

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
62 (1), pp. 108-120, 2015

Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the Promoter of Neo-Patristic Thought in Romanian Theology

Daniel Lemeni

Daniel Lemeni

West University of Timișoara
E-mail: daniel.lemeni@e-uvv.ro

Abstract

The paper will outline the Neo-Patristic contribution of Father Stăniloae in the Romanian theology. We believe that the Father Stăniloae has offered, originally, a model of Neo-Patristic synthesis. Thus, the Romanian theologian places himself within Orthodox theology – with Russians like G. Florovsky and V. Lossky, with Greeks like John Romanides, and J. Zizioulas, Ch. Yannaras, with Father I. Popovici – as a representative of the Neo-Patristic current. In this sense, Stăniloae's monumental *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* is perhaps the first attempt to work out in detail what the Neo-Patristic synthesis might be. All the time Fr. Stăniloae seeks always to indicate the inner coherence of dogmatic truth and the significance of each dogma for the personal life of the Christian. It is the theologian's task to make manifest the link between dogma and personal spirituality, to show how every dogma responds to a deep need and longing in the human heart, and how it has practical consequences for every human person.

Keywords

Neo-Patristic Synthesis, theology, spirituality, Fr. D. Stăniloae, living experience.

1. The “Neo-Patristic” program initiated by G. Florovsky within the Congress of Theology (Athens, 1936)

A touchstone in the development of Neo-Patristic thought was the first International Congress of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Athens (1936)¹. Whithin this Congress, G. Florovsky² will hold two exceptional communications: “Western Influences in Russian Theology” and “Patristic and Modern Theology”. In the two statements, he outlines the central themes of *Ways of Russian Theology*³ (1937). In brief, it is two essential elements of Neo-Patristic program⁴:

Firstly, the rejection of heterodox influences exerted on Eastern theology in post-Byzantine era. The Neo-Patristic synthesis is based on Florovsky’s theology. For Florovsky Russian theology had been “entirely disfigured by western influences” so that a “redirection” of theology was

¹ The Congress Orthodox theologians, held in Athens at the end of the year 1936, was a representative gathering: eight theological faculties, in six different countries, were represented. Two major problems were conspicuous on the agenda: first, the “External influences on Orthodox Theology since the Fall of Constantinople”; secondly, the Authority of the Fathers. The fact of Western accretions has been frankly acknowledged and thoroughly analyzed. On the other hand, the authority of the Fathers has been re-emphasized and a “return to the Fathers” advocated and approved. Indeed, it must be a *creative return*. An element of self-criticism must be therein implied. This brings us to the concept of a *Neo-Patristic synthesis*, as the task and aim of Orthodox theology today (see, Brandon Gallaher, “Waiting for the Barbarians: Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky”, in *Modern Theology* 27:4 October 2011, pp. 559-691).

² Georges V. Florovsky has been called “the most profound Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century” (A. Blane, *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993 p. 9). This book is devoted to the life and thought of Georges Florovsky.

³ In this massive work, he questioned the Western influences of scholasticism, pietism, and idealism on Russian theology and called for its re-evaluation in the light of patristic writings. Shortly, *Ways of Russian Theology* (1937): calls for Russian theology to return to the theology of the Fathers; directed against the thinkers of the Russian Religious; Russian theology characterized by Pseudomorphosis, and a “Babylonian Captivity”; new way: Neo-Patristic synthesis, “Christian Hellenism”.

⁴ For a more extensive on this program, see Sergey S. Horuzhy, *Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Russian Philosophy*, in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 3-4, 2000, pp.309-328.

required in the form of a “radical return to the ignored and forgotten sources of Patristic Orthodoxy”⁵.

This was an acute Romanization of Orthodoxy, a Latin *pseudomorphosis* of Orthodoxy. A Latin and Latinizing school system in built on a deserted spot; not only ritual and language, but also theology, worldview and religious psychology become Latinized. Orthodoxy itself, however, remained unchanged, as the foreign accretion did not destroy the “authenticity of faith”. What is required is a “return to the historical sources of eastern Orthodoxy” away from “the path of scholasticism”, of “alien sources”.

Secondly, the vital imperative of returning to patristic sources (this is the fundamental premise of the contemporary revival of Orthodox theology). Florovsky pointed out that “Orthodoxy theology must oppose other confessions not so much with criticism as with the witness, the truth of Orthodoxy”⁶. Florovsky’s Neo-Patristic synthesis implies that the advancement of thought demands its return and penetration into its origins, and suggests that the only fruitful strategy for creative thought retains a living connection with these origins, using them as a signpost and a measuring stick. For Florovsky, the Origin resides in Greek patristic, in “Christian Hellenism”, “baptized” or “transfigured” Hellenism.

