

A Quarter of a Century since Father Dumitru Stăniloae's Departure for Eternity (1993-2018) – Confessor of the Values of Orthodoxy in a Troubled Century

We can find Father Dumitru Stăniloae in the gallery of theologians who manifested themselves in an unmistakable way in the debate of ideas and outlined new perspectives for the Church and theology, dominating almost the whole twentieth century. He recorded his name in the golden book of Orthodox Theology, remaining for a long time a landmark, a leading star and one that continues to inspire and provoke theology in general and the Orthodox one, in particular. The theological teachings and spiritual experience of the Holy Fathers of the Church were a starting point for his theological thinking and a source of renewal of the theology and missionary work of the Church in the contemporary world. For those who know fewer things about Father Staniloae, it is due to present some biographical references, briefly at least.

The Romanian theologian was originally from Vlădenii Braşovului, where he was born in the year 1903. After completing the primary school, young Dumitru attended the High School “Andrei Şaguna” in Braşov, and then he enrolled at the Faculty of Theology from the University of Chernivtsi, where he became “Doctor in Theology” in the year 1928. With the generous support of the worthy Metropolitan Dr. Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania, he attended specialization studies in several university centres: Athens, Munich, Berlin, Belgrade, and Paris. The metropolitan sensed in him the becoming a complex personality, with great potential for the thinking and theological work, and full of expectations. Indeed, in 1929 he appointed him a professor of theology at the “Andreiana” Theological Academy in Sibiu, until 1946 when he had to leave for Bucharest as a result of the political pressures of the time. He was appointed professor at the Faculty of Theology, respectively the Theological Institute of University

Degree where in the beginning he taught *Ascetics and Mysticism* (1947-1948), and then *Dogmatic Theology* (1948-1973).

After his departure from Sibiu to Bucharest, a period of great trials began for the theologian from Sibiu and his family. There were years when the confrontation between the values of faith and Church and, implicitly, the bearers of these values on one hand, and the ideology of the communist regime which sought for a more stable place in Romania, on the other hand, was increasingly visible, making Father Stăniloae suffer from this confrontation. This explains why this theologian was arrested at the beginning of September 1958 and imprisoned at Jilava and Aiud, from where he was released in 1963. The aggravation of his situation in the mid-1950 was also the result of the participation in the conferences of “Rugul Aprins” group at the Antim Monastery in Bucharest, together with the archimandrites: Benedict Ghiuș and Sofian Boghiu, Professors Atanasie Mironescu and Constantin Joja, poet Sandu Tudor, Andrei Scrima et.al. Through the meetings of its members, the conferences they held and the dialogues between them, this group tried to strengthen itself in a kind of resistance to the atheistic and threatening current that came over the Romanians.

After his release from Aiud prison in 1963, Father Stăniloae continued his teaching at the Department of the Theological Institute in Bucharest, teaching Dogmatic Theology, especially at magisterium courses equivalent to today’s PhD courses. He resumed his research, study, books and articles, which he published in our country and abroad, making the Orthodox theology and spirituality of the Romanian people known with great zeal and determination. He dearly loved Jesus Christ, Orthodoxy, the Church, and the faithful people, whom he confessed with much sacrifice in all the circumstances. To them he dedicated his whole being to the end of his life (1993).

If we were to briefly sketch his laborious theological work, that is, his writings, we could retain the following directions:

1. In the centre of his theological conception, Father Stăniloae put Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, Whom all were created through, and all were saved and perfected by. Therefore it was not by accident that he dedicated his first reference work of great value to Jesus Christ: *Jesus Christ or Man’s Restoration* (Sibiu 1943, re-edited in 1993). The Person of Christ represented for Father Stăniloae the key to understanding the

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meaning of the whole world, but especially the meaning of human life, which is enlightened in and by Jesus Christ, the One Who has become the guarantee of the eternity of the human person in communion with God the Eternal and the Lover of human kind.

2. Throughout his life he felt the need to resort to the creative and always fresh thinking of the Holy Fathers of the Church that guided and inspired him. On the basis of this approach, Father Stăniloae made a neo-patristic theological synthesis of great spiritual breath, which has its culminating expression in the elaboration of his monumental work *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, 3 volumes*, published in Bucharest 1978. As he confessed in its foreword, in this work he endeavoured to understand the Church's teaching of faith, as the Holy Fathers understood it, or rather, as they would have understood if they had lived in our times.

3. Another of his works dedicated to the Holy Fathers is the publication of the 12 volumes of *Philokalia* that presents how man can be cleansed and perfected. This monumental work, which appeared in Sibiu starting 1946 and then continued in Bucharest until the appearance of the 12th volume, constituted a mark of existence and resistance in the era of the militant atheism not only for the Church's servants, but also for some common intellectuals and laity, eager for God's knowledge and perfection through Him.

4. In Father Staniloae's vision the world in its quality of creation of God, represents the place where man meets God, perceiving the world as God's gift to men. Understanding the world as a gift, man has to meet through the world with the Giver of this gift, who is God. In this way, the world becomes transparent to God and to the natural purpose of man, which is to perceive its Supreme Reason through the things of the world, Who is the Logos or the Word of God.

5. In this significance of the world, man has a totally exceptional purpose: to consecrate the world as a gift in his capacity of priest of creation, turning this to God, the Creator of all seen and unseen. Full consecration of the world to God takes place during the Divine Liturgy, culminating in the intervention of the priest, when he exclaims: "Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all and for all". Thus, the world becomes a factor of human prosperity in all areas: spiritual, intellectual, cultural, scientific, social etc. The consequences of this vision on the cosmos and man are telling about how man always has to relate to the world he lives in.

Recalling the accomplishment of a quarter century from the passing of the great Romanian theologian to eternity is not only a formal remembrance of the one who was called “probably the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20th century” or “the patriarch of Romanian Orthodox theology”, but also constitutes an opportunity for theology, in general, and for the Orthodoxy, in particular, to extract its directions, meanings and perspectives from the richness, depth and freshness of its theology, which determine an impetus and encouragement for today’s theological research and for the Christian mission not only in Romania but also in the whole European context.

We can easily figure out the potential of the theological thinking and faith-confession that lies in the thinking, writing, and entire work of Father Stăniloae. The contemporary theological and Church projects will be able to find out much substance, new ideas and theological, cultural, and spiritual aspects that can be identified in its thinking. Today’s theologians still have a lot of work to constantly capitalize on his theological heritage.

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