the level of a merely negative intellectual theology.⁴⁵⁵ For the Fathers there is no clear-cut separation between affirmations and negations regarding the experiential knowledge of God.

Fr Staniloae suggests that the Fathers' insistence on the soteriological value of knowledge of God is first of all the reflection of the preference of Orthodoxy to live or experience the mystery of salvation by preserving it rather than by trying to deplete it in intellectual explanations.⁴⁵⁶ Simply said, the true knowledge of God must have its source not in our individual self-sufficient intellect, but in our life in God, in communion with the Holy Trinity, brought to and in us by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who actually gives us the knowledge of God – or rather who makes possible our union with him - especially in the sacraments of the Church, starting with Baptism and culminating with the Eucharist. These are the channels of the uncreated grace. There is not any real life outside God, who is its ultimate source. The mystery of life surpasses and even transcends all interpretations⁴⁵⁷, no matter how logically solid and exhaustive they might seem. Therefore the mystery and the divine gift of life demand our humble recognition of human limitations. Without this humility it is impossible to advance in the true infinite knowledge of the loving Triune God. It is in this humility that one may discover and properly understand the full spiritual sense and necessity for asceticism.

We should pause for a moment in case one might wonder what this subtlety or sensitivity, a notion that is recurrent in Staniloae's work, is actually about. He claims it is a built-in spiritual ability of man, the intent of which is to perceive the complexity of God's presence and acts in one's life and in the world, since the presence of God in creation is

⁴⁵² Ibidem, 211

⁴⁵³ Ibidem, 116-117

⁴⁵⁴ Ibidem, 112

⁴⁵⁵ Ibidem, 109

⁴⁵⁶ BT, 180

⁴⁵⁷ Staniloae, "Characteristics", 628

real yet unfathomable, impossible to be fully grasped by man's conceptual thinking⁴⁵⁸ as God transcends all things as a single source of their reason of existence.⁴⁵⁹ Consequently:

Every understanding that touches upon God must have a certain fragility and transience; it cannot be something fixed once and for all, but it must urge us to call this understanding into question and stimulate us to seek one further along in the same direction. If such an understanding does remain fixed in our mind, we place limits on God corresponding to the boundaries of this particular understanding.⁴⁶⁰

As an expression of the theologian's personal and ecclesial-communitarian experience of God, his personal theological reflection, the theological language (imagery and analogies) in particular should also be subject to a permanent renewal since the content of dogmas is apophatic "it can never be comprehended in notions or words that might exhaust it"⁴⁶¹.

Orthodoxy places a great emphasis on asceticism due to its role in the cultivation of the spiritual abilities and gifts we receive from God at the moment of Baptism and Chrismation, to the benefit of the Church, in a mutual enrichment of her children, but also in the service of the world.⁴⁶² To give an example of this, Fr Staniloae has made use of his own spiritual experience in his attempt to clarify some certain 'ambiguities' in the thought of St. Athanasius and the Cappadocians, but especially in the mystical theology of Dionysius the Areopagite, without compromising their approach. Relevant is the one concerning the Trinitarian theology of Dionysius⁴⁶³ i.e. the super-essential source of all God's attributes⁴⁶⁴ is not just purely the divine super-essence but the Tri-Hypostatic or Tri-Personal divine super-nature, thus keeping the divine essence and the personal aspect of God in balance and inseparable.

This Tri-Hypostatic divine super-essence is the ultimate principle in God. If we regard this in the light of St Maximus' principle⁴⁶⁵ that there is no unhypostatized nature, we may come to the conclusion that the prefix 'super' actually indicates the personal reality or an existence in-itself and for-itself. Having this in mind it is much easier to grasp the inner connection between the praiseful exclamation which opens the *Mystical*

⁴⁵⁸ EG1, 106

⁴⁵⁹ Ibidem, 107-8

⁴⁶⁰ EG1, 105

⁴⁶¹ Ibidem, 92-3

⁴⁶² Staniloae, "Din Aspectul Sacramental al Bisericii", in ST, 18: 9/10 (1966), 539-44

⁴⁶³ *Divine Names* IX.2, PG 3, 909C. See also EG1, 245-49

⁴⁶⁴ EG1, 125-242

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. EG2, 89-90 based on *Ambigua*, PG 91.1220C.

Theology: “Trinity super-essential, super-divine, super-good!”⁴⁶⁶ with Fr Staniloae’s tri-equivalent confession of God, The Most Holy Trinity via St Maximus: “tripersonal subsistence of the infinite and uncreated essence”⁴⁶⁷, “essence subsisting in Three Persons”⁴⁶⁸ and “three Persons in whom the unique supra-essence subsists.”⁴⁶⁹

So this spiritual sensivity, as manifestation and gift of the divine grace in the faithful’s being is extremely important since only through it we can really understand why God can only be Supreme Personal Reality and why our relation with Him could not be conceived outside His perfect, sacrificial, unselfish and compassionate love. Fr. Staniloae argues, in the spirit of the Fathers, that interpersonal divine love is the source of the true knowledge which precedes and overcomes the simple rational knowledge and not vice-versa. Furthermore, one might want to know how to foster this ability and which is its real contribution in man’s spiritual growth. Let us give the floor to Fr Staniloae:

Only through an effort of purification does the subtlety of the spirit increase and it is only this subtlety that one can renounce any understanding about God that has already been achieved, or the slothful tendency to remain fixed in it, or the further tendency to make it into an idol and thus immobilize the spirit with the worship of its limited reality.⁴⁷⁰

This applies, first of all, to our knowledge and experience of the reality of God as the Most Holy, perfect consubstantial and life-giving Trinity if one wants to avoid the pitfall of any misconceptions and idolization.⁴⁷¹

Staniloae’s emphasis of the manifold aspects of personal and communitarian sustained ascetic effort, which imply the human person in its wholeness, reveals once again the synergetic character of deification. Partially influenced by one of Fr Staniloae’s comments on the fifth Ambiguum⁴⁷² regarding the consequences of mystery of Christ’s incarnation and hypostatical union⁴⁷³, Cooper writes:

To be sure, divine incarnation and human deification are both theophanic events in which the divine and human natural activities - the latter of which is marked not least of all by increasing passivity or receptivity in God - are

⁴⁶⁶ PG 3: 997 AB

⁴⁶⁷ EG1, 245

⁴⁶⁸ Ibidem

⁴⁶⁹ Ibidem, 247 sq

⁴⁷⁰ Ibidem, 108

⁴⁷¹ Ibidem, 246

⁴⁷² *Commentary 19 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op. cit., 382

⁴⁷³ Cooper, *The body in St. Maximus The Confessor’s: holy flesh, wholly deified*, (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 163

welded in a new theandric deifying dynamic. [...] Deification is as much “suffered” as it is “achieved”. From the redemptive complex of evidence on display on the incarnation, Maximus brings to bear upon his readers the conviction of the catholic patristic tradition that Christ’s suffering, death and holy flesh, and implicit with these, the inherent passibility of the created human nature, are not obstacles to union with God but the fundamental loci of God’s proleptic demonstration and historic realization of humanity’s goal of union with him and indeed, the expansive media through which he turns suffering and death on its head and brings the whole cosmos to its pre-planned perfection.⁴⁷⁴

Fr. Andrew Louth⁴⁷⁵ is also interested in revealing the Christological significance of “a certain new theandric activity” formula following St Maximus’ interpretation and defence of this Dionysian phrase considered by Staniloae to be in fully accordance with Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and so beautifully synthesized in the expression “suffering wonders and wonderful sufferings.”⁴⁷⁶ In Fr Staniloae’s opinion the expression ‘theandric activity’⁴⁷⁷ preserves the integrity of the divine and human activity without producing an intermediary activity through their union, since the one nature cannot suppress the other through assimilation. The divine activity gets humanized and the human one gets divinized in their union but neither one of them loses its character. The boundaries of human nature are never broken by God. The union between God and man does not produce an intermediary, hybrid entity. Love unites those who love one another imprinting the image of one into the other though without any fusion.⁴⁷⁸ As Fr Louth put it, this expression is Dionysius’ way of arguing that “in Incarnation there is a coherence of divine and human, so that Christ does human things divinely and the divine things humanly.”⁴⁷⁹ Fr Staniloae says that in the unique Person of Jesus Christ there is a “convergence” between the divine and human and not a fight or opposition.⁴⁸⁰

It is all about man’s continuous spiritual ascent, yet within the framework of the dynamism of our experience of God. Here Fr Staniloae meets Fr Pavel Florensky who, observing the epistemological value of the tension between doubt and certainty, argues our imperative necessity to overcome through faith the sphere of abstract concepts and to

⁴⁷⁴ Ibidem, 164

⁴⁷⁵ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 54-55

⁴⁷⁶ PG 91, 105B

⁴⁷⁷ *Restoration*, 141

⁴⁷⁸ *Commentary 18 to Ambigua* in Larchet, op. cit., p. 382

⁴⁷⁹ Louth, op. cit., 54

⁴⁸⁰ FD, 733

ascend into the sphere of intuition, of the apophatic living experience of God: “The asceticism of faith consists in going from the given assertoric truth of the world to the apodictic but yet not given Truth of dogma. It consists in preferring the certain but not yet present ‘there’ to the doubtful yet present ‘here’.”⁴⁸¹

God always takes the initiative of the loving and life-giving dialogue with man, He is the One who comes down to man in order to lift him up but humbly waits for his free response. Fr Staniloae’s insistence on the cultivation of this spiritual sensitivity as a virtue reflected in the dynamism of epektatic-existential knowledge of God specific to Orthodox spirituality is a reflection of the philokalic dimension of his theology.

Donald Allchin has also stressed the positive value of asceticism in Orthodox life and spirituality which, unlike any cult for comfort and leisure, is basically seen as a “way of mortifying the egotism” implying not a repudiation but on the contrary a full engagement and a development not only of our mind and spirit but of the human body abilities too.⁴⁸² The subtlety of Allchin’s assertion, based at least partially on an article of Fr Staniloae on St Callinicus of Cernica in whose process of canonization the Romanian theologian was actively involved, is a strong argument for the impact of Staniloae’s theology in West. This is an example of how Staniloae always strives to connect modern theology and spirituality in a patristic spirit, a constitutive aspect of his ecumenical vision which is extremely relevant, particularly in terms of future Orthodox witness’ potential in the quest for Christian unity.

III.3. Supreme love

Fr Staniloae’s Trinitarian theology has at its core the Trinitarian personalism with a focus on the inner relation between the intratrinitarian love and intersubjectivity as an expression of perfect communion. He was definitively influenced by the Russian theologians Florensky, Bulgakov and Lossky but also Kovalevsky as one can see from the numerous references in his *Experience of God*. Considering these obvious influences, he could not avoid their problems either: the integration of the principle of identity within the Trinitarian theology introduced by Bulgakov and adopted by Florensky and the struggle with the third in the Trinity to find a balance between Christology and Pneumatology.

⁴⁸¹ PGT, 47

⁴⁸² TL, 8-9

He reacted against the reductionist Thomist and neo-Thomist philosophical essentialism which regards the divine persons simply as “subsistent relations”⁴⁸³ i.e. relations of divine essence, while in Orthodox theology the relations always presuppose the persons.⁴⁸⁴ The person is subject to the relation. Relation is only an attribute of person. But how did Fr. Staniloae build his argument? He actually referred to St Gregory of Nazianzus’s notion of “relation” in the Trinitarian context.⁴⁸⁵

It is worth mentioning at this point that Fr Staniloae’s trinitarianism follows closely the line of Saint Athanasius’ argument as presented in particular in *Epistolae I,II Ad Serapionem*⁴⁸⁶, or the Cappadocians’ thought as conveyed especially in St Gregory of Nyssa’s famous *Contra Eunomium I, II*⁴⁸⁷, or in St Basil’s *Adversus Eunomium*⁴⁸⁸, St Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Five Theological Orations*⁴⁸⁹, St Cyril of Alexandria’s major works against Arians⁴⁹⁰ and of St Maximus’ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*⁴⁹¹ or *Capitulum de Charitate Centuria*⁴⁹². St John Damascene with his *De Fide Orthodoxa*⁴⁹³ and St Gregory Palamas⁴⁹⁴ are not overlooked either.

In the spirit of the Maximian axiom “God is identically a monad and a triad”⁴⁹⁵, Fr Staniloae says that the only unity which preserves the diversity of persons is the unity in love:

The most perfect and the most meaningful is the unity in love, that is, unity between persons who retain their own individual identities. Any other unity

⁴⁸³ SCF, 493 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, I Sent. d.24, q.1, a.; a, q.29, a.4: “Persona igitur divina significat relationem ad subzistentem.” But in this way person-nature balance is compromised. The ‘personalism’ of Thomas Aquinas succumbs in a sort of monolithic essentialism since the subsistent relations are seen as prior to the acts of origin in Trinity. Fr. Staniloae argues that the person cannot be reduced to the level of a simple relation no matter how substantial that relation would be. This theory makes the essence the persons’ source and support. In fact it is the substance which has as the support of its reality the person or the persons. However the common ousia is not prior to persons nor are the persons prior to common ousia. They are simultaneous ontological realities.. However, in his *Summa Theologica*, 1a, q. 36, a.2,4 nm Thomas Aquinas says that his explication of the procession of the Spirit also from the Son on the one hand and his proceeding from the Father and reposing in the Son (Cf. John 1:32) do not exclude each other.

⁴⁸⁴ SCF, 493

⁴⁸⁵ CCT, 138

⁴⁸⁶ PG 26, 576A-580A

⁴⁸⁷ PG 45, 493B; 789C

⁴⁸⁸ PG 29, 593 A-B We could also add *Liber de Spiritu Sancto*, 27; PG 32, 193 and Ep. 38, PG 32, 326-328.

⁴⁸⁹ PG 36, 142-44, 172

⁴⁹⁰ *Thesaurus de Sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate*, PG 75, 9-656; *De Sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate* PG 75, 657-1124, *Dialogue sur la Trinite* SC 231, 237, 246

⁴⁹¹ PG 90, 296B-C, 361C

⁴⁹² PG 90, 964A-969B

⁴⁹³ PG 94, 848 C-D;856B

⁴⁹⁴ PG 150, 1145A-B

⁴⁹⁵ *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2, 13; PG 90, col. 1125A

is void of meaning and life. Hence the expressions “one in being” and “three in Persons” must not lead us to contemplate the divine being in itself as distinct from the Persons and from their mutual love, but rather as the love existing in persons and between persons.⁴⁹⁶

Within the Trinity love is simultaneously substantial-relational and personal. However the divine essence is never identified with relation. The unity of divine being is distinct from the unity of Persons which hypostasize the common divine ousia. Love is the “being of God”.⁴⁹⁷ God is love because it is a perfect communion of distinct Persons. He further explains: “communion means both truth and perfect existence and the divine absoluteness [...] in the divine, love is all.”⁴⁹⁸ This seems to be in agreement with what Fr Florensky says:

If God exists, and this for me was becoming unquestionable, He necessarily is absolute love [...] God is an absolute because He is the substantial act of love, act-substance. God or the Truth not only has love but, above all, God is love, “ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν” (1 John 4: 8, 16). That is, love is God’s essence, his own nature⁴⁹⁹

On the other hand, Fr Florensky also argues: “The true subject is a relation of the three but a relation which appears as essence, that is, a substantial relation.”⁵⁰⁰ What Staniloae seems to get from Florensky’s Trinitarian vision is that the only way to maintain the definition of love as the essential divine act, and the definition of this act as relation, is to see the divine being as unity and relation simultaneously, as relation in the very heart of unity.⁵⁰¹

He finds in Florensky’s definition of divine love as essential act-relation, the expression of a Trinitarian theology which keeps in balance the unity of being and the distinction of persons or divine subjects. Based on Florensky’s insights regarding the principle of Trinitarian consubstantiability, Staniloae introduces the principle of reciprocal reference in his own Trinitarian theology. According to this principle reciprocal reference is an essential act in God pointing at the same time to a distinction of those who have reference to each other.⁵⁰² Staniloae would use this principle to argue that the Holy Trinity is perfect love in which there is at the same time a unity of divine being and an interpersonal unity-in-distinction based on the relationships between divine hypostases:

⁴⁹⁶ TC, 76

⁴⁹⁷ Ibidem, 79

⁴⁹⁸ Ibidem

⁴⁹⁹ PGT, 54

⁵⁰⁰ Ibidem, 49 cite in EG1, 256

⁵⁰¹ EG1, 258

⁵⁰² Ibidem

He is one God through the unity of His essence and of the unlimited love that is His through the relationship between the Father and the Son, united in the Holy Spirit [...] He is a single God because the three divine Persons are in a relationship in which each includes the other two according to the special place that he has in his relationships with Them.⁵⁰³

Just to be very clear he reiterates that “we find three Persons together expressing the unrepeated essence in their relationships as Father, Son and Holy Spirit without being mixed. Each Person bears the entire divine essence unrepeated, so each is fully God, without splitting the essence but also without being confused with the other two”.⁵⁰⁴

Staniloae’s Trinitarian theology is deeply shaped by Florensky’s Trinitarian conception even if Staniloae does not always explicitly or fully states that. Preoccupied by the issue of the nature of true unity among the faithful⁵⁰⁵, Florensky developed the principle of Trinitarian consubstantiability and applied it to the metaphysics of created beings. Thus he could speak of love, defined as ecstatic, as an ontological bond and not merely moral “the metaphysical nature of love lies in the supra-logical overcoming of the naked self-identity *I=I* and in the going out of oneself.”⁵⁰⁶ In this ecstatic movement “I becomes in another, in not-*I*, this not-*I*. *I* became consubstantial (homousios) with the brother and not just like-in-substance (homoiousios).”⁵⁰⁷

Fr Staniloae performs a comparison between the divine and human fatherhood to argue why God, as a trinity of distinct yet united persons, is the perfect love.⁵⁰⁸ However Fr Staniloae is quite clear when it comes to this kind of analogies: “In any case we do not forget, not even for a moment, that God is beyond any human idea and no attribute from this world could be ever bestowed on Him in a proper sense.”⁵⁰⁹ Staniloae is actually trying to emphasize those aspects of human experience which reflect the reality of divine-human communion and this determines him to focus on the dialogical and dynamic character of love.

Within the Trinity, the distinction between the particular and the common is safeguarded only through the person-nature synthesis: “All is common in the Trinity, but in this communion there is no confusion of the distinct modes in which each Person

⁵⁰³ HTE, 21

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 23

⁵⁰⁵ PGT, 64

⁵⁰⁶ Ibidem, 67

⁵⁰⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁰⁸ HTE, 17-27

⁵⁰⁹ *Restoration*, 84

experiences what is common.”⁵¹⁰ Love does not really exist apart from persons or interpersonal relationships. An impersonal love would be imperfect, abstract, dried, a non-sense. On the other hand a monopersonal God would be incapable of a sacrificial love absolutely necessary for the salvation and deification of humanity. A monopersonal God would be neither a person, nor God.⁵¹¹

Like Bulgakov before him Fr Staniloae has also been particularly interested in outlining strong arguments against the insufficiency of all doctrines developed around the idea of a monopersonal God in order to emphasize the superiority of Christianity, based on the Trinitarian theology of St Maximus the Confessor:

All the doctrines about God which aim to argue that He, unlike the people, can have within Himself the happiness of an infinite self-contemplation, lacking in nothing, are superseded by Christianity, the only one which ousted egoism from this happiness, the only one which does not strip it of the essential element of the generosity without being conditioned by the creation of a world from eternity. [...] at God the joy, the happiness does not depend solely on the possession of being but also on the communion of subjects.⁵¹²

Following the Fathers, Fr Staniloae is particularly concerned in unveiling the soteriological function of the Holy Trinity as the dictum of St Athanasius suggests: “God became man so that man might become a god”.⁵¹³

A fundamental question emerges: to what extent the loving relationship between two or more human persons could mirror the relationship of love between man and God? We should say right from the start that for Fr Staniloae all possible analogies or images are subject to insufficiency.⁵¹⁴

St Gregory of Nyssa sees the source of these analogies in man as *imago Dei* with all its ontological and existential implications.⁵¹⁵ A relevant aspect of St Gregory’s theological anthropology⁵¹⁶ is that human nature and personhood indicate to a certain extent characteristics of divine nature and personhood without compromising the Creator-creature ontological distinction.

⁵¹⁰ TC, 76

⁵¹¹ HTE, 17

⁵¹² *Restoration*, 78

⁵¹³ St Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54:3, (PG 25,192B)

⁵¹⁴ *Restoration*, 77

⁵¹⁵ *De Opificio Hominis*, XI, PG 44: 156B, NPNF 5, 396-340; *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, PG 44, 21D, NPNF 5, 479

⁵¹⁶ PG 44, 184

St Maximus provides stronger arguments that man does not reflect the divine only as a person but also by his nature.⁵¹⁷ Overcoming the shortcomings of the modern existentialist dualism between person and nature, Staniloae contends, in contrast to Zizioulas⁵¹⁸, that although created, the human spiritual nature “bears (within itself) all these potentialities which each individual human person is called, in communion with other, to hypostasize according to his or her infinitely rich possibilities”⁵¹⁹ including the one of living a theandric life as deified man. However deification is never achieved in isolation but always in the Church, since theosis is the expression of the most intimate union between the faithful and the Holy Trinity, a perfect communion of equal divine persons. Fr. Staniloae emphasizes the fundamental communitarian dimension of deification by placing it within the framework of a continuous extension from the Church to the person and from the person to the Church. The Personal and the communitarian aspects of deification are inseparable.

The Fathers do not sustain a theological anthropology based on a natural-supernatural separation but distinguish between the life in communion with God, in God and life outside, without God. The natural life of man is the life in God. In the authentic spiritual life the supernatural and natural are united.

On the other hand this perspective also urges us to regard the soteriological implications of the greatest of St Maximus’ Christological achievements against Monothelism based on the Chalcedonian definition i.e. the distinction between the natural and personal/gnomic will⁵²⁰ which explains the mode of existence of unity-in-distinction of the human and the divine will in Christ in a broader light.

But what is the difference between natural and gnomic will? Fr John Meyendorff’s analysis of this difference starts with a succinct presentation of St Maximus’ development of the theology of the image which places him alongside St Gregory of Nyssa:

If man is the image of the divine nature and if the divine nature is free (αυτεξούσιος), so is the image. As a result, man possesses a natural will [...] and that will is a freedom of nature [...] in conformity with divine freedom and unable to lead to anything but God. Created in paradise in the image and likeness of God, man did not need to deliberate in order to acquire

⁵¹⁷ Loudovikos op.cit, 4

⁵¹⁸ CO, 18-19, 165, 222-280

⁵¹⁹ Silviu Rogobete, “Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation?”, TMT, 199

⁵²⁰ Cf. John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Thought*, 137: “The distinction between the natural will and deliberative will constitutes one of the most important contributions of the Confessor to the elaboration of Christian tradition.”

participation in divine goodness and wisdom. He had only to follow the laws of his own nature [...], but this freedom did not reside in a permanent choice between several possible ways of realizing his destiny. Man's only true destiny was to conform to his nature, that is, to be in communion with God.⁵²¹

This anthropological aspect is extremely important in clarifying the delicate issue of the fall vis-à-vis the creation of man, the existence of evil and sin on a basis of revelation, rather than on a philosophical basis. By contrast, the gnostic will, that is, individual (or rather deliberative or opinionative) will which characterizes man after the fall, being "intrinsically linked with hypostasis or human person"⁵²² is considered imperfect, contaminated, a will that chooses between good and evil - otherwise an unnecessary action in the original paradisiac state of man.⁵²³ So sin is always a personal act and it does not corrupt nature. Sin always remains at the plane of *gnome* (opinion), of personal choice "usually linked with hesitancy, ignorance, uncertainty"⁵²⁴. Personal will is the only source of sin. St. Maximus is also very clear in this respect: the fall actually concerns the *tropos* and not the *logoi*.⁵²⁵ This discussion is relevant for the Orthodox perspective of the relationship between nature and grace in soteriological terms.

However this does not automatically imply that the personal will is irremediably compromised and evil, but instead, as Orthodox spirituality points out, there is always the possibility of healing, recovery and strengthening of man's will through God's grace to do the good to please God as long one fights against any form of egotism and isolation, committing oneself as much as possible to transform one's own will into God's will (Cf. Matthew 6, 10). Only the one who strives to make God's will his or her own can experience the real freedom in union with Him. The Fathers make a clear distinction between the original sin which is personal, and its consequences for humanity i.e. a tendency to do evil. As St Basil and many other Fathers argue, God is not the source of evil.⁵²⁶ Even the tree of knowledge of good and evil was not evil in itself, despite the fact that it was tempting.⁵²⁷

⁵²¹ CEC, 137-38

⁵²² Ibidem, 149

⁵²³ Ibidem, 138

⁵²⁴ EO, 186

⁵²⁵ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 57

⁵²⁶ Fr Staniloae refers quite frequently to St Basil's work *God is Not the Author of Evil* (7, PG 31.345B; 5, PG 31.341B-C; 8, PG 31.348 A-B; 7, PG 31.344C-345A; 8, PG 31.348D) especially in EG2, endnotes 87, 145, 150, 152, 165.

⁵²⁷ PG 31.348C-D, cite in EG2, 212

The ontological implications of this post-fall existential reality are significant because, among other things, they also help us to understand why, and to a certain extent how, Christ fully assumed human nature in his unique divine hypostasis yet remaining without sin.⁵²⁸ That means that our restoration is possible and fully achieved only in Christ, the incarnate God. Human will has to exist in Christ in order for it to be saved or restored. The reality of the Incarnation involves the reality of the human will. The question is: how do these two wills preserve all their characteristics and what is their relationship in the unique hypostasis of Christ? Deification as union with God and participation in the life of the Holy Trinity is at the centre of the Orthodox faith. Mindful of this issue, Fr Staniloae has treated in depth the relation between nature and grace following the line of the Fathers, who based their thought on the revelation fully accomplished in Christ, the incarnate word of God. The aim was to explore the anthropological consequence of the hypostatical union of Christ.

