

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
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**THE NEO-PALAMITE SYNTHESIS OF FR. DUMITRU
STĂNILOAE**

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ABSTRACT

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Adrian Agachi

The thesis provides ground-breaking information in what concerns the contribution made by a well-known Romanian scholar to the Palamite studies in the twentieth century. The introduction contains a detailed literature review which helps to the understanding of the fact that Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae has not been solely a systematic theologian as the majority of scholars present him nowadays but, also, a very important Patristic scholar. The first chapter analyses critically for the first time the importance and the shortcomings of his monograph dedicated to Gregory Palamas (1938). The second chapter focuses on the principal aspects of his Neo-Palamite synthesis contained in his work entitled *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* (1947, reprinted in 1973), where he used the Palamite insights as basis for subjects as apophaticism, deification and method of pure prayer in Orthodoxy. The third chapter focuses on his most famous work entitled *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1973), where he develops his Neo-Palamite synthesis on subjects such as the relation between angels and humans in the realm of creation, the importance of the Palamite distinction between the essence and energies of God and the significance of the human being as image of God. The fourth chapter is concentrated on two other important books entitled *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* (1993) and *God's Immortal Image* (1987). In these, Stăniloae discusses at large the importance of the divine light and its eschatological meaning and develops the concept about the human being as image of God. The final chapter is dedicated to four significant studies in which Stăniloae discusses three main aspects of Palamas' works, namely the Mariology, Triadology and the relation between nature and grace. The fourth study is dedicated to modern Western interpretations of Palamas.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, ADRIAN AGACHI declare that the thesis entitled THE NEO-PALAMITE SYNTHESIS OF FR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- None of this work has been published

Signed: ADRIAN AGACHI

Date:...30th of June 2012

INTRODUCTION

Introductory note

The main purpose of this thesis is to present the Neo-Palamite theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. I have chosen a historical approach¹ for the subject, because I want to present not only the main themes of the Neo-Palamite contribution of Father Stăniloae but, as well, the way in which these essential concepts were developed during his entire career and work as an Orthodox theologian.

The thesis will be divided into five chapters which will be preceded by an introduction. The introductory part will be divided into three significant sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter will include the most important chronological details concerning the life and work of Father Dumitru Stăniloae and detailed explanations about why I have chosen to assess in a critical manner this particular part of his Neo-Patristic synthesis. The second sub-chapter will include a presentation of the way in which Father Stăniloae viewed himself as a Patristic scholar² and why he considered that Gregory Palamas³ was one of the significant Church Fathers underestimated by the Patristic scholarship of Western Europe.⁴ The third part of the introduction will provide a documented literature review about Father Stăniloae as a representative example of the Neo-

¹ By which I understand a clear, chronological presentation, which will depict in a logical manner the way in which Stăniloae achieved the results of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

² It is important to note here that very few scholars view Stăniloae as a Patristic scholar. The general view is that he was, more or less, a systematic theologian.

³ For a brief, but rich presentation of the life of Palamas and main theological contribution consult George C. Papademetriou, *Introduction to St. Gregory Palamas* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004).

⁴ It is also true that the Eastern scholarship has proven to be just as limited on disseminating the useful insights of Gregory Palamas.

Patristic synthesis with a special focus on the way in which modern scholars have assessed the influence of St. Gregory Palamas on his entire theological contribution.

The first chapter of the thesis will provide an analysis of the first major contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae in the field of Neo-Palamism.⁵ One must add here the fact that *Neo-Palamism* represents solely the presentation and interpretation of Palamism in the modern period and its contribution in general for the *Neo-Patristic* current and not a rejection of Palamism. I will analyse in detail in this chapter the influence of his principal book on Gregory Palamas⁶ and also the manner in which Stăniloae has offered a model of Neo-Patristic Synthesis through this important contribution. I will also concentrate here on the common aspects and significant differences that exist between his approach on Gregory Palamas and the ones that have been provided by important Orthodox scholars such as Basil Krivocheine⁷, John Meyendorff⁸ or Anglican scholars such as A. N. Williams.⁹ This chapter will also be focused significantly on the historical contribution of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

⁵ We consider that authors such as John Meyendorff, Dumitru Stăniloae or Basil Krivocheine can be considered as significant figures of Neo-Palamism. The scholars that can be included in the current of Neo-Palamism have not only made significant contributions to the understanding of the writings of St. Gregory Palamas but have also been highly influenced by this Church Father in their general scholarly approach. However, I believe that we can consider as members of this Neo-Patristic current solely the theologians that have accepted the Palamite ‘concepts’ as being true. I do not think, for example, that we can include in this list theologians such as M. Jugie, who, although he made important contributions about the historical dates of the works of Palamas, has strongly rejected the approach of this significant Church Father.

⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2006). In order to avoid extensive footnotes that present the Romanian title and its English translation, I will specify after the translation of the title the abbreviation [in Rom.] so that one can observe that the book exists only in Romanian language.

⁷ Basil Krivocheine, *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas*, (London: Geo. E. J. Coldwell, 1954).

⁸ John Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood: SVSP, 1998); Idem, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (Crestwood: SVSP, 2010); Idem, ‘Continuities and Discontinuities in Byzantine Religious Thought’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 47 (1993), pp. 69-81.

⁹ A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Similar works which make comparisons between Palamism and modern theologians are also useful. See for example: Gerry Russo, ‘Rahner and Palamas: A Unity of Grace’, *SVTQ*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1988), pp. 57-80.

