

- Dumitru Stăniloae -

Background, context and development of an ecclesiological synthesis

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Dumitru Staniloae was one of the most influential Orthodox writers of the second half of the twentieth century. J. Moltmann said about him that he was the greatest theologian alive in his day¹, and an Orthodox Heidegger, an Eastern Karl Barth². His theological synthesis is a mirror of his ethnic construction. Romanians are a Latin nation with an Eastern belief and they are situated at the confluence of Latin, Greek and Slavic Christianiy. That is why Staniloae's theology is a theology of synthesis without losing its personal character.

Although his profile is unique in the Romanian theological landscape, the uncritical admiration risks generating an immense cloud of incense which will block us from seeing his real theological contributions and effort.³

This essay tries to analyse in the first part his educational background and possible trace of his youthful sources of inspiration. He is situated in the theological context of the Orthodox teaching system. Than follows an introduction to the development of Orthodox ecclesiology in the twentieth century. Staniloae is placed among other important professors following at the same time the structure of his theological triptych: dogma / spirituality / liturgy. After presenting this development together with the other theological contributions, Staniloae's ecclesiology is analysed in the light of his patristic sources. The last part of the essay will try to describe and evaluate the consequences of such a theological construct.

Before the neo-patristic revival, Orthodox Ecclesiology⁴ from the Dogmatic manuals was modelled upon the highly hierarchic, pyramidal, institutional Catholic view. The head of the Church was not the pope but the Synodal system. Nevertheless the way of conceiving the Church's life was of Tridentine inspiration.

The beginning of the twentieth century brought important changes for Orthodox theology. The change was to start in Paris in the Theological institute Saint-Serge,

1The preface to Staniloae, D. *Orthodoxe Dogmatik* 3 vols. (Zürich: Gütersloh, 1984/1990/1995).

2V. Ierunca, 'Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa a parintelui D. Staniloae'. In I. Ica jr. (ed.) *Persoana si Comuniune. Prinos de cinstire preotului profesor academician Dumitru Staniloae 1903-1993* (Sibiu: Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxa, 1993), p. 104.

3M. Bielawski, *Parintele Dumitru Staniloae, o viziune filocalica despre lume* (Sibiu: Deisis, 1998), p. 70.

4A very good overview of the ecclesiological developments of the twentieth century in I. Ica, jr. *Canonul Ortodoxiei I, Canonul Apostolic al primelor veacuri* (Sibiu: Deisis/Stavropoleos, 2008) and K. C. Felmy, *Dogmatica experientei ecleziale. Innoirea teologiei ortodoxe contemporane* (Sibiu: Deisis, 2005²).

founded by the leading scholars of the Russian emigration. Great names like Bulgakov, Florovsky, Lossky etc. would radically change the face of modern Orthodox theology. In the 1930s Nicholas Afanasiev, professor of Canon Law, pleaded through a series of articles for the rejection of the structures of medieval ecclesiology and a return to the Eucharistic, local and concrete ecclesiology of the Early Church. The synthesis of his ideas was *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, published partially only after his death.⁵ He was the pioneer of the renewal of Orthodox Ecclesiology which happened in the broader context of revalorising the patristic sources.

Alexander Schmemmann defended his PhD thesis on Byzantine ritual in 1959 in Paris.⁶ He rightly pointed out that throughout the centuries the ritual's deep eschatological aspect as "manifestation and anticipated epiphany of the Kingdom of God"⁷ was lost. He argued for the repositioning of the Eucharist as the central eschatological epiphany which is the Church and in the Church.

A few years after Schmemmann, in 1965, John Zizioulas defended his PhD thesis in Athens on the unity of the Church in the Eucharist and the Bishop in the first three centuries.⁸ It was an engaged attempt to build a Eucharistic ecclesiology based on the vision of St. Ignatius with the Eucharist and the Bishop in the centre of the Church, thus distancing itself from Afanasiev's earlier view of a communitarian and charismatic Ekklesia.⁹ This vision of the Church was in a certain manner opposed to the theology and ecclesiology of Romanidis, another Greek leading theologian. Deeply rooted in the patristic vision of spiritual experience i.e. the hesychast tradition, Romanidis sees the Church as being the milieu of a profound therapeutic experience. Christians experience Christ in his glory and this meeting with Him in the Church is identical with deification, with the kingdom of God. It is definitely a more individualistic vision than Zizioulas'. Romanidis emphasises the personal experience in the Church, having as a background the monastic tradition and experience.