However, such a return to the origins of Orthodoxy must be both a *critical* and “*spiritual return to patristic sources and foundations*”⁷.

Thus, at the Athens Congress, G. Florovsky was given in English (“Patristic and Modern Theology”) and it calls modern Orthodox theologians to return to their own Eastern tradition of the Fathers and the liturgy.

This is a return not to the dead letter of their texts but a return which is a rekindling of the “creative fire of the Fathers, to restore in ourselves the patristic spirit” resulting in a “continuity of lives and minds”⁸.

The Fathers’ works are not museum exhibits, nor should the “patristic faith” be understood as only a heritage of the past, as popular opinion has it. This viewpoint must be rejected. In the opinion of Fr. Georges Florovsky “The church is still as fully authoritative as she has been in the ages past, since the Spirit of Truth quickness her now no less effectively than in the ancient times”⁹.

⁵ G. Florovsky, “Western Influences in Russian Theology”, 1939, CW IV, pp. 157-182.

⁶ G.V. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, 1983, p. 513.

⁷ “Western Influences in Russian Theology”, pp. 174, 179 and 181.

⁸ “Patristics and Modern Theology”, 1939, *Diakonia*, vol. 4 no 3 (1969), pp. 227-232.

⁹ Cf. G. Florovsky, *St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers*, in *The Collected Works*, vol. I, Vaduz 1987, pp. 105-120.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the Promoter of Neo-Patristic Thought...

Therefore, it is not possible to limit the “patristic age” to a particular era in history. A well-known contemporary theologian, Bishop Kallistos Ware of Diokleia states, “An Orthodox must not simply know and quote the Fathers, he must enter into the spirit of the Fathers and acquire a patristic mind”. He must treat the Fathers not merely as relics from the past, but as living witness and contemporaries where does this quotation begin?

Bishop Kallistos Ware does not consider the patristic age to have ended in the 5th or 8th centuries. The patristic era of the Church continues to this day.

Thus, commitment to the Tradition not only involves a study of patristic writings and an attempt to bring the legacy of the Fathers to life, but also implies the belief that our era is no less “patristic” than any other. The “golden age” inaugurated by Christ, the apostles and the early Fathers have continued in the works of the Church Fathers of our day to last as long as the Church of Christ stands on this earth and the Holy Spirit animates it.

Especially, in “Patristic and Modern Theology”, Florovsky presents an extensive program of patristic assumption:

“The call to return to Fathers can easily be misinterpreted. It does not mean a return to the old patristic documents. To follow footsteps of Fathers does not mean «*jurare in verba magistris*». What is sought and required by this call is not all a blind and slavish imitation or simply repetitions, but rather a development in the patristic doctrine, homogeneous and congenial. We must rekindle the fire again creator of the Fathers, and we restore in us the spirit of patristic. Our religion is essentially Greek”¹⁰.

In light of these considerations we can be drawn two key concepts of neo-patristic theology:

The congenial spirit – it defines the achievement merger of contemporary theology with the patristic spirit of ancient and undivided Church, namely:

Historically, the need updating of patristic spirit (The Tradition of the Apostles not is only a transmission of texts and liturgical practices, but a living and dynamic reality which is “the very presence of the Holy Spirit” in the Orthodox Church. The successors of the Apostles, that is the Holy Fathers have developed the Apostolic kerygma. Thus, the patristic inspira-

¹⁰ Apud Ioan I. Ică jr, *Patristica și teologia modernă: semnificația și actualitatea unui program teologic* (G. Florovsky), in Mitropolia Ardealului, 1982.

tion not over and it will never end, because the Holy Spirit will be active continuously in the Church)

The existential aspect: the existential character of patristic spirit derives from the ontological reality of the main subjects of theology (God, Incarnation, Resurrection, Church), which presents all as living and inexhaustible mystery of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the congeniality is always a participation in the Holy Spirit, and thus in the mystery of ecclesial presence' Holy Spirit. This widening allows the deepening of spiritual meanings of the revealed mystery.

In short, the congeniality not be exhausted in a simple experimental rediscovery of theological texts (absolutely necessary, but insufficient for effective and creative renewal of theology), which could fall under the charge of conservatorism and outdated *passeisme*¹¹.