The second chapter will comprise an analysis of Stăniloae's work entitled *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*.¹⁰ The final part of this work, concerned with deification, has been highly influenced by the writings of St. Gregory Palamas and I will analyze in detail how Father Stăniloae has developed the Palamite 'insights' into a creative and important approach on this particular subject. This chapter will focus, therefore, on the ascetical and mystical themes of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

The third chapter will analyse the main Palamite themes that have been presented and developed in an extreme interesting manner by Father Stăniloae in his significant *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*.¹¹ In the three volumes of this magnificent work that plays an important role in the general Orthodox Neo-Patristic approach nowadays, the essential concepts of St. Gregory Palamas have played a significant role. Therefore, this chapter shall be concentrated on the systematic character of Father Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite contribution.

The fourth chapter will present the Palamite influence in two of Stăniloae's most important writings that have not been translated in English until now: *God's Immortal Image* and *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being*.¹² This chapter will be an in-depth analysis of the main characteristics of the liturgical aspect of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

¹⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*, translated by Archimandrite Jerome Neville and Otilia Kloos (New York: St. Tikhon Seminary Press, 2002).

¹¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Rom.], 3 vols. (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2003). There is also an English translation of the first Romanian volume that appeared in two separate volumes: Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, translated by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, (vol. I, 1994; vol. II, 2000) (Massachusetts: Holy Cross University Press).

¹² Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image* [in Rom.], 2 vols. (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 1987); Idem, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* [in Rom.], (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993).

The fifth chapter will present a selection of several important studies dedicated by Father Stăniloae to different historical aspects of the life and writings of St. Gregory Palamas.¹³ The studies will be presented into a chronological order so that the progress of Father Stăniloae's theological contribution in this area can be observed. The last part of the thesis will comprise the conclusions of the research.

Thus, the thesis aims to identify, present and analyse critically the Neo-Palamite contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae from four different points: historical, systematic, ascetical and mystical and, nonetheless, liturgical.

Methodology

It is clear that the research one has to develop on a subject as profound as the interpretation given by an Orthodox scholar to Church Fathers cannot be an easy task. This is why I chose to give some details about the methodology employed in my research. Thus, I will describe my ontological, epistemological and methodological approach to the subject.

Jonathan Grix argued that:

Examples of ontological positions are those contained within the umbrella terms 'objectivism' and 'constructivism'. Broadly speaking, the former is an ontological position that 'asserts the social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors'. The latter on the other

¹³ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Revelation through Acts, Words and Images' [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, Vol. 20, Nr. 3 (1968), pp. 347-377, reprinted in *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 109-155; Idem, 'The Mother of God as Intercessor' [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, 4 (1952), 1, pp. 79-129; Idem, 'Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology', [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, 26 (1974), 3, pp. 392-439.

*hand, is an alternative ontological position that 'asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories 'are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision.'*¹⁴

However, I consider that both these positions are up to some point inadequate for my research. Fr. Stăniloae has interpreted Gregory Palamas inside a certain Christian Tradition, namely the Orthodox one. I believe that my research stands, thus, in discovering what Fr. Stăniloae was able to give further to our theological knowledge about Gregory Palamas and how these results contribute universally to this particular subject. However, I also keep in mind that he acted inside a certain Tradition and presented thus particular features that influenced strongly his approach in this direction.

My epistemological position, however, is clearly an anti-foundational one. I develop a qualitative research and, thus, employ the methods which rely on this type of research in order to achieve my purpose. I use mainly documentary analysis and hermeneutics. I rely mainly on the books and studies of Fr. Stăniloae, but also on the most important books and studies written up to this moment on Gregory Palamas and his theological contribution. I will finish this section with a quote which summarizes very well my ontological, epistemological and methodological position:

Knowing other's 'worlds' is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them (...). Without knowing the other's world, one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's

¹⁴ Jonathan Grix, *The Foundations of Research*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), p. 61.

*presence because the other is only dimly present to one. Through travelling to the other's 'worlds' we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are victims of arrogant perceptions are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant, perceive and are pliable, foldable, file-available, and classifiable.*¹⁵

The life and theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae¹⁶

Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae was born in Vlădeni, a village near Braşov, in the province of Transylvania on the 16th of November 1903. Though he was born in a family of peasants, he had the opportunity of studying in many important universities.¹⁷ His mother, Reveca, always believed that her son has the capacity of studying at a high level¹⁸ and convinced his father, Irimia, to help Dumitru in this direction. Dumitru was the fifth child of the family and the money was not enough to support his studies. However, between 1917 and 1922, when he pursued the courses of the college 'Andrei Şaguna' in Braşov, he obtained an important scholarship that

¹⁵J. Laible, 'A loving epistemology: what I hold critical in my life, faith and profession', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13 (2000), p. 691.

¹⁶ A very similar presentation of his life is included at the beginning of my MTh dissertation entitled 'A Critical Analysis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae's Contribution to the Theology of Icon' which was submitted at University of Wales, Lampeter, in July 2010.

¹⁷ A summary in this direction can be observed in the important article of Father Mircea Păcurariu, 'Pr. Prof. Acad. Dumitru Stăniloae. A few biographical coordinates' [in Rom.], p. 3. This study was published in the volume dedicated to Stăniloae for his entire career entitled *Person and Communion* [in Rom.] which was edited by Mircea Păcurariu and Ioan I. Ică jr. and published at Sibiu in 1993.