Although by far the most acknowledged in western theological environments because of the translation of his works and articles in circulation languages, Zizioulas has his own critics. One recent evaluation of Zizioulas' ecclesiology was realised by Kevin Berger¹⁰, who argues a lack of equilibrium between Pneumatology and Christology in Zizioulas' view, comparing his conception with Dumitru Staniloae's.

⁵Afanasiev, N. *The Church of the Holy Spirit* (University of Notre Dame, 2007).

⁶A. Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (London, 1966).

⁷I. Ica, jr. *Canonul Ortodoxiei ...*, p. 46.

⁸J. D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001).

⁹I. Ica, jr. *Canonul Ortodoxiei ...*, p. 47.

In 1985, Nikos Matsoukas, professor of dogmatics in Thessaloniki, published his *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology*, an attempt to harmonize the earlier ecclesiological tendencies. His departure point is the *Mystagogy of Saint Maximus the Confessor*. The church is a reflexion of God in all his plenitude and diversity, and, because we are living in history, the Church also implies an eschatological dynamism. The Church is only a witness to Truth and not the owner. That is why a confessional view of Orthodoxy in itself might be as well just another version of the sin of “the chosen people”.¹¹

The newest theologian to engage in a fresh ecclesiological project is Nikolaos Loudovikos. He published in Athens in 2002 his major work called *The Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality*. In a profound historical approach he sees in Origen the first sign of clash between institution and charisma. Through Pseudo-Denis the Christian access to God is mediated by the institutional hierarchy, therefore the Church has its own hierarchical ontology. Loudovikos also sees in Maxim the Confessor’s *Mystagogy* the solution against this pyramidal view. Maxim corrects both Origen and Pseudo-Denis through an apophatical ecclesiology of concentric consubstantiality. Loudovikos argues that “the Church is determined as neither charismatic-existential nor structural-institutional but as an imitation-participation to God’s grace, who activates through the power of faith the eschatological consubstantiality in God of the inner man, of humanity and Cosmos.”¹²

Loudovikos’ thought is a welcome correction of both the opposing accents from previous ecclesiological attempts. His coherent synthesis makes compatible the individual/ monastic/ transcendental pattern with the communitarian/ Eucharistic/ practical one.

“From Baptism and Unction Christ is fully present in each believer according to his personal charisma which must be activated both ascetically/ existentially and liturgically/ Eucharistically, but the model is not the pyramid with wide base and unique top, but of the wheels which move one in another from Ezekiel’s vision”¹³

This vision of the body of the Church has a lot of ecumenical potential especially in the dialogue with the Protestant Churches. This type of synthesis was realised *avant la lettre* but departing from different premises by Staniloae. He reached his conclusions through a series of theological moments.

10Kevin Berger ‘Does the Eucharist make the Church?’ *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 51 (2007), p. 23-70 apud. I. Ica, jr. *Canonul Ortodoxiei ...*, p. 52.

11I. Ica, jr. *Canonul Ortodoxiei ...*, p. 55.

12I. Ica, jr. *Canonul Ortodoxiei ...*, p. 56.

13I. Ica, jr. *Canonul Ortodoxiei ...*, p. 56.