Moreover, G. Florovsky believes that the achievement of congeniality with patristic spirit depends on the conscious assimilation of discursive and symbolic structures that crystallized the formulation of dogma.

According to Florovsky,

“the ancient culture proved sufficiently resilient to accept an inner transfiguration. The christians have proved that it was possible to redirect the cultural process, to restructure the cultural fabric of a new spirit. The same process described in various faces as the «Hellenization of Christianity» can be designed more like a «Christianization of Hellenism»¹².

In other words, within the Church, the Hellenism received an eternal character, he incorporated into his body.

2. Fr. D. Stăniloae and the Neo-Patristic thought

2.1. Fr. D. Stăniloae or about vocation of theology

The Father D. Stăniloae is the most important figure in the Romanian Orthodox Church, and as noted Bishop Kallistos Ware, is the greatest Orthodox dogmatic theologian of modern times: “Dumitru Stăniloae is wide-

¹¹ cf. A. Louth, Introduction in John Behr, *Drumul către Niceea* (The Way of Niceaea), vol. I, trad. rom. by Mihai Neamțu, Ed. Sophia, București, 2004.

¹² George Florovsky, *Faith and Culture*, St. Vladimir's Quarterly, 4, 1-2 (1955-1956), p. 40.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the Promoter of Neo-Patristic Thought...

ly regarded as the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20 th century”¹³. Through his work, D. Stăniloae outlines a spiritual and theological program which may be circumscribed in a highly phrase, namely neo-patristic¹⁴. Stăniloae’s work is the result of a programmatic approach, and this approach may be circumscribed in a highly used phrase, namely “neo-patristic”¹⁵.

In this context the question is: how neo-patristic theology was born?

In the nineteenth century there were two basic directions on the theology of Romanian, Russia, Greece and so on:

1. The first direction is the so-called “school of theology” which was, essentially, an academic theology (Makari Bulgakov in Russia, Hristos Andrutsos and Panayotis Trembelas in Greece);

2. The second direction, developed mainly in Russia, is the so-called religious philosophy. We are dealing here with a theology made by laity. These thinkers (Khomiakov, Soloviev, Bulkagov, Florenski and so on) have developed a system theological “free”, where “free” means here a speculative and philosophical thinking, a thinking based often an intellectual innovation. These thinkers saw in Orthodoxy a response to the issues of contemporary philosophy.

Therefore, both directions were abstract and speculativa theologians, namely detached from the Orthodox ecclesial, liturgical experience and from any spirituality.

In response to the direction of scholastic and philosophical speculation appeared neo-patristic direction, which aims to return to the text and the mysteries of the Holy Fathers. According to Neo-Patristic synthesis, the

¹³ In the Foreword of Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, v.1, Brookline MA, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998 p. ix.

¹⁴ The Neo-Patristic movement is the most lively and original movement from the Modern Orthodox theology. The term “Neo-Patristic” was proposed at the First International Congress of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology by G. Florovsky. Two major problems were conspicuous on the agenda of this Congress: first, the “External influences on Orthodox Theology since the Fall of Constantinople”; secondly, the Authority of the Fathers. The fact of Western accretions has been frankly acknowledged and thoroughly analyzed. On the other hand, the authority of the Fathers has been re-emphasized and a “return to the Fathers” advocated and approved. Indeed, it must be a *creative return*. An element of self-criticism must be therein implied. This brings us to the concept of a *Neopatristic synthesis*, as the task and aim of Orthodox theology today.

¹⁵ See, Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.

Fathers of Church are authentic sources of Orthodox theology. In this case, the Neo-Patristic theology will be marked, as remarked Ch. K. Felmy, by the experience of the Liturgy and the saints¹⁶. And, indeed, his real sources are Orthodox. This means, predominantly the Fathers, his engagement with whom we have already discussed. But it also includes the lived liturgical experience of the Orthodox Church. In this context, we mention that Fr. Dumitru's *Dogmatics* is the fruit of his lifelong engagement with the Greek Fathers.

For A. Louth, to return to the Greek Fathers in such a spirit is more than an academic "return to the sources": "it is the recovery of an understanding of theology that seeks to set men and women on the road to an openness to God and experience of his healing grace: it is a theology that is both spiritual and pastoral"¹⁷.