Therefore Fr Staniloae has dedicated many pages to St Maximus' treatment of this problem, who argued that Christ did not have a gnostic will since in His enhypostatization of the human nature he did not assume the human hypostasis but has only the human natural will inseparable from human nature.⁵²⁹ In Fr Staniloae's words:

The will of human nature that is activated through its own hypostasis in the human person takes in him the form of decisions made by the free will. In this free will is given the possibility of the sinful activation of innocent passions, or of non-resistance to their inclination to be activated in a sinful way. St Maximus considers that there was no human free will (γνώμη) in Christ because there did not exist in him a human subject that could make decisions separately from God, but only (the nature's) natural will, which made concrete decisions through the Hypostasis of the incarnate Word and which did not have a free will that could have chosen sin. The Hypostasis of

⁵²⁸ Cf. *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG 91, 308CD-309A.

⁵²⁹ PG 86,1: 1280 AB, PG 86: 1945 AB. Synthesizing St Maximus' ontology centered on the distinction between ability of willing and the act of will, Leontius' distinction concerning self-existence and Dionysius' concept of participation developed by St Gregory Palamas in his doctrine of uncreated energies, Staniloae will always emphasize the personal character of self-consciousness, transparency, newness, spontaneity and intentionality for communion defining the divine and human personhood though without breaking the ontological differences. If Origen detached the nous from the human nature transforming it in some kind of meta-ontological category, Fr Staniloae seems to link the nous to the self within the horizon of apophatic dimension of the human being. However, he is not willing to simply identify the self with the person although the person can be understood only through "the self".

the Word was always activating the will in conformity with nature, something that was in conformity with His divine will as well.⁵³⁰

In Christ the human will is always fully harmonized with the divine one, there is no contradiction between the human and the divine will since all of Christ's acts or works are wanted by both wills⁵³¹ even if His human will had to fight against the innocent passions to remain in conformity with the divine will⁵³². Fr. Staniloae carefully builds his argumentation on Maximian Christology and its soteriological implications, and also on St Maximus' dynamic, dialogical-theandric concept of human nature.⁵³³ If St Cyril of Alexandria⁵³⁴ sees the encounter between the divine and the human in the divine kenosis, St Maximus⁵³⁵ sees it more in the divinization of the human being achieved in the highest degree in the unique person of Christ. However Fr Staniloae considers these two perspectives complementarily. Moreover the *kenosis* does not change the nature of divinity, as deification does not change the nature of humanity either.⁵³⁶ The divine will wills nothing more than what the human will wills when it conforms to human nature. If the human will conforms to the divine will, it remains in conformity with its own nature.⁵³⁷ Christ as God wills what conforms with the true aspirations of the human being and also, as Man He wills what conforms to God's will concerning the human being.⁵³⁸ The most relevant aspect is that the perfect convergence of wills is assured both by the unity of Personhood and an "intrinsic conformity of wills between themselves."⁵³⁹

He also argues that the human will is not absorbed, crushed or annulled by the divine one, the divine will is always the one which offers and calls, while the human one remains the one which fully responds without the suppression of their distinction⁵⁴⁰, the divine will wants to save the human one and the human will wants to be saved and restored. Fr Staniloae does not hesitate to discuss even the matter of the human conscious as inseparable from the human nature that was assumed fully by Christ in the Incarnation.⁵⁴¹ The mystery of the Incarnation reveals the encounter, the spiritual relation between the divine humility and the supreme humility of what is human which actually

⁵³⁰ EG3, 74

⁵³¹ FD, 745

⁵³² EG3, 74

⁵³³ FD, 737

⁵³⁴ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Quod unus sit Christus*, PG 75, 1197. Cf. FD, 738

⁵³⁵ St. Maximus, *Opuscula theologica et polemica*, PG, 91, 77C, 80, 81D, 32, 23D. Cf. FD, 743-6

⁵³⁶ TC, 126-7

⁵³⁷ FD, 743

⁵³⁸ Ibidem

⁵³⁹ Ibidem

⁵⁴⁰ CEI, 325

⁵⁴¹ *Ad Thalassium*, 63, 64 in *Filocalia rom.*, III, 351-78

coincides with its supreme exaltation⁵⁴²; there is no tension between the divine *katabasis* and the elevation of what is human to a supreme degree of spiritualization.⁵⁴³

The freedom of choice always implies a personal act conforming with or against nature. Our salvation presupposes, apart from divine grace, the ascetic effort of transforming the personal gnostic will into a will harmonized with the divine one or reorienting it towards God through the reintegration of virtues.⁵⁴⁴ Only by freely uniting in love our will with God's will, making the will of God our will, i.e. willing according to our nature, we can fulfill all the potentialities of our nature. Personal will has a decisive role in reaching the likeness of God. In other words each one of us has to participate freely, through his or her will, totally open to the divine will, to the fulfillment of the unifying divine plane imprinted on the reason of the existence of human nature, its logos.

On the other hand, St Maximus says: "God and man are paradigms of one another."⁵⁴⁵ Fr Staniloae unfolds the multiple implications of this *Grundaxiom*. If one would accept that God is a paradigm for man, when it comes to the reciprocal part, things get a little complicated. He connects St Gregory's ideas with the ones of St Maximus and synthesized them in his own Christological anthropology (developed based on the Chalcedonian hypostasis-nature synthesis and the image-archetype relationship) for a better emphasis of these analogies between the human and the divine personhood which do not decline into a blunt anthropomorphism.

Though created and limited, human beings are ontologically endowed with the capacity of infinite growth in the communion of the infinite God. The human being has been created by God from nothing but he can advance towards God's infinite existence only in communion with Him. His aspiration to infinity reflects the infinity of his Creator.⁵⁴⁶ Man as a spiritual being is a created abyss which only the Triune God who is love can fully satisfy, filling him up to the brim.

Now we can see the nature of the relationship among humans and between man and God from a wider perspective. The apophatic character of the human personal and

⁵⁴² FD, 741-3

⁵⁴³ TC, 126. Paraphrasing, the supreme humility of what is human refers to the fact that human will is freely and totally at the disposition of the divine will. This is a condition for the free and supreme spiritualization of the human will in God made man and consequently of the whole human nature. The divine humility is the manifestation of God who descends, in freedom, through human acts and forms without constraining or pressing the human will to rise to the act of willing to be subject of the divine activity, helping and strengthening it instead to reach that state of the supreme spiritualization.

⁵⁴⁴ *Capita de Caritate* III, 80; PG 91, 1041 B

⁵⁴⁵ *Ambigua* 10, PG 91, 1113 Cf. Louth, *op. cit.*, 100-102

⁵⁴⁶ See STC, 18

relational existence which is the direct consequence of the creation of man in the image and the likeness of God leads to an interesting point of view on freedom and will vis-à-vis the concept of reciprocity. Fr Staniloae writes:

You cannot know your neighbour in a personal way only on your own initiative, or by an aggressive expedition. In order to know him he must reveal himself on his own initiative; he does this in proportion to the lack of aggression to know him. How much more so with God, the Supreme Person and one who isn't clothed in a visible body; Man can't know him, unless He reveals himself. [...] Relations between created persons show us how close communion between them can be, and also the irreducibility of the 'I's', even when there is the most permanent union between them. These relations are also an icon of the relationship of man with God. They help us to understand the relationship which cannot be expressed by words except in a contradictory way. On the one hand it is union, on the other, this union is not identification.⁵⁴⁷

We have to note again the substantial value of the iconic - analogical language used by Fr Staniloae and his appropriation of the paradox. The paradox is not simply the tension between two or more distinct realities which may appear irreconcilable at first sight, but rather an attempt to seize a higher complex reality which actually engulfs, fulfils, overwhelms and reconciles without 'vitiating' the initial ones:

Thus perfect love is a paradoxical union of these two things: on the one hand, many 'I's' who love one another while remaining unconfused, and on the other hand, the highest degree of unity among them. Apart from the existence of a perfect eternal love there can be no explication for the love in the world, nor is the purpose of the world at all evident.⁵⁴⁸

This perception of the paradox is fully employed in Staniloae's theology of personhood, treated in detail in the previous chapter. The person is always seen as a conscious subject. The subject could never be separated from consciousness or vice-versa. In this way the *union* does not compromise the persons' uniqueness, identity or integrity. The major anthropological implication of this is that God - an essence subsisting in three distinct persons - as a perfect infinite interpersonal communion opens to man the possibility of a free personal participation in mutual love and it is the source of reciprocal love between men:

⁵⁴⁷ OS, 38-39

⁵⁴⁸ EG1, 245

Love, however presupposes a common being in three persons [...] in its turn, reciprocal love among humans implies that there many persons capable of loving on the basis of an essence which, in a certain measure, is common to them all. This unperfected love between us presupposes, however, the perfect love between divine persons with a common being. Our love finds its explanation in the fact that we are created in the image of the Holy Trinity, the origin of our love.⁵⁴⁹

A beautiful image of the love among people, very close to Fr Staniloae's heart is the relationship between a mother and her child:

The union between the mother and her child is always (especially during the pregnancy) so intense that the mother experiences all of her child without being confused with him. There is a mystery intimately connected to the presence of a soul in the child right from the moment of conception. It is the mystery of utmost love between the mother and her child which unites them while remaining unconfused.⁵⁵⁰

III.4. Dialogue of Love

Fr Staniloae has written extensively on the nature of the 'I-Thou' relationship, whether human or divine, which in his opinion implies besides the unrestrained mutual openness an increasing awareness of the responsibility of this dialogical experience essential for man's spiritual growth. Again some similarities between the dialogue at the human level and the dialogue between God and man are employed:

When men speak to one another, whether in challenge or response, if they do so with a sense of unconditional responsibility towards one another, then whether they challenge or respond, they are in fact responding to God. The more a man feels himself bound in dialogue with his fellowmen, the more he feels himself bound in dialogue with God, and vice versa. The life of spiritual beings has the character of a dialogue; it challenges, it responds. And this means that these beings are in a dialogical relationship with the

⁵⁴⁹ Ibidem

⁵⁵⁰ CEI, 10

subject who has created them with this structure that is to say with this necessity to speak and to respond.⁵⁵¹

Developing his pneumatology around the notions of communication and communion, Fr Staniloae has also paid attention to the anthropological vision of the modern thinker Martin Buber⁵⁵², an important piece of the latter's dialogical philosophy:

It has been said that man discovers himself as 'I' in relation to 'Thou'. And it is precisely when I feel my responsibility towards the other, that I can experience intensely this 'I-Thou' relationship. This means that I become aware of myself as 'I' in the fact that I answer to the summons of the 'Thou'. Men live this 'I-Thou' relationship, by reason of the fact that they are beings who speak, and beings who speak because they feel themselves responsible.⁵⁵³

Then he outlines the organic link but also the distinction between the experience of responsibility specific to the mutual relationship amongst men and the one which characterizes man's relation with God 'the supreme Thou' in terms of different levels of intensity and profoundness, an intensity which shapes otherness:

But insofar as they truly accept and live this responsibility towards one another, thus far they live their responsibility towards God. And in the intensity of their responsibility towards God, they live God as 'Thou', and each one feels himself as 'I', before God. I feel this intensity of my own existence as 'I', in relationship with the other as 'Thou', because in the other I become intensely aware of the existence of a reality other than myself, like a wall which I cannot get through, which turns me back on myself by an inescapable spiritual pressure. But in the experience of God as the 'Thou' who exercises supreme pressure, I have the experience of my own self with a profound intensity. Without this experience of God as the supreme 'Thou' everything dissolves into mist, into mere appearances of existence.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ TL, 61

⁵⁵² TC, 61-62, 231. While Buber puts at the basis of relationship between two people a third 'ontic' element which in Staniloae's understanding is rather "an impersonal milieu" even though it goes beyond the individual, social, confronting the traditional subject-object relationship, the Romanian theologian asserts that "the third" is actually the Person of the Holy Spirit which is between two or more who meet in him and through which the living relation between two or more is achieved and sustained. The distinction between these two perspectives is partially due to the different approaches of these scholars towards revelation specific to Judaism and Christianity respectively.

⁵⁵³ TL, 61

⁵⁵⁴ Ibidem, 61

Despite his enormous work of translating the Hebrew Bible to German, Buber⁵⁵⁵ seemed to remain faithful almost exclusively to the Hassidic principles. In fact Buber's 'I-Thou' philosophy is the outcome of a personal reflection focused mainly on Hassidic mysticism, and only subsequently on the history of religions and Western philosophy.⁵⁵⁶ On the other hand Fr Staniloae develops his theology of personhood and communion based on Trinitarian and Incarnation doctrines. He regards Buber's dialogical philosophy within the framework of interhuman communication and communion. Fr Staniloae tries to approach communion between human subjects considering Buber's ideas who says that "a human person becomes for us a real Thou only when that person also makes from us a real 'I', plenary fulfilled with subject's character, of 'I-Thou' relationship."⁵⁵⁷ In other words Fr Staniloae seems to be interested in Buber's notion of meeting somebody else's authentic subjectivity, as our direct experience.

Fr Staniloae refers a few times to Buber's work *Ich und Du*⁵⁵⁸ (he actually had access to the German edition) in his Christological synthesis, *Restoration*, specifically when he tries to answer to the following questions: Why is it that man is chosen by God to be the propagator of His revelation? What is it that makes him to be fitted for such a task? Why is it that every man does not receive individually the revelation of God? How come God can talk to us better and more intensively through another person, rather than through objects?⁵⁵⁹ Fr Staniloae does not hesitate to assert in patristic spirit, that as long as the spiritual relationships between humans and between God and man are recognized as real, although they belong to the realm of apophatic, unfathomable realities, impossible to be fully described in words, yet they are somehow accessible to us "falling to some extent within our experience"⁵⁶⁰. The supernatural does not suppress, crush or eliminate the natural. The only way of knowing or grasping something about their dynamic character is through this direct, intuitive experience.

Within the framework of the analogy and distinction between the perfect divine and human imperfect and limited communion⁵⁶¹ Fr Staniloae tries in his theological

⁵⁵⁵ Glatzer, "Aspects of Martin Buber's Thought" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May, 1981), Oxford University Press, 1-4

⁵⁵⁶ Friedman, "Martin Buber's View of Biblical Faith" in *JBR*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1954), 3-13, here p. 4

⁵⁵⁷ *Ich und Du*, (Berlin, 1938), 18, 36 cited in *Restoration*, 23

⁵⁵⁸ *Restoration*, 22,24

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 19

⁵⁶⁰ TL, 62

⁵⁶¹ EG1, 269-270

anthropology to extend Buber's 'I-Thou' relationship⁵⁶², stressing the fact that "even in the case of human beings however, there can never be more than three categories 'I, 'thou' and 'he' or their multiple [...]. From the perspective of 'I-thou' relation there can be no progress beyond the 'he', for there is nowhere else to go."⁵⁶³ Fr Staniloae seems to be interested in Buber's personalist philosophy due to its allegedly theistic underpinning. His first intention is to emphasize the tri-personal character of God and inter-subjective communion in a language familiar to modern philosophy.⁵⁶⁴ In God the 'I-Thou' relationship is absolute, perfect and eternal.⁵⁶⁵ Thus the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are somehow simultaneously yet each one in its own respect, 'I', 'Thou' and 'Thou' in the context of an absolute reciprocal reference.⁵⁶⁶ In addition to the fact that the divine hypostases could not be conceived outside a direct 'I-Thou' relationship, all the Trinitarian interpersonal relationships 'I-you' or 'We-Thou' are also simultaneous with the 'I-thou' relation. He writes: "Each divine subject is capable of this simultaneous attentiveness to the others, whether seen as distinct or in pairs."⁵⁶⁷ He approaches this matter again in terms of an open analogy:

And we can see even in ourselves, who are created in the image of God, that someone else distinct from 'I' and 'Thou' brings us a new, enriched mode of love and thus of greater joy.... we experience this even through the linguistic necessity to add a 'he' to the 'I-Thou'. We cannot forget about a he while being involved in an 'I-Thou' relationship. Maybe the more we love one another the more we experience the love for him; or vice-versa the more we, bound as 'I-Thou', experience the love for a third; the more we love one another. We feel the urge to be loved by a third or to love a third and the more we love him the more we love one another.⁵⁶⁸

Fr Staniloae integrates creatively in his theology of creation the 'I-Thou' relation. The indivisible whole 'I-Thou-Nature' is an ontological datum that points out that the human being cannot exist apart from his relationship with nature.⁵⁶⁹ However the model of perfect reciprocal interiority of three persons is the Holy Trinity, because only the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share a perfect love:

⁵⁶² TC, 82-84 passim

⁵⁶³ EG1, 270-271

⁵⁶⁴ EG1, 270

⁵⁶⁵ EG2, 198

⁵⁶⁶ EG1, 270. Within Trinity no one is the third in the strict sense.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibidem

⁵⁶⁸ STL, 77-78 sq

⁵⁶⁹ EG2, 198

The Holy Spirit is necessary for the plenitude of love and joy in God or so we can see that two Persons do not ever exhaust all the potentiality of love but it requires a third one which is not merely in a relation but even in a union or unity with the other two.⁵⁷⁰

Now we can understand better the particular interest of Orthodox theology in pneumatology, as we consider the role of Holy Spirit in keeping the Trinitarian balance and its participation in the deification of man, as the Spirit of our adoption as sons of God the Father in order to become through grace what Christ is by nature. A dyad could never comprise the whole richness and complexity of this reality. The Trinity overcomes the egoism of the dyad.⁵⁷¹ Christ, the incarnate Son of God is perfectly consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit but also with us. So our consubstantiality reaches its fulfilment in the union with the risen and ascended Christ who is always present in his Church through the Holy Spirit.

In his restless quest for new words, expressions or images closest as meaning, 'compatible' or rather analogous to those used by the Fathers and specific to apophaticism, that is, which characterize the mystical experience of the union between man and God, Fr. Staniloae leaves Buber's theory aside and turns towards Binswanger whose phenomenology of love is also deeply influenced by Buber. Still we cannot proceed without wondering what reasons are behind Staniloae's interest in Buber's philosophy.

Although it is not the subject of our thesis we have tried to explore at least some of them with the help of M. Friedman, a scholar who seems to know and understand quite well Buber and his work. In one of his articles Friedman remarks that Buber's decisive influence on last century's philosophy is rather overlooked when it comes to epistemological aspects.⁵⁷²

Friedman writes: "The significance of Buber's theory of knowledge lies in the fact that it expresses and answers the need felt of many in this age to break through to a more humanly realistic account of the way in which we know."⁵⁷³ Friedman also explains at length why and how Buber develops his epistemology on the basis of the 'I-Thou' relationship from which the 'I-It' relation derives.⁵⁷⁴ He argues that despite the fact that the

⁵⁷⁰ STL, 77

⁵⁷¹ D. Staniloae, *Der Dreieinige Gott und die Einheit der Menschheit*, in P. Stuhlmacher /L. Abramovski (ed.), *Toleranz*, (Tübingen 1982), 149- 63, here p. 159. See also CCT, p.174

⁵⁷² Martin S.Friedman, "Martin Buber's theory of knowledge", 264

⁵⁷³ *Ibidem*, 264-65

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 268-9. In the beginning of his *I and Thou* (translation from German belongs to Ronald Gregor Smith, Edinburg, T&T Clark, 1937), Buber writes: "The primary word 'I-Thou' can only be

'I-Thou' relation is not Buber's discovery he is the one who clears up the distinctions between the 'I-Thou' and the 'I-It' relations formulating and developing systematically and in detail the implications of this difference. In a very optimistic tone, Karl Heim considered the difference between the 'I-Thou' and the 'I-It' relations an important and crucial discovery, capable of initiating a Copernican revolution of modern thought, a conception which should lead eventually to a breakthrough announcing the dawn of post-Cartesian philosophy.

Buber's epistemological perspective based on the assertion: "As I become I, I say Thou" could be considered a turning point in modern secular European thought proposing a new manner of our knowledge of our selves, of other selves and the external world. What he actually argues is that our belief in the reality of the external world arises from our relation to other selves.⁵⁷⁵ More precisely Buber focuses on what he calls the "presentness and concreteness" of meeting with the "other" in order to point out the distinctiveness of the 'I-Thou' relation. This new vision would eventually become a landmark of the existentialist philosophy being further developed or referred to in their works, from different perspectives by Martin Heidegger, Ferdinand Ebner⁵⁷⁶, Gabriel Marcel and others. Fr. Staniloae tries to synthesize Ebner's conception in the following phrases: "The true faith leads to love. That is why love also is considered to be the source of communion."⁵⁷⁷

Nevertheless Buber's epistemology with its emphasis on ineffable reality of meeting and "dazwischen" (there-in-between) and its direct ontological implications⁵⁷⁸ is obviously different from and transcends Descartes's abstract individualism which reduces the subject to the level of isolated consciousness. The extreme rationalism on the one hand and all those conceptions which exhilarate against reason, vital impulse or irrational⁵⁷⁹ on the other, leading to the deepening of the gap between philosophy and theology had to face their own limitations.

spoken with the whole being. The primary word 'I-It' can never be spoken with the whole being." (p.3) See also *I and Thou*, pp.5, 11 and 17

⁵⁷⁵ Ibidem

⁵⁷⁶ Concerning the characteristics of the true "I", the role of word in the true communication between persons and their communion, the relevance of faith as fundament of true communion without which there is no true spiritual birth, Fr. Staniloae refers frequently to F. Ebner's works *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten*, (Regensburg, 1921), *Wort und liebe*, (Regensburg, 1935). Cf. *Restoration*, 23, 31

⁵⁷⁷ *Restoration*, 30

⁵⁷⁸ Fr Staniloae cites from Buber's anthropological study "Das Problem Des Menschen" in *Werke*, (Erster Band, Schriften zur Philosophie, Heidelberg, 1962), pp.405-06: "On the small border where 'I' and 'thou' meet is the Kingdom of Between." Cf. TC, 62

⁵⁷⁹ *Restoration*, 54

Fr Staniloae's concern for Buber's concept is based on his conviction that only a living and true relation between human persons could be the basis of an authentic human community and the chance of man's renewal. However Fr Staniloae seems to be fully aware of the fact that Buber actually gives up the mystical ideal of union in favour of the dialogical notion of relation, central to his philosophical conception. Buber stops at the gates of transcendence.

In an individualistic society dominated by the philosophy of the "death of God", Fr Staniloae must have searched and definitely found in the thought of Buber, Heidegger, Jaspers or Grisebach who altogether seem to be willing to listen and know not only a part or another of the human being, but to see man in his integral unity, as being, in an attempt to decipher the sense of human being, to reach out its foundations, a spark, a sign of hope and the possibility of a true and necessary dialogue between the secular culture and theology of the last century. Otherwise it would be quite difficult to understand Fr Staniloae's interests in philosophical existentialism beyond the limits of mere personal intellectual curiosity. This is nevertheless an important aspect of Fr. Staniloae's endeavour to forcibly argue the actuality of Jesus Christ, who restores not only the human being but the entire universe, for modernity and post-modernity, because He is always actual, anticipating continuously the actuality, the only one who has the answers to all questions of the human being, regardless of generation (Colossians 2:3).⁵⁸⁰ Since, in this context, the truth is one (John 14:6) the philosopher, the scientist and the theologian, if they are really sincere in their quest for the truth, for the ultimate sense of the human being and the existence of the world or for finding solutions for mankind's actual or older unsolved problems, they would eventually realize that their paths, although distinct, are convergent.

It seems that uniqueness of the truth despite its infinite aspects and the sincere search for it, are for Fr Staniloae like the hermeneutical principles of an authentic dialogue between theology and secular culture. That is why his engagement with the existentialist philosophy is serious yet nuanced, avoiding those reflections which betray a narcissistic, superficial or self-sufficient attitude. His optimism concerning the outcome of this dialogue is the expression of an original theological reflection nourished from his love for God and men towards whom he always feels constantly responsible, recognizing and cherishing the gifts God has bestowed on them. It seems that this optimism is balanced by a profound knowledge of the human condition since no one can really elude the hardships, the challenges of life from which most of humankind's questions and concerns arise.

⁵⁸⁰ *Restoration*, 7

Fr Staniloae would later argue that in a paradoxical way the perspective on transcendence of the existentialist philosophy is the sign of its openness and limitation at the same time: openness in terms of a wider horizon in comparison to all previous philosophical trends but limited because of its hesitation to acknowledge the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Trinity, as the real transcendence. He writes in this respect: "Man cannot experience the true transcendence in any of his intellectual systems or artistic creations. That is why neither one of them could generate the force to put man in state of fearful seriousness and responsibility or to source his true self-knowledge, as being."⁵⁸¹

The concluding idea is that existentialist philosophy placed itself on the boundary of the transcendence but fails to enter in communion with it.⁵⁸² Heidegger's definition of transcendence⁵⁸³, the fundamental structure of man, "understood as act, as our continuous work of passing from ourselves to the world, and through that, from the 'present us' to the 'future us', elevating us from an existential state subject to general cliché to the conscience of our intimacy"⁵⁸⁴ appears to be a significant step forward but Fr. Staniloae had his doubts as to whether it would be enough. He considered that Heidegger envisaged a rather subjective transcendence limited by and oriented toward one's self. As long as one fails to accept the meeting of the Absolute in a concrete divine person, one could not really experience transcendence. Only in a living and reciprocal relationship with God, experienced as a concrete reality close to us, the conscience of transcendence reaches a new superior level of intensity.⁵⁸⁵

Binswanger on the other hand was particularly intrigued by the fact that each one of the two conscious subjects simultaneously experiences a harmony and an indefiniteness in the other in their dynamic reality of 'We-ness' produced by their mutual love. Indefiniteness points toward something lived or experienced, difficult to catch in concepts or to describe in words. It is the mark of metaphysics.