Before moving to Staniloae's theology in this context, I would like to mention another Serbian contribution to Orthodox theology. Archimandrite Justin Popovitch proposed in his dogmatic theology a radical centrality of Christ on the grounds of the deification of human nature. The Church is nothing less than the place where the believer assumes what is already realised by Christ, i.e. sanctified human nature.¹⁴

I have already mentioned the vast output of translations from the Greek Fathers of the Church that Staniloae started from his early years as a Professor. The selection of the Fathers was based on two principles. He translated on the one hand the spiritual literature of the Desert Fathers and other collections (Paterikon, Lausaikon) that reflected eastern monastic spirituality and thought, and on the other hand he translated the most important theologians that shaped Eastern Theology. On the basis of these later translations but always referring to the spiritual literature as well, Staniloae built his Dogmatic Theology (3 vols. 1978). Although keeping the structure of the former Orthodox Dogmatics dominated by scholasticism, he wrote a new dogmatic theology in the neo-patristic style.

The entire Christian vision and evaluation of life is shaped through the optics of the Fathers. The base for Staniloae's view on cosmology is St. Maximus' teaching of the logoi, of the rationality of the universe. Because the creation was made by Christ and for Christ, there is an ontological capability of creation to be transparent to the presence of God in it. Staniloae actually develops a deep theological ecology which culminates "in the maximian vision of the transfigured cosmos"¹⁵

Another characteristic of his thought is the predominant reference to the Holy Trinity. God in three Persons and one person of Christ with two natures are the fundamental dogmas of the Eastern fathers and through these dogmas all the other theological developments must be considered and verified. The creation of the world and of humans was nothing less than the extension of the inner life of the Trinity, a life of love and communion. That is why the human's aim is to fill their lives with the love and the knowledge of the Trinity, made possible only through the incarnation of one person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. Staniloae's theology was identified by Kallistos Ware as a theology of love and personal communion.¹⁶ The dynamic of Christian life is based on the tension between the distance and at the same time the closeness of God.¹⁷

14J. Popovitch, *Philosophie Orthodoxe De La Verite, Dogmatique De L'église Orthodoxe* (Editions L'age D'homme, 1993) and J. Popovitch, *L'homme et le Dieu-Homme* (Editions L'age D'homme, 1991).

15K. Ware, 'Experientia lui Dumnezeu in "Teologia Dogmatica" a parintelui Dumitru Staniloae'. In In Ica, I. jr. (ed.) *Persoana si Comuniune. Prinos de cinstire preotului profesor academician Dumitru Staniloae 1903-1993* (Sibiu: Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxa, 1993), p. 119.

16K. Ware, *Experientia lui Dumnezeu...*, p. 113.

Only a few years after publishing his dogmatic synthesis, Staniloae published *Orthodox Spirituality* (1981) with the alternative title *The Ascetic and Mystic of the Orthodox Church*. If his dogmatic compendium was based on the theologian Fathers, in this later work Staniloae gave a spiritual synthesis of the Desert Fathers. Their understanding of the spiritual life lies in the background of Orthodox understanding of living in the Church. There are a few patristic premises on which Staniloae builds his spiritual theology. The fallen state of humanity can be surpassed only through Jesus Christ whose works of redeeming the assumed humanity not only justified us in front of God, but effectively the human nature was sanctified in him. The spiritual life according to the Eastern Fathers is to assume that deification already worked in Christ and to reach the likeness with God. This likeness is not an aesthetical/exterior norm that we must attend, but the likeness is participative.

There are three main stages of the spiritual life: purification, illumination and deification (Gr. Katharsis, Fotismos, Theosis). The first step is to cleanse ourselves of the passions to which we are subject. There is a difference between sins (Gr. amartia) and passions (Gr. pathe), the later being frequent, repetitive and leading to addiction. There is a very complex methodology of fighting with the passions. They can be uprooted especially by the work of virtues. According to St. Maximus the Confessor, the essence of virtues is Christ, and through the practice of virtues Christians unite with Christ. The three steps are not to be thought of as strictly sequential. There is no such time in a person's life when it can be said that he/she is sinless. But with the struggle to fight against passions, always helped by Christ through prayer and Eucharist, the Christian starts to uncover the mysteries of creation and to see who is behind all things. The illumination is a process in which one discovers the universal presence of the divine logoi. Creation becomes thus transparent, leading the soul towards the true contemplation. Theosis is the ultimate gift of God because in the uncreated light of the Trinity the soul experiences God's sanctifying presence. In that moment the soul foretastes the Kingdom to come.