In this sense, the father Ioan Ica jr highlights that the Romanian theology has advanced most in the way of creating and developing a Neo-Patristic theology¹⁸.

While translating the *Dogmatics* of the Greek theologian H. Androustos, Stăniloae realized that work had a pronounced scholastic approach to theology. This, along with the rediscovery of the Fathers of the Church, led Stăniloae to be among the first to break with the scholastic approach that dominated Christian theology during the first half of the twentieth century. As remarked L. Turcescu,

"he increasingly came to view theology as a personal experience, a living encounter with a living God, rather than as an abstract system, or a philosophical theory. His all theology is marked by this new spirit, and in this context, father D. Stăniloae was the first Romanian theologian characterized by the Neo-patristic spirit"¹⁹.

¹⁶ According to Ch.K. Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței ecleziiale. Înnoirea teologiei ortodoxe contemporane*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1999.

¹⁷ Andrew Louth, "The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae", in L. Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae. Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, The Center for Romanian Studies, Iași-Oxford-Palm Beach-Portland, 2002, p. 56.

¹⁸ Cf. Ioan I. Ică jr, "Iustin Popovici: lupta cu Protagoras sau criteriologia filozofiei ortodoxe a Adevărului", în *Arh. Iustin Popovici, Omul și Dumnezeu-Om*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 1997

¹⁹ L. Turcescu, Introduction, in *Dumitru Stăniloae. Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, The Center for Romanian Studies, Iași-Oxford-Palm Beach-Portland, 2002, p. 7.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the Promoter of Neo-Patristic Thought...

According to the theological thought of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, he explores inductively all the basic issues of Orthodox doctrine in a personal and invigorating spirit. This spirit is given by the rediscovery of the patristic theology for that the theology is not intellectual exercise, whether practised on matters philosophical or historical: it is an experience, realized in prayer. And the experience is transforming, transfiguring: its fruits are the virtues of faith, humility, serenity, but what we become in our transfigured state is God himself. Fr. Dumitru has said: “Orthodoxy, through the joy of living in God is doxological and not theoretical. It does not indulge in speculations about God but it expresses the joy of living in God, and of participating in existence with the whole of creation”²⁰.

In this sense, the Romanian theologian places himself within Orthodox theology – with Russians like G. Florovsky and V. Lossky, with Serbian like Justin Popovici, and with Greeks like J. Romanides, Zizioulas and Ch. Yannaras – as a representative of the Neo-Patristic synthesis:

“Fr. Dumitru takes a position within Orthodox theology that places him with Russians like G. Florovsky and V. Lossky, and with Greeks like J. Romanides and Ch. Yannaras, as a representative of what Florovsky called the Neo-Patristic Synthesis. If that is so, then his Orthodox Dogmatic Theology is the first attempt to work out in detail what this synthesis might be”²¹.

And, indeed, from this point of view, Stăniloae was himself involved in constructive conversations with the Orthodox theologians of his day (H. Androustos, P. Nellas, P. Evdokimov, J. Zizioulas, J. Meyendorff, O. Clément, and others), but he also knew how to recognize things of value in the thinking of theologians from other Christian confessions (K. Rahner, J. Daniélou, K. Barth, H. U. von Balthasar, O. Casel, J. Ratzinger, H. de Lubac, et al.).

In this context, L. Turcescu had remarked that Stăniloae’s *Dogmatics* is perhaps the first attempt to work out in detail what the Neo-Patristic synthesis might be.

For example, among the sources who play a role of the first order in Stăniloae’s theology, we find the works of Maximus the Confessor, Greg-

²⁰ Cf. “Some Characteristics of Orthodoxy”, in *Sobornost* 5:9, 1969, p. 628, quoted by Bishop Kallistos Ware, p. xxii.

²¹ A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae”, in L. Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae. Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, The Center for Romanian Studies, Iași-Oxford-Palm Beach-Portland, 2002, p. 69.

ory Palamas, Dionysius the Areopagite, Cyril of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, and others.