The organization of the reality of 'We-ness' engendered by the mutual pure love between an 'I' and a 'Thou' which is more authentic and radically different from the experience of a 'we' based on some mutual interests, or characterized by the conflictual

⁵⁸¹ Ibidem, 58

⁵⁸² *Restoration*, 59. Cf. Ewald Burger, *Philosophie*, Bd.III, p. 226

⁵⁸³ For a very interesting dialogue attempt between Heidegger's nihilism and Dionysius' apophaticism see Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God. Heidegger and the Areopagite.*, Andrew Louth (ed. and introduction), Haralambos Ventis (trans.), (T&T Clark, 2005), 49-58;73-110;115-132

⁵⁸⁴ *Restoration*, 53. Fr Staniloae also gives in the footnote on the same page a passage from the original German text of Martin Heidegger's "*Vom Wesen Grundes*", published in *Jarbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung Husserl-Festschrift*, (Halle, 1929), 80-82

⁵⁸⁵ Ibidem

tension between an 'I' and a 'Thou', is called by the Swiss psychiatrist 'structure' (Gestalt). Actually Gestalt is a term specific to psychology used in connection with man's acts or manifestations designating a configuration, "a symbol which comprises, in a sharply defined outline, the indescribable depth or abyss of a person, even the infinity of a love. What is tragic is the fact that a positivist judgment can seize only the sharp outline, material or rational within such a symbol. But that is blind in front of reality."⁵⁸⁶

Love among people implies harmony and balance, and its absence implies conflict and disruption. Binswanger writes:

In the pure form of love, the glance, the greeting, the wave, the word, the kiss and the embrace of love, already the origins of the perceptions of the existence, show themselves in the well-known double meaning of the word, namely in the meaning of the actual gaining of knowledge...From greeting until the embrace we recognize each other as loving...So Gestalt is not the abstract fixation of contents. Gestalt is not already a certain conception but the foundation of certain conceptions.⁵⁸⁷

The 'structure' as a form of experience is not simply a concept but rather a conceptual matrix, a 'seed' of concepts which come to life only as a reflection of this form of living.⁵⁸⁸

Binswanger's phenomenology of love provides some elements for the structural terminology of Fr Staniloae's theology of personhood, of the interpersonal communion in love. However the main reason for this terminological 'adoption' seems to be the illustrative potential that some of these terms might have in conveying certain aspects of the experience of the uncreated light as it appears at St. Gregory Palamas in manner more accessible to the post-modern man. There is some kind of direct intuition which assumes and overwhelms rational thought.⁵⁸⁹

The critical and prudent appraisal of these terms in the context of apophatic theology (Wir-struktur, Gestalt) in order to avoid any confusions or relativization of the teaching of faith, precedes their reception and imbue with a vivid theological content which widens the vista of Fr Staniloae's original theological conception concerning the mystical character of love. In one of his articles⁵⁹⁰ Fr Staniloae after commenting on Heidegger's conclusion on the 'angst'⁵⁹¹ - a continuous fear produced by the inevitable fact

⁵⁸⁶ *Restoration*, p. 226. Cf. L. Binswanger, op. cit., 596 sq.

⁵⁸⁷ OS, 349. Cf. L. Binswanger, op.cit, 504

⁵⁸⁸ OS, 349

⁵⁸⁹ Ibidem, 354

⁵⁹⁰ OR, 197-98

⁵⁹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, (Halle, 1935), 251

of death (extinction) - as being a fundamental feature of man, clearly states “needless to say that we partially share this opinion”⁵⁹². Later on he would oppose the dynamic fear of God to this angst.

Their suitability is strictly conditioned by their efficiency in sustaining the ‘heavy load’ of certain antinomical patristic concepts or ideas.⁵⁹³ It seems that this terminological influence, which has never been fully analyzed so far, helps him to avoid the artificial limits of a narrow self-sufficient traditionalist discourse. Fr Staniloae always tried to avoid the pitfall of a rigid confessionalism knowing that it could be risky to compromise the universal dimension and the vocation of Orthodoxy. This rather unconventional attempt to find ‘common ground’ for a dialogue between recent theology and certain relevant aspects and positions of modern existential philosophy and the psychology of the abyss, is, in the end, the expression of his noticeable mediating efforts.

This ‘common ground’ could consist in the fact that love is the perfection of the person and meaningful in the context of personal conscious existence, because only through love the person is really alive, and grows only in free communion with other persons. Binswanger asserts that reciprocal love rather than fear (angst), death or despair as in Heidegger’s conception, is the ultimate meaning of the human conscious existence, ‘structuring’ it while Fr Staniloae argues why the source of this love can be only a Tripersonal God. In other words, the ultimate meaning of our dialogical existence can be found only in God, the perfect communion of equal and coeternal Persons. Fr Staniloae wants to argue that mystical, ecstatic love is an unfathomable union between subjects, an interpenetration of ‘I’s which never lose their identity, not even in their mutual projection. However Fr Staniloae makes a clear distinction between human and divine love. Fr Staniloae engages Binswanger’s concept of imaginative love in an attempt to clarify what the reciprocal communication at human level is about.⁵⁹⁴ Only love as communion opens that way of the real fulfilment of the subjects by engaging them in a reciprocal revealing of their mysterious depths.⁵⁹⁵ The source of the true human love is in fact the divine perfect love and human participation in God through the Trinitarian uncreated energies is a mystery of divine and infinite, kenotic love poured in the limited human beings deifying without crushing them.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹² OR, 198

⁵⁹³ OS, 357

⁵⁹⁴ Sandu Frunza, *The Christian Love*. (Galati: Porto Franco Publishing, 1993), 173

⁵⁹⁵ Ibidem

⁵⁹⁶ Ibidem, 172

One of the greatest challenges of modern theology, which Fr Staniloae did not avoid, was to place the issue of deification in the context of the dialogue between theology, philosophy and psychology starting from the consequences of each one's way of seeing the relation of love between two beings. How could the modern man be deified? First of all he had to show why God's love for man is superior to love among men although the latter reflects somehow the first using the language and the concepts familiar to modern philosophy, psychology and psychoanalysis in particular, and to human sciences in general.

Again he strives to find an analogy powerful enough to draw the attention to this fundamental aspect of existence. He actually uses a 'two-step' analogy between the development of man's natural powers through the love which links him to somebody else who cherishes and trusts him, and deification which has its source in the relationship of love between us and God in order to give us a much more accessible picture of how man grows and evolves through and in deifying love. Fr. Staniloae suggests that many features of human love can help us to better grasp the gifts of deification. In turn, Binswanger says that what man receives when he experiences love is the plenitude of being (Daseinsfülle) which is an enlargement of love through itself in an 'I-thou' relationship.⁵⁹⁷ Here it could be made an interesting analogy between Binswanger's perspective and Fr Zacharias' mystical theology which speaks about human deification in terms of a permanent enlargement of the heart of the believer who unceasingly participates through prayer "in the uncreated energy and grace of Christ and lives the indescribable enlargement which comes from the Holy Spirit"⁵⁹⁸.

That plenitude of being which is seen as an "overflowing of being" in love should also be understood in terms of 'over-spatialization' (Überräumlichung), 'super-temporalization' (Überzeitigung), 'infinivitization' (Verunendlichung) and 'super-historicity' (Übergeschichtlichkeit).⁵⁹⁹ Based on these assertions Fr Staniloae discerns between 'Daseinanalytik' and 'Daseinanalyse', both preoccupied with the problem of transcendence, infinity or eternity in an anthropological context. According to Heidegger any launch of the 'Sorge-Mann' [i.e. man as care] towards the future moment is simultaneously an enrichment and a relinquish to other possibilities, thus being positive and negative at the

⁵⁹⁷ *Restoration*, 188. Cf. GED, 154

⁵⁹⁸ See Archimandrite Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, (Mount Tabor Publishing, 2012) pp.145, 213,229

⁵⁹⁹ *Restoration*, 155

same time, whilst Binswanger argues that man, as love, is the subject of an unceasing pure development, growing with all his possibilities and potentialities.⁶⁰⁰

However, even under these circumstances the relation of love between two human beings is mysterious and impossible to quantify since we cannot accurately know and separate what comes from one person and what comes from the other, although it takes two for the relation to come to life.⁶⁰¹ But what really draws Binswanger very close to the Fathers' concept of deification (union without confusion with God) is his paradoxical remark that "despite all that always increasing over-abundance and over-flowing due to love, the human nature does not break its creatural boundaries, although it lives in infinity and transmits infinity".⁶⁰²

We are dealing with an honest invitation to an open dialogue for man's sake and not with an unwilling concession. This responsible perspective on the problems of modernity prevents us from considering Fr Staniloae just a 'transmitter' of the classical Orthodox Patristic theological tradition. Maybe this is the moment when we should highlight one of Fr Staniloae's theological particularities. The abundance of adverbs in his language proves it. Staniloae's theology could never be suspected of being an abstract, self-sufficient monologue. His real concern was to stimulate the next generations through his work so they could give their own testimony, to feel responsible, to do their part. Staniloae's culture of dialogue is the fruit of a humility which springs from his profound sense of God's merciful and compassionate presence in the world. No one could ever consider him a mere imitator of the Fathers. To give an example, we refer to one of his theological reflections concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Fr Staniloae writes:

One might say that since the Father is infinite and the Son is infinite there is no need for another Person to bring something new to the love of One for the Other. But in this line of reasoning it could be argued that even one Person in the Godhead would be self-sufficient in its own infinity in order to be joyful and happy [...] It is not the infinity in itself which brings joy to love but showing love before another distinct Person does...Where the consciousness is missing there is no reason for joy. Real joy is given by another consciousness⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Ibidem, 188

⁶⁰¹ Ibidem

⁶⁰² *Restoration*, 188-89. Cf. GED, 156

⁶⁰³ TC, 76

For Fr Staniloae the plenitude of perfect existence is under no circumstances consistent with the loneliness of a monopersonal God⁶⁰⁴ and even a divine dyad would never succeed to completely banish all the dark clouds of egocentrism, self-sufficiency and uncertainty or fear from its limited horizon since within this dyad one person is a wall rather than a window for the other. So a third person saves and opens the communion of the two persons. Only a third could complete and fulfil the communion in all its richness and complexity:

A lonely single person is not light, not even in man's case. There cannot be seen a sense, a meaning, a joy in this loneliness.[...] The light is not conditioned by the I-thou relation but by I-thou and thee. We fully love one another united by the common love for the third. When you exist I know what I am living for, my life has a purpose but when there is a third we both know what we are living for. The light in three is a whole and unitary light.⁶⁰⁵

This is definitely a completion, an enlargement of Buber's perspective. But what is the spiritual significance of light in Fr Staniloae conception? He explains:

The 'light' and 'life' have an identical content, because when darkness overcomes life, existence diminishes. The certainty of eternal life and the richness, the powers and infinite gifts [received from God] give light to existence. And the happy, joyful life is possible only within the loving interpersonal communion. [...] But we have eternal life, unceasingly enriched and full of joy and happiness only in the divine Trinity, being without beginning and end, the existence of communion in undepleted love.⁶⁰⁶

III.5. Three is perfection

In the context of Western theology which seemed increasingly tempted to depersonalize the Trinity⁶⁰⁷ for the sake of unity, Fr Staniloae has tried a personalist approach to the

⁶⁰⁴ Kallistos of Diokleia, "The human person as an icon of the Trinity", *Sobornost* 8:2 (1986), 6-23. Ware speaks about a manner of approaching the mystery of the Holy Trinity, found in both Eastern and Western Christendom that is thinking about God in terms of mutual love. "God is love because is exchange, self-giving, solidarity." The true and perfect love is simultaneously mutual and shared and always presupposes interpersonal relations.

⁶⁰⁵ CCT, 173

⁶⁰⁶ Ibidem, 172

⁶⁰⁷ John Meyendorff identifies several modern concerns which ask for or rather avail a "return to an existential and experiential approach to the doctrine of God seen in the context of history salvation"

mystery of the Holy Trinity yet stressing out the equally important role of the divine essence in the unity of the distinct divine Persons. “What can justify being, more than love?” Father Staniloae asks. No one will ever grow weary of love. Therefore love can actually be without end - it can also be without beginning, and thus to be eternal. Only a love without beginning and end satisfies the whole being completely; it is its light or sense. An impersonal essence subdued to some irrational laws with no beginning or end could not provide any light for being. Fr Staniloae further adds:

The personal character of God presupposes pluripersonality, because the person who lacks in the joy of communion and love is not complete. And since God has never lacked in joy and love, He has never lacked in personal, thus Trinitarian character.⁶⁰⁸

Orthodoxy sees the Holy Trinity as a God who is love, a God of love always present and working in the souls of the faithful through the Holy Spirit, in order to raise them in the loving relationship between its Persons.⁶⁰⁹ That is why the sacraments of the Church are so important for the life of faithful. They do not receive through them a created grace but the divine uncreated energy. The emphasis on sacramental life conveys the spiritual and sanctifying character of Orthodoxy.⁶¹⁰ That is why Orthodoxy regards the Church, first of all, as the gate of Heaven.

Those who believe, receive through the uncreated energy not only forgiveness of their sins, but also the power of Christ to love God and the people through His Holy Spirit, after the deliverance from all egotistical passions thus being increasingly sanctified in a synergetic action.⁶¹¹ God is, above all, an absolute free conscious being without beginning and without cause. God is the greatest mystery, yet a mystery which paradoxically explains everything. Apophaticism is not totally inaccessible and dark, while cataphaticism is never a complete knowledge. The first sheds a light on, but also increases the mystery of the latter

and “a revival of a more authentic Trinitarianism”: the crisis of deism, the shortcomings of the Augustine and Thomist Trinitarian essentialism heavily questioned by the philosophy of “the death of God” which is the direct consequence of the many modern theologians’ unconvincing manner of justifying the being of God as “a philosophically defined entity”. See BT, p.181. Colin Gunton also reacts against this process of depersonalization which is, in his opinion, the burden of Augustine’s and Thomist tradition which led to an obliteration of particularities or distinctiveness of persons in an almost exclusive affirmation of God’s unity. He is doing that by returning to the Cappadocians’ Trinitarian theology in the attempt to recover and emphasize the value of person in the relation between God’s personal otherness in relation and our social existence. However he is rather prudent in engaging the social analogy considering the consequences of the Augustine’s psychological one. Cf. Colin Gunton, *Promise of the Trinitarian Theology*, xii-xxx

⁶⁰⁸ *Restoration*, 78

⁶⁰⁹ HTE, viii

⁶¹⁰ *Ibidem*

⁶¹¹ STL, 3-4

and vice-versa. We experience them both, yet never completely, as they gradually reveal their mystery depending on God's mercy.

Fr Staniloae explains in a refined Maximian tone, which reminds us about the theology of the Logos and the logoi of creation, the intimate connection between the rationality of creation and the mystery of Supreme Personal Reality i.e. why the basis of the entire existence should be *someone* rather than *something* (a uniform essence). The dangers and possible consequences of conceiving God as an impersonal divine essence are treated in detail by Fr. Staniloae throughout his works.⁶¹²

The person is a self-conscious being and the being is meant for personal existence. The person turns being into a reason for joy. The person gives sense to being. Consequently it can be inferred that the person is somehow an 'actualization' of the being by unceasingly enriching and giving meaning to it, although the person cannot be reduced to self-awareness.

On the other hand he seems to be preoccupied with the following question: if the person is the only conscious mode of the being, or if the being implies the personal consciousness about it, which is the nature of the relationship between them? For Staniloae a dialectical separation between the being in general and the conscious personal being is wrong and unfounded.

In reality, he says, the conscious being is nothing else than the fullness, the necessary completion of the non-conscious being. A non-conscious being is inferior, as it is not aware of itself. Moreover the impersonal being is governed by the personal or conscious being, by someone. If the truly fulfilled being implies personal consciousness, the personhood of a being explains the being, revealing its content.

The person is an ontological-existential reality which has the entire content of the being without coming from outside the being as something added to it. Maybe we could distinguish them in thought but never separate them in reality. The person emphasizes the dialogical and relational character of being. However Staniloae does not stop here. In the realm of perfect being the conscious person is not limited by any non-conscious imperfect being at all. He argues that the Supreme Personal being or reality is simultaneously an absolute and free Self-giving, a perfect joy produced by both these acts of self-giving and receiving oriented towards another conscience or perfect person.

⁶¹² Kevin M. Berger, *Towards a Theological Gnoseology: The Synthesis of Fr Dumitru Staniloae*, PhD thesis, I, (Catholic University of America: Washington D.C., 2003), p.78 and footnotes 139, 140. All this arguments give consistence, distinctiveness and weight to the Staniloae's personalist thought.

An important conclusion at this point is that there is no real joy, goodness or love outside reciprocal interpersonal communion. Let us not forget that in God any act is essential and personal at the same time. Only a God in whom an eternal Father shows and gives His love to an eternal Son is true and above all and any law, since He manifests his absolute freedom of showing always his infinite and eternal goodness.

This true generosity as absolutely free and conscious self-giving can be only the characteristic of a person, or more accurately of persons in communion. The perfect absolute being, the perfect good, as Staniloae likes to call it, reminding us of the *Summum Bonum* of Aquinas, is a self-conscious being, yet always seen within the horizon of the absolute love in which the distinct persons' inexhaustible reciprocal exchange of self is doubled by the fact that the persons also affirm themselves and "establish themselves in existence" in this act of total reciprocal giving or mutual possession of distinct 'I's'.⁶¹³ Within the Trinity any kind of subject-object relation is transcended. But this requires more than one conscious person for the dialogue to really take place. God is a perfect communion of persons. This generosity presupposes an absolutely free personal will and a perfect reciprocity. However this does not mean that God is Trinitarian by necessity. Fr. Staniloae argues, based on the thought of the Fathers,⁶¹⁴ that a monopersonal God would be neither a person, nor God since his omnipotence would not be accompanied with goodness or love.⁶¹⁵ He writes: "A monopersonal God would be like an impersonal essence subordinated to laws of evolution or emanation, laws inexplicable in their origin or their results."⁶¹⁶ A God like that does not exist in reality. God has revealed to us as structure of the supreme love, Trinity of perfect, divine and infinitely good Persons capable and worthy of infinite and perfect love and communion, but in one perfect divine being, fully and simultaneously possessed by each one of them. The experience of God, the Holy Trinity as a personal reality is distinct from and superior to any form of polytheism and pantheism. Nevertheless the threeness and oneness of God remains an abyssal mystery.

The divine being can subsist only in three Persons and only then these Persons are truly and fully divine because they have an infinite value as worthy and capable of pure love since they permanently experience a perfect mutual intersubjectivity and transparency which make them capable of perfect love:

⁶¹³ TC, 78

⁶¹⁴ HTE, p.90, Cf. St. Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, Oration 3.66, NPNF² 4, 430, St Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 8.5, NPNF² 5, 207, St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 31*

⁶¹⁵ HTE, 17

⁶¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 18

On the heights of love there cannot be noticed the distinction between the giving and receiving but only the unceasing joy of common possession of being. [...] Although each person is the plenitude of being, happiness resides only in a common possession of being and not in its solitary possession. [...] The joy and bliss can exist only together with generosity, as the affirmation of the other.⁶¹⁷

It seems that Fr Staniloae tries to reconcile communion and otherness by arguing the simultaneity of joy, happiness and generosity in God. Fr Staniloae is keen on showing as clearly as possible why God cannot be just one person or an indefinite number of persons either. Actually a monopersonal God would not be either a true person or true God. It would be instead like an almighty and cold tyrant showing no mercy, goodness or love, imprisoned within his own egotistical self-sufficiency. Would he be really interested in or capable of creating something from nothing in time or to sustain a communion with this creation?

Inspired by the Fathers⁶¹⁸, Fr Staniloae conceives an argumentation meant to lead us step by step to the conclusion that a monopersonal God would eventually dissolve in an impersonal essence dominated by a law of evolution or emanation in pantheistic sense which could never provide us with satisfactory responses concerning the origin and dynamic of the entire existence. All heresies are in the end attempts to either completely separate God from his creation or to identify them, compromising man's restoration, salvation and deification. Only the infinite love of a supreme, conscious, kenotic, generous Tripersonal being is really inexhaustible, alive and active. A conscious and absolutely free generosity emerged from such infinity never 'dries out'. Staniloae concludes:

The infinity of perfect being is the infinity of a Father who gives Himself from eternity and until the ages of ages to a Son with His joy of self-giving and of the Son's joy of receiving it; but also with the communication of joy (as existence) to a Third, capable of grasping through a personal and equal experience all generosity of the Father accompanied by joy and the whole receiving of that generosity accompanied by joy of the Son.⁶¹⁹

This approach on the mystery of the Holy Trinity in the context of the apophatic theology of gift gives us the opportunity to see in a new light Christ's words "It is more blessed to give

⁶¹⁷ *Restoration*, 77

⁶¹⁸ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos, Oratio I*, PG 26,48 and Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium, VII*, PG 45, 769

⁶¹⁹ STC, 14-15

than to receive.” (Acts 20:35). Within the Trinity interpersonal love is neither uniform nor monotonous. Each of the Trinitarian persons manifests its humble love by affirming the other two. The infinite and eternal Supreme Personal reality, the perfect Trinity is the source, and the final destination of the whole world precisely because only the perfect love of a God experienced as a mystery of unity in diversity and diversity in unity could reconcile by transcendence the unity and diversity of all his creation.

Regarding the Trinitarian antinomies Fr Staniloae discovers the beautiful definition of Hugh of Saint Victor via E. Kovalevsky’s article “Les nombres dans la Génèse”⁶²⁰ which he will further develop in his Trinitarian theology. But Hugh’s Trinitarian approach is poached by one of his disciples, Richard of Saint Victor.⁶²¹ Bringing again to light the work of this mediaeval scholar is undoubtedly the merit of Colin Gunton who has discovered some striking parallels between John Macmurray’s arguments about the relational character of the human persons⁶²² and those employed by Richard about the persons of the Trinity. This scholar monk seems to avoid in his argument the psychological analogy of Augustine⁶²³ which was virtually embraced by almost the whole Western Trinitarian theology, preferring instead to look at persons in relation in his search for coordinates necessary for a balanced epistemological approach.

If Richard argues that “Shared love is properly said to exist when a third person is loved by two persons harmoniously and in community”⁶²⁴, Macmurray contends that the relation between two human persons becomes negative by excluding the others while a positive relation should be always inclusive and without limit.⁶²⁵ However, the obvious differences regarding the context and the interest in the human person on the one side and the almost exclusive preoccupation with the doctrine of the Trinity on the other remain, although Gunton says that there is a very important aspect which links these two: despite the fact that Richard and his predecessors, including Hugh, were almost totally concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity, we can definitively trace the possibilities their work might

⁶²⁰ TC, 232-33

⁶²¹ *De Trinitate*, G.Salet (ed.), (Paris: Cerf, 1959), book 3

⁶²² However Gunton seems to be very cautious concerning Macmurray’s philosophical personalism which has in his estimation a certain but limited theological relevance since the latter’s philosophy is in fact a reaction to the Cartesian and Kantian individualism based on the separation between person and nature. See also Gunton’s book *The One, the three and the many*, 169 and John Macmurray, *Persons in Relations*, (London: Faber& Faber, 1961), 17, 69, 157

⁶²³ SCF, 484-8 passim

⁶²⁴ Richard of St. Victor, book 3, xix. 927B.7-9. Cf. Colin Gunton, *The Promise of the Trinitarian Theology*, (London: T&T Clark, 1997²), footnote 18, p.90

⁶²⁵ John Macmurray, op. cit. Cf. Colin Gunton, book cited, footnote 19, p.90

provide for the emergence and development of a more mature relational view of the person.⁶²⁶

It is exactly the huge potential of this way of thinking relationally about God, which somehow survived in the West, even if only marginally, that E. Kovalevsky and Fr Staniloae identify and praise in their Trinitarian theology, which is centered on the balance between person and nature. Fr Staniloae expands this perspective, in particular his pneumatological justification of the perfection of the Trinitarian model, but starting with St Athanasius's assertion: "The Lord has said that the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth; he thereby shows that in Him the Trinity finds its perfection."⁶²⁷

To be even more accurate, he specifies: "In every respect the Holy Spirit keeps his role as the Third Person in the Trinity. In no way can he become the second, because the Trinity cannot be reduced to a duality, and because each Person keeps his separate role within the Trinity. The Third Person confirms the other two in their difference from each other, not letting them become merged in a single one, as happens in certain systematizations of the 'filioque' clause."⁶²⁸

After that he presents the Trinitarian intersubjectivity as a continuous reciprocity of the divine Persons in balance with their perfect consubstantiality beyond any doubt or confusion:

Only the Three in their uninterrupted mutuality, each one unique and at the same time implying the other two without mingling them together, represent perfect being and perfect relationship. The existence of a Third is necessary in order to bet beyond any duality without being any confusion of the Two. If they were only Two Persons, they would run the risk either of becoming merged in each other, or of being completely separated from each other. Only a Third Person can ensure the joyful communion of the other two.⁶²⁹

As we have already shown, Fr Staniloae's theological concept of personhood has at its foundation the person-nature synthesis in which person and nature are always mutually presupposed, distinct but never separated. His Trinitarian theology is also fully consistent with this balanced approach. The person is never simply identified with or reduced to communion. The Trinitarian interpersonal communion would not be possible if the divine

⁶²⁶ See Colin Gunton, *The Promise of the Trinitarian theology*, 91

⁶²⁷ Staniloae, "The Holy Spirit in the theology and the life of the Orthodox Church", *Sobornost*, 1 (1975), 6

⁶²⁸ Ibidem

⁶²⁹ Ibidem

nature would not permit it. There is no interpersonal communion outside the common divine nature. In God, the being is an infinite full of possibilities including the capacity for interpersonal communion. Thus in Fr Staniloae's Trinitarian theology the perfect intersubjectivity of the divine Persons which are pure subjects, is always balanced by the common divine essence, or their perfect consubstantiality. This perspective enables him to have a well-argued and firm position regarding the distinction between the unity of essence and unity of love in Trinity⁶³⁰, the issue of the principle of monarchy or the distinction between certain types of relationships within the Trinity and their consequences in economy i.e. God's presence and activity in his creation.