The aim of Orthodox Spirituality is deification.¹⁸ This might seem to be an individual and isolated process, but is quite the opposite. Staniloae develops the connection between the social life and the involvement of the spiritualised Christians.¹⁹ Seeing that the Trinity is the ground of Christian spirituality, deification can be realised only in communion and as communion between the human person, the divine Persons and

17K. Ware, *Experientia lui Dumnezeu...*, p. 114.

18D. Staniloae, *Ascetica si Mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe* (Bucuresti: Editura Institutului Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane, 2002), p. 5; also on the patristic teaching on deification see

N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

19D. Staniloae, *Ascetica si Mistica...*, p. 15 et passim.

the fellow human persons. Only in this milieu of love, Christ's sanctified humanity is shared by all.

The book that completes Staniloae's triptych view of theology was published in 1986. If in the Dogmatic he developed the basis for the possibility of real communion with God, he completes in Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy the picture created in The Ascetic and Mystic of the Orthodox Church which risked being an individualistic approach to Christian life. Apart from the personal struggle against passions, the Christian is called to communion with the neighbour. Aside to the general form of social interaction, the space of Liturgy is the most sublime sort of socializing.

Staniloae attempts to recover the original sense of Eucharist and Liturgy.²⁰ One of the main aspects of Eucharist is that it configures the community as a whole. Unfortunately, in Christians' perception, the Eucharist ended up, in both Western and Eastern Churches, being a personal affair and belonging mainly to the private sphere, whereas in the early Church it was a communitarian event. Partaking of the same chalice and bread made the believer a definite part of the community. Early practice of the Eastern Church imposed the confession in front of the community for the ones that abstained from Eucharist. The Apostolic Constitutions present the rite of the confession in terms of readmission to Eucharist and thus to the Church. Taking communion involved the whole community of fellow Christians. Staniloae's merit is in closely connecting the sacramental/liturgical communion with the spirituality.²¹

Unfortunately, it has become common practice among Orthodox Christians to participate to the Divine Liturgy and not take communion. About this aspect Staniloae affirms that the Liturgy being the place of meeting with Christ, there are several levels on which this communion can be realised. Apart from the sublime union in Eucharist, the Liturgy is also the Liturgy of the Word, a place of continuous self revelation of Christ. The dialogical nature of the Word generates and asks for an answer of praise, laud and prayer.²²

This liturgical crowning of the spiritual life represents an important particularity of Staniloae's ecclesiology. Faith, asceticism and liturgy are the three components of his vision on Ecclesia.

What it is interesting to note is the place of Ecclesiology in the structure of his Dogmatic Theology. In the second volume, which is dedicated to Christology, the chapter about the Church is named The salvation work of Christ in development. The

20I. Ica sn, 'Modurile prezentei personale a lui Iisus Hristos si ale comuniunii cu El in Sf. Liturghie si in Spiritualitatea Ortodoxa'. In Ică, I. jr. (ed.) *Persoană si comuniune: Prinos de cinstitie Părintelui Profesor Academician Dumitru Stăniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani* (Sibiu, 1993), p. 336.

21I. Ica sn, *Modurile prezentei personale...*, p. 337.

22I. Ica sn, *Modurile prezentei personale...*, p. 341.

person of Christ is central to the understanding of how the Church works and should be interpreted.

“The salvation is realised, says Staniloae, only through Christ’s dwelling in us with the body he bore, resurrected, ascended and entirely spiritualised or filled with the Holy Spirit and became through this fully transparent. This dwelling produces the Church.”²³ The Spirit makes Christ present in the believers and this presence forms the Church, his body. At the same time the Pentecost marks the beginning of a new state. It is the revelation of the Holy Spirit’s hypostasis. The Spirit’s hypostatic descent over the newly formed Church shows Christ’s will to extend his godly power and the holiness of his human nature upon all creation.²⁴ He makes an interesting remark, probably aimed at Catholics, when he describes the flaming descent. The fact that all the apostles receive the Spirit, and not only one or a few, shows the fact that the Spirit is present only in the communion of the Church²⁵, above all pretensions of primate or earthly powers.