Also, the return to the Greek Fathers in the spirit of the *Philokalia*²² is the retrieval and utilization of a theological understanding that seeks to put human beings on the path of openness to God. Each element of his theology is significant for Fr. Dumitru's conception of the renewal of Orthodox theology in the modern world. And, as remarked A. Louth, "the *Philokalia* itself suggests a particular approach to theology"²³. If one looks at the Greek Fathers who are central to Fr. Dumitru – Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyrill, Denys, Maximos, and Gregory Palamas – a familiar pattern emerges: for these are the Fathers central to the "Neo-Patristic" synthesis that was so dear to Fr. G. Florovsky, but was only sketched out in his mainly occasional writings, the same Fathers to whom V. Lossky had constant recourse, notably in his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*²⁴. All his life, Florovsky sought to implement a remarkable vision – a creative recovery of the patristic mind, so that – the fathers are to be treated not as voices from the distant past but as contemporary witnesses; they are to be not only quoted but questioned, for holy tradition represents the critical spirit of the church²⁵.

²² As remarked M. Bielawski, "the names of Stăniloae and *Philokalia* are strongly linked. In other words, a deep and personal link was established between Stăniloae himself and the *Philokalia* – a spirit which expresses itself in his theological work and life. Stăniloae was deeply marked by the *Philokalia*, but by his own spirit he also deeply marked the *Philokalia*. It is this mysterious synergy that enables us to talk about a *Philokalia* of Stăniloae and about his theology being philokalical" (Maciej Bielawski, "D. Stăniloae and his *Philokalia*", in Turcescu, L. (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, Palm Beach: Center for Romanian Studies, 2002, pp. 51-52.

²³ A. Louth, "The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae", in L. Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae. Tradition and Modernity in Theology*, The Center for Romanian Studies, Iași-Oxford-Palm Beach-Portland, 2002, p. 55.

²⁴ In *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991; translated from *Essai sur la Theologie Mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient*, Paris, 1944), Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958) has set out how – "the Eastern (Orthodox) tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church" (p. 8). Lossky believed deeply that theology and mysticism are not – mutually opposed, but rather – support and complete each other! because – one is impossible without the other".

²⁵ Andrew Blane (ed.), *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the Promoter of Neo-Patristic Thought...

So, this retrieval of patristic thought is realized in conversation with contemporary theology as articulated by Orthodox theologians and by theologians of other confessions. The historical evolution of theology entails this dialogue between different eras and different theologians.

In his work, Fr. Stăniloae assumed the major premise of Vladimir Lossky, namely that “the theology is experience, and to know God we must approach Him”. I saw that Neo-Patristic movement emerged as a reaction to the “theology of school”. According to Yannaras, this theology was “strictly separated by the experience and spirituality, liturgical and mystical”²⁶. In other words, the dogma has not the slightest reference to the experience of the saints, and the truth of the dogma is not empirical, but only ideological.

For the Orthodox Christians, the dogma expresses the experience of the Church, and not theological principles, so that the living experience is the only legitimate knowledge of the dogma. Spirituality, profoundly rooted in the dogmatic foundation of which the Church is the guardian, provides the necessary basis for advancing along the path of perfection and of deification. According to Stăniloae, these two main branches of one and the same theology arrive at their fulfillment in the liturgy. Thus, he says, a personal spirituality is a spirituality that remains solely theoretical. Spirituality is essentially communion, so it can be experienced solely in the liturgy. If spirituality concerns the contents of the faith, contents experienced by each of the faithful in a personal way, the liturgy makes the union of all these personal experiences possible through communion. This interpenetration of dogmatics, spirituality, and liturgy satisfies the definition of theology and it makes theology faithful to the Church in its development and immediately available to the faithful.

Thus, the theology should be an expression of faith, love, hope, and of a living relationship between God and man. This ecclesial experience of Neo-patristic school sends to the Church, the sacraments, prayer and asceticism, experience which can be subsumed under the term “ecclesiality” (*cerkovnost*)²⁷.

²⁶ Ch. Yannaras, *I teologia*, apud K.Ch. Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței ecleziale. Înnoirea teologiei ortodoxe contemporane*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1999, pp. 48-49.

²⁷ In this sense, we mention the book of Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2011. In this book, the author shows us just how deeply Trinitarian Stăniloae's ecclesiology is. As Father John Meyendorff explains in his Foreword to *Theology and the Church*, Stăniloae presents in seven

Briefly, as noted Ch. K. Felmy “in the neo-orthodox theology the experience must be understood as ecclesial experience”²⁸.

The concept of experience is the very important in the school of neo-patristic. For example, Stăniloae’s two volumes published in English to date are *The Experience of God (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 1: Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God)* and *The Experience of God (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 2: The World, Creation, and Deification)*. The Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae was a prolific author, who was also highly original²⁹. This originality derives notably from his understanding of theology and above all from his use of patristic sources with a personal commitment to interpreting and enacting them.