But why does Fr Staniloae speak so much about communion? Again his response is quite direct and illuminating: "If we emphasize so much the aspect of communion of the internal life of God, it is because this profound and noble aspect of human reality has been particularly emphasized in late times."⁶³¹ An adept of the true culture of dialogue who really has something to say, should do everything to make himself understood by others, including 'speaking their language', that is using the concepts and terms they value as vehicles for his own ideas. Otherwise it is almost impossible to touch their minds or hearts or at least draw their attention.

Fr Staniloae offers such an example in the discussion of the intentionality for communion as a fundamental characteristic of subject at both the Trinitarian and the human level. More specifically, he remarks that Heidegger acknowledges the existence of this intentionality, which being specific to the state of love, manifests itself, no matter how hard man would try to suppress it, as a fundamental structure of his being.⁶³² Building this 'common ground' with the help of St Maximus he argues that the meaning of the existence of man is to become *the subject of divine love*. Here Fr Staniloae reiterates in an original key, giving new connotations to certain philosophical terms, the affirmation of the human being as *imago Dei* in his ontology of love using the Maximian 'potentiality-actuality' binom⁶³³. If God is the perfect *Subject* as the supreme reality, then the human being is the *subject*, who receives in the act of creation the capacity to be, to become the receptacle of the divine love, to become God by grace, a capacity that not even sin could compromise.

⁶³⁰ EG1, 246-47

⁶³¹ *Restoration*, 84-85

⁶³² *Ibidem*, 76-87. Fr Staniloae actually refers to Heidegger's concept of 'Mitsein' i.e. 'Being-with' or 'togetherness' in the footnote 1 of the same page. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 123

⁶³³ For a clear exposition of this principle of St Maximus' cosmology, fundamental for his theology of participation see Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Gillian Clark & Andrew Louth eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 130-32, 150-52

This capacity corresponds to the image of God in the human being and its continuous actualization as the fundamental dimension of man's spiritual ascension is seen within the horizon of the likeness of God.⁶³⁴ Fr Staniloae contends that, generally speaking, only a subject has the ability to get something and to manifest it as its own feature. So only the receiving and manifestation of the divine love can transform the human being into a "full subject"⁶³⁵. The human being is never complete without the permanent love of God.⁶³⁶ As we have already argued earlier, Binswanger makes a similar point, which is nevertheless focused on the inter-human level. Intrigued by Louis Lavelle's (1885-1951)⁶³⁷ major metaphysical work *La Dialectique de l'éternel présent* which comprises four volumes, *De l'Être* (1928), *De l'Acte* (1937), *Du Temps et de l'Éternité* (1945), and *De l'Âme Humaine* (1951), Fr Staniloae argues that consciousness and freedom (from which self-determination and spontaneity derive) are the essential features of the subject. He uses this approach to illustrate the distinctive and superior place the rational human being holds in the economy of creation, in the relation between God and the world, and also the synergetic character of deification. Actually Fr Staniloae quotes quite extensively from the first two volumes of Lavelle's opus in his Christological synthesis *Restoration* bringing face to face in this case the epistemology, or rather, the gnoseology of St. Maximus and the spiritual existentialism of Lavelle⁶³⁸. Lavelle argues not only that "there can be no metaphysics of the object"⁶³⁹ but also that "Being reveals itself as the one and the univocal (univoque), but at the same time is infinite and above all pure act, God. Whatever exists, it exists through a participation in a pure, infinite act."⁶⁴⁰ I suspect that Fr Staniloae was interested in Lavelle's metaphysics because of his efforts to surmount the pantheism through a strong affirmation of God's transcendence. If we add to that the guiding principles of the French *philosophie de l'esprit*: "the recognition of the absolute, an accounting for the whole of human experience, and a readiness to embrace all those spiritual efforts which promote the understanding of the human person"⁶⁴¹ we could better understand why he saw in Lavelle a potential partner of dialogue. To be more specific, Fr Staniloae argues that St Maximus' discussion regarding

⁶³⁴ Ibidem, 69-70

⁶³⁵ Ibidem, 75

⁶³⁶ Ibidem

⁶³⁷ Cf. Joseph M. Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, University of California Press, 208. See also in English *Evil and Suffering* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963)

⁶³⁸ See De Waelhens, "Une philosophie de la participation. L'Actualisme de M. Louis Lavelle", RNP, 1939. John Collins, "Louis Lavelle on Human Participation" in *The Philosophical Review*, vol.56, no.2, 1947, 156-83 and Colin Smith, *Contemporary French Philosophy: A Study in Norms and Values*, 1964, 47-74

⁶³⁹ J.M. Bochenski, op.cit., 209

⁶⁴⁰ Ibidem

⁶⁴¹ Idem, p. 208.

the inferiority and relativity of *γνώμη*⁶⁴² with the problematic option it introduces, is somehow confirmed by Lavelle who argues that absolute freedom is superior to human free will, being a characteristic only of the pure Act⁶⁴³ (i.e. of divinity). According to Lavelle our free will and necessity are inseparable.⁶⁴⁴ All the work of Fr Staniloae is a bold, yet humble and responsible invitation to dialogue, animated by the strong conviction that the culture of the soul is the soul of culture. Fr Staniloae considers that one of the most pressing and hardest tasks of a theologian is to keep connected and in balance the needs and concerns of society in certain times, unfolding the significance of Jesus Christ and his work for the world, and a strong continuous bond with the tradition of the Church.⁶⁴⁵ Returning to our time, the unfolding of the tradition of the Church must be performed in a relevant, accessible and intelligible way for modernity. The theologian must always keep in mind that God wants the salvation of all human beings which should “come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4).

All the manifestations of the divine essence pass through the perfect divine persons’ sphere of initiative. However, in order to avoid any suspicion of Modalism, this assertion should be also regarded in the light of Fr Staniloae’s theology of the personhood who, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, argues that person and nature are simultaneous ontological realities in both God and man based on the Maximian axiom that there is no such a thing as an unhyposatized nature. On the other hand, here lies one of the fundamental ontological distinctions between God and man since “the abyss” of the divine being is far from being in the same state of obscurity and somehow of freedom vis-à-vis the personal factor, as in man’s case. In other words, God has always a clear vision of his ‘abyss’ which is completely at his disposal. Based on this aspect he has always tried to argue the irreducibility of the Persons in relation to the common divine being.

A first major consequence of this fact would be that absolutely all manifestations of God are voluntary hence personal. In God there is a perfect total harmony and balance between His will (personal sphere) and power (essential sphere). Fr Staniloae does not imply a separation between the will and the essence of God, but rather he seems to suggest an antinomial distinction between them, regarding the specific way the personal God chooses to use his divine power under certain circumstances as an expression of his compassionate love and mercy for man. He does not seem to suggest that each Person of

⁶⁴² PG 91, 17C; PG 91, 21D-24 A; 192 A B D and PG 91, 308 D-309 A

⁶⁴³ Louis Lavelle, *De l’Acte*, p. 193, cite in *Restoration*, p.175 and footnote 2

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibidem*

⁶⁴⁵ *Restoration*, 8

the Trinity would have an independent or separate will, either since God the Father does everything through the Son in the Holy Spirit, or since each one of the divine persons actually lives for the other two. Even if there are some works in which the presence of one divine person is, let's say, more preeminent than the others, the other two persons of the Holy Trinity are always present and active in that work, and their communion is always perfect. An argument for that is the mystery of the incarnation of the Logos (Luke 1:30-35). God's will perfectly covers and reaches all the 'endless shores' of His actual and potential power, unlike man whose will is sometimes stronger or weaker than the powers he has.

This point is really useful for our understanding of the divine essence-energies distinction. Man cannot simply experience God through his divine uncreated energies in any way or whenever he likes, but only when or how God considers fit. These energies do not just emanate mechanically, automatically or chaotically from the divine essence since the divine Persons activate, actualize, unify, direct, or use them in specific ways. For example the Trinitarian interpersonal communion would not be possible if the common nature would not enable it. There is no interpersonal communion outside the divine common nature.

Actually there is a permanent life-giving dialogue between God and man which makes the joy of living in God more real and important, than one would think through theoretical speculations about Him. This reciprocity defines our very existence as Eucharistic: "All is a great sacrament of God's love for us, and a sacrifice and thanksgiving of man to God."⁶⁴⁶

Due to the fact that God is a perfect being and has a perfect will which is in perfect control of His power, we can say, beyond any doubt, that God is not constrained in any way whatsoever or in any moment to do what He can do. But God is a perfect being also because he is love and true love exists only between free persons; love and real joy is always manifested in interpersonal communion.⁶⁴⁷ So God could never be a fatalistic, impersonal, irrational, pantheistic force. He must be a personal reality.

In the same respect, the acts of God which are an actualization of his powers' potentiality are not an emanation of His being which is never depleted in each one of His acts. Although he could do anything, He does what He wants, what He chooses to do. Consequently God could never be 'actus purus', completely depleted in his acts since their voluntary infinitely source is the divine personal being. Beyond any act there is always the person.

⁶⁴⁶ Staniloae, "Some Characteristics of the Orthodoxy", 628-29

⁶⁴⁷ *Restoration*, 77

Fr Staniloae convincingly argues that the Palamite doctrine of uncreated energies is a viable alternative to Thomist essentialism. All these distinct personal acts of God do not compromise His unity or simplicity. He does not exist because of His acts. His being is always simple, infinite and unitary in every respect, yet full of infinite possibilities. The paradox is that although all actualized possibilities, i.e. energies are not “essentially” different from “the abyss” they emerged from, we cannot identify or substitute each one of them nor altogether with the personal being because of their unilateral cause-effects relationship.⁶⁴⁸ This relationship preserves the essence-energies distinction.

Fr Staniloae writes that the expression ‘person-in-communion’ “expresses in the most definite way the fundamental, primary and incontestable truth of existence: one being in three Persons, because these three Persons cannot experience the oneness of the being but in the form of communion. But this truth is also reflected by the *modus esse* of humanity. Instead it is achieved through the union of divinity and humanity in the Person of the Son of God. And this is the supreme and fully assuring degree of love between these two forms of personal communion and consequently of the entire existence.”⁶⁴⁹

Here we can quite clearly see that in Staniloae’s opinion the doctrine of the Holy Trinity (three hypostases in one essence), and the doctrine of the Incarnation (two natures in one hypostasis), are fundamental to the entire Christian faith. The Romanian theologian is interested in unfolding the relation between the Trinitarian and the human communion. He has always sustained man’s great need of being in communion with the others as his source of joy and happiness. The emphasis on the necessity of our love towards all others human beings which has its origin in our love for Christ, reveals once again the importance of the Church as the spiritual milieu, the communion and the community in which we fulfil the commandment of Christ to unite ourselves with Him and in Him through the power of the Holy Spirit as He is united with the Father.⁶⁵⁰ Man can truly evolve becoming a person, in the most profound sense of the word⁶⁵¹, only in union with Christ. The Trinitarian perfect communion should be conceived as the ideal of society.⁶⁵² The person can truly exist only in interpersonal communion.

⁶⁴⁸ OR, 129 sq

⁶⁴⁹ PC, 639

⁶⁵⁰ Ibidem, 638

⁶⁵¹ BC, 27-66

⁶⁵² Ware, art. cit., 10, 16, 17. As Ware synthesized it “God is ‘social’; he contains within himself something corresponding to what we mean by ‘society’ but at an infinitely higher level.” Every organized form of human community should have as ideal the Trinitarian communion because each human social structure ranging from the family to the level of nations has the vocation to become through the grace of God, “a living icon of the Holy Trinity”.

His dialogic ontology of personal love (love which cannot exist outside a hypostasis) is definitively fresh and surprising as it proposes a distinct way of approaching deification, which concerns all the aspects of the human existence, yet being convergent with those of the Holy Fathers of the Church, actualizing in an original manner the patristic vision.

For Fr Staniloae the internal, personal dimension of deification has direct external consequences on the environment and creation in general. He actually outlines the principles of a modern theology which pays much attention to the *saeculum*. Christianity's active involvement in finding solutions to different social problems is also imperative since purification, illumination or deification cannot be separated from the transformation of the world and its deliverance little by little from violence, poverty, injustice, intolerance, pollution and marginalization.

With Christ's help a better Christian should do everything so that not only he and his contemporaries, but also the generations to come could live in a better world. This could be one of the many ways of fulfilling and putting in practice the words of the Lord about the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Cf. Matthew 5: 13-14). *Ecclesia orans* and *ecclesia militans* are one and the same. This vision is also connected to a positive approach on the asceticism of Orthodox spirituality. At any rate, no one could label such a theology as strictly confessional, considering it either entrapped in the past or irrelevant for the present. Overall, we can see, once again, that in Staniloae's ecclesiology the Trinitarian theology, Christology, anthropology, eschatology and soteriology are never separated.

III.6. Conclusion

Fr Staniloae's experience of the Triune God is always under the sign of plenitude of divine perfect, eternal, unselfish, responsible love, life, truth, happiness, freedom, dialogue and interpersonal communion. For Fr Staniloae the real ontology is the ontology of love placed within the horizon of personal reality. The plenitude of being is simultaneously experienced by each one of the Trinitarian persons as a permanent, total and unceasing reciprocal self-giving. Even more, Fr Staniloae insists, in an apophatic tone, that divine love is so perfect that in fact each divine person does not experience anything else but the love of giving.⁶⁵³ True love is always kenotic. Fr Staniloae speaks about a kenosis of each person in relation to the other two as a fundamental feature of the intratrinitarian life. That is why the

⁶⁵³ *Restoration*, 77

intentionality for communion of the Trinitarian persons is the expression of the most pure love and manifestation of the equal continuous possession of the whole being in unity by each one of the Trinitarian hypostases: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This unfathomable divine plenitude is the only one which could fully satisfy the human being, because it is above any kind of necessity and insufficiency which characterize man's love as a creature. Consequently the final aim of man, seen as a subject, is deification as communion with the Holy Trinity.

Deification seen in the perspective of Fr Staniloae's Trinitarian vision is ultimately the activation and actualization of man's potential to become a subject of the divine love granted to him by God through creation. The outcome of this synergetic, interactive process is the transformation of man to a bearer of the divine love which is a gift from God that grows unceasingly in him, nevertheless without excluding his own contribution to his theosis.⁶⁵⁴ Only when we love in a kenotic way we are really free. Deification is also a mystery because the way God's love deifies man by overcoming the uncreated-created abyss is beyond our comprehension.⁶⁵⁵ The integration of the Palamite doctrine of divine uncreated energies in his neo-patristic synthesis allows him to keep in balance the distinction of *theologia* and *economia*. Thus God comes close to us, remaining at the same time a totally inaccessible mystery for us in his essence. Again, the paradox is engaged to express the mystery of God: The Holy Trinity is God, but God always interested in humankind and we can speak of the Holy Trinity as such only because of its involvement in the world, history and in our life.⁶⁵⁶

Based on fact that it is the person of the Father and not only the common divine essence which ensures the personal character of the divine persons, the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit being simultaneous personal acts, Fr. Staniloae has developed his Trinitarian theology around the concept of Trinitarian intersubjectivity as an expression of pure and eternal love, creatively developed with terms and notions significant for the contemporary secular culture- philosophy, sociology and psychology in the first place. Nevertheless, further explanation regarding the way a divine person 'passes through' another within the context of their absolute transparency and perichoresis would definitively have helped. Perhaps this hesitation was generated by a personalist overtone. According to Fr Staniloae the Christian teaching of faith which confess God, based on revelation, as Supreme Personal Reality, is the only one capable to provide pertinent

⁶⁵⁴ Ibidem, 70

⁶⁵⁵ Fr. Staniloae refers here to some of St Maximus' soteriological texts. See PG. 99, 1189

⁶⁵⁶ *Restoration*, 42

answers to the questions of the personalist and existentialist philosophy which emerged from their reflections upon the fundamental ontological categories of the human being. The fundamental destination of man is to become the subject of the perfect divine love, to enter in the communion of love of the Holy Trinity.

Reflecting on the human experience of love to clarify his Trinitarian theology Staniloae attempts to elaborate a balanced Trinitarian model. I agree that love defines human existence. However I think that, by trying to apply the phenomenology of Spirit to his Trinitarian conception, following Bulgakov, Staniloae ends up becoming highly speculative in his own deduction of the Trinity. The necessity of God's self-revelation is hardly reconcilable with the absolute character of His divine freedom. Staniloae's justification of the necessity of the third in the Trinity based on the analogy between the human and divine communion in love also has its shortcomings. The 'necessity language' remains problematic within Trinitarian context even if it is very hard to give up to it. I find quite hard to understand why love between three must be emphasized in contradistinction with the love between two. Isn't God's love present between two? Despite its personal character love cannot be quantified precisely because of its spiritual character. I know that Staniloae, a parish priest must have in mind the image of his own family but what about those who do not have children, who are after all God's gift?

IV. The Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae

IV.1. Introduction

Following Bulgakov, Florensky and Lossky, who apply the Trinitarian model to the church, Staniloae tries to integrate the Trinitarian dimension of ecclesiology, into a balanced synthesis with the concept of 'open sobornicity'⁶⁵⁷ as the dynamic expression of unity in diversity of the Church. Staniloae is not simply interested in the Trinitarian model of the Church but rather in pointing out the special relation of each divine person with the Church in communion with the other two. His faithfulness to patristic tradition is proved by his attempt to integrate in his ecclesiological synthesis the Cappadocians' triadological vision of the Church, St John Chrysostom's insights on Pentecost and the mystical nature of the Church, St Gregory Palamas' theology of the uncreated divine energies, the sacramental theology of St Nicholas Cabasilas, and above all the ecclesiology that flows out of the writings of St Maximus the Confessor. The relation between the Trinity and the Church was conceived in ontological terms by Bulgakov and Florensky or in analogical terms as in Florovsky's vision. It seems that Staniloae was interested in both and oscillated between them. Nevertheless Staniloae's interest in the idea of sobornost originating in the Russian religious philosophy definitively places him alongside other great personalities of Orthodox contemporary theology such as A. Khomiakov, N. Afanasiev, V. Lossky, Schmemmann. In addition, his focus on the recovery of the relationship between theology and liturgy, places him next to Florovsky with his stress on the Christological dimension of the Church, Meyendorff and Zizioulas.⁶⁵⁸ Khomiakov⁶⁵⁹ is the one who introduces the idea of sobornost in Russian theology but it was developed by Florensky⁶⁶⁰ in a Trinitarian context. Interest in ecclesiological theory has grown constantly holding the central position on the ecumenical agenda at least in the second half of the last century which has been called the century of the Church.⁶⁶¹ The discussions were focused on 'Eucharistic ecclesiology' and 'communion ecclesiology' and how each one responded to the issues regarding the unity, nature, boundaries, universal and local aspects of the Church. Reflecting on the idea of church as

⁶⁵⁷ I use this word here consistently with the literature I have used in my research although I am aware of the nuances and the proper origin of the word and of the concept.

⁶⁵⁸ Michael A. Fahey, "Shifts in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Ecclesiology from 1965 to 2006", *Ecclesiology* 4 (2008), 135, 144

⁶⁵⁹ *Collected Theological Works*, Petrov (ed.) (St Petersburg, 1995), 278-80

⁶⁶⁰ *Collected Works I* (Moscow, 1994), 403-04

⁶⁶¹ John Behr, "The Trinitarian Being of the Church", in *SVTQ* 48:1 (2003), 67

imago Trinitatis Lossky seems to be the first one who integrates in his ecclesiological synthesis the Trinitarian aspect of the Church and the concept of *sobornost*.⁶⁶² He also applied the principle of Trinitarian being to the church to keep in balance the common and particular within her.⁶⁶³ However his separation between the ‘economy of the Son’ and the ‘economy of the Holy Spirit’ remains problematic. Zizioulas is right to say that we cannot simply subscribe to the perception of Orthodoxy only to the level of ‘Eucharistic ecclesiology’ developed by Fr N. Afanasiev on the principle “wherever the Eucharist is, there is the fullness of the Church”⁶⁶⁴ with its unsatisfying consequences for the relation between the Universal and the local Church. Afanasiev developed his liberal ecclesiology around the bold idea that the Catholic Church is wholly present in each local Church where the bishop presides in the Eucharistic community, regardless of whether this local church is linked to other local Churches or not, and thus making room for isolation and dogmatic relativism. Each local Church is considered to be the Church of God in its fullness.⁶⁶⁵ The transfer of all marks of the universal Church to the local church seemed natural.⁶⁶⁶ Consequently, Afanasiev has been suspected of a certain type of hyper-sacramentalism in the context of a rather anti-universalist ecclesiology due to his tendency for an exclusive and complete identification of the Church with the Eucharistic assembly. Based on St. Cyprian of Carthage’s doctrine of the universal Church as a universal organism, ‘universalist’ ecclesiology had been adopted by both the Orthodox and the Roman- Catholic Church, each one claiming that is the universal Church and waiting for the other to join her as there is only one true Church. This tragic and paradoxical situation which threatened to compromise the quest for the unity of the Church convinced Afanasiev to react. His idea regarding the restart of the ecumenical dialogue was to try to recover what he coins as ‘Eucharistic Ecclesiology’, a certain type of ‘primitive’ ecclesiology specific to the Church of the first three centuries, based on the writings of St Ignatius of Antioch⁶⁶⁷. Despite the critical tone, some of his insights were corrected and further developed and improved by Zizioulas, who was Florovsky’s disciple. Although Zizioulas tries to keep the balance between the local and the universal Church as simultaneous aspects of the Church and acknowledge the necessity of the communion between the interdependent local churches which are not independent and self-sufficient as in Afanasiev’s vision. However Zizioulas’

⁶⁶² MT, 115-17

⁶⁶³ ILG, 180-81

⁶⁶⁴ Afanasiev, “Una Sancta”, *Irenikon*, 36:4 (1963), 452-53

⁶⁶⁵ Idem, “The Church Which presides in Love”, *The Primacy of Peter*, John Meyendorff (ed.), (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 1992), 93

⁶⁶⁶ Idem, “Una Sancta”, 452

⁶⁶⁷ “Una Sancta”, 441-44

argumentation of an episcopocentric structure of the Church (i.e., “the bishop makes the Church” based on St. Ignatius of Antioch’s double assertion in his *Letter to the Smyrneans* 8:2: “Wherever the bishop *appears*, there let the people be present, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church”⁶⁶⁸) seems to remain close to Afanasiev’s approach which supports the triad local church-one Eucharistic community-one bishop, leaning toward limiting the function of the bishop to the celebration of the Eucharist. We should mention however that the position of Afanasiev is much more radical, as it is practically including the bishop in the concept of the Eucharist, while in universal ecclesiology, apparently, the bishop is considered *in persona* the principle of the Church’s unity.⁶⁶⁹

On the other hand Zizioulas, raised the issue of episcopal conciliarity based on the tradition of the ordination of a bishop by at least two or three other bishops of other local churches.⁶⁷⁰ The question is whether this Eucharistic ecclesiology revisited which clearly diminishes the significance of the parish does clearly state the role of the bishop and parish priest and their relation with the community outside the celebration of the Eucharist.⁶⁷¹

We are dealing with a conception which, despite its relevance for the continuation of ecumenical dialogue, fails to embrace the whole complex reality of the present Church’s life. Staniloae seems more focused on the role of parish, the fundamental cell, in the life of the Church as a theologian who accepts the plenitude of the local church but only in the context of the universal Church that is a communion of faith among all local churches:

Only in the parish Church the affective bond between all its members is constantly strengthened while they gradually advance in the knowledge of the integral spiritual thesaurus of the faith, the source of the most profound and larger communion.[...] But this (i.e. communion) must be activated in all mutual-help relationships of the faithful. The smaller communities are nurtured from the larger communion of the Church and encompassing ‘affectivity’ of dogmas and its activation through the prayers and spiritual experiences of as many faithful as possible. But this means that the priest plays an important role in the deepening and warming up the communion

⁶⁶⁸ Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*. Elizabeth Theokritoff (trans.), (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001). See also Andrew Louth’s review of Zizioulas’ thesis in *The Ecumenical Review*, 56:1 (January, 2004) 146-47

⁶⁶⁹ “Una Sancta”, 453

⁶⁷⁰ BC, 155

⁶⁷¹ Demetrios Bathrellos, “Church, Eucharist, Bishop: The Early Church in the Ecclesiology of John Zizioulas” in Douglas Knight (ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

between the faithful. Through this he maintains the connection between his office as priest and the charismata of the faithful. [...] Charismata emerge and grow only in the atmosphere of prayer, [...] spiritual and material mutual help within the parochial community, when the priest enkindles the commune prayer with the sincerity and warmth of his own prayer, when he manifests his own love for God, for the faithful in his praise and sermon [...]. He must be a model and the focus of the intimate, affectionate communion with all the faithful urging them to do the same, communicating the spirit of this communion to all.⁶⁷²

The one who has coined the term 'ecclesial being' realizes that there are many deficiencies in Afanasiev's theory, also outlined by Meyendorff: the overseeing of Trinitarian and anthropological dimension of ecclesiology, the almost exclusive focus on the local nature of the Eucharistic community which led to the minimization of dogmatic unity and the overlooking of the universality of the Church are altogether caused by an obvious lack of pneumatology in the Russian theologian's ecclesiology. Turcescu notices the same insufficiency: "Afanasiev assigns almost no role to the Holy Spirit in his Eucharistic ecclesiology; his ecclesiology is definitely Christocentric."⁶⁷³ Zizioulas contends that the nature of the Eucharist points to the simultaneity of the local and universal aspect of the Church. Moreover, he argues that in the Eucharist any dichotomy between Christology and Pneumatology is transcended.⁶⁷⁴

It seems that Fr Staniloae's approach is more categorical, referring in his profound analysis of the Russian theologians to almost all the articles of Afanasiev on the matter.⁶⁷⁵ For him the theory of Afanasiev is "an exclusively Eucharistic ecclesiological universalism", which reminds him of the exclusivist vitalist theories.⁶⁷⁶ He writes:

The vision of Afanasiev is roughly this: the basis of the Church, her profound essence, is a universal Eucharistic continuity; on the surface, on a plane exterior to the very essence of the Church, there is the teaching of faith.