¹⁸ Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu, daughter of Father Stăniloae, gives some details about this particular aspect in the biography of her father. See Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu, *The Light of Deed from the Light of Word – Together with My Father, Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000), p. 37. Reveca, Stăniloae's mother was convinced that her son will become a priest. However, in order to fulfill her dream, he had to go at least to college. In the end, he got the chance not only to benefit from a college education, but also from an entire international academic training.

helped him to finish his studies. Afterwards, between 1922 and 1927, he was awarded another scholarship by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan to pursue his studies in theology at the University of Cernăuți. Between 1927 and 1929, Stăniloae had the opportunity to study abroad and he went to Athens, Munich and Belgrade. In 1928, he took his doctoral degree with a thesis on Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem at Cernăuți. In 1929 he was appointed professor at the Theological Institute in Sibiu and he got married to Maria Mihu. He became rector at the Theological Institute of Sibiu in 1936 and remained in this position until 1946 when he was dismissed due to the pressure of the communist regime. In 1947 he was appointed professor of systematic theology at the Theological Institute of Bucharest. Stăniloae was imprisoned for six years between 1958 and 1964 because of his religious beliefs. He continued to serve as a professor at the same Institute from 1964 until 1973. In that year he had to retire against his will. Stăniloae remained a consultant professor for doctoral theses until 1993. He died on the 5th of October 1993.¹⁹

Though Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae had to live under the communist regime for more than forty years, this did not impede his theological creativity. Before the communist regime he published, in almost sixteen years, between 1930 and 1946, five books²⁰ and five translations (mainly writings of Church Fathers such as Maximus, Evagrius or John Cassian).²¹ During the communist regime, he concentrated more on publishing studies until 1973. From 1973 and until his death, Fr. Stăniloae published his most important books and translations, taking, thus, to perfect his

¹⁹ This presentation respects the chronology given by Lidia Stăniloae in her book: *The Light of Deed from the Light of Word – Together with My Father, Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000) and, also the one provided by Ioan I. Ică jr. in the preface of the book signed by Marc Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *A Little Dogmatic* [in Rom.], translated by Maria Cornelia-Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), pp. 5-8

²⁰ Marc Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *A Little Dogmatic*... [in Rom.], p. 6

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

research activity.²² During this period of time, he was invited to important conferences in Western Europe²³ and was recognized as one of the most outstanding theologians of the twentieth century.²⁴ Nowadays, several of his books and studies have been translated in other languages, but still, many of them remain unknown to important researchers in the field of systematic and liturgical theology.²⁵

The communist regime persecuted the intellectual elite of Romania between 1946 and 1960. Many intellectuals were put in prison and most of them died there, while others left the country and sought asylum in Western Europe. Fr. Stăniloae did not want to take his family and leave. He was courageous, but this did not protect him from being arrested, judged in a few weeks and put in prison for more than five years, under the charge of being subversive to the regime.²⁶ The only charge against him lay in the fact that he attended for some time the meetings of an important intellectual group entitled ‘The Burning Bush’²⁷ which was concerned with religious beliefs. Of course, this was not an isolated case. There have been reported situations in which people were condemned just for listening to radio programmes that were forbidden by the regime. However, Fr. Stăniloae was released after five years of imprisonment, a period of time in

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For his ecumenical efforts see the study of Ronald G. Robertson, ‘Dumitru Stăniloae on Christian Unity’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 104-126

²⁴ A complete bibliography, very useful, but unfortunately published only in Romanian was done by Virginia Popa, *Fr. Stăniloae: Bio-Bibliography* [in Rom.] (Iași: Trinitas, 2004).

²⁵ It is very hard to say who must be blamed for this, but the Romanian theologians have done very little until now for the recognition of Fr. Stăniloae’s theological contribution in Western Europe. See Ștefan Lucian Toma, *Tradition and Actuality in the work of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Rom.] (Sibiu: Agnos, 2007), p. 21 and the analysis of Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae*, (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 2000). However, some analysis between his contribution and other theologians has been made: see Silviu Eugen Rogobete, ‘Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation? Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 167-207.

²⁶ For his beliefs concerning the regime consult Costion Nicolescu, *The Theologian in the City: Fr. Stăniloae and the Political Area* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: Christiana, 2003).

²⁷ Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics in the Orthodox Spirituality, Ascetics and Mystics of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Rom.], translated by Ioan I. Ică jr. (Sibiu: Deisis, 2006), p. 56

which his entire family was put under close surveillance by the police. The main problem that appeared after his release was the fact that he needed books and studies for his core research on Church Fathers and it was almost impossible to gain access to important theological books written in Western Europe.²⁸ However, at the beginning of the 1970s, observing that Fr. Stăniloae was beginning to be appreciated in Western Europe, the regime permitted him to attend important theological conferences but, at the same time, obliged him to resign from his post at the University of Bucharest. Of course, this was a strange way of acting, but the regime wanted to be perceived as a permissive one in Western Europe. It allowed him to go to important conferences, but would not give him even a place in a small parish as a priest. Fr. Stăniloae had to serve as a priest only in parishes where he was known by the other priests. It was a very hard time for him. His daughter, Lidia Stăniloae-Ionescu, argues that even the Romanian Patriarch, Justinian Marina, was unable to give him a parish. After Fr. Stăniloae was released from prison in 1964, he went to see Patriarch Justinian Marina (he has been Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church between 1948 and 1977):

Two days later he went to see the Patriarch. At last he received him, after so many years, and told him that he would be unable to take him back at the cathedral. "Perhaps we can find something for you at the archdiocese", he told him. Father was extremely bitter and told me: "How can I live off your earnings? He has to give me something!" I told him that he should not create problems for himself. With my salary as a professor we would be able to get

²⁸ The situation slightly changed in the 1980s.

*by; what was all this when compared to the happiness of being together again?*²⁹

Modern researchers know very much about the theological contribution of Fr. Stăniloae, but very few things about how he was able to achieve it. He was never given the necessary conditions for pursuing research. Most of his last years were spent in a house where hot water was considered a luxury. He had to live and work in two small rooms together with his wife, his daughter and his nephew. Many people came to him for financial help or advice, but, at least according to his daughter, very few were really his friends.³⁰ He was never truly appreciated in his own country and even his theological contribution was not taken into consideration until after his death. Lidia Stăniloae mentions a strange episode that happened during the 1980s. Fr. Stăniloae was asked in that period of time why he wrote so much. If it had come from the communist regime, the question would have seemed normal, but it was addressed by the director of the Patriarchal Publishing House.³¹ For a priest and a theologian in his eighties, with a vast experience, these questions were really painful. In these moments he used to return to his small desk and read or write something.