So deep is the union between the Church and Christ, that the gathering of the believers who form the Church is an extension of the assumed body and humanity of Christ, both because of shared human nature and for his dwelling in us through Eucharist. In the same time the human nature which was sanctified through the ultimate self sacrifice of Christ is offered continuously as thanksgiving to the Father. This sacrificial transcendent state of nature is shared by the Church. We are called to share this sacrifice with Christ. Fighting against sin and all that separates us from God, strengthened by the power of Christ, we offer ourselves and our life together with Him to the Father in the light and sanctity of the Holy Spirit. Staniloae’s thought on the Church has a deep Trinitarian imprint.

The ministry of Christ reflects upon the Church, and the Church’s essential ministry in the world is to serve as Christ would have done. Although Staniloae writes about the three ministries of Christ he does not recognize that this structure is of Protestant origin. He affirms that you can find the teaching in the Fathers’ writings but does not give specific references.

Christ’s priesthood is shared by all members. But nevertheless there is also a special type of priesthood, the sacramental priesthood. The general priesthood is manifested in personal life. As we are all the body of Christ, in all we do, we serve as Christ including in his priestly function.²⁶ Another mode of manifesting the universal

23D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa* vol. II (Bucuresti: Editura Institutului Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane, 2003), p.201.

24D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 211.

25 D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 213.

26D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 243.

priesthood is through the sacramental one. Apart from this observation he does not develop the relation between the two. The doctrine about sacramental priesthood holds, in general lines, the structure of older Dogmatics. In Staniloae, sacramental ministry maintains the unity of the Church. Here he stands along St. Ignatius' view on the Church. As the priest holds the liturgical unity of one community, they are one in their bishop. And the communion of bishops without any primacy pretensions is the warrant of the Church's unity.²⁷ When, later in the text, he speaks about the four characteristics of the Church, he places Christ as the source of unity, present equally in all his body - the Church. "The Church is held as one through continuous communion of Christ, but as Christ is in the Church through perpetual communion and the descent of the Spirit since the Apostles, He comes on the one hand from heaven, and on the other hand he is in the church."²⁸ Therefore Staniloae speaks of the double source of unity (the bishop/synodality and the Eucharist) like Zizioulas, but compared to the latter, he integrates monastic spirituality and the doctrine of deification.

To the common life in Christ, he adds as aspects of unity, the sharing of the same confession of faith - expression of living in Christ.²⁹ One cannot say that we have the same experience of Christ if we have different confessions of faith in him.

The source of the Church's holiness is Christ through his sanctified body. Pentecost is the starting point and the search for holiness keeps an eschatological tension within the Church.³⁰ Staniloae interprets the universality of the church in the Slavic optics of sobor, and sees it as the unity of the persons in complementary variety³¹, as communion and plenitude in the Holy Spirit³², rejecting any Universalist claims over the Church.

Apostolicity is as well an aspect of the Church's source of unity in Christ. The apostles were the first to see and believe in the divinity and resurrection of the Lord.³³ That faith is the foundation of the Church. The apostles' testimonies are a source of direct knowledge of Christ and they were the first receivers of the Holy Spirit, thus the first members and founders of the Church.

27D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, pp. 258-59.

28D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 267.

29D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 271.

30D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 285.

31D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 292.

32D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 295.

33D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 304.