⁶⁷² Staniloae, "Ortodoxia in fata unor fenomene actuale din crestinismul apusean" (Orthodoxy: confronting some actual phenomena of the Western Christianity) in *Ortodoxia*, 26:21 (1974), 325-345, here 344-5

⁶⁷³ TLD, 69

⁶⁷⁴ BC, 12, 25, 132-33

⁶⁷⁵ "La doctrine de la primauté à la lumière de l'ecclésiologie", *Istina* 4 (1957), 401-420; "L'infailibilité de l'Eglise du point de vue d'un théologien orthodoxe" in volume *L'infailibilité de l'Eglise*, (Chevegtone, 1961); "Le concile dans la théologie orthodoxe russe", *Irenikon*, 35 (1962), 316-319; "Una Sancta", *Irenikon* 4 (1963); "L'Eucharistie, principal lieu entre le Catholique et les Orthodoxes", *Irenikon* 3 (1965). See Staniloae's article "Biserica Universala si Soborniceasca," *Ortodoxia* 18:2 (1966), 167-174

⁶⁷⁶ BUS, 196

There are two different unrelated planes of which the Eucharistic one is essential, constituting the very ecclesial substance and the other dogmatic one is unessential not affecting the Church in her substance. But the traditional vision of the Church is different: the Eucharist and generally speaking the sacramental life, does not constitute a plane separated from the teaching of faith and consequently more essential than this. Within the sacramental life of the Church, the doctrinal meanings are like an intrinsic principle, just as the laws, the proportions, the relations, which the science discovers and formulate in a coherent system, are imprinted in the organic life. The Doctrine of the Church is the 'entelechy' of the sacramental life.⁶⁷⁷

It seems that according to Afanasiev's theory⁶⁷⁸ it would be sufficient for someone just to receive the sacraments without knowing the Christian faith in order to be saved. We should remember here the institution of catechumens specific to the ancient Church. At first the Apostles taught the gentiles as Christ Himself had commanded them and only after that they administered the sacraments to the converts starting with the holy Baptism. The teaching stage is essential (Cf. Matthew 28:18). Moreover, the *Didache*⁶⁷⁹ and the *Catechetical Lectures*⁶⁸⁰ of St Cyril of Jerusalem provide us with sound arguments regarding the fact that this practice was both biblically based and an integral part of the early Church life.

In his critical evaluation of Afanasiev's theory, Fr Staniloae starts by identifying two stages of the Russian theologian's theory: after he initially opposes Eucharistic ecclesiology to 'universalist' ecclesiology, giving the impression that he fights against papal primacy, in one of his last articles⁶⁸¹ Afanasiev argues that the Eucharist alone assures the universality of the Church. Fr Staniloae remarks that both formulations of the theory are meant to serve the same purpose: the re-establishment of communion between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church by way of avoiding the discussion of the differing dogmatic aspects and the minimalization of all differences in order to induce a relativist perception

⁶⁷⁷ Ibidem

⁶⁷⁸ Turcescu shows the internal contradiction and inadvertencies of the theory by nailing the ambiguity of Afanasiev's notions of 'reception' as manifestation of the unity among the local Churches (Cf. "Una Sancta", pp. 453-55), the vagueness of primacy ('legalistic expression') priority (based on the 'authority of witness') 'switch' (Cf. "The Church which presides in Love", pp. 79-82) which actually does not question but strengthens the position of the Pope.

⁶⁷⁹ We refer here to the chapter VII in particular.

⁶⁸⁰ NPNF, 2-07, pp. 6-7, 8-28, 147-48

⁶⁸¹ Afanasiev, "L'Eucharistie, principal lieu entre les Catholique et les Orthodoxes", *Irenikon*, 3 (1965) 336-69

for them.⁶⁸² The Russian theologian even goes further and claims that thanks to the Eucharist the unity among the two churches has never ceased to exist. The break of communion was only administrative, and not a real one: “it must be remembered that our separation, although it had been provoked by dogmatic divergences, has only a canonical purpose. This separation remains at the surface of the ecclesial life and does not reach its depths.”⁶⁸³ This ‘new’ from of the theory also seems to diminish the value of the teaching of faith, disconnecting the Eucharist from the context of faith. “It would be like the presence of Christ in the Eucharist would be accomplished independently of the faith of the community, as a pure objective fact, which transforms us in the Body of Christ by force.”⁶⁸⁴ St Irenaeus wrote: “Our teaching is in harmony with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms our teaching.”⁶⁸⁵ Fr Schmemmann argues that “in early times Church knew fully well that the *lex credendi* (rule of faith) and the *lex orandi* (rule of prayer) were inseparable and that they mutually substantiated each other.”⁶⁸⁶ This interdependence could also help one understand why the Church did not recognize the martyrdom of those who did not fully embrace and confess her teaching of faith. Afanasiev simplifies the complex reality of the ecclesial communities. To this perspective Staniloae responds with a sound patristic argumentation of the sobornic⁶⁸⁷ universality of the Church based also on the writings of St Irenaeus of Lyon. Although Afanasiev and Schmemmann⁶⁸⁸ are right when they argue that every community has ecclesiological completeness as the Spirit is entirely present in each community, and through it also Christ, they have difficulties in defining the relation between the local and the universal Church. Therefore Staniloae insists that every community possesses ecclesiological completeness only because it is included in the general body in which the same Spirit dwells, as the life of the body is wholly present in every member which belongs to that body. So the community is not a mere ‘part’ of the whole as the member of the body is not simply a ‘part’ of it. But this analogy is not fully satisfying because the local communities are equally important in the whole body of the Church, thus making it more difficult to discuss about them in terms of dialectic of whole and part. The community enjoys ecclesial fullness, the fullness of the Spirit only in the

⁶⁸² BUS, 174

⁶⁸³ Ibidem, 195

⁶⁸⁴ Ibidem, 194

⁶⁸⁵ *Against Heresies* 4:18:5.

⁶⁸⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, (Crestwood, NY:SVS Press, 2003), 13

⁶⁸⁷ EG2, 208

⁶⁸⁸ BUS, 174-75. Fr Staniloae argues that basically Schmemmann mixes the Eucharistic ecclesiology and universalist ecclesiology by grounding his universalist ecclesiology on a Eucharistic base which eventually could not satisfactorily cope with the papal primacy.

ecclesial fullness of the Body. “The member is equal to the body but only in the Body.”⁶⁸⁹ The members do not exist before the whole or vice versa. The first community in Jerusalem had the characteristics of the whole but after the emerging of other communities they altogether needed the unity of the whole which they constituted, and the whole needed them. This is close to Zizioulas’ approach⁶⁹⁰ but it presents more clearly the relation between the local communities.

To conclude, Fr Staniloae contends that the universality and sobornicity⁶⁹¹ of the Church are simultaneous aspects of her being. Moreover only these aspects altogether are the expression of the meaning of the true catholicity, that is a whole with all his parts, but fully present in each one of its members. The true catholicity is the balance between the universality and conciliarity. An exclusive understanding of each of them or their separation compromises this equilibrium. The notion of open sobornicity is the expression of Staniloae’s attempt to respond to this delicate issue. I think that the emphasis of role of the parish as a fundamental cell of the Church is a positive aspect of Staniloae’s thought but he seems to forget about the monastery and monastic life which is also very important in Orthodoxy and because of that his ecclesiological approach is a little bit unbalanced. Another issue here is Staniloae’s tendency to point out the pneumatological dimension of the Church as the expense of the institutional one as a reaction to an excessive clericalism fostered in his opinion by any type of pyramidal ecclesiology which could generate a fracture between the clergy and faithful. The problem is that Staniloae is pushing things too far and because of that he fails to give a clear account of the relation and distinction between the three ranks of hierarchy in his treatment of the institutional aspect of the Church insisting on the parish and the parish priest too much.

IV.2. An integrated ecclesiological approach

Zizioulas urges us to engage in the mission of widening the Orthodox ecclesiological horizon through a synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology⁶⁹² which is necessary in order to counterbalance the temptation of many Western theologians to approach Orthodoxy

⁶⁸⁹ Ibidem, 191

⁶⁹⁰ TLD, 67

⁶⁹¹ Ibidem, 52

⁶⁹² BC, 26 Zizioulas calls for, in Florovsky’s spirit, a new vision based on a synthesis of Western and Eastern contemporary theology by retrieving their common roots though aware of their differences in the conceptualization of the catholicity of the Church.

from a narrow confessional perspective, considering it merely a confederation or congregation of local churches⁶⁹³. The Greek theologian writes:

Orthodox theology has not yet worked out the proper synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology. Without this synthesis it is impossible to understand the Orthodox tradition in itself or to be of any real help in the ecumenical discussion of our time.⁶⁹⁴

The ecclesiological synthesis of Fr Staniloae emphasizes the inner link between the mystery of the Church, seen simultaneously as the house of God the Father, the mystical Body of Christ, God incarnated, her head, who fills all in all, temple of the Holy Spirit, event, sacrament, reflection, anticipation and inception of the Kingdom of God, and mystery of creation, of human being in particular.⁶⁹⁵ Permanently permeated by the divine uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity, the Church is the expression of the divine-human koinonia which transcends time and space⁶⁹⁶ but also of plenitude of life in resurrected Christ unceasingly celebrated in her liturgical life and witnessed in the world. It is all these aspects that make Fr Staniloae's ecclesiological approach extremely relevant for the contemporary ecumenical dialogue.

The feasts, the cult and worship, the prayers, chants and icons of the Orthodox Church, and especially the Divine Liturgy, envelop and convey theology in its most sublime form: doxology. The ritual of the consecration of the Church building⁶⁹⁷, as a worship place and as a focus of the community of the faithful, definitely makes no exception in this regard and it might help us to reach the core of Orthodox ecclesiology. One should be aware that the symbolism of every liturgical gesture or act performed within the Church which "makes seen what is unseen" and expressed by her mystagogical-sacramental language which always reflects an eschatological tension, is deeply grounded in Scripture and the apostolic tradition. For instance one might ask why it is only relics of martyrs that can be placed

⁶⁹³ Ibidem

⁶⁹⁴ BC, 140

⁶⁹⁵ *Restoration*, 31-44, 374-93. EG1, 37-51, 79-85. IHL, 213-216. SC, 21-175

⁶⁹⁶ Staniloae, "Biserica in sensul de locas de inchinare si de larga comuniune in Hristos" (The Church as place of worship and all-embracing communion in Christ) in *Ortodoxia* 3-4, 3 (1982), 344

⁶⁹⁷ Staniloae, "Locasul bisericesc propriu-zis, Cerul pe pamant sau Centrul liturgic al creatiei" (The Church building, the Heavens on Earth or the Liturgical Centre of Creation), *Mitropolia Banatului*, 4-6/1981, pp. 277-307. The work of Rev. Dr. Gus George Christo, *The Consecration of a Greek Orthodox Church according to the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: A Detailed Account and Explanation of the Ritual*, Preface by Georgia J. Mandakas, (Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

under the Altar.⁶⁹⁸ The answer comes from the Holy Scripture, the Book of Revelation (the cry of the Martyrs):

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed (Revelation 6:9-11).

Fr Staniloae refers to this passage from the Book of Revelation to argue the continuation of the life of the martyrs after death. The white robe of the martyrs symbolizes the purity or the power to give their lives completely and unreservedly for and to Christ.⁶⁹⁹ However this purity, this power is not simply the result of their own efforts, no matter how necessary and important they would be in the synergetic process of deification, but a gift from Christ.⁷⁰⁰ Another important aspect Fr Staniloae pointed out based on Revelation 7:9-10; 14-15 is that martyrs are with God right after the moment of their martyrdom.⁷⁰¹ The Church does not just cite Scripture because it is the same Spirit who fully dwells within her and inspired those who wrote the Scriptures. That is why Scripture belongs to the Church as an inseparable part of her Tradition. According to Church tradition and some of post-apostolic writers such as Clement of Alexandria (c.150 - c.215 A.D.) and Tertullian (ca. 160 – ca. 220 A.D) the persecution of Christians during the first centuries led to a rapid spreading of the cult of martyrs in the early Church.

Within the context of the living worship of the Church, we aim to outline the particularities of Staniloae's creative ecclesiological synthesis: the Trinitarian aspect of the Church, the unity between the Church and Christ, the permanent co-operation of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the Church as extension of the intratrinitarian relations, the reciprocity of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Church.⁷⁰² The Romanian theologian is also concerned with the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and its specific structural role in her unity, the dynamism of the Church expressed in the

⁶⁹⁸ As a member of the clergy of the Romanian Orthodox Church I can confirm that this tradition is still followed at present in our Church.

⁶⁹⁹ Staniloae, "Sfintenia in Ortodoxie", *Ortodoxia* 32:1 (1980), 41

⁷⁰⁰ Ibidem

⁷⁰¹ Ibidem, 42

⁷⁰² STL, 86

permanent dialogue between God and the faithful through Christ in the Holy Spirit until the end of time, the theological basis of hierarchy, different aspects of synodality and the concept of 'open sobornicity'- the ecclesial expression of responsible assumed freedom. To these we could add the convergence of universality and ethnicity in the Church, the emphasis of a certain type of ecclesial perichoresis derived from the analogy between hypostatic union and the Christ-Church union, the cosmic dimension of the Church's mystical reality, the understanding of the sacraments (mysteries) as 'channels' through which the faithful who actively participate in the sacramental life of the Church receive the grace, the divine uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity, for their salvation.

Let us not forget the vision of the Church as diakonia, as an expression of compassionate love of the Church for humanity and the world, and her active and concrete contribution manifested through social and philanthropic activities. Staniloae always stresses the necessary continuation of the Liturgy outside the sacramental space, the unity and interdependence between the dogmatic truth, the infallibility of the Church expressed by her hierarchy and Ecumenical Councils, and all sacraments (not only the Eucharist) as liturgical expressions of the teachings of the faith. Last but not least, Fr Staniloae considers the Church as a means of spiritual renewal and restoration of an authentic communion among the people who have to face the consequences of isolation, despair, and marginalization, specific to the contemporary secularized society.

Staniloae applies the Trinitarian communitarian model to humanity through his Christology. The relation between the Trinitarian consubstantiality and human consubstantiality is possible only in Christ, the God-man who as God is consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit and as the new Adam with all humanity. Staniloae synthesizes his Trinitarian and Christological insights in his ecclesiology seeing Church as communion in Christ, the incarnate God and as communion in the Holy Spirit at the same time. Therefore we could argue that Staniloae developed a Christo-Trinitarian principle as the ground pillar of his theology of the persons in communion and ecclesiology:

Created by the Son and the Word of God, men are made for fellowship with Him and with one another. No man can live spiritually and physically alone but is longing for communion with others. The more profound and sincere communion is, the greater is the joy that human beings experiences. The

other one is my life and I am his or her life. We live in communion without being mixed.⁷⁰³

Following Bulgakov who argues the co-crucifixion of the Father who fully shares Christ's sufferings⁷⁰⁴, in fact of the entire Holy Trinity⁷⁰⁵ Staniloae is more focused on the action of the permanent "suffering or compassionate love of God" for humankind until the end of time. Staniloae wrote on this subject a very interesting article about the second Ecumenical Council and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed focused on kenotic aspect of the immanent Trinity as a dialogical manifestation of its perfect and eternal love towards man and the universe. He writes: "In an ineffable manner God unites His divine apatheia with the mercy and compassion for us and Christ on the Cross with the passions of death." The soteriological act of Crucifixion is not exclusively Christological, the Father as well as the Spirit is also present and participates. The fact that God shares the joy and sufferings of man without compromising His divine apatheia (so-called impassibility or immutability) is conceivable only as a consequence of the divine essence-uncreated energies distinction projected in the mystical depths of a perfect divine personal reality. The very same idea is articulated in the context of man's experience of God:

Thus God shares man's sufferings in a certain way. We are used to saying that God suffers if man does not respond to his love. But God suffers not because he himself would have need of our love, but he suffers for all the sufferings which appear in us owing to our refusal to respond to his love and to our reciprocal appeal for a complete and unhesitating love. [...] His suffering derives from the fact that he cannot make us participate in his blessings because of our refusal to accept his love.⁷⁰⁶

IV.3. Church - icon of the Triune God

In Staniloae's vision the Trinitarian communion is a communion of love, a permanent and perfect mutual self-giving of the distinct divine Persons who are at the same time consubstantial and equal. This communion is extended and manifested in the theandric reality of the Church. The unity of Trinitarian Persons in the communion of love is also transparent at the immanent level in their co-operation, especially for the 'personalization'

⁷⁰³ Staniloae, "The Church: The Communion in Christ, the Son of God Incarnate", in *Romanian Orthodox Church*, 19:3 (1989), 17

⁷⁰⁴ LG, 370

⁷⁰⁵ Ibidem, 371

⁷⁰⁶ EG1, 166

of the human being and the transfiguration of creation.⁷⁰⁷ Thus the Holy Trinity is ‘the structure of the supreme love’⁷⁰⁸ as well as ‘the creator, the salvation and the eternal aim of all the faithful’⁷⁰⁹. Zizioulas highlights the ecclesiological implications of triadology without which the description of the Church as *koinonia* is not conceivable: “Ecclesiology must be based on Trinitarian theology if it is to be an ecclesiology of communion.”⁷¹⁰

Nevertheless Fr Staniloae takes this a step forward and, based on Joseph Bryennios’ theological insights on the intratrinitarian reciprocal relationships, according to which “every relation between two implies also the Third Person”⁷¹¹, he elaborates and develops a profound, nuanced and dynamic Trinitarian theology (which always highlights the *ad intra-ad extra* correspondence i.e. the ‘place’ and activity of each persons in Revelation and Church corresponds to their position in the internal life of the Trinity):

Just as within the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, by coming to rest upon the Son, or shining forth from him, shows forth the Son to the Father, and the Son shows forth the Holy Spirit to the Father, because of the reciprocity existing between them, in the same way within revelation and its subsequent effects, the Son sends the Holy Spirit forth into our innermost being, and the Spirit sends forth the Son or leads him before our spiritual vision, or even brings him directly within us.⁷¹²

This is the trinitarian basis of Staniloae’s ecclesiology: the perfect reciprocity among Trinitarian Persons and communion as perfect harmonious unity in diversity. The reciprocal trinitarian relations are always grounded in the distinction of hypostatic characteristics (*idiomata*).⁷¹³ The important detail is that these *idiomata* are eternal, equal and simultaneous. As the Father never loses the quality of being, the only principle of the other two persons, so the Son never loses the quality of being the only begotten and the Spirit never loses the characteristic of being the only one who is sent forth, that is who proceeds from the Father towards the Son.⁷¹⁴ The Church-*koinonia* always reflects and fulfils the Trinitarian economy of salvation. The influence of Bryennios’ theology⁷¹⁵ on Staniloae

⁷⁰⁷ STL, xii

⁷⁰⁸ TC, 87-92

⁷⁰⁹ STC

⁷¹⁰ Zizioulas, “The Church as Communion”, *SVTQ*, 38.1 (1994), 8

⁷¹¹ TC, 37. It seems that Joseph Bryennios’ understanding of reciprocity between the Son and the Holy Spirit as “passing through” put pressure on the Father as the principle in the Trinity.

⁷¹² EG1, 30, 36

⁷¹³ SCF, 503

⁷¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 501. Staniloae comments the work of Bryennios “*Douazeci si patru de cuvinte despre Purcederea Duhului Sfânt*. (Buzau, 1832) (Twenty four orations on the Procession of the Holy Spirit):

requires further research and analysis as it might provide some additional answers on the Filioque. Still the professor emphasizes that the act of procession is always mentioned after and having a different significance than the begetting of the Son. This is another hint about the 'special' position of the Spirit in the Trinity which seems to be inferred also by the expression: "The Spirit rests upon the Son."⁷¹⁶

The reflection and extension of Trinitarian communion and the reciprocity of God the Father, the Word of God and the Spirit of God in the life of Church is specific to Orthodox spirituality and consistent with Staniloae's theological vision, especially when it comes to deification:

The Father and the Son are always above our intimacy so they can come from there (above). The Father and the Son 'come' through the Spirit in our intimacy [...]. By highly emphasizing the presence of Christ and the Father in the intimate being of faithful through the Holy Spirit the Eastern Christianity affirms Their or the Holy Trinity's efficient action and presence in the life of the faithful even from this life, if they strive for their liberation from the egotistical sins and passions.⁷¹⁷

This perspective places Staniloae near Fr Schmemmann who also writes about the being of the Church and her unity in diversity:

Triadological theology may be applied, by analogy, to the Church. [...] as the hypostases of the Holy Trinity do not divide the divine nature, each of them possessing it fully and in living, so the nature of the church-body of Christ is not divided by the multiplicity of the churches. But, just as the divine Persons are 'numbered'-in the words of St. Basil the Great-so the churches are 'numbered' and there is a hierarchy among them.⁷¹⁸

Permanently preoccupied by deification as the ultimate aim of Christians' life, Fr Staniloae had always searched for the most appropriate images of the Church to sustain and reflect it. And it is this search that led him also to St Maximus' ecclesiology. His interest in St Maximus is justified by the Maximian emphasis of the ecclesial character of the cosmos,

"As for intratrinitarian relations, the Byzantine writer moves forward by affirming directly reciprocity between the Son and the Spirit, and even among all three divine Persons. He pointed out that besides the expression 'Spirit of the Son' there is also used the expression 'Word of the Spirit'. It is not only the Son who communicates the Spirit to us but there is also the Spirit who reveals us the Son.

⁷¹⁶ SCF, 501

⁷¹⁷ TDO2, 126

⁷¹⁸ Schmemmann, "La notion de primauté dans l'ecclesologie orthodoxe", in *La Primauté de Pierre*, (Neuchâtel, 1960), 143

the deep insights concerning the presence of the whole in parts, a whole which due to its organic character is much more the mere sum of the parts and also by what he calls the indication, *in nuce* of communitarian spirit of the true Church.⁷¹⁹ He argues that the eternal and supreme communion of God is the basis of the communion between God and human beings, and that the Church is the mean and medium in which the latter is achieved. St. Maximus speaks about the Church in terms of it as a type and icon of God⁷²⁰ in order to emphasize the relevance of the Church in the relationship between God, humankind and world. Fr Louth concentrates on St Maximus' approach on "the union of differences"⁷²¹ which characterizes the relationship between God and creation but also the Church's relationship with its members. It is "a union that, though profound, does not confuse the beings joined, but preserve their integrity."⁷²² Fr Staniloae develops this Maximian insight extensively in his theological thought concerning the nature of the Church. He speaks about a symphonic diversity in unity⁷²³ as a landmark of the patristic thought.⁷²⁴ He writes:

The true teaching of faith about the synodicity of Church, which paradoxically and ineffably joins the unity and distinction of persons within it, has something similar with the teaching about the unity of being and the distinction of the Trinitarian persons or the one about the hypostatical union and the distinction of the natures in Christ. All three are characterized by the same joining of opposed aspects (*coincidentia oppositorum*).⁷²⁵

Based on these assertions Fr Staniloae contends that wholeness, the capacity of embracing and keeping in balance the apparently opposed aspects of reality is a fundamental characteristic of Orthodoxy. In his opinion by acknowledging the infinite character of the divine truth and the knowledge of it as an experience, as an advance in the experience of this infinity depending on the spiritual progress, all having the chance to contribute to its understanding depending on their experience, nevertheless without any one breaking the unity of this experience and consequently of the knowledge of this infinity, one could avoid the pitfall of a unilateral thought.⁷²⁶ In other words, without accepting and embracing the mystery of the Church it is impossible to enter in communion with God. Fr Staniloae

⁷¹⁹ Staniloae's introduction to the his translation of St Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogia* (PG 91, 657-718), 3

⁷²⁰ Louth, "The Ecclesiology of St Maximos the Confessor" in *IJSC*, 4.2 (July 2004), 110

⁷²¹ *Ibidem*, 111

⁷²² *Ibidem*

⁷²³ NS, 607-09

⁷²⁴ *Ibidem*, 608-10. PG 46, 705; PG 36, 448; PG 60,253; PG 91, 1097

⁷²⁵ *Ibidem*, 610

⁷²⁶ *Ibidem*

suggests that we need to accept that the understanding of different persons is not uniform though they all are aware of the same infinite reality.⁷²⁷ As we shall see below Fr Staniloae's conception of the synodicity of the Church is an important piece of his complex concept of open sobornicity.

Nowadays more than ever the mission of the Church is to witness the love and gifts of God towards the world and to keep the flame of love among people, of their faith, joy and hope alive.⁷²⁸ As in an icon Christ is present through his divine uncreated energies which are communicated to the faithful so the Church gathers all the creation in the love of God, transfiguring it, since she, as body and bride of Christ is full of the Trinitarian uncreated divine energies. The moment of the Incarnation as a Trinitarian act announced by the Archangel Gabriel (Cf. Luke 1, 26-37) urged the Latin Fathers to call the Holy Theotokos *figura ecclesiae*, that is, in terms of Orthodox spirituality, the icon of the Church. We note here again Fr. Staniloae's predilection for the iconological-analogical language perhaps because of its power of suggesting the apophatic dimension of the Church. The relationship between the Holy Trinity and the Church is definitively a type-archetype one. These ecclesiological considerations also concern the vocation and mission of Orthodoxy in ecumenical dialogue⁷²⁹, in revealing the spiritual content of dogmas⁷³⁰ as expressions of the existential and not abstract - theoretical truth of faith as it is experienced by the faithful in the Church through the complementary work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in her life.