The little room did not have electrical light and he had to keep a small desk lamp lit. (...) Anyway, entering his own thoughts again was for him the best cure against daily problems. He was hiding in a domain that belonged to him, where nobody was acting badly against him, where nobody was envying him and where the ideas were his beloved friends. He wrote them down on

²⁹ Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu, *Remembering my Father*, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), p. 19.

³⁰ Lidia Stăniloae-Ionescu never ceases to repeat this in the biography of her father.

³¹ Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu, *The Light of Deed from the Light of Word – Together with My Father, Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000), p. 330.

*paper and the ideas rewarded him with the satisfaction of offering people a new life perspective.*³²

However, despite of all the hard conditions that he had to get accustomed to, Fr. Stăniloae left a magnificent theological contribution. Nonetheless, an important part of this contribution is represented by his Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

Why Gregory Palamas?

Stăniloae considered always that Gregory Palamas is an important figure of the history of the Church. Unlike most Western theologians³³, who considered that Palamas as more or less just a heretic³⁴, Stăniloae saw in his work an important synthesis of the Tradition of the Church with a fundamental focus on the distinction between the essence of God and His energies. However, what Stăniloae noticed from the beginning of his research³⁵ was that even the Orthodox scholars were not defending the fruitful results of the Palamite ‘Synthesis’. Some of them³⁶ were even supporting the opinions of Catholic scholars such as M. Jugie who were highly critical towards Palamas. Thus, Stăniloae began by being polemical against what he considered to be ‘a Roman-Catholic view’ on Palamas that was shared up to a great extent by the Orthodox scholars. This is why when he published the first monograph dedicated to Gregory Palamas³⁷, he was aware of the

³² Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu, *The Light of Deed from the Light of Word...* [in Rom.], p. 330

³³ With few exceptions such as A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁴ The example of M. Jugie leads to no further comments.

³⁵ The first moment of interest appeared when he was studying in Munich and he discovered that Palamas was strongly rejected even by the Orthodox researchers.

³⁶ Examples such as Trembelas cannot be underestimated.

³⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.], (Sibiu, 1938).

fact that he was doing something extremely important, although he did not know that writing it in Romanian would not make him known in Western Europe.

One might say that, after discovering the works of Maximus the Confessor, Stăniloae got so overwhelmed by them that the role of the other Fathers was reduced drastically. I totally disagree with this opinion. It is true that the concepts and ideas of Maximus the Confessor embellish all of Stăniloae's works after 1947, but this does not mean that Stăniloae leaves aside important names such as Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa and, especially, Gregory Palamas. Gregory Palamas continued to play an important role in Stăniloae's theological contribution. I rank him second after Maximus the Confessor in what concerns the influence on Stăniloae's work. The third important figure that very few scholars seem to remember is Cyril of Alexandria. The fact that Stăniloae was influenced by Maximus the Confessor is attested by all the researchers, but very few seem to acknowledge the influence of Palamas. Furthermore, there were even fewer researchers that were capable of identifying also the main areas where Stăniloae developed with substantial results the Palamite legacy.³⁸ This is why I consider that it is time to bring forth the features and the effect of the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Fr. Stăniloae. Although I am aware that this is a very difficult task, I believe that I will be able at least to open this subject so that it could be researched in detail later by other scholars.

I will now analyse the way in which Stăniloae saw himself as a person that has used the Church Fathers in order to provide a background for his theological contribution. The autobiographical fragments that will be used demonstrate that he viewed himself not only as a systematic

³⁸ I would name here three persons: A. Louth, entitled 'The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae', in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 53-71; Emil Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (New York: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006); Kallistos Ware, *Foreword*, in: Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, translated by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, vol. I (Massachusetts: Holy Cross University Press, 1994).

theologian as it is the general opinion among the researchers of his work, but also as a Patristic scholar.

Fr. Stăniloae as a Patristic scholar

I believe that it is important to present the way in which Father Stăniloae considered himself to be a Patristic scholar for two important reasons. The first one is that even if modern theologians who have analysed his work take into consideration his Patristic research they still believe that he should be viewed as a systematic theologian and not as a Patristic scholar.³⁹ The second reason is that Stăniloae viewed himself solely as a humble spiritual disciple of the Fathers.⁴⁰ He was eager in developing their concepts through massive commentaries when he translated their works and he proposed many important Neo-Patristic projects so that the long cherished heritage of the Church Fathers could still be applied in the practical life of the Church.⁴¹ What is more important is that he *lived* by respecting the advice of the Church Fathers, ready to become not solely a good Christian in the moral sense of the word but a truly transfigured man.

Did Fr. Stăniloae consider himself to be a primarily Patristic scholar? What we have is mainly indirect testimonies. We have to take into account not only his writings, but also the testimony of

³⁹ This is the main impression that one gets if he reads the important works dedicate to Stăniloae's life and work like: Emil Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (New York: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006); Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 2000) and Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics in the Orthodox Spirituality, Ascetics and Mystics of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Rom.], translated by Ioan I. Ică jr. (Sibiu: Deisis, 2006).

⁴⁰ He always used to quote different Church Fathers and speak about their opinions in a very humble manner, leaving his own considerations aside or expressing them in a manner similar with the one used by the Fathers. This is visible from some works like: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Rom.], 3 vols. (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2003); *Seven Mornings with Father Stăniloae* [in Rom.] (Bucharest, Anastasia, 2002) and Dumitru Stăniloae, *Eternity and Time* (Oxford: Will Print, 2001).