The brief account of Staniloae's exposition on the Church shows that in general lines he does not differ from previous Romanian Orthodox Ecclesiology. The place where he is indeed original is when he describes the way believers personally assume Christ's works of redemption. The optics of his theology on this point are of patristic origin. This segment of the salvation's history is under the guidance of the hypostatic presence of the Holy Spirit and the salvation is dealt in terms of co-working with the Spirit (Gr. *synergeia*). Staniloae develops the pneumatological / ecclesial aspect of theosis: deification through grace.³⁴ Grace is according to palamite theology the divine, uncreated energy of the Holy Trinity. The theology of *Theia energeia* was explicitly formulated in the fourteenth century in Byzantium by St. Gregory Palamas and the so called "hesychast" monks. They were named thus because *hesychia* means quietness, the quietness they seek in order to pray. St. Gregory did not invent the theology of grace, but this doctrine has deep eastern patristic roots.³⁵

The Eastern doctrine of uncreated energy might sound impersonal. It is not like that because grace is given to the believer personally and in a personal manner. "The Greek term *energeia* is translated in Romanian through the word work. This shows that in grace as a work the divine subject is present himself".³⁶ The grace is the radiation of the personal energy of Christ in those who open in faith towards him. The grace cannot be won or taken as an any time available impersonal energy. But God's grace is the environment of dialogue in love and freedom. It cannot be determined or gained in a mechanical / causal way.

Theosis/Deification has in Staniloae's theology also an ecclesiological aspect: Theosis is the personal communion with God in Jesus Christ filled by the grace of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ The place of this communion with God through grace is the Church. That is why he always implies communitarian categories. The communitarian aspect is based on the trinitarian model because the Holy Trinity is the base as well as the model of the Church.³⁸

Even when he speaks about the Trinity, he connects it with the theme of deification because the theology of the uncreated energy is a Trinitarian dogma. In placing deification in the Church, Staniloae denied the individualistic views on hesychasm. And this is seen in the old eremitical tradition of always returning to the

34E. Bartos, *Conceptul de indumnezeire in teologia lui Dumitru Staniloae* (Oradea: Editura Institutului Biblic Emanuel, 1999), p. 395.

35N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

36D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 312.

37E. Bartos, *Conceptul de indumnezeire...*, p.355.

38E. Bartos, *Conceptul de indumnezeire...*, p. 357.

community for communion in Sundays and Feasts. The authenticity of Staniloae's theology on hesychasm, deification, Fathers of the desert comes from a deep understanding of their writings which he eventually translated into Romanian. On the foundation of the Philocalical writings and of the theological developments of later byzantine hesychasts, Staniloae was able to build a theological description of Orthodox Spirituality, of the Mystical and Ascetical practice of Eastern Christendom. But he did not just present this monastic spirituality as a norm for the entire Church. Rather he placed their spiritual aim as a desirable movement for all Christians. What might seem a strict and unsuitable view for the laypeople's power of dedication and expectations is actually confined to a theology of liberty of forms. Through this holistic approach, Staniloae converged towards a unitary and integral ecclesiology.

The deification theme is deeply connected with the teaching on Trinity, and the Church is the common life of the Trinity extended to the Church.³⁹ Through this he creates a personal / communitarian framework of deification.⁴⁰ Theosis is not a individualistic approach of the spiritual life. God is communion, he created us as dialogue partners for him and between us, and this dialogic component of our being, intended for us from the very moment of creation, is constitutive to our spiritual growth. At the same time, grace is not invasive. Because we are partners of dialogue with God and not slaves, we also have liberty. Vladimir Lossky, a Russian Orthodox theologian, said that by creating an equal subject as a genuine dialogue partner, God had to make him free. Through this he assumed his greatest risk, that the free subject he created might turn his back on him.⁴¹

Staniloae also laid a great emphasis on personal freedom. God's grace is not irresistible.⁴² The Church as the place of dialogue between God and his people is an environment of freedom. But freedom is not a caprice or opening towards sin. Sin is slavery, egocentrism opposed to the community that forms the Church. True liberty is given by virtue and grace. True freedom is freewill accepted slavery towards good, and at the same time the unselfish opening towards the community.⁴³ There is an interesting dynamic of the freedom involved in his view of Ekklesia.

"True freedom is not an appanage of the singularised individual, nor of the one closed in immanence, but of the one who is in a loving relation with God through the

39D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 275.

40E. Bartos, *Conceptul de indumnezeire...*, p. 397.

41VI. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974.)

42D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 323.

43D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 326.