Stăniloae’s major preoccupation was to find within the great patristic tradition of Orthodoxy the basis of his own theology and also the possibility of a fresh, modern reinterpretation of the Church’s dogmatic teachings. Stăniloae assimilated and appropriated to himself this patristic mind so as to attempt to make it current and credible to modern people.

The reinterpretation of the patristic mind follows that general conception of theology as well as the interpenetration of the three domains of Christian theology. Stăniloae affirms that we are left to direct our effort in the manner in which the Ancient Fathers understood the teachings of the Church. In this interpretation of dogmas at hand, we have also taken into

essays – a dynamic presentation of the Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as the basis of ecclesiology and anthropology (cf., *Theology and the Church*, Saints Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980, p. 7).

²⁸ K.Ch. Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței ecleziale*, p. 50.

²⁹ Stăniloae’s theology has attracted attention in all the main branches of Christianity. Some Roman Catholics such R. Roberson (*Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Ecclesiology. The Contribution of Dumitru Stăniloae and Younger Colleagues*, Pontificium Institutum Orientale, Rome, 1988) and Maciej Bielawski (*The Philocalical Vision of the World in the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae*, University of Pontifical Angelicum, Roma, 1997) have written doctoral dissertations on his theology, while others (such as Robert Barringer) studied with him and learned Romanian in order to translate some of his works into English. Various Anglican theologians have written books (Ch. Miller, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) or articles (A.M. Allchin) on Stăniloae, while the Lutheran Romanian theologian Hermann Pitters translated his *Dogmatics* into German. In the French-speaking world, Stăniloae has exerted considerable influence on Orthodox theologians such as O. Clement and Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the Promoter of Neo-Patristic Thought...

consideration the spiritual needs of the soul that seeks salvation in our era. We have tried to understand the teaching of the Church in the spirit of the Fathers, but at the same time to understand it just as they would have understood it today. Indeed, they would not have disregarded our time just as they did not disregard theirs.

In this perspective, many themes are re-examined through the prism of a new and modern reinterpretation whilst keeping their basic patristic voice, to such an extent that Andrew Louth affirms that Stăniloae is the first theologian ever to have attempted a dogmatic theology in a Neo-Patristic voice.

Fr. D. Stăniloae highlighted entirely three dimensions of the Orthodox theology, namely:

- The mystical dimension (*Ascetica și Mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe*)
- The dogmatic dimension (*Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*)
- The liturgical dimension (*Spiritualitate și Comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*)

These three dimensions have been addressed from the perspective of the neo-patristic theology. Thus, the whole of Stăniloae's work is a patristico-modern theological synthesis which connects triadology, the theology of the Incarnation, ecclesiology, and anthropology.

His work is a creative Neo-Patristic synthesis, in which the dogmas of faith, liturgical life and mystic experience intertwine and emphasise one another. From the beginning, the contact with the works of Father Stăniloae, in the chronological order of their appearance reveals a language and thought never included in the tiring scholastic stereotypy, in outdated cultural schemes. On the contrary, his thought is vivid, compelling, nourished by the great theological and philosophical creations of the time, especially in the German and French areas of the Western culture.

In short, his theology is the theology of the personal communion. For Stăniloae, theology is not what you study, but what you live and do. As his friend Fr. Donald Allchin remarked "He is a man who restores one's confidence in life"³⁰.

Finally, it must be said that Stăniloae's theology is the best expression of his personality. One cannot detach, in his case, the vision from the style of life. As noted A.M. Allchin, for D. Stăniloae, "theology and prayer

³⁰ In the Foreword of Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, v.1, Brookline MA, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998, p. xv.

have been indissolubly united”, and in this sense, “ the Philokalia on the one side, and the Dogmatic on the other, witness to the breadth of his interests”³¹. His soft and fatherly face emanates a fundamental simplicity and sympathy, a healing calm and serenity which overcome any hardness of heart and aggressive distance.

D. Stăniloae not only genuinely renewed the traditional way of thinking based on the authority of the Church Fathers, but raised several points fundamentally significant for theological discourse of today.

In this perspective the legacy of the his theology is a challenge for our generation, in the Orthodox Church and outside of it.

³¹ Rev. Dr. A.M. Allchin, “Lancelot Andrews: The fathers our contemporaries”, in *Persoană și comuniune. Prinos de cinstire părintelui profesor academician Dumitru Stăniloae*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Ortodoxe Sibiu, 1993, p. 166.