⁴¹ An example in this direction is given by his monumental work *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2005).

the people he knew. I will begin by quoting a passage from his biography written by his daughter Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu:

He enjoyed his work and spoke ceaselessly about the texts of the Holy Fathers (...). The [translation] of the Philokalia changed him. His life got a new dimension of existence, unknown before. This did not influence solely his thinking but also his daily life. In 1930, he translated the Dogmatic of Andriusos. Now he used to say: "I have to write a new Dogmatic and another book on Jesus Christ, on the grounds of the theology of the Holy Fathers. The Christological elements of the Philokalia have such a rich spirituality that no theological book has ever had before."⁴²

Thus, the first thing that captures our attention is the fact that he *lived* what he was doing. Fr. Stăniloae was one of the few Patristic scholars that were not simply able to translate, present and assess the essential ideas of the Church Fathers, but also capable of conforming to their advice in a practical way as well. He knew that his mission was, from the moment in which he started to translate the *Philokalia*, not only to present accurately the concepts of the Fathers, but also to live a spiritual life.

However, his short introduction to the first edition of his monumental systematic treatise *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*⁴³ is rather programmatic and specifies in a very clear manner the way in which he views his own importance as a Patristic as well as a Systematic scholar. I will quote this in full length because, unfortunately, it does not appear in the English translation of the book:

⁴² Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu, *The Light of the Deed from the Light of the Word...*[in Rom.], p. 173.

⁴³ See note 9.

We have tried, in this Synthesis, as well as in our previous studies, to discover the spiritual significance of the doctrinal teachings, to underline their truth in its correspondence with the profound needs of the soul which searches for its salvation and progresses in this manner in a more positive communion with its neighbours. Through this communion the soul reaches God as the supreme communion and source of the power of communion. We have, thus, left aside the scholastic method of treating doctrines as abstract phrases, which have only a theoretical interest that remains in its greatest part obsolete and which have no connection with the profound spiritual life of the soul. If an Orthodox Dogmatic Theology means an interpretation of the doctrines – in the sense of revealing the deep and infinite rich salvation content (...)comprised in their short formulations, - we believe that an authentic Orthodox Dogmatic Theology is the one that keeps on the road described above.⁴⁴

I strongly consider that this is the main passage that provides the clue towards what Stăniloae thought he was doing when he was writing his most important work, the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. This marvellous piece of Neo-Patristic Synthesis, one of the best, if not the best work of this kind, remains, as its title indicates, a work of systematic theology. However, although the structure of the book and the main subjects that are tackled inside certainly belong to the area of systematic theology, the way in which they are analysed and dealt with remains truly patristic. No subject is presented without an appeal to the writings of the Church Fathers. Stăniloae does not agonize on formulas and different theological ‘systems’. He prefers a different way of

⁴⁴Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Rom.], vol. I (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2003), p. 5.

discussing his systematic subjects, namely, the traditional development of these important truths in the writings of the most important Church Fathers. However, before analyzing in more depth these ideas, I want to focus on the passage given above.

Father Stăniloae is concerned here with the fact that the doctrines of the Church have been presented before his ‘synthesis’⁴⁵ just as simple propositions that have no meaning whatsoever for the modern population and which seem to provide just some interesting theoretical truths that cannot appeal to the inner spiritual life of a Christian. Thus, he considers that the doctrines of the Church need a new presentation, in which their spiritual content has to be underlined more directly, without insisting too much on their ‘rational’ explanation. However, he makes a very important statement at the end of his brief introduction:

*We led ourselves in doing this work by the manner in which the Holy Church Fathers have understood the teaching of the Church, but we also took in consideration when we interpreted the dogmas, of the spiritual needs of the souls that hunger for their salvation in our times (...). We tried to present the teaching of the Church in the spirit of the Fathers, but we also tried to understand it as they would today, because the Fathers would not have left aside the needs of our time, as they have not left aside the needs of their time.*⁴⁶

Thus, our systematic theologian is, in fact, also a humble follower of the Fathers. Not only does Stăniloae try to use the contribution of the Church Fathers in the most important of his systematic works, but he also seems to consider himself a modern continuator of their legacy.

⁴⁵ This represents a very interesting choice of terminology.

⁴⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*...[in Rom.], vol. I, p. 5.

Thus, what Stăniloae offers us through his majestic *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* is, in fact, not only a systematic treatise, but also a Patristic treatise, in fact a proof of Patristic erudition. However, although he claims that the teaching of the Fathers has to be presented in our times, Stăniloae does not forget about the critical view of their works and contribution. We have to be *as* the Fathers, not simply to copy the Fathers, but also to have our own view, dictated in some cases by the different circumstances that exist today. Time goes on. Problems change as well. Thus, we have to be able to discover which are the problems and the new challenges of the present, while we can look in the past in order to find out whether Church has faced something similar, to reflect on the differences and similarities between the past and the present and then proceed with the solution. Very often, we find out that modern problems are just the same as in the past and the teaching of the Fathers suffices in order to provide a solution. However, this is not always the case. The Fathers were not able to anticipate everything and, thus, we have to break new ground without the direct guidance of the patristic tradition at some point and, with humility, discernment and thoughtful analysis, to try to respond to our modern and unprecedented problems. This stands at the core of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis. This is what Stăniloae tried to underline in the extract quoted above. This is the mission of the Orthodox Patristic scholar nowadays when he is forced more or less to give an answer to some burning issues.