Spirit, in a relation in which, on the one hand he receives God's help, and on the other he makes an effort himself to stabilise and grow [in that relation]"⁴⁴

Due to the consequences of the asserted freedom of grace, the Spirit is not necessarily confined in the Church to the Sacraments. They are of course important as aspects of community which objectify the Church in its act of prayer. But grace is also a gift and participation to God's grace is according to the personal opening and disposition of each individual.

Dumitru Staniloae builds his theological thought on the dynamic tension between essence and presence in God.⁴⁵

The key to understanding this stands on the one hand in his understanding of grace and on the other in the profound compatibility between the creation and God in the light of St Maximus' theology of the divine *logoi*. These reasons of creation open the entire created world to God in a very generous vision. The Church is the Place where not only humans are sanctified and share Christ's deified humanity, but nature as a whole partakes of the ecclesiastical divine life.⁴⁶

The Sacraments, involving sometimes the usage of natural products, have this creational component⁴⁷ which in Staniloae's thought is an argument for nature's sharing of the uncreated sanctifying divine energy.

In the same time, deification as it is understood by the Eastern Fathers, has its own place in the Church. It is far from being an individualist approach to personal sanctity. In Staniloae's view the place of deification is inside the Church even though he does not exclude monasticism or eremitism. But both religious and hermits have to be part of a community. Spirituality is a struggle for communion.⁴⁸ And the Church is communion in both sacramental and social sense.

What is original in Staniloae is the integration into an ecclesiological system of a venerable monastic tradition. It can be said that it is not legitimate to impose a monastic vision on lay people who have different attitude and spiritual exigencies. And the critique is fair enough. But in the same time there has never existed a lay

44D. Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica...*, vol. II, p. 329.

45I. Bria, 'The Creative Vision of D. Staniloae. An introduction to his Theological Thought'. In Ică, I. jr. (ed.) *Persoană si comuniune: Prinos de cinstire Părintelui Profesor Academician Dumitru Săniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani* (Sibiu, 1993), p. 76.

46Henkel, J. *Indumnezeire si etica a iubirii in opera parintelui Dumitru Staniloae* (Sibiu: Deisis, 2003), p. 90 et passim.

47E. Bartos, *Conceptul de indumnezeire...*, p. 424.

48M.-A. Costa de Beauregard, and D. Staniloae, *Mica dogmatica vorbita, dialoguri la Cernica* (Sibiu: Deisis, 2000²).

people's spirituality in the Eastern Church. The aim was always the same: Theosis / Deification. The path was different according to each person's vocation.

Staniloae tries to formulate a holistic image of Orthodox spirituality with all the Christological / Pneumatological / Ecclesiological implications.⁴⁹

His vision has also pastoral implications. Jürgen Henkel observed how the mystic and the neighbour are connected. In Staniloae the Mystic is not separated from existence's sociality⁵⁰, but is a ground for diakonia.

The first step of the spiritual progress is the cleansing of passions which opens the person towards the neighbour and the society as a whole. When one renounces egocentrism, the relations with other persons change and become fruitful. Not only is the relation between persons improved, but also the attitude towards nature as the creation of God. If nature is transparent and testifies about its Creator one cannot exploit it till destruction. Staniloae, based on the Creation theology of the Fathers sets the base for an engaged eco-theology. Through the practice of virtues inside the community of the Church, Christ takes shape in each believer who becomes in its turn transparent to Christ. This has an important implication because it implies sharing Christ's diakonia. The communion is complete only when it transcends the individual and the individual is realised in communion. In this context, sharing Christ's diakonia can change completely the dynamics and motivational approach of pastoral care or duties.

Through unitary vision of his theological triptych: dogma, spirituality and liturgy, Dumitru Staniloae braided in a unique manner the ecclesial with the mystical, sacramental with experimental, communitarian with individual, the liturgical Church with the Church from within.

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⁴⁹D. Staniloae, *Ascetica si Mistica...*, p. 50.

⁵⁰Henkel, J. *Indumnezeire si etica a iubirii...*, p. 34.

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