IV.4. Reciprocity of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church

Fr Dumitru Staniloae's sustained effort to unfold the implications of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and his relation to the Son⁷³¹ (which shed more light on the

⁷²⁷ Ibidem

⁷²⁸ Staniloae, "Witness through Holiness of life" in *Martyria and Mission, The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, (Geneva: WCC, 1980), 48-52

⁷²⁹ Staniloae's contributions in several collective volumes: "The Mystery of the Church" in *Church, Kingdom, and Church: the Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign*, edited by Gennadios Limouris, (Faith and Order Commission; Chantilly, France, Jan. 1985. Geneva: WCC, 1986), 50-57; "Devotion and Theology in the Orthodox Church", in *Gottes Zukunft- Zukunft der Welt*, (Munchen: Kaiser Verlag, 1986), 103-111; "Romanian Orthodox- Anglican Talks: A Dogmatic Assessment" in *Romanian Orthodox Church and the Church of England*, (Bucharest: EIMBOR, 1976), 129-148

⁷³⁰ TDO2, 174

⁷³¹ EG1, 30 ff. Staniloae is keen on revealing the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, Revelation, creation and Church. He starts with the analysis of an idea of Gregory of Cyprus, the Patriarch of Constantinople: "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and *shines forth* through the Son". (PG: 142, 240, 242, 250, 257, 260, 267). Initially an Athanasian locution (cf. *Ad Serapionem* 1.18, PG 26, 572D.573B) it will play a key role in Orthodox ecclesiology and soteriology. In Fr Staniloae's estimation this is the expression of an interpersonal eternal relationship and not of an essential

relationships between the Persons of the Holy Trinity) in the life of the Church and the faithful in the most authentic neo-patristic spirit, led him to the elaboration of an ecclesiology in which the mystical, eschatological and charismatic aspects of the Church are never overshadowed by or separated from the institutional one: "Orthodox theology is a theology of spirituality and communion, and inasmuch as it is the theology of the Church it is at the same time a theology of the mystery of God's activity in men and of the growth of men in God."⁷³² If we consider the critique of Lossky's rather schematic ecclesiology⁷³³ centered on the notion of the dual economy of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, echoing the dyad of Son and Spirit from Bulgakov's theological synthesis, Staniloae and Zizioulas are on the same ground but coming to their end from different paths. Before moving forward we have to say that Lossky eventually became aware of what Fr Bobrinskoy called a "logopneumatic" economy of the Son and the Spirit in soteriology and ecclesiology:

Both dispensations - of the Son and of the Spirit - are inseparable; they mutually condition one another since one without the other is unthinkable. One cannot receive the Holy Spirit without being a member of the body of Christ; one cannot call Christ "Lord", that is, have a consciousness of his divinity, other than by the Spirit.⁷³⁴

The perichoretic reality of the Church comes from the life of the Holy Trinity present in her, one God in three hypostases revealed in Christ, the God-man through the Holy Spirit. The reality of the Church is the living expression of a dynamic spirituality based on a theology which embraces the whole world and integrates all sacraments in the larger context of the divine-human dialogue and communion, but it does not allow us to separate or to simply reduce the celebration of the Eucharist only to the consecration of the elements.⁷³⁵ The permanent cooperation of the Word of God and of the Holy Spirit, who are always

identity between the Son and the Holy Spirit. That means there is an intimate connection between the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father and the eternal procession of the Spirit by the Father and also between the begetting and the eternal shining forth or rest of the Spirit upon the Son as reciprocal and equal intratrinitarian personal relations. The distinct eternal shining forth of the Spirit through the Son, is revealed especially in the sending the Spirit by the Son in immanent order. On the other hand Fr Staniloae recalls the words of Saint Ambrose: "Both Father and Spirit have sent the Son; in the same way both Father and the Son have sent the Spirit" (The *Holy Spirit* 3.1.8, PL 16.811A).

⁷³² TC, 218

⁷³³ MT, 135-90. Lossky tries to balance the inseparability of the Son and the Spirit with their distinct economy starting from the distinction between essence and person developed his Trinitarian theology. His Christology-Pneumatology synthesis is thus trapped in the dialectic of objective-subjective aspects of the Church and could not explain the relation between the institutional and charismatic aspect of the Church.

⁷³⁴ ILG, 190

⁷³⁵ See Staniloae, "Teologia Euharistiei", *Orthodoxia*, 3 (1969), 343-344. TBC, 78

together, “the two hands of the Father” in revelation, Church, Scripture and Tradition as the source of the balance of the ecclesial life.⁷³⁶ The Church is never above Scripture, inventing new ungrounded dogmas and Scripture is never above the Church and the community (*sola Scriptura*)⁷³⁷. The living Church, Holy Tradition (“the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church” as Vladimir Lossky put it), and the Scripture, as the written part of Tradition, are inseparable and indissoluble united.

The Church is the receptacle of faith and apostolic conscience which is always active in every generation by the operation of the Holy Spirit. One of the most profound and useful assertions of Staniloae’s Trinitarian vision is that starting from the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father only and His resting in the Son and linked to the fact that persons and the essence of God are simultaneous realities he infers that within the Trinity there is a unity by relations of distinct Persons which does not compromise their identity or their unity of essence in a perfect reciprocity. Thus the Son and the Spirit are also united by the fact that one is begotten by and the other one proceeds from the same source. The Persons of the Holy Trinity are united in a perfect communion of mutual love and cooperation without any separation, isolation or subordination:

But because the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son, and therefore is not begotten like the Son, an endless multiplication of the divinity is avoided, and a certain internal unity is achieved, for not only is the unity between Son and Spirit made manifest in this way, but that between the Father and the Son is also strengthened. The Spirit [...] like an arch unites Father and Son in one embrace.⁷³⁸

Obviously the act of embracing has a strong personal imprint. If we analyse the trinitarian theology of Zizioulas, Florovsky, Lossky and Nissiotis, we’ll realize that each one of them has been interested in finding the theological balance between Christology and Pneumatology in an articulate ecclesiological synthesis. The delicate question was: are they simultaneous aspects of theology or should we give priority to one over the other? Florovsky had been engaged with a rather Christocentric approach of the Church, partly as a reaction to the dual economy of the Son and the Spirit which in his estimation would ‘shrink’ the space of direct relationship of the faithful with Christ, placing the Spirit, the

⁷³⁶ EG1, 29-31, 29-30 passim

⁷³⁷ TC, 220

⁷³⁸ TC, 23; SO, 54

architect of Church unity, 'below' the Son.⁷³⁹ On the other side there was Nissiotis with his own obvious preference for pneumatology and pneumatological anthropology. Finally at the centre we have the 'supporters' of the concurrence: Lossky seems to remain closer to Nissiotis arguing the simultaneity of Christology and Pneumatology while Zizioulas builds on his mentor's 'pre-set' ecclesiological conception pointing out the simultaneity of Pneumatology and Christology.⁷⁴⁰

Having all this in mind we are interested in how Staniloae addresses the ecclesiological challenges of his time and even of our time, in order to objectively appreciate his involvement and contribution in these ecclesiological debates concerning the tension between the universal Church and the local churches, papal infallibility or primacy, the Filioque issue, the balance between freedom, authority and responsibility in the ecclesial life and communion, the inner connection between episcopal synodality and the sobornocity of the Church, and the question of canonical and jurisdictional boundaries. Is the communion ecclesiology, which is centered on the notion of koinonia,⁷⁴¹ a better expression of the Church unity, life, experience and reality, than the Eucharistic ecclesiology which in Staniloae's eyes⁷⁴² rather encourages a dangerous relativism concerning the local Church? Could we consider the implementation of the concept of 'open sobornicity' in ecumenical ecclesiology as a starting point for further important steps towards Christian unity? Under what circumstances could communion ecclesiology incorporate the most constructive elements of the Eucharistic ecclesiology?

The universality of Orthodoxy and her vocation for unity and synthesis of all aspect of existence comes from her remarkable sense of the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit within her.⁷⁴³ Fr Staniloae realizes that contemporary theology has the tendency to speak more about the Spirit *and* the Church rather than about the Spirit *in* the Church. The life of the Church and life in the Church are interwoven aspects of a very complex reality:

In the future, therefore, Orthodox theology will also be a theology of the Church. For the Church is the communion of the faithful realized in Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. It is communion and profound spirituality

⁷³⁹ Boris Bobrinsky, "The Church and the Holy Spirit in 20th Century Russia", *The Ecumenical Review*, 52:3 (July 2000), 332

⁷⁴⁰ Skira, *Christ, Spirit and the Church in Modern Orthodox Theology: A comparison of Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Nikos Nissiotis and John Zizioulas*, (University of St. Michael's College, Canada, 1998), 12

⁷⁴¹ Bobrinsky, art cit, 331: "koinonia or sobornost is the Pentecostal grace of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church forever."

⁷⁴² BUS, 169-170

⁷⁴³ TC, 12

at the same time. And because of this, it is life. It is communion in the Holy Spirit. The very existence of the Church is an effect, continually renewed, of the action of the Holy Spirit in creating communion.⁷⁴⁴

This could explain why the Romanian theologian is interested in the 'pneumatological retrieval'⁷⁴⁵ of theology and in particular of ecclesiology as a reaction to a scholastic, rigid analysis of the Church structures, its hierarchical organization or its administration. Fr. Staniloae finds the words of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon who has masterly illustrated the pregnant pneumatological dimension of the early Christian Church and her theology, extremely powerful and suggestive⁷⁴⁶: "For where the Church is, there too is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and grace: and the Spirit of Truth."⁷⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit is the living principle of the Church, of her integrality and fullness, of her unity in diversity and unity in communion; outside or without it the Church is not complete.⁷⁴⁸ Although the gifts are different (I Cor. 12:20) they all come from the one Spirit who also bonds those who receive these gifts to one another in mutual responsibility without compromising their identity. We receive the seeds of these spiritual gifts in the mystery of Chrismation in order to cultivate them in our lives in a non-egotistical manner.

A keynote of Fr Staniloae's ecclesiology (considering the relation of the Church with Christ and the Holy Spirit who inspires the human beings with love for Christ, in the context of his theology of person and communion) is the vision of Church as a "multipersonal symphony in which every human person, like a musical note, is connected with the others due to Christ's person which permeates, coordinates, unifies and directs them just as a leitmotif, all persons contributing [in return] to the concretization and revelation of this leitmotif and to their mutual enrichment."⁷⁴⁹ The Church is a community *of I-s or collective 'we' looking up to Christ.*⁷⁵⁰ Because of the reciprocity of the Son and the Holy Spirit the union between Christ and the faithful is a relation of love analogous to the one between human persons, who love each other without compromising their integrity and identity, as "our love for someone is not just our love, it also belongs to the one who loves us".⁷⁵¹ In

⁷⁴⁴ TC, 218

⁷⁴⁵ Bria argues the necessity of understanding the Church reality and unity "within the wider horizons of the oikonomia of the Holy Spirit." *Ecumenical Review* 26 (1974), 229. Bria seems to see Staniloae's ecclesiology closer to the one of Bulgakov.

⁷⁴⁶ EG1, 58

⁷⁴⁷ *Adversus Haeresies*, 3, 24, 1 (PG 7: 966)

⁷⁴⁸ Dumitru Staniloae, "The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of the Church" in *Orthodoxia*, 19:1 (1967), 47

⁷⁴⁹ Staniloae, "Autoritatea Bisericii" (The Authority of the Church) in *ST* 16: 3-4 (1964), 187

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibidem*

⁷⁵¹ TC, 43-44

sharing love or gifts the persons do not dissolve to one another but they experience a mutual personal indwelling with the preservation of their personal identity. For Staniloae's the unity of the faithful in the Church is a dynamic dialogue of love expressed through the mutual exchange of their complementary spiritual gifts.⁷⁵² Staniloae also tries to give a personal and intuitive interpretation to actual Christian disunity as 'wounded love':

Maybe the ecclesiological sense of divided Christian communities resides in the fact that each one of them is based on a relation with Christ, in every one of them there is a relation among its faithful. But this *we-Thou* or simply *we* which they accomplish does not have the power to become a universal *we* but instead it is affirmed as *we against you* and the other Christian communities; whilst the *we* of the Church must be a universal *we*.⁷⁵³

But the Spirit never works alone; the Father and the Son are always present and active. In order to get the whole picture one should not consider the pneumatological aspects of Staniloae's ecclesiology apart from Triadology, Christology, anthropological apophaticism, eschatology or theological personalism, as they are all organically intertwined and synthesized in a profound gnoseology. Fr Dumitru Staniloae has always emphasized the place and work of the Holy Spirit in his ecclesiology, structured by a continuous invocation and descent of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which is her respiration, in the broader spiritual horizon of deification, a landmark of Orthodox spirituality and evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit: "By the Holy Spirit we are raised up to the divine world or the divine world penetrates us. This changes us, with this our deification starts."⁷⁵⁴

IV.5. The Christological foundation of the Church

In his *Restoration* Staniloae seems to be particularly interested in how the fundamental ontological and personal dimension of Christology and objective soteriology shapes the faithful's experience of God in the milieu of the ecclesial communion and community, or simply put, how can the eternal plane of divine existence be reconciled with the temporal-historical one in the experience and the life of the Church:

But due to the fact that Jesus Christ, even after the Ascension, is still God who definitively assumed the human nature, his relationship with history has to be more intimate. And that part of history, which is in this more

⁷⁵² Ibidem, 52-53

⁷⁵³ Staniloae, "Autoritatea Bisericii" (The Authority of the Church) in *ST* 16: 3-4 (1964), 187

⁷⁵⁴ OS, 55

intimate relation with Him [...], framing some sort of history core, is the Church. The conscience of Jesus Christ's permanent presence is alive within the Church. She is the communion of the faithful from all ages with Him.⁷⁵⁵

This intimacy urged the Orthodox Church to call Christ, Savior or Redeemer as a centre of her enlarged sacrament and mystery: "The Orthodox Church has never separated the faith as a spiritual act from its content. That is why her liturgical prayers and the particular prayers of the faithful are simultaneously acts of faith and confession of the content of faith."⁷⁵⁶

The Palamite theological synthesis of the divine essence-energies distinction, with its corollary that the uncreated energy cannot be separated from the divine person⁷⁵⁷ although it can be experienced by man, allowed Fr Staniloae to claim that one could never separate the person of Christ, the God who became man, from his work of redemption of humanity and the universe, nor could one separate Christ from his Mystical Body which bears and effuses the love and the communion of the Trinitarian Persons. As God who has revealed Himself to man and did not abandon our humanity, raising it up in the perfect communion and love of the Holy Trinity, "the Risen Christ sets us within a temporality *opened* to his eternity, and his eternity communicates with our temporality [permeating it]."⁷⁵⁸ In liturgical terms, the time-eternity continuity is symbolized by the liturgical calendar full of known and unknown saints who lived in different ages and are represented, especially in the narthex, of many Orthodox Churches. From this perspective the liturgical calendar appears to us like a 'screen', a projection of eternalized and sanctified time.⁷⁵⁹

The saints of the Church experience and witness this transfiguration of time until the *parousia*, and also after the ascent of their souls to God, through their bodies (relics) which are any longer subject to corruption, decay or decomposition, as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The communists confiscate or burn the relics of the Saints⁷⁶⁰ precisely because they proved the spiritual foundation of matter and any created reality in a way that contradicts communist materialism and atheism. The reality of Christ is either an atemporal and impersonal eternity nor a super-temporality, radically remote and thus inaccessible for this world, but time fulfilled in the risen Christ's continuous presence and

⁷⁵⁵ *Restoration*, 374

⁷⁵⁶ CND, 38

⁷⁵⁷ Staniloae, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Theology and Life of Orthodox Church", *Diakonia* 9.4 (1974), 344

⁷⁵⁸ *Restoration*, 378

⁷⁵⁹ EG1, 154

⁷⁶⁰ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture*, (Wiley- Blackwell, 2010), 52

permanent contemporaneity and with Him and through Him of the loving presence of the Holy Trinity. It is the sacred time of our salvation, which is always liturgically celebrated, the interval between God's offer of love and man's free response.⁷⁶¹ Envisioning the experience of the faithful of the reality of Christ as a permanent creative tension between what have been already received and accomplished and what is yet to come, Father Staniloae continues:

He [Christ] must be eternally the same [as God], but not indifferent and afar from us. The reality which he irradiates, 'clothing' those who believe in Him, forms the Church. That is a whole comprised of all those who believe in Him but also of a Christocentric reality which wraps them. It is a temporal-super-temporal continuum.⁷⁶²

This is actually a reflection about the necessity of the confession of the true faith for receiving the Baptism, which is our entrance in the Church⁷⁶³ and the Kingdom of God (as long as Christ is always present in the Church in the Holy Spirit and not only above her, we can say that the Church is the inauguration of the Kingdom of Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and yet a pilgrim⁷⁶⁴ in this world toward the heavenly Jerusalem, because where the king is, there is also his kingdom). Here we have the affirmation not just of the communitarian character of the Christian faith but of the centrality of Christ which is also a landmark of dialectic theology, of Barth's transcendental theology in particular, which is completed with the Palamite theology of the essence-energies distinction, which makes possible a personal experience of God for each believer. The eternal Word of God, the *unapproachable*, apophatic, incomprehensible Triune God, comes down to human beings, and becomes incarnate, to save and deify them. Fr Staniloae conceives the intimacy of the relationship between Christ and the Church in the apophatic terms of a transparency of the Church reflected in sacramental life⁷⁶⁵. Fr Staniloae argues that the incorporation in the Church is actually incorporation in Christ. The transparency of the Church for Christ, community and communion of those united in Christ (Cf. Romans 6, 4-5) is simultaneously a datum and a mission, a responsibility.⁷⁶⁶ The Church is so transparent that it would be

⁷⁶¹ EG1, 167

⁷⁶² *Restoration*, 375-79 (passim)

⁷⁶³ EG2, 40-42

⁷⁶⁴ EG2, 107, "The Church is a pilgrim towards heavens because Christ is the way to heaven and the One who travels with her and in her towards heavens." The eschatological dimension of the Church is given in her theandric constitution.

⁷⁶⁵ Staniloae, "Transparenta Bisericii in viata sacramentala" (Transparency of the Church in the sacramental life), in *Ortodoxia*, 4 (1970), 501-7

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibidem*

impossible to ignore Christ as her basis, head and final aim and she, in return, sees only Christ (Cf. I Cor. II, 2).⁷⁶⁷ But Fr Staniloae refers to another sense, related to the first one, of the Church's transparency: Christ is imprinted in her being and her members, without annulling her humanity.⁷⁶⁸ By permanently looking at him, the Church is imprinted by his image.⁷⁶⁹ Fr Staniloae employs the term of transparency of the Church to give an apophatic expression to the Christological foundation of the Church. The fact that the Church could never really exist without or apart from Christ, being the bearer of his image⁷⁷⁰ and having him as its centre, is shaping Fr Staniloae's thought regarding the nature and the purpose of the Church. Inspired by St Maximus' ecclesiology, Fr Staniloae argues that the Christological and ecclesiological basis of the sacraments of the Church in which Christ is always present and active through the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷¹

Now let us see how Fr Staniloae creatively develops his apophatical ecclesiological synthesis. First of all the unity between opposites is a mystery.⁷⁷² The most comprehensive mystery is the union of God with the whole of creation; it is the union between the uncreated and created. St Maximus presents this union, which starts with the moment of creation, in terms of a permanent movement of all creatures to reach the state in which "God may be all in all" as St Paul tells to the Corinthians.⁷⁷³ God is the beginning and the end.⁷⁷⁴ In addition to that, based on the Maximian theology of Logos and logoi, Fr Staniloae contends that the components of creation are mystery because their inner principles indicate God's unfathomable presence in them, keeping them distinct yet united since the unique source of their individual logoi is the Logos.⁷⁷⁵ The place of the human being as a union between spirit and matter is special since he has the vocation to unite the entire creation within himself and then with God. A direct consequence of this vision is that the

⁷⁶⁷ Ibidem

⁷⁶⁸ Ibidem

⁷⁶⁹ Ibidem

⁷⁷⁰ Fr. Staniloae argues that the common faith in the same Christ is the ultimate fundament of the unity and communion of those who believe in him and not vice-versa. "The Church is the expression of common faith in Christ, of common reference to him." He considers this common reference to Christ the fundament of the Church because this is the direct and fundamental preoccupation of those who through it only constitutes the Church. The centrality of Christ in the Church is suggested by the Pauline image of the Church as real body of Christ in the sense of community of faithful. (I Cor. X, 17; XII, 12, 14, 27; Eph. I, 28)" Cf. art.cit., p. 502

⁷⁷¹ EG5, 7

⁷⁷² Ibidem, 6

⁷⁷³ *Ambigua* 7, PG 91,1073C

⁷⁷⁴ Ibidem

⁷⁷⁵ *Ambigua* (ro), 204

human being is seen as the priest of creation.⁷⁷⁶ This image is later employed by Zizioulas in his anthropology. Based on the Maximian theocentric cosmology Staniloae holds that human mediation is fundamental in creation's fulfilment in God but also makes the distinction between the natural and the ordained priesthood. But the mystery of the human being is also a mystery full of mysteries, man realizing more than any other single entity world the paradoxical character of this mystery.⁷⁷⁷ These elements shape the apophatic anthropology of Fr Staniloae. Although sin has introduced separation, alienation and division in the created order, weakening the world, the Word of God does not give in to the human nature, showing that the human nature is not evil in itself, using its in-built ability to unite all created thing among themselves and with God in order to achieve a closer and more complete union of all things in Himself.⁷⁷⁸ Hence if the all-encompassing mystery of creation, or the cosmic mystery, to use the words of St Maximus, is the first mystery and the mystery of incarnation of the Logos, the mystery of Christ is the second one, then the mystery of the Church as the supreme unity of God with all created things is the ultimate mystery, and strictly speaking the third.⁷⁷⁹ Actually Fr Staniloae, closely following St Maximus, presents these three mysteries as corresponding to successive increasingly higher degrees of union between God and the world. Being filled with the mystery of Christ, the mystery of Church is the extension of the mystery of Christ.⁷⁸⁰ The Church, as body of Christ, is filled with Christ but this does not compromise the head-body unity in distinction. But since Christ is one of the Holy Trinity, the mystery of Christ, the God-man, cannot be separated from the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Therefore the Church by revealing Christ, her head, reveals the whole Trinity. To sum up, the Church considered by Fr Staniloae the third mystery is filled continuously with the divine uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity; the mystical yet real, full, life-giving, active, vibrant, loving and deifying presence of Holy Trinity dwells permanently in the Church (Cf. Ephesians 2). The apophatic ecclesiological synthesis allows Fr Staniloae to argue that the relationship between each person of the Holy Trinity and the Church is nothing more than a constitutive aspect of the latter's Trinitarian foundation.

⁷⁷⁶ For the discussion of the implications of Fr. Staniloae's theology regarding universal priesthood and its connection with the natural and ordained priesthood see Radu Bordeianu, *Priesthood Natural, Universal and Ordained: Dumitru Staniloae's Communion Ecclesiology*, Pro Ecclesia, Vol. XIX, 4, 405-33

⁷⁷⁷ Ambigua (ro), 4

⁷⁷⁸ Ibidem, 5

⁷⁷⁹ Ibidem, 6-7

⁷⁸⁰ Ibidem

IV.6. The Holy Spirit and the unity of the Church - open conciliarity

All Orthodox theologians involved in ecumenical dialogue have stressed the importance of the concept of *koinonia* - communion in connection to all the aspects of the Church. Like Karmiris, Fr Staniloae asserts the interdependence of all attributes of the Church, each one implying the others.⁷⁸¹ As one might have suspected, the necessity of the Orthodox contribution and witness is always seen within the inter-confessional perspective:

For instance, the remarkable strong feeling of God's presence in the world and for the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, specific to Orthodoxy might be 'rounded' by the methodical 'practicism' of Catholicism and the emphasis of the value of the individual experience proper to Protestantism.⁷⁸²

In his development of the concept of communion, which is fundamental for Orthodox ecclesiology, Staniloae focused on apostolicity⁷⁸³ and sobornicity, and their roles in the achievement and preservation of the unity of the *Una Sancta*. He practically equates the Church with communion: "Church and communion in the Holy Spirit are one and the same [...] where there is no communion there is no Church."⁷⁸⁴ Surprisingly, he starts from describing communion as one of the deepest aspirations and vocations of the human beings created in the image and likeness of the Triune God. At the core of his understanding of communion lies the concept of 'sobornicity' which, paired with the concept of universality, defines the catholicity of the Church in its most authentic Orthodox meaning. The explanation of unity in diversity within the Bible is given in the document *Scripture and Tradition*⁷⁸⁵ which mainly dealt with the biblical hermeneutics: "the variety of thinking presented within the Bible (always seen as whole which comprises a variety of complementary and sometimes contradictory senses) reflects the diversity of God's actions

⁷⁸¹ TDO2, pp. 168-198. The ontological character of the unity of the Church is suggested by the understanding of this unity as unity of life in the same Christ who is at the same through his sacrifice the source of holiness of the Church. Here Staniloae is on the same ground with Zizioulas who argues that the source of Church's unity is Christ himself and not an abstract, impersonal doctrine. See also Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*. Elizabeth Theokritoff (trans.), (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 15-16

⁷⁸² Dumitru Staniloae, "Coordonatele Ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox" (The coordinates of the Ecumenism from an Orthodox point of view), in *Ortodoxia*, 19:4 (1967), 514

⁷⁸³ Ibidem, 513: "Therefore the desired unity of the Church cannot be envisaged or achieved apart from *her integral apostolicity*."