One of the main reasons for which the texts quoted above seem to be more general and abstract and do not point directly towards the person of Father Stăniloae is that he always considered himself to be just a humble follower of the Fathers and not a Patristic scholar in the more obvious or usual meaning of the word. Furthermore, in his time, intellectual life in Romania was

greatly impoverished. When Father Stăniloae gave an interview in the last few years of his life and he was asked which theologian he was mostly like, he gave a striking answer:

*I believe that Lossky is the one to whom I feel closest. I began to read Berdyaev first and afterwards Bulgakov, but I realized that Lossky is more rigorous [than them]. However, they all had a very important role. It is a pity that we [the Romanians] never had such men, neither priests, nor laymen from the Diaspora. Almost all of these Russians were laymen. We never had such men.*⁴⁷

Of course, these statements have to be seen in a different light and not necessarily understood in their literal meaning. There were important theologians in Romania, even during the communist era. There were important theological schools and there were also some important writings. However, sadly, very few of the respective Romanian theologians who were active during the life of Father Dumitru Stăniloae was able to approach the high intellectual level of the Greek theologians or Russian theologians. Nonetheless, he could not include consider himself to be highly important without appearing arrogant or simply unrealistic.⁴⁸ This explains in part why he never presented himself directly as a Patristic scholar or as a systematic theologian, although he belongs to both kinds, as I have stated above.

In Stăniloae's conception, Patristic research cannot be divorced from the spirituality that the Church Fathers have experienced. A scholar must be able not only to analyze the texts of the Fathers from a historical or philological point of view, but also to use their *spiritual method*.

⁴⁷*Seven Mornings with Father Stăniloae* [in Rom.] (Bucharest, Anastasia, 2002), p. 103.

⁴⁸ Nowadays, however, in the aftermath of the Communist regime, we have some important theologians that could be considered if not at Stăniloae's level, at least close behind him. The most important one is without doubt Father Ioan. I Ică jr.

Stăniloae offers the example of the spiritual exegesis of the Bible offered by many of the Church Fathers in contrast with the scientific method that has so many followers in the theological domain nowadays:

*The Church Fathers have a method: in all the words of the Bible they always searched the spiritual meaning and the work of God. When they explain a word, they see a new meaning, which rises above the meaning that can be discovered by the natural man. They see the purpose of God's action, His intention. (...) Their exegesis is a doxology and almost a prayer.*⁴⁹

If humility is the first quality of a theologian and especially of a Patristic scholar, then the search for the spiritual meanings of the writings of the Fathers and their application nowadays is the second one. A third characteristic is the *liturgical* one. Every exegesis, every interpretation of the Fathers remains somehow a *liturgical celebration*. If prayer and doxology do not emerge from our interpretation, then it is clear that we are far away from the spiritual experience that the Fathers had. Stăniloae argued that:

The Fathers had this [spiritual] experience. We must always return to their theology. The Theology of the Church Fathers is a kind of Liturgy in itself, because it represents a meeting with God. In its expression, this theology remains a worship offered to God who has made himself known to us. (...)

⁴⁹ Marc Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *A little Dogmatic* [in Rom.], translated by Maria Cornelia-Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), p. 153.

*The experience of God (...) is something we can reach if we follow Christ through a continuous invocation.*⁵⁰

The interpretation of the Fathers is always a liturgical action. It nourishes our prayer and evolves from it. However, Stăniloae was not against using scientific approaches towards the texts of the Fathers. He strongly considered that modern methodological approaches are useful and must be used, but they are merely instruments and not goals in themselves.

One of the few places where Stăniloae speaks boldly against a theological approach that simply repeats the words of Scripture or of the Fathers without taking into consideration modern methodological developments and the new problems, is in the first chapter of the first volume of the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. Here, Stăniloae speaks in general about the mission and the goals of theology. First, he proclaims the fact that, even though dogmas are inviolable truths that cannot be questioned or considered obsolete, the task of theology does not simply stand in repeating them and proclaiming them without offering a good interpretation. The first task of theology relies, thus, in interpreting the doctrinal tradition and consolidating its understanding in the Church. Stăniloae argues that:

When theological explanations are organic manifestations of doctrines and are useful for renewing ecclesial life – and as such enter into the general and permanent preaching of the Church – they are included in the teaching of the Church in a broad sense. In the case of the Church Fathers, that is what happened with almost the whole of their theology. A basic identity exists on the one hand between dogmas and the teaching of the Church, while, on the

⁵⁰ Marc Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *A Little Dogmatic...*[in Rom.], p. 173.

*other hand, they are formally distinct. Church teaching, as the content of dogmas made explicit, depends on the dogmas. Nevertheless, until the teaching has been officially defined by ecumenical synods and appropriated by the consensus of local synods, it remains as ecclesiastical teaching in this broad sense.*⁵¹

If the task of theology is to interpret correctly the dogmas of the Church, this means that the work of modern theologians continues the one which was began by the Fathers. Stăniloae does not speak about himself in these lines. He was, generally speaking, a very discrete person. However, we can recognise why he chose as a lifetime project the interpretation of dogmas and why he was so closely related to the writings of the Fathers. One is dependent on the other in his conception. We can certainly ask ourselves how was it possible for the majority of Romanian researchers to consider Stăniloae only as a systematic theologian, when he was certainly a Patristic scholar as well.

Stăniloae does not forget to add the fact that a theologian must not be divorced from the liturgical experience of the Church or to lack in personal prayer. “The theologian must take part in this prayer and in the life of the Church, for theology wishes to know God from the experience of his salvific activity among the people.”⁵² Nonetheless, although Stăniloae underlines deeply the traditional frame in which a theologian must do his own research and develop his insights, we cannot consider himself as a person that lacks any respect for social and scientific progress. Stăniloae argues that the progress of theology consists of three different aspects: fidelity to

⁵¹Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, translated by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, vol. I, (Massachusetts: Holy Cross University Press, 1994), p. 83.

⁵² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 87.

