

Rev. Prof. Ph. D. Ștefan Buchiu, *Apophatic Knowledge of Father Stăniloae's Thinking*, Second edition, revised, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, 240 p.

Professor Father Ștefan Buchiu, professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Patriarch Justinian in Bucharest, offers his readers a new edition (the first edition, appeared in 2002), revised and enlarged, regarded as being his valuable contribution dedicated to apophatic dimension of orthodox gnoseology in Prof. Priest Dumitru Stăniloae's reasoning, entitled "Apophatic Knowledge of Father Stăniloae's Thinking". Disciple of Fr. D. Stăniloae, Ș. Buchiu managed to capture in the eight chapters of his work, in a systematic and unified way, the various aspects of the apophatism in Father Stăniloae's work.

Such an approach is justified by the importance of the theme in the work of Father Stăniloae, the originality of approaching the apophatism - pr. Stăniloae applying apophatism to all the dogmas and doctrines of the faith of the Orthodox Church, so that we will meet both a sort of dogmatic, trinitarian, cosmological, anthropological, ecclesiological, eschatological apophatism - and also boarding the apophatism in a uniform manner by applying it to the liturgical and mystical field. Referring to the inseparability and complementarities of dogmatics, with mystics and liturgics, Father Buchiu claims about the theologized method of Fr. Stăniloae that, "only by his will to investigate how apophatism works within cult and spirituality, the author (D. Stăniloae) may fully prove that God's relationship with man and that of man with God require not only to be simply known or defined, but mainly experienced or lived on the basis of transfiguring presence of God in man and cosmos" (p. 14).

Concerning Staniloae's thinking about the ways of God's knowledge, Fr. Buchiu identifies in his work, three types of synthesis: synthesis of positive rational knowledge and apophatism, secondly the synthesis of negative and rational knowledge and apophatism, and thirdly the synthesis of affirmative and negative rational knowledge and apophatism. (p. 23).

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Also Father Buchiu points out the very important aspect of reconsidering the cataphatism in Staniloae's work, opposing the initiatives of some contemporary theologians such as Christos Yannaras who disassociated the great importance of positive theology (p. 17).

Besides the apophatism approached as a method of dogmatic knowledge, in Fr. Staniloae's work one can grasp "a second meaning of apophatism, that of the theological attitude to the truth of faith" (p. 25), as a response to contemporary society exacerbated rationalism: "Apophatic theological attitude is likely to limit the excess of scientific rationalism, in which man and the world are reduced to the status of independent objectivity, with no relationship to the transcendent" (p. 31).

Father Buchiu dedicated a generous expansion to approaching trinitarian apophatism in Fr. Stăniloae's research. Father Buchiu's analysis covers the whole spectrum of trinitarian dogma from the God's being apophatism to the divine persons apophatism and to that of the uncreated divine energies, indicating, on the footsteps of the Church Fathers, "personalist perspective of Eastern tradition in the Trinitarian dogma." Thus, if in the medieval Catholic theology there was at first emphasized the divine unity, divine persons being a bit overshadowed, in Orthodox theology there was indicated the person as "the ultimate source of existence". "Refocusing from nature to the person highlights not only the unique and unrepeatable value of the person, but, paradoxically, that of being, which, at the level of the Holy Trinity is not repeated monotonously in every hypostasis, but it exists itself personally and at the community level, meaning, whole at the same time both in all three hypostases and in each of them." (p. 61).

The apophatic dimension is extended by Father D. Stăniloae both to man and the cosmos, both of them being seen in certain solidarity with the creative act of God, being both mystery and reason. Fr Buchiu will devote two chapters of his research to cosmological and anthropological apophatism. Regarding the apophatic character of the cosmos, it can be reduced, according to Father Buchiu, to the following: a) creation of the world out of the goodness, wisdom and power of God - the Trinity; b) the presence and work of God in the world through the good angels; c) rationality of creation (cosmos and man); d) the presence of God in the world through the uncreated divine energies; capacity of creation to ascent to God spiritually. Anthropological apophatism retains deepening the following: a) the rationality of human persons - witness of the mysterious

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presence of the Logos; b) man - image of the Holy Trinity - by emphasizing the phrase "the image of God" - "kinship and special relationship of man with God"; c) man, paradoxical being intended to deification

Closely with the cosmological and anthropological apophatism can be placed the ecclesiological apophatism, whereas, orthodox theology - Father Buchiu states - always kept emphasizing the mysterious presence, but the real God in the cosmos, in man and in a particularly intense manner in Church. The three items listed above involve also the affirmative rational knowledge, but their full identity, hiding their secret, is revealed by an apophatic approach" (p. 149). Fr. Buchiu analyzes several dogmatic points which "gives the ecclesiological apophatism a basis". A first dogmatic item illustrated by Fr. Buchiu refers to Church - "spiritual reality which unites in itself Created with Uncreated" (p. 150). In the author's opinion, in order to grasp the spiritual reality of Church we need the spiritual knowledge, the power of the Holy Spirit, because it involves lifting or submission of one who knows from reason to faith and practice" (p. 152). As well as the cosmological and anthropological apophatism the author develops the topic of the presence of the Holy Trinity in Church, outlining the manner in which each Person of the Holy Trinity is existing in Church.

The last issue addressed in the ecclesiological apophatism aims "the inauguration of the eternal kingdom in Church", namely "the eschatological aspect of the Church". This should not be understood as a betrayal of the Church social, institutional role but as an act of revealing its true sense, meaning to be "pilgrim to heaven" to be "the anticipated kingdom of God" (p. 169 - 170). This eschatological Church marks the switch to another type of apophatism, the eschatological type. In analyzing some specific topics of eschatological apophatism, Father Buchiu starts by outlining two premises required for a complex understanding of eschatology: a) eschatology specific to Father Stăniloae's theology is not just something pushed into the future, but for believers eternal life has already begun (Karl Christian Felmy opposed futuristic eschatology of dogmatics influenced by Western textbooks to the presentist eschatology Orthodox ecclesial experience); b) eschatological opening of human being when remaining anchored in Christ. Based on these aspects, the author deeply exposes the specific issues of Stăniloae's eschatology; a) The mystery of the spiritual matter, item considered by Father Buchiu "the main novelty in eschatology of Stăniloae's treaty." (p. 175); b) The mystery of the kingdom of God (p.

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180-185); c) The mystery of God's infinite knowledge (p. 185-190). In the last two chapters of his writing, Father Buchiu analyzes and deepens the mystical and liturgical dimension of apophatism in Fr. Stăniloae's work, the dogmatic-mystical-liturgical blending being quite visible. Through this correlation between theology – spirituality – cult, Father Staniloae's method of theologizing perfectly fits the neo-patristic revival of the 20th century. By his appeal to patristic sources of authority: St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, pr. Staniloae "reintroduced in the Romanian theology the personalist way of theologizing, specific to the Holy Fathers, which allowed him to rewrite in a visible spiritual note about the dogmatic and orthodox mysticism" (p. 135), counterbalancing either the rationalistic, secularised trends, or the pietistic ones found within Western theology.

In conclusion, by the present study, the merit of pr. Stephen Buchiu is to have perceived and valued in a positive manner, an extremely important domain of Fr. D. Stăniloae's theology, namely the apophatic dimension of the Orthodox gnoseology, contributing both to a better knowledge and understanding of Fr. Stăniloae's theology and to enriching scientific literature dedicated to the Romanian theologian. Considering the multitude of issues raised, completing this book offers its readers both intellectual enrichment and an impetus for renewing their spiritual lives.

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