⁷⁸⁴ TC, 220

⁷⁸⁵ *Nouveaute dans l'oecumenisme* (Taizé:Les Presses de Taizé, 1970).

in different historical situations and the diversity of human answers to God's actions."⁷⁸⁶ This intrigues Staniloae enough to address the concept from an Orthodox point of view. He wants to extend the honest and wise document's exhortation addressed to theologians to avoid any exclusive and unilateral biblical hermeneutics, to the level of a principle that the Churches should follow as much as possible as path towards reconciliation and ecumenical rapprochement through the avoidance of the extremes. For instance, Staniloae argues that a distorted understanding of the Church either as a unity opposed to the individual or as the proclamation of the individual against the Church which also contests all the structures of the Church and spiritual life sustained and fostered through relation with God: the sacraments, the holiness, the communion of love and faith but mainly the hierarchy which must ensure the good preservation of these ecclesial structures is counterproductive.⁷⁸⁷ This proves that a unilateral vision could only generate an even bigger unilaterality.⁷⁸⁸ Overall, this is the outcome of an intellectualist theology separated from the complex life of the Church which forced the spiritual ecclesial reality to fit in its narrow linear abstract systems, a theological expression of a judicial spirit enclosed in strict alternatives and inclined to a schematic rationalist approach. Staniloae contends that many of the divisions that emerged within the Church are the consequences of such a narrow, exclusivist perspective.⁷⁸⁹ Fr. Staniloae says that "this conscience of the transparency of all means and forms of knowledge and worship of God is an integral part of Orthodoxy."⁷⁹⁰ There are many voices which acknowledge the vital role of Orthodoxy in the pursuit of Christian unity.

Nowadays the encounter between Western Christians and Orthodoxy is much more than a simple intellectual curiosity. The accentuation of certain points of the teaching of the faith done by both Catholicism and Protestantism starting from the Reformation until now has undoubtedly some positive value. The temptation of a sense of isolationism and triumphalism is present even in modern Orthodoxy which increasingly recognizes that it needs to engage creatively with Western spiritual values. Otherwise it could not claim that its sobornicity is still alive. The Orthodox are aware that after the encounter with

⁷⁸⁶ Ibidem, 58

⁷⁸⁷ SD, 168-69

⁷⁸⁸ Ibidem, 169: "Rome had chosen from the contradictory complexity of Scripture's texts about Peter only the ones which seemed to support the idea of a primacy of Peter in order to legitimize her authority. In reaction to that, the Reform opted exclusively for those texts from the paradoxical variety of locus in Scriptures which speaks about the general priesthood, the life of brotherhood and diversity of offices for the purpose of backing up the rejection of any structure within the Church, ignoring the ones concerning the sacramental priesthood or the sacraments."

⁷⁸⁹ Ibidem, 165-8

⁷⁹⁰ Ibidem, 176

Catholicism with its vertical, judicial and centralist vision of the Church's unity they have to find again the balance between affirming the independence of their local Churches and the ways of preserving their unity. After the emergence of Protestantism, Orthodoxy manifested the tendency to stress the role of Tradition over Scripture, or to outline the importance of the objective sacraments and hierarchy, placing the personal spiritual experience and the communion of relation with God on a secondary plane. So without a sincere constructive self-criticism and the understanding of its own limits, true sobornicity cannot be achieved in practice, and it thus remains a beautiful yet only theoretical concept.

Fr. Staniloae writes:

Actually, sobornicity must be a living experience of the faith in lively communion; it is the Christian universality in the form of communion. [...] It is not only the universal unity of all Christians in the form of communion but also the all-encompassing unity of the Christian teachings experienced by the universal and free community of Christians. It is equivalent to the universality of the aspects of divine Revelation, seized by the totality of human perspectives and transformed in common good for the universal human community. It has to be the sobornost of the entire world in which all the Christians should bring their own understanding of the whole revealed divine reality and human reality in the light of the integral revelation in order to share it with all, each one of them enjoying the perceptions of all. The communion of souls must achieve or valorise the sobornicity of ideas, a harmony of all perceptions and of the perception of all of all aspects of divine and human reality.⁷⁹¹

Our challenge is to see always God beyond the diversity of modes of his revelation and not reduce the Son to the rays, because this is the only way to perceive God's integral unity. Any of these modes of revelation could not substitute the 'ultimate reality' as they could never grasp, not even together, the complexity of divine reality.

But we should perceive all of them as transparencies of God because each one of them points at Him. Moreover we should also admit new ways to experience God, or better said our relation with Him. This implies our recognition of all Christian modes of expressing God known so far, being aware at the same time of their narrowness and relativity.⁷⁹²

⁷⁹¹ Ibidem, 172

⁷⁹² Ibidem, 173

This is why they should be overtaken by new and more profound ones. The openness and transparency of Staniloae's sobornicity comes from its dynamism which is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit:

Sobornicity is not just an embracement of all modes of revelation and expression of God through the world and life and of all perceptions and answers always deepened but also openness, increasingly perceptive and comprehensive toward God, Who is beyond them, a continuous progression movement in his infinite spiritual richness.⁷⁹³

This unceasing spiritual progression movement within sobornicity is vertical and horizontal at the same time. Every Christian and every Church should strive to embrace all modes of revelation and expression of God, but at the same time to perceive their unity in God, which means that they should see the infinite God and his undepletable reality, through them and beyond them. All have an eternal value but they must be continuously elevated by the faithful to a higher level of spirituality in God.⁷⁹⁴ The open sobornicity is opposed to any form of division, separation or domination, to any attempt to absolutize one particular aspect of reality.

On the other hand we cannot speak about an authentic spiritual renewal without experiencing an actual and personal connection with God. There is a great difference between considering the Bible as a simple book, and regarding the Scripture as the love letter addressed by God to the entire humanity. Even a non-believer can read the Bible and can form certain views about it. The external and internal aspects of our experience of God are strongly interrelated. Fr Staniloae argues that the Holy Spirit is actually the One who accomplishes the renewal within us, working in our mind through external acts: the reading of Scripture, the participation to the Divine Liturgy etc. These acts are the opportunities for the Spirit to work in our souls. The danger of formalism should not be underestimated though. The consequence of the Spirit's work is that the faithful experience their relation with God through those acts which are no longer seen as merely formal but as strings which draw near and bond them to God. It is like when we make a new friend. This person's actions have a different importance and impact on us. The experience of God in the Spirit transforms all acts which become transparent to God.⁷⁹⁵ This *transparency* - the spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit - is extremely important in Staniloae's vision and it holds a particular place in the knowledge of God. St Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833) says that the

⁷⁹³ Ibidem, 178

⁷⁹⁴ Ibidem, 178

⁷⁹⁵ Ibidem, 174

main goal of the Christian's life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. Theologically speaking, the open and transparent sobornicity implies a certain theological pluralism in the sense of trying to understand in God the experiences, perceptions, ideas or images of all the others as comprised in the depths of the mystery of God. After he defined the concept he always tried to connect it to every other aspects of his theology. He continues with the 'sobornic' knowledge⁷⁹⁶ of God and then he moves to a description of sobornicity as a means of a full disclosure of the apostolic tradition.⁷⁹⁷ To sum up, one might notice that this conception has potential, providing a very profound and considerate vision of the Church and of the world which may help us to learn from the mistakes of the past, to assume responsibly the present and to work together to tackle the entanglements of the future on the path towards unity.

IV.7. Filioque - an unhealed wound on the body of the Church

Fr Staniloae always presented the Orthodox teaching about the procession of the Holy Spirit and the relations between the Persons of the Trinity, while respecting its mystery and objectively analysing all the attempts to 'apprehend' it. In contrast to what he considers the unique, exclusive, unfitted and oversimplified analogy between intratrinitarian divine relations and relations among the psychological functions of the human being as expressed by Augustine which by the way introduced a distinction in the understanding of the three divine Persons⁷⁹⁸ he prefers the 'biblical formulae': "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent forth by the Son" (cf. John 15:26), "rests upon on the Son" or "shines forth from the Son" in reference to the relationship of the Son and the Spirit. Inspired by the Fathers⁷⁹⁹, Fr Staniloae employs the analogy of the inner life of the human spirit (mind, reason, heart) to depict the perfect internal reciprocity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, thus keeping in balance the unity of divine being and the distinction of the divine persons, "each one of them possessing the whole divine being yet in a distinct manner"⁸⁰⁰. Fr Staniloae argues that the specific hypostatical characteristics of each divine person are

⁷⁹⁶ EG2, 115

⁷⁹⁷ Dumitru Staniloae, "Coordonatele Ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox" (The coordinates of the Ecumenism from an Orthodox point of view), in *Ortodoxia*, 19:4 (1967), 516

⁷⁹⁸ SCF, 503

⁷⁹⁹ *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1088 A; *Questions to Thalassius* 25, PG 90, 332, 337-9. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *On peace*, PG 35, 1161 D.

⁸⁰⁰ SCF, 503

the basis for the perfect intratrinitarian reciprocal relationships.⁸⁰¹ Fr Staniloae speaks of the Son and the Spirit as perfect ‘Alter-Egos’ of the Father.⁸⁰² The Father as the principle within the Holy Trinity is the uncaused Mind⁸⁰³, the head of the supreme Logos (reason, meaning, ratio or Word), i.e. the Son who is the entire thinking of the Father about himself, the consubstantial image of the Father who loves this image of himself through the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰⁴ Orthodox theology explains why the Son comes together with the Spirit in the world as persons which both converge towards the Father and encourage the world to converge towards the Father. There is no true communion without freedom and mutual responsibility. Staniloae reacts against what he considers to be the relative, improper term of ‘consubstantial processions’ and the emphasis of the idea of the order of processions in God by stressing the ontological character of the persons in communion.⁸⁰⁵ He does not agree with the psychologism of the Catholic theologians Le Guillou⁸⁰⁶, A. Malet⁸⁰⁷, G. Lafond⁸⁰⁸ who take the human psychological functions as pattern or model in their conception of the divine hypostasis and their unity of being. Fr. Staniloae considers that the perspective of the Catholic theologians mentioned above reduces the love of God to the love of His intelligence towards the Word (as the understanding of this intelligence) and turns the God of the real love among different persons into a God of a self-love of a single person, of a self-closed individual or of a substance subject to automatic deployment, which is not really a love in freedom. The work of such a God in the world would actually be the impersonal extension of the force of nature subjected to its inner laws.⁸⁰⁹ However, he did not forget to point out the guiding-epetatic and not exclusive role of these analogies which should be used precisely in order to be surpassed by others more clearly and penetrating, making us think of them as climbing up a ladder, in approaching the mystery of the procession of the Holy Spirit, as long as any one of them is not perfect. Consequently Fr Staniloae argues that the relationship among human persons, possessors of the one

⁸⁰¹ Ibidem, 503

⁸⁰² Ibidem, 504

⁸⁰³ Ibidem, 503: “For them [the Fathers] *voūς* means a spiritual existence as a whole, a hypostasis. Applied to the Father, the term or name of Mind does not introduce a division of the divine essence but it actually refers to hypostatical existence of the whole divine being in the Father.” See St Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, PG91, 1088 A

⁸⁰⁴ HTE, 35-6

⁸⁰⁵ SCF, 476

⁸⁰⁶ *Le Mystère du Père. Foi des Apôtres, gnosés actuelles.* Fayard, 1973

⁸⁰⁷ *Personne et amour dans la théologie trinitaire de St. Thomas d’ Aquin*, Vrin, 1956

⁸⁰⁸ *Peut-on connaître Dieu en Jesus-Christ?*, Paris, Cerf, 1969

⁸⁰⁹ SCF, 505, Staniloae wrote this article in response to J.H. Garrigues’ article “Procession et ekporese” firstly published in *Contacts* 3 (1971), 283-309. Garrigues is the only one in Staniloae’s estimation who is really interested in understanding the Cappadocians’ concept of person.

same nature could not be but a pale, imperfect image of the perfect communion of the divine persons. Fr Staniloae also refers to the rapport between the psychological functions for the understanding of the perfect mutual interiority of the trinitarian persons. Moreover we cannot forget the analogies of the spring-water-river, roots-stem-fruits or Sun-ray-light for a certain perception of the simultaneity of procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Spirit's special relation with the Son in order to constantly affirm reciprocity of relations between all divine persons.⁸¹⁰ This perfect reciprocity within the Trinity, reflected in creation, starting from the relation between the Son and the Spirit and the emphasis of the special place of the Spirit within the Trinity and in relation to the world, which laid the foundation for the development of a theology of the divine trinitarian relations *ad intra* and *ad extra* is creatively synthesized by Fr. Staniloae in his Trinitarian ecclesiology.

The Son of God Himself reveals the Trinitarian communion as the perfect model for the ecclesial communion (John 17: 21). Our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Trinity, put a great value on communion between God, human being and people altogether (Matthew 18:20). The fact that he has chosen twelve Apostles to preach his Gospel in the whole world (Matthew 4) speaks for itself.⁸¹¹

Being aware that there is no true and perpetual unity except in the Holy Spirit who communicates, through the divine uncreated energies, the Trinitarian love to human beings and to the entire creation in order to take them up to the height of that intratrinitarian love and communion through deification, Fr Staniloae strives to illustrate more clearly the place of the life-giving Spirit in the Trinity and the specific role of the Comforter and treasury of all blessings, and its mission in the life of the Church. If we consider the mystery of the Incarnation⁸¹², the Holy Spirit is the one who reveals the assumption of the human nature by the Son of God, and in fact he reveals the Word of God, the Logos even before the incarnation since before time. Fr Staniloae's theological reflection on the indissoluble, eternal, perfect character of reciprocal relations between the Trinitarian persons, reflected in the life of the Orthodox Church and expressed in her theology⁸¹³ is a direct reaction and an attempt to counteract the consequences of the Filioque for Western Christianity⁸¹⁴ which, among others things, induced an exclusive focus

⁸¹⁰ Ibidem, 500. I consider that this article should be paired with the one from *Theology and Church*: "The Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church" in order to get a better picture of Staniloae's pneumatology.

⁸¹¹ TC, 217-18 passim

⁸¹² OS, 54

⁸¹³ TC, 40. TDO2, 130, 170

⁸¹⁴ TDO2, 163-65, 175 passim. The threefold condition for the unity of the one (in sense of integral, intimate and active unity between Christ in his unique Bride) Church: dogmatic, sacramental and

on Christ (a rigid Christomonism) leading, he argues, to the necessity to institute a vicar for Him in the case of Catholicism, or to His remotely ineffective presence and influence on the lives of the people and their ecclesial community in Protestantism.⁸¹⁵ The doctrine of the Filioque influences directly the life of the Church and of the faithful for whom the hierarchy is being held responsible:

The idea of the procession of a person from two persons implies the weakening of the hypostatic or ontological consistency of divine Persons and conversely the weakening of hypostatic and ontological consistency of the human persons created in the image of the divine Ones. Besides, such an idea also means a weakening of the reality of the specific communion between persons.⁸¹⁶

Fr Staniloae seems to imply here that the procession of a person from two persons would actually give preeminence to the divine essence over the divine hypostases thus compromising the hypostatical properties within the Trinity. But the only real existence of an essence is the hypostatical one, without forgetting however that hypostasis and essence are simultaneous, inseparable ontological realities. Fr Staniloae further explains:

Were the Son to possess the Spirit as one who caused him to proceed, he would no longer be related to the Father through the Spirit as a Son towards his Father. In such a common procession of the Spirit, the hypostatic properties of Father and Son would be identified. It would no longer be the Son's love, as Son, for the Father which was manifested in the Spirit, but rather the hypostatic identity of Father and Son.⁸¹⁷

In divine and human terms the hypostasis expresses uniqueness and identity, preventing the persons from confusion and dissolving into the common essence. The begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit have an apophatic character. They could never be explained in terms of human rational and logic. So any analogy in this respect should be regarded with great caution. Once again in the most authentic irenic and ecumenical spirit which aims at the restoration of the unity of the Church, Fr Staniloae says:

The level of the most intimate active presence of Christ within her is confessed and experienced by the Orthodox Church, which has preserved

communion of hierarchy is compromised because of Filioque which weakness and diminishes the role of Holy Spirit in the Church and the concept of papal infallibility which generates a certain type of pyramidal ecclesiology by giving unjustified priority to *unus super omnes* over *unus inter pares*.

⁸¹⁵ TC, 14-5

⁸¹⁶ SCF, 503

⁸¹⁷ TC, 30

the life tradition of the Church of the first centuries. Christendom could reach the unity of the Church only through the organic unity between the Body of Christ, united in the highest degree with its Head.⁸¹⁸

Orthodoxy is integral. Long before Staniloae, Bulgakov and Florovsky argued that the Orthodox Church is the fullness of life of the Church, that it is the true and only Church, possessing the plenitude and purity of the truth in Holy Spirit.⁸¹⁹ It does not lack anything necessary for the deification of man. Orthodoxy actually enkindles the Catholics' and the Protestants' desire and need to continuously search, recover and disclose the depths of the profound roots of their form of Christianity which is decisive for the renewal of their ecclesial life. So from inter-confessional perspective, Fr Staniloae observes and does not arbitrarily propose different stages of unity between Christians or Christian groups and the Lord which influences Christ's saving work efficiency within them depending also on their openness, commitment and determination to hear and keep his words, to take their cross and follow him (Luke 11:29). Although Staniloae argues like most of Orthodox theologians that only the Orthodox Church is the true Church, his approach to the other confessions is humble. He is willing to admit the existence of some traces of ecclesiality in the non-Orthodox ecclesial communities. Union with Christ is a grace and a gift but at the same time it is also a task and a synergetic act (I Corinthians 3:9) which always implies man's free will, personal commitment and sustained ascetic effort. However for Fr. Staniloae the efficacy of Christ's saving work reaches its highest level in Orthodoxy. Maybe this is why he writes concerning the issue of the unity of the Church raised during Vatican II: "Catholics aspire to the sobornic freedom of the Orthodox, and Protestants to their communitarian unity, while both groups consider that what they are seeking resembles most closely the form of ecclesial life which flourished in the earliest Church."⁸²⁰ It is the permanent task of the Orthodox faithful from all ages to strive to fully experience this kind of ecclesial life which embodies the wholeness of Orthodoxy with all her riches of spirituality; it is their responsibility which should be assumed in a self-critical manner (with humility) to bear witness to the one true faith and its fruits in the Church, family and society following the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles and all the saints.

His reflection on the Pauline verse: "No one can say Jesus is the Lord except in the Holy Spirit" (I Cor.12:3) gives us another indication of Fr Staniloae's distance from academic and intellectualist theology. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth (John 15, 26), communion

⁸¹⁸ TDO2, 176

⁸¹⁹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1997), 196-200

⁸²⁰ TC, 12

(I. Cor.12) (i.e. the unity in freedom which preserves the personal distinction) and of our own transfiguration, is the only One who could allow us to truly confess Christ. Our union with Christ, our deification basically, the sense and ultimate goal of our existence, is possible and attainable only in the Holy Spirit. The more the Holy Spirit's presence and work is overlooked or underestimated, the harder it is to confess Christ in the Church and in society. The unity between the Holy Spirit and the Son, the God-man, is as important as their personal distinction. One confirms the other. So the Christian faithful cannot be truly *christophoros* unless he is *pneumatophoros* and vice-versa. The Romanian theologian appeals to the Fathers of Church⁸²¹ to better represent the mode of the active presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Thus the unbreakable union between the dynamic presence and work of the Holy Spirit, and that of the Son of God is also given in the Holy Spirit's work as Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15,23) increasingly making us adoptive sons of the Father in the image of his Son.⁸²² Fr Staniloae tries to synthesize in his Trinitarian theology the pneumatology of St Basil⁸²³ who alternatively refers to the relations of the Trinity with creation, and the identity of being between the Spirit and the other two Persons in his argumentation for the 'third place' held by the Spirit in all doxological formulas of the Church, and the theology of Saint Athanasius the Great who says that without the Holy Spirit the Trinity is not perfect⁸²⁴. He continues with an exhaustive analysis of the perspective of Gregory of Cyprus and his expression "shining forth"⁸²⁵. Finally he investigates the arguments of Bryennios regarding the intratrinitarian relationships which are brought together in a creative synthesis with the pneumatology of St Gregory Palamas⁸²⁶:

The Holy Spirit is like an ineffable love of the Begetter towards the ineffable begotten Word, which the Word-beloved Son also manifests toward the Begetter but possessing the Spirit (both) as the one who proceeds from the

⁸²¹ St John Chrysostom affirms that the presence of Holy Spirit within us is linked to both the Son and the Father. He writes: "...if it was not for the Spirit we could not call Jesus, Lord" or "we could not be able to call God, our Father, consequently we could not say the prayer Our Father." in *Sanctam Pentecostem, hom. II*, PG 50, 458 cite in TDO2, 131

⁸²² St Cyril of Alexandria writes:" So, just because of Son abiding within us through His Spirit, we can say that we are called to the spiritual sonship." De Sancta Trinitate, dialogus III, PG 75, 853 D in TDO2, 131. This emphasis on the relationship between Father and the Church is a particularity of Staniloae's ecclesiology.

⁸²³ Epist. 38; PG 32, 329C , PG 32 193

⁸²⁴ Cf. *Epist. I Ad Serapionem*; PG 36, 589

⁸²⁵ TC, 16-29

⁸²⁶ St Gregory Palamas describes the Spirit as "pre-eternal joy of the Father and Son" but whose existence depends on the Father alone as the only principle in the Trinity. (*The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 36, PG 150, 1144-5)

same Father who begets the Son and as the one who rests upon the Son due to their identity of being.⁸²⁷

St. Gregory is even clearer about the Spirit's abiding or resting in the Son than Gregory of Cyprus. This relation is simultaneously essential and personal. "Even the Father and the Son have a new relationship between themselves through the Spirit."⁸²⁸ All these pneumatological accents of Fr Staniloae's Trinitarian theology are serving his intention to emphasize that persons in communion represent the only authentic fulfilment of the being at divine and human level. It seems he wants to use the Trinitarian theology as a basis for the inner connection between Christology, anthropology and ecclesiology. By articulating this interdependency Fr Staniloae tries to balance the almost unilateral insistence and preoccupation concerning the institutional structure of the Church which seemed to be a common characteristic of the theological research in the field of ecclesiology in the ecumenical context of the beginning of the second half of the last century with a creative theological reflection on the Church's nature of koinonia.⁸²⁹ Obviously, Fr Staniloae faces the difficult challenge of reconciling two assertions concerning the particular role of the Spirit in the Trinity and the fact that this role can only refer to his distinctive personal quality of being the only one who proceeds from the Father, or, in other words, to present the distinction between the 'procession' of the Spirit from the Father alone and his 'manifestation' through the Son. Fr John Behr notices this problem too in terms of picturing clearly the relationship between the Trinity and the Church, or in other words to conceptualize the presence the Trinity in the Church but from a slightly different perspective. Fr Behr, based on another text of Palamas (*The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 36) concludes that as long as the Spirit is 'manifested' through the Son in both the temporal and the eternal realm this would imply that "the distinction between the 'procession' and 'manifestation' does not correspond to a distinction often made between intratrinitarian 'processions' and extratrinitarian 'missions'."⁸³⁰ Fr Behr also argues that the Trinitarian order from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit is not unilateral but should be coupled with the movement in the Spirit through the Son to the Father: "As the Cappadocians already realized, the relation between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is identical, and it must be so, with the pattern of divine life revealed in the Scriptures: the Spirit who proceeds from the Father, rests upon the Son, as a bond of love returned to the

⁸²⁷ *Capita Physica*, 37: PG 150, 1144-1145

⁸²⁸ TC, 29

⁸²⁹ EG2, x-xi

⁸³⁰ TBC, 76

Father.”⁸³¹ Fr. Staniloae makes use of the exegetical synthesis of St Gregory of Nyssa⁸³², St Maximos the Confessor⁸³³ and St John Damascene⁸³⁴ who all sustain in convergent and complementary ways that what they call ‘coming forth-manifestation’ of the Spirit from the Son, does not compromise the fact that the Father is the unique uncaused cause or principle in the Trinity. He writes:

The Spirit cannot be the particular hypostatization of the Father’s love towards the Son, as both the Son and Father are the modes of fulfilment and possession of the whole divine being by two other subjects. [...] Although there is no temporal precedence of the begetting of the Son over the procession of the Spirit, the procession presupposes the begetting, it is linked to it, it is ‘conditioned’ so to speak by the begetting of the Son.⁸³⁵

He continues in a Palamite framework:

The Father begets the Son simply for having another subject to enjoy together with Him and also to enjoy together the wholeness of the divine being. He sends forth the Spirit not only for having someone with whom he can exclusively enjoy the whole divine being in another mode of real existence, but also the Son can have too.⁸³⁶

A first interesting conclusion is the two-folded explanation of the procession of the Spirit⁸³⁷ the hypostatic bond for the Father and the Son.⁸³⁸ He adds:

In this respect the Spirit is not just simply the fruit of love of the Father but the fruit of His love for His beloved Son. But in order to be this he is no less the subject of the whole divine being found in the Father. The Holy Spirit is the carrier of the paternal love for the Son, as subject of the entire divine being of the Father for the sake of the Son and not the hypostatization of the exclusive love of the Father. Otherwise would the Son lack in love? How could he then contribute through love to the procession of the Spirit as argued by Catholic theology? The love of the Father is the motive of the procession of the Spirit, but not the attribute which sends forth the Spirit, as

⁸³¹ Ibidem, p.77

⁸³² PG 45,133

⁸³³ PG 91,136

⁸³⁴ PG 95, 60 D

⁸³⁵ SCF, p. 502.

⁸³⁶ Ibidem, p. 502.

⁸³⁷ TC, pp. 30-1.