Tradition, responsibility towards the believers and “openness to the eschatological future.”⁵³ Although one might suspect that Stăniloae is under the spell of traditionalism, when he argues so strongly that a theologian must be faithful to the Tradition of the Church, the following words point exactly in the opposite direction:

An inadequate theology is one that consists in a literal repetition of the words and the formulae of the past. A damaging theology is one that remains fixed in the formulae of a past system and confuses them with revelation itself. (...) This was a theology⁵⁴ that hindered any spiritual revival and any spiritual progress, a theology void of all dynamic meaning and reflecting a static and exterior order which it continued to think of as perfect. Furthermore, it implied a lack of responsibility shown towards the faithful of its own time, and consequently also towards the faithful of its own time, and also towards theology's duty to work for religious renewal in its own time. This, in turn, implies also a lack of responsibility shown for the richness of revelation expressed in the Holy Scripture and in Apostolic and Patristic Tradition.⁵⁵

Thus, a theology that simply repeats all the words of the Fathers or the words of the Church dogmas is, in reality an *inert theology*. All these words apply in fact as well for the research that Stăniloae undertook during his lifetime concerning the writings of the Church Fathers, only in the other way round. He knew that his Romanian Orthodox predecessors did nothing in order to discover and value the writings of the Church Fathers. He was pragmatic, bold, active and

⁵³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 88.

⁵⁴ Stăniloae offered before the example of the Catholic scholastic theology that influenced strongly the Orthodox theology especially in the nineteenth century.

⁵⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 88.

ambitious. He did everything that was needed in order to translate accurately many writings of the Fathers.⁵⁶ Furthermore, he knew that the simple translation of the Fathers was not enough in order to awaken an interest in Romanian Orthodox theology. He had to do more than that. So, he adorned everything he translated with commentaries. Father Louth observes that: “the commentary (...) is his preferred way of interpreting the Fathers.”⁵⁷ His commentaries were not necessarily scholarly notes. They sometimes lacked a scientific analysis, but right through this aspect they seemed to be more connected to the spiritual meaning of the writings of the Church Fathers. However, Stăniloae knew also that what the Orthodox Church really needed were not so much translations of the Fathers, even if they might have been adorned with useful commentaries. The Orthodox Church needed new theological works. Not everything that the Fathers said was directly useful in the modern period. Thus, he focused on the examination of the doctrinal tradition of the Church. He appeared as a systematic theologian, but he rejected the high rationalist aspect that these theologians used to propagate in Romania during his time. This happened because in his own works he brought the useful contribution of the Fathers that seemed to be forgotten and whose works were still used only as means for supporting several philosophical systems that were transformed into ‘Orthodox’ theology. I strongly consider that Stăniloae was, basically speaking, a Patristic scholar that turned his attention towards systematic theology because he considered that this is where the most arduous problems of his time existed.

⁵⁶ As one can see from the massive translations comprised in the *Philokalia* which has 12 volumes (!) or the ones that were published as different volumes in the collection entitled *Church Fathers and Writers* [in Rom.] and which consisted from: Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, *Selected Writings* [in Rom.], translated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, 2 vols., PSB collection (volumes 15 and 16) (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1987-1988); Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Selected Writings* [in Rom.], translated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, 4 vols., PSB collection (volumes 38-41) (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1991-2000); Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Selected Writings* [in Rom.], translated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, PSB collection (volume 29) (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1982); Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings* [in Rom.], translated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, 2 vols., PSB collection (volumes 80 and 81) (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1983-1990).

⁵⁷ Andrew Louth, ‘The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), p. 58.

Although Stăniloae does not speak too much about certain Church Fathers that influenced his thought, we can observe that, in his theological contribution, Palamas played a very important role. There are four main areas where Stăniloae was highly influenced by Gregory Palamas. First of all, he reconsidered his entire interpretation of the history of the Church through the hesychastic controversy. In the second edition of his monograph on Gregory Palamas, Stăniloae argues that “the hesychastic controversy was the most significant event in the history of Orthodox spirituality after the Patristic era.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, he observes that “we cannot say anything serious and concrete about Orthodoxy without taking into account the contribution of this profound Eastern theologian.”⁵⁹

The second area in which Stăniloae was influenced by Palamas is the aspect of deification that one may encounter analysed profoundly in his work *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*⁶⁰. Here, Stăniloae uses mainly Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Palamas when he speaks about the visual experience of the divine light by the believer that has reached a high spiritual level. Nonetheless, the whole discussion that Stăniloae initiates on apophatic knowledge has a Palamite sound and he criticizes the errors of Vladimir Lossky from what he considers a Palamite perspective.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.], 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Scripta, 1993), p. 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Translated in English with the name of *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*, translated by Archimandrite Jerome Neville and Otilia Kloos (New York: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 2002).

⁶¹ For more details see: Silviu Eugen Rogobete, ‘Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation? Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 167-207.

The third area is of course the distinction between the essence and the energies of God that appears everywhere in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*.⁶² This distinction stands in the centre of Stăniloae's conception regarding knowledge of God and His encounter not only with the human being but also with the created realm in general.

The fourth and final area is represented by the liturgical aspect that embellishes all his works, not just his final works of synthesis entitled *God's Immortal Image* and *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Believer*[in Rom.] and which draws material not only from Maximus the Confessor, but also (and especially) from Gregory Palamas.

Now it is time we turn our attention to what other researchers have said until now about the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae. I will also include here some points of view that, although make no mention of Gregory Palamas, speak in general about the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Fr. Stăniloae. I consider that it is important to see also the larger background of Stăniloae's Neo-Patristic Synthesis in order to assess not only the theological results of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis, but also the methodology that he used and the reasons that stood behind his choice of certain themes over others.

Literature review

⁶² For more details on this distinction between the essence and the energies of God see: David Coffey, 'The Palamite Doctrine of God: A New Perspective', *SVTQ*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1988), pp. 329-358; Leonidas Contos, 'The Essence-Energies Structure of Saint Gregory Palamas with a Brief Examination of its Patristic Foundation', *GOTR*, Vol. 12 (1967), pp. 283-294 and Alexis Torrance, 'Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocians Fathers', *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 63 (2009), pp. 47-70.