⁸³⁸ *Capita Physica Theologica*, 36, PG 150, 1145 A-B.

the begetting of the Son is motivated by the Father's love, but this love is not actually the attribute which begets Him.⁸³⁹

However Fr Staniloae feels the need to clarify: "As Son, the Son does not possess the Spirit in the way that the Father does, that is, as causing the Spirit to proceed from himself, but he possesses the Spirit as one who receives him from the Father and, as Son, possesses him."⁸⁴⁰ All these arguments culminate in Staniloae's definition of 'procession':

Maybe because the 'manifestation' of the Spirit means that it is not simply motivated by the loving will of the Father to have another subject of His being to enjoy together with Him of the divine being but by the Father's loving will to have another subject to enjoy of the divine being together, both with Him and with the Son [...] this 'manifestation' (*provenire* in Romanian which comes from the Latin *pro-venire*) of the Holy Spirit is named procession.⁸⁴¹

Fr Staniloae develops his argument concerning the procession of the Spirit 'through the Son' or 'with the Son' based on an explanation of Bryennios's expression 'the Spirit of the Son' – but not 'from the Father and the Son'. "As such the Spirit rests upon the Son, shines, as carrier of the paternal love over the Son, is revealed by the Son."⁸⁴² I do not agree that Staniloae sometimes links the Filioque and the doctrine of papal primacy in his early critique⁸⁴³. His approach is uncritical and requires further analysis and consideration at least in terms of Church history, as long as they did not emerge or develop simultaneously in the theology of the Roman-Catholic Church. I notice the mild tone of the Romanian theologian's considerations about the Catholic Church, especially after his participation in the second plenary session of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue held in Munich in 1982. Moreover, this matter should be also regarded in the light of the latest research about the strictly theological and ecclesiological implications of the Filioque,⁸⁴⁴ in particular the major agreed statement "The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?" which is the outcome of a four-year study project of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological consultations, issued in October 2003. What looks promising is that even though the statement

⁸³⁹ SCF, 502

⁸⁴⁰ TC, 30

⁸⁴¹ SCF, 503

⁸⁴² *Ibidem*, 503

⁸⁴³ Roberson, CSP, "Ecumenism in the Thought of Dumitru Staniloae" in *The Theological Legacy of Fr Dumitru Staniloae and its Ecumenical Actuality, The Sixth Ecumenical Theological Symposium*, December 6, 1998, Published by The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, (New York, 1999), 43-54

⁸⁴⁴ Erickson, "A Welcome New Study of a Very Old Issue", in *SVTQ* 48:1 (2004), 89–92

recognizes that it will not “put an end to the centuries of disagreement among our Churches” it acknowledges however that “undoubtedly papal primacy with all its implications remains the root issue behind all the questions of theology and practice that continue to divide our Churches.”⁸⁴⁵

At any rate the approach of Staniloae and Behr reveals that the theology of St Gregory Palamas has still much to offer in finding a solution to the issue of the Filioque. Fr Staniloae’s approach and contribution to this sensitive matter is scrupulously analyzed by Marshall⁸⁴⁶ arguing that Fr Staniloae tries to establish “a basis in God for tying the temporal missions of the persons to the eternal order among them, without implying the hated Filioque.”⁸⁴⁷ However Fr Staniloae’s person-nature synthesis at the Trinitarian level and the Palamite theology of the uncreated divine and eternal energies prevent us to simply equate the Holy Spirit’s “shining forth” of the Son” to “originating” from the Son as Marshall does.⁸⁴⁸

Summarizing so far, Fr Staniloae pneumatological insights point out the Trinitarian basis of the Church since the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ is not only the Spirit of unity and communion, but also the Spirit the adoption of the faithful by God the Father. In the work of the Holy Spirit upon the Church and within the Church, the Son and the Father are also present and active.

IV.8. Church – ‘Laboratory of Resurrection’

The description of the Church as a laboratory of resurrection⁸⁴⁹ is quite unusual but suggestive and linked to another paradoxical feature of the Church as she is at the same time the Mother of saints and sinners.⁸⁵⁰ This means for Staniloae that theology is basically the ‘science’ of salvation and eternal life, a science of deification or theosis. He writes:

The Church is the spiritual locus where gradually by his Holy Spirit, Christ, the Giver of life, communicates the imperishable life of his risen humanity to our humanity. The Church is the *laboratory* in which God prepares us for and makes us advance towards the resurrection and the life everlasting. It is

⁸⁴⁵ Ibidem, 89-90

⁸⁴⁶ Marshall, “Et Occidente Lux? Aquinas and Eastern Orthodox Theology”, *Modern Theology* 20:1 (January, 2004), 23-50

⁸⁴⁷ Marshall, art.cit., 37

⁸⁴⁸ Ibidem, 38

⁸⁴⁹ TDO2, 149

⁸⁵⁰ TDO2, 185

the place in which we are brought back to the forward movement which is proper to our nature.⁸⁵¹

Fr Staniloae avoids giving an abstract definition of the Church, but he is so generous and creative when it comes to outlining theologically the major aspects of the authentic ecclesial life and the spirituality that is fostered by it. Starting with Pentecost⁸⁵² the Church is at the same time the fifth act of the Son of God's redeeming work following the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension, and the illumination of the divine life and love from his transfigured body, which was raised through his Ascension in the supreme intimacy of the infinite and perfect communion and love of the Holy Trinity poured out upon the people or the extension of Christ's penetrating redemptive work and divine life from his personal humanity towards the other human beings and indwelling or his transfigured body through the power of the Holy Spirit in those who believe in him.⁸⁵³ In Christ with his body which is infused by the Holy Spirit and is given to us in Eucharist, our approach and union to God reaches its pinnacle. Fr. Staniloae says that the Eucharistic communion is extended through the Holy Spirit to the communion of the saints.⁸⁵⁴ The Church brings into existence the communion of saints through the holiness she receives from her Bridegroom (Ephesians 5: 25-27).⁸⁵⁵ The saints are the priceless gifts and fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. They are pilgrims, as Christ Himself was in this world until His death on the Cross, his Resurrection and Ascension, searching during this earthly life the Triune God and his kingdom, which is not from this world, in response to the calling of our Lord (Luke 12:31). Through asceticism, prayers, repentance, meekness and good deeds they seek the Holy Spirit for the union with the One in whose image we are all created and who is always above this world, yet present, sustaining it and working in it until the end of time (Matthew 28:20). Being illumined and transfigured by the uncreated light of the Holy Trinity, the saints become in turn lights full of joy, beauty and hope of the Church and in a world shaded by the darkness of sin and death for all ages, and they are, alongside the sacraments of the Church, channels of the unending perfect love, mercy, healing, blessings and holiness of God towards those who believe and confess the true faith. The saints are teachers, guardians and confessors of the Orthodox faith without any compromise or misinterpretation (Matthew 10:32) (the case of St Maximus the Confessor

⁸⁵¹ Staniloae, "The Mystery of the Church", 53

⁸⁵² Idem, "Universality and the ethnicity of the Church from an Orthodox perspective", *Orthodoxia*, 2 (1976), 143-152

⁸⁵³ TDO2, 129-130

⁸⁵⁴ PG 91, 1193C-1196C cite in TC, 39

⁸⁵⁵ TDO2, 185-86

is relevant) but always humble⁸⁵⁶ and aware of their human limits, sensitive to the troubles, needs, weakness, tears and sufferings of all peoples who are asking for their intercession, full of awe and reverence towards God. Thus the faithful receive light from their light, joy from their joy, peace from their peace, being responsible in return to guard and confess the true faith. The saints are the never-fading stars on Church's firmament, and cherished temples of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16), beloved children of the Una Sancta, the mystical body and bride of the Unus Sanctus, the source of all holiness and goodness, the Word of God who became flesh (John 1:14). This explains why in the Orthodox Church all saints from all ages, known and unknown, from different social background are celebrated on the first Sunday after the Sunday of Pentecost. The saints show us that the truth of faith is not abstract or simply intellectual but existential and experiential, by unifying in a sublime manner theology with spirituality. They prevent us from seeing the Church merely as "the earthly society of those who settled their conflict with God through Christ"⁸⁵⁷ and witness the theandrim of the Church by becoming themselves *anthropo-ecclesia* full of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and of the Holy Trinity. They are the true *homini universalis*. They unite the heavens, where their souls are, with the world where their bodies (relics) became vehicles of the uncreated energies which God poured in their souls, and are a source of blessings for the faithful. They unite and gather; they do not separate or divide the people. To enter in the communion of the saints we need to follow the way of saints which is the way of the Church, our way towards heaven.

IV.9. Conclusion

The several aspects of Fr. Staniloae's ecclesiology that were analysed above are synthesized in creative theological approach which aims to argue the necessity of the Church, as testimony and mission in the context of the secularized post-modern society. In his vision of the Church he is preoccupied to outline the inner link between theology and spirituality, the importance of cultivation by the faithful of the spiritual gift of freedom with the awareness of responsibility and to explore the true nature of the spiritual authority in the Church. He sees the relation between laity and clergy not in terms of power but of self-sacrificing love. He has a balanced approach on the priesthood by arguing that its natural and universal dimensions are always connected with and find their fulfilment in the

⁸⁵⁶ PG 51, 312

⁸⁵⁷ EG3, 121

ordained priesthood.⁸⁵⁸ He contrasts between a sacramental and a sociological vision of hierarchy. He applies the principle of sobornicity to his theology of priesthood to argue the role of ordained priesthood in keeping the balance between the institutional and the sacramental in the Church, essential for the unity of the Church. Seeing the Church as a dynamic synod, Staniloae emphasizes the sobornic-communitarian dimension of the ordained priesthood to show the interdependence between the clergy and the laity and to strengthen the communion between them.⁸⁵⁹ The necessary pneumatological accents of Fr Staniloae's ecclesiology are meant to reflect the Trinitarian foundation of the constitution and life of the Church as koinonia. The Church is ultimately a Trinitarian epiphany. The Holy Trinity is the one which works through the Holy Spirit in the souls of those who believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in order to raise them to in a loving relationship between the Trinitarian persons.⁸⁶⁰ Consequently in the Orthodox Church, the holy Sacraments have a vital role in the spiritualization and deification of the life of her children. Fr Staniloae's particular interest in the Pauline apophatic theology could be explained by the fact that he finds in it strong arguments for the inter-personal Trinitarian communion. The most important point which Fr Staniloae makes here, influenced also by the intimately interconnected insights of Gregory II of Cyprus,⁸⁶¹ St. Gregory Palamas⁸⁶² and Joseph Bryennios⁸⁶³, is that the Trinitarian persons are united based not only on their common essence but also due to their personal characteristics.⁸⁶⁴ His way of explaining why the Spirit is called the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, though the Father is not called the Father of the Spirit, nor is the Son called the Son of the Spirit, is at least intriguing. He argues that Christ, the Son of God incarnated makes us sons of the heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit. Commenting on a passage from the Galatians 4:4-6 he writes:

So the Holy Spirit sustains in the Son, from eternity, the Son's love towards the Father, as the one who proceeds from the Father for this work. Therefore when the Son became man, he had, also as human, the Spirit of love from the Father so that He might communicate the Spirit to us too.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁵⁸ EG5, 148-53

⁸⁵⁹ Dumitru Staniloae, "Slujirile Bisericești și Atribuțiile lor" (The Ecclesial Offices and their Attributions), *Ortodoxia* 3 (1970), 467-69

⁸⁶⁰ HTE, 89-92

⁸⁶¹ Ibidem, 82 sq

⁸⁶² TC, 30

⁸⁶³ Ibidem, 33-38

⁸⁶⁴ HTE, 88

⁸⁶⁵ Ibidem

In another comment of a passage from Romans 8:14-17, 29 which presents the Holy Spirit as the spirit of unity and of our adoption by the Father in Christ, he reiterates and deepens this idea. He writes:

He [Christ] has become for us, as human, the bearer of his spirit of divine sonship so as to communicate it to us. In this way, the Holy Spirit is the one who unites us also with the Father and the Son [...] Still we are aware that we could not cry out 'Abba, Father' by ourselves, if the Holy Spirit had not united himself with us, if he did not cry out together with us to [...] Consequently the Spirit of the Son is not only his own but also of the Father, that is, it is received by the Son before the Incarnation from the Father. Secondly, the Spirit through which we cry out 'Abba, Father' is not separated from the Son either. The incarnate Son is the one who cries out together with us strengthened by the same Spirit 'Abba, Father'. Through the Spirit we are not just calling the Father Abba, but we also pray to the Father and to the Son, or also the Son prays together with the Spirit within us. We cannot pray alone to the Father without the Spirit, hence without the Son also. God, who wants our salvation, also gives us the power to ask for his help.⁸⁶⁶

Without the Holy Spirit we would not know how to pray. The Spirit of our adoption by the Father reveals itself as the Spirit of communion since it is the one who unites us with God. Fr Staniloae argues that this impulse to pray with the Spirit of the Son or with the Son who dwells within us through his Spirit, does not obliterate the synergetic character of our deification.⁸⁶⁷ The Holy Spirit does not suppress our identity or our freedom. Fr. Staniloae explains:

The Son is not a passive object of the Father's love, as in fact we are not passive objects when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us [...] the fact that it is through the Spirit that we love the Father does not imply that it is not ourselves who love him. The Spirit of the Father, penetrating within us as the paternal love kindles our own loving filial subjectivity, in which the Spirit is also made manifest at the same time.⁸⁶⁸

According to Fr Staniloae's ecclesiological view, the Trinity is always actively and personally present in the Church through Christ, the incarnated Son and Word of God who

⁸⁶⁶ Ibidem, 89-90

⁸⁶⁷ Ibidem, 91

⁸⁶⁸ HTE, 30-31

recapitulates within Him all those reborn in the Holy Spirit to be brought to the God the Father. This Trinitarian presence is experienced by the members of the Church as divine glory which is transmitted by Christ to his entire mystical body through the Holy Spirit:

The glory that fills the Church coincides with her members' complete acquisition of their quality as children of God. It consists not only in seeing but also in partaking of the Son's glory that the incarnate Word-the head of the Church-possess as man.⁸⁶⁹

The light of the communion between the Son and God the Father is the source of the light of the Church. The light of the Church is for Fr Staniloae precisely the unity between God and humanity restored by Christ in the image of the Trinitarian unity. This is the glory received by the Son as man from the Father: to unite the human beings with the Father, as His sons as the Son is united with the Father as man.⁸⁷⁰ But the light of incarnate Son of God is also the shining forth of the Spirit through the Son's deified humanity and the same Spirit rests upon all united and reborn in Christ through the mystery of Baptism. This unique divine light originating in the Father is given to the members of the Church in unitary yet distinct way by the Son and Holy Spirit. Engaging the poetic and apophatic language of light and glory to emphasize "the distinct personal character of each divine person in its personal relationships with other two divine persons"⁸⁷¹ Fr Staniloae attempts to provide us with a balanced Trinitarian ecclesiological synthesis as a sound alternative to any form of Christomonism, which allows him to make a clear distinction, rather than separation of the Holy Spirit's place and role *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and brings to the surface the person of the Father and his relationship with the Church.

However I consider that despite its positive aspects, Staniloae's Trinitarian ecclesiology does not accurately reflect the complex reality of the Church's life. Having the tendency to reduce the ecclesial life to the level of parish and ignoring the monastic life Staniloae's ecclesiological synthesis is unbalanced. That is surprising considering that he is considered the father of Romanian Philokalia. A possible explanation could be the pressure of the communist censorship. His insistence on the parish life and the parish priest's ministry prevent him to give a more detailed and critical account in his sacramental theology of all three ranks of priesthood and their specific attributions.⁸⁷²

⁸⁶⁹ EG4, 22

⁸⁷⁰ IHL, 214

⁸⁷¹ Ibidem, 88

⁸⁷² EG5, 144-48

V. Conclusions

Fr Staniloae is indeed a convinced personalist⁸⁷³ who has always argued the preeminence of the person over nature but in a neo-patristic not philosophical sense. We showed that he develops a personal theology of personhood by creatively integrating patristic Christological principles in Trinitarian theology, anthropology and ecclesiology. He does not follow the line of Bulgakov, who in his reading of the Cappadocians identifies hypostasis with uniqueness and freedom and nature with necessity, like Lossky, Yannaras or Zizioulas to a certain extent did. Instead Staniloae is more focused on idea of balance between human and divine in Christ, immanence and absolute transcendence of God, cataphaticism and apophaticism, mystery and rationality of creation. It is this idea of balance which shapes Staniloae's theology and in particular his personhood: person and nature which have the same content are always mutually presupposed in communion. Communion is always inter-personal but it is possible only through nature at both divine and human level.

However Staniloae emphasizes the personal character of the divine persons in their perfect communion. The human person has an infinite value only because of the personal character of God. God is personal reality because is love and he wants to share this love to his creation. Our fundamental experience is therefore the experience of communion because God the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit is Himself perfect communion. God is communion within Himself but also with the human beings and through them with the whole creation.

In Staniloae's theological vision the relation between God and human beings takes the form of a dynamic dialogue of love and the world is the arena of this deifying dialogue. His style is not an impersonal one, specific to the old manuals of Dogmatics; it less didactic and more poetic. His writings are the expression of a personal testimony and experience of God in which the inner link between theology and spirituality is sought by connecting the meanings of dogma to the human spiritual life. For Staniloae the Holy Trinity is the source and the model of the unity of humankind and of the Church. By engaging the principle of *homo capax divini*, since human being is an image of the Trinity, Staniloae develops a maximalist anthropology like Florensky and Bulgakov and reduces the ontological distance between God and creation yet without compromising uncreated-created distinction.

⁸⁷³ EG6, xi

Synthesizing the Maximian theology of logoi and the Palamite doctrine of uncreated energies Staniloae argues that knowledge and love are inseparable and always mutually presupposed. His whole epistemology is the expression of the 'rationality' of love incarnated in Christ as reaction to rationalism. In the one's knowledge-experience of God the mind and the heart are united. Fr. Staniloae argues that rationality of love as communion is the loving harmony between God and humankind in which we are introduced by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Knowing God is to love Him and loving God is to know Him. He does not redefine the concept of personhood when moving from divine to human personhood. In both cases the person is characterized by its capacity for love and communion despite the qualitative differences.

However I think that by introducing the phenomenology of self-revelation of the spirit in his Trinitarian model, Staniloae has great difficulties also in defining human personhood and the relation between the divine and human spirit. Reducing the image of God in human being to the soul and defining the relation between the divine Spirit and human spirit in terms of reduplication or replication is definitively ambiguous.⁸⁷⁴ This approach challenges the person-nature balance which Staniloae strongly advocates since it tends to reduce the action of Spirit only to the soul in the act of creation and it contradicts the patristic view of human being as 'incarnated spirit'. God's love is infinite and human person's thirst for love is infinite. Thus deification is a never-ending process. He explores more the infinite potential of human being to become subject to the divine love and not so much the human limitations. The personal reality is full sense and mystery at the same time. Staniloae is influenced in his apophatic theology by Lossky at least in two respects: a categorical rejection of an exclusively intellectual knowledge of God and the presence of apophaticism on every step of human being's ascension to God.

I consider that Staniloae's reading of Palamas is unclear and speculative regarding the relation between the negative theology and apophaticism. Staniloae's concept of personhood allows him to emphasize the distinction between the apophaticism of divine essence, the one of each one of the Trinitarian hypostases and the apophaticism of the divine energies. He also argues the existence of anthropological and cosmological apophaticism which have their source in the divine apophaticism without diminishing the value of cataphatic theology. Because of its spiritual fundament the entire creation remains a mystery for us no matter how much we know and discover about it. Staniloae creatively develops his apophatic theology within the context of the divine-human communion. Like

⁸⁷⁴ EG2, 67-69

Bulgakov, Staniloae relies on the human experience to elaborate his Trinitarian conception being preoccupied to maintain the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. Bulgakov was focused on the human experience of self. Under the influence of German idealism he tries to integrate the phenomenology of the self-revelation of spirit in his Trinitarian conception. However this application of the phenomenology of the spirit to Trinitarian doctrine introduces a tension between God's absolute freedom and the necessity of His self-revelation. Staniloae tries to avoid this difficulty but in his justification of necessity of the third in Trinity which is pivotal for his understanding of divine intersubjectivity he actually follows Bulgakov. Staniloae also refers to Bulgakov's application of the phenomenology of the spirit in his own personhood to fathom the relation between the divine Spirit and human spirit but he would soon abandon it returning to the patristic tradition.

In my opinion the temptation of the 'trinitarian deduction' based on human experience of love remains a problem in Staniloae's triadology even if his critique of Buber's 'dialogical philosophy' or theological implications of Binswanger's 'phenomenology of love' provide Staniloae with strong arguments in favour of the Christian doctrine of Trinity. For Staniloae the fundamental human experience is love. And love cannot be manifested but in communion. Inspired by liturgical language of the Holy Liturgy, Staniloae introduces in his theology the notion of world as God's gift for humanity. Goodness characterizes the personal God in his loving relation with creation. A gift should always be a sign of true love. The human goodness as reflecting the divine goodness is the indication of God's active presence in human being. This exchange of gifts between God and humanity is the expression of their dialogue of love revealing the natural priesthood of man, restored by Christ and strengthen the personal communion between them which grows endlessly.

Nonetheless I consider that there is an overemphasis of apophaticism in Staniloae's theology and this problem is evident in his cosmology.⁸⁷⁵ He sees the role of man as mediator of creations' fulfilment in ideal terms. His exaggerated optimism concerning the work and human being's ability to master the world in the perspective of its deification is harshly contradicted by the contemporary aggressive consumerism which generated a profound ecological crisis. Consequently, Staniloae does not make a clear distinction between the idea of progress and development.⁸⁷⁶ In his understanding the 'humanization'

⁸⁷⁵ EG2, 1-85

⁸⁷⁶ For a more detailed analysis see Elizabeth Theokritoff's contribution in "Creator and Creation" in E. Theokritoff, M. Cunningham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 71-73

of creation does not imply a distinction between the transformation of nature for human being's needs and nature's own needs. The focus is on imprinting nature with our marks. Moreover the density of Staniloae's theological argument in which the patristic tradition, philosophical influence and his own opinion are at times hardly distinguishable, perhaps because of the lack of references, makes the reception of his theology quite hard and not only for Western reader.

I think another problem is Staniloae's oversimplified view and a rather superficial knowledge of certain aspects of the Western theology especially regarding the issues of nature and grace, unjustly identifying the theology of justification with an abstract legalistic theory. Based on the Christological fundament of priesthood Fr Staniloae argues the continuity between the natural and ordained priesthood in order to eliminate the tension or separation between them. On the other hand I consider that Staniloae's focus on the parish and parish priest's activity does not reflect accurately the complex reality of the life of the Church and it partially compromises the universal/local or pneumatological/institutional balance he sought in his ecclesiological synthesis. He leaves little room for the discussion of the particularities of all three ranks of priesthood.⁸⁷⁷ It is through this exchange of gift that human being has the experience of authentic freedom, giver and receiver becoming transparent one to another. Through this gift humans can ascend to the Giver. Everything is included in this dialogue of love, even theology which takes the shape of an intellectual liturgy becoming a form of doxology of Christ, the living dogma. Moreover this doxology does not include not only the mind but the whole being of the one who is communion with God through prayer. Staniloae's insistence on the existential character of the dogmas of the Church is an original and defining feature of his theological thought. Dedicated theologian and professor he appears as the same time as a humble and kind spiritual father who feels deeply responsible for the all the others. He initiated a patristic revival in his country which set a new course for the Romanian modern theology despite the Communist oppression. Staniloae's *Philokalia* generated a necessary spiritual renewal of the monastic life and helped the faithful to resist against the atheist regime. To love God is to love the others and this means to mortify our egocentrism, to constantly make room for others in our heart, mind and life and, by showing how to do that in an authentic neo-philokalic spirit, Staniloae's theology is profoundly ascetical.

⁸⁷⁷ EG5, 144-48, 158-67

Nonetheless I showed that Staniloae's outstanding contribution to the cultural and spiritual life in his country is shadowed by his support for a dangerous mystical nationalism and a rather radical and counterproductive position on the dialogue between theology and philosophy in the Romanian culture. His theology is a personal confession, expressing his own experience of God. He speaks about God as he met Him in patristic writings but also in his own life, in the Church, in his family, friends, in all human beings and in the world. He truly speaks with the wisdom of the heart.⁸⁷⁸ Staniloae's ecclesiology is definitively Trinitarian. He avoids a separation between the economy of the Son and the economy of the Spirit by arguing the reciprocity between the Son and the Holy Spirit which is reflected in the life of the Church. For Staniloae the Church is not only communion in the Holy Spirit or the mystical body of Christ. By presenting the Holy Spirit as Spirit of our adoption Staniloae points out the special relation between God the Father and the Church. Unreservedly committed to the ideal of the Christian unity Staniloae integrates and creatively develops the concept of sobornicity in his ecclesiological synthesis. He accentuates the dynamic character of sobornicity, emphasized by Florensky in his reflections on the nature of unity of the Church, by introducing the concept of 'open sobornicity'. Open sobornicity is the expression of God's personal, dynamic, all-embracing kenotic love. It is the confession of the loving truth of all those who are in the communion of the truthful love. In open sobornicity, life, truth, love and communion are identified with the Triune God, the Supreme Personal reality. This concept is the core of Staniloae's ecclesiological view and despite the fact it does not offer final solutions to the issues regarding the relation between local and universal aspects of the Church or the limits of the Church and salvation of non-Christians, we showed its potential and resourcefulness that the Church could use to advance on the path of unity and reconciliation.

However I think that because of its strong eschatological imprint the implementation of concept of 'open sobornicity' in the Church would be rather difficult. I question the soundness of Staniloae's critique of Filioque because he connects it with the doctrine of papal primacy ignoring the historical reality. Apart from the emphasis of the special relation between God the Father and the Church, I think that Staniloae's ecclesiological view is not original being heavily indebted to the ecclesiological approach developed in the theology of the Russian emigration.

The theological legacy of Fr Dumitru Staniloae is rich and profound having much to offer to the Church and to the world. His Neo-Palamism defends the ontological distinction

⁸⁷⁸ EG1, xv

between God and creation by keeping in balance the immanent and economic Trinity against any form of Gnosticism and pantheism which compromise the reality of divine-human communion. The integration of the principle of essence-energies unity-in-distinction in the Maximian theology of logoi enabled him to keep in balance the mystery and rationality of creation thus arguing the spiritual fundament of existence against the materialist ideologies. He is justly considered an exponent of the 'Neo-patristic synthesis' together with Florovsky, Lossky, Schmemmann, Meyendorff, Zizioulas and others because his theology, developed around the affirmation of an ontological personalism, creatively synthesizes the patristic tradition, principles and concepts specific to the modern culture and his own personal spiritual experience. At the same time the ascetical and existential dimension of his theology place him alongside other important spiritual figures of the last century such as Fr Sophrony Sacharov. The living theology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae is a beacon of light and hope in our troubled age.

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