There are a number of scholars that have identified and tried to present the Patristic work undertaken by Father Dumitru Stăniloae. However, the Romanian theologians who have tried to realize this objective are very few.

The most significant contribution in this direction appears in the study written by Father Andrew Louth.⁶³ Father Louth discusses in his study only some particular aspects of the treatment of the views of the Church Fathers in the three volumes of Stăniloae's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. First of all, Father Louth considers Stăniloae to be a significant figure of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis current.

*If one looks at the Greek Fathers who are central to Fr. Dumitru – Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril, Denys, Maximus, Symeon and Gregory Palamas – a familiar pattern emerges: for these are the Fathers central to the “Neo-Patristic” synthesis that was so dear to Fr. Georges Florovsky, but was only sketched out in his mainly occasional writings.*⁶⁴

Father Louth goes on and even argues that Stăniloae was not a ‘marginal theologian’⁶⁵ in the West and that “he is at the centre of what many would regard as the liveliest and most original movement in modern Orthodox thought.”⁶⁶ Does this mean, however, that Father Louth avoids the cliché according to which Stăniloae is primarily a systematic theologian? Yes and no. Father Louth is clearly avoiding this general cliché at least from some points of view. First, he is one of the few that acknowledges that the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (I focus on this particular case because it represents the main book on which Father Louth concentrates in his study) *is not a*

⁶³ It is quoted right above at note 52.

⁶⁴ Andrew Louth, ‘The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae...’, p. 57.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

systematic treatise, or, at least, not in the classical meaning of this concept. However, Fr. Louth believes that what we have in front of our eyes is a *paradoxical* example.

From what has been said about the essentially unsystematic nature of patristic theology, it might appear something of a paradox to publish a Neo-Patristic dogmatic theology: this is partly why Fr. Dumitru holds the field alone. It does not seem to me that the completion of the work simply dispels the paradox (as Achilles overtakes the tortoise by simply walking). There is the danger that Fr. Dumitru will be drawn back into the constraints of the “systematic” that he sought to avoid by turning to the Fathers.⁶⁷

What is really striking in this argument of Fr. Louth is the observation that Stăniloae has written a systematic treatise from a *Patristic perspective*. Stăniloae does not follow the methodology of the systematic theologians that preceded him. He is generally speaking, a Patristic scholar that is preoccupied not solely with translating and commenting on the Fathers, but also with the subjects of systematic theology that need a refurbishment from the Patristic perspective, because these were influenced too much by modern philosophy or theological insights that are not necessarily Orthodox either in structure or in exposition. This is clear from the fact that, although Stăniloae relied not only on the works of the Church Fathers in order to accomplish his magnificent ‘systematic’ synthesis, but also on the useful approaches built by different Western theologians such as Rahner, Barth, Althaus, von Balthasar, he still remains extremely critical towards the Western results. This particular aspect is underlined as well by Fr. Louth who argues that Stăniloae’s “attitude to Western theology is quite negative, even uncomprehending.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷Andrew Louth, ‘The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae...’, p. 60.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 63.

Furthermore, Fr. Louth writes that Stăniloae's sources "are Orthodox. This means, predominantly, the Fathers."⁶⁹

Thus, I argue that Fr. Louth is one of the first scholars that pointed out the fact that Stăniloae must be considered not only as a systematic theologian, but also as a Patristic scholar, a true representative of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis movement. However, Fr. Louth has also identified two significant things that point towards the *methodology* used by Stăniloae in his important Patristic contribution. First, Louth is clearly interested in the fact that Stăniloae was not only an academic scholar, but also a very good priest. His spiritual life was nourished from the writings of the Church Fathers and, as a result, it has also put an important seal on his theological contribution. Thus, Louth argues that:

*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.*⁷⁰

Louth observes as well that the commentaries provided by Fr. Stăniloae almost on every page of his translations of the works of Church Fathers, represent admirable spiritual interpretations that offer to the reader the possibility of not only understanding better the difficult works of some of the Church Fathers, such as the works of Maximus the Confessor or Gregory Palamas, but also of obtaining spiritual guidance.

⁶⁹Andrew Louth, 'The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae...', p. 63.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 58. See the study of Dănuț Mănăstireanu, 'Dumitru Stăniloae's Theology of Ministry', in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 126-147.

The second important aspect that Louth observed is the fact that Stăniloae does not simply rely on the writings of the Church Fathers or the contribution of significant Eastern or Western theologians, but also on the liturgical experience of the Church. This choice is pointed out by Louth:

This emphasis on the lived – the “existential” Fr. Dumitru often says – nature of theological reflection constitutes the dynamism of his thought. (...) Fr. Dumitru is concerned with an engagement that takes place within his own mind and heart – and if there, then in the minds and hearts of those who engage with what he says – minds and hearts shaped by an experience in the modern world (where else?), but also endeavouring to live in the Tradition of the Church that goes back to the apostles and beyond, through the experience of Israel, to creation itself.⁷¹

The theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, whether we speak about his achievements in Patristic or in systematic studies, is ultimately pointing towards a liturgical theology.

The second most important source where I discovered a lot of important information about the Patristic contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae was in the *Foreword* written by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware to the first volume of *The Experience of God*.⁷² Here, Metropolitan Kallistos begins by arguing that Stăniloae was a theologian that highly respected the Fathers and their theological contribution.⁷³ However, although Stăniloae was deeply indebted to the writings of

⁷¹Andrew Louth, ‘The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae...’, p. 64.

⁷²Kallistos Ware, *Foreword*, in: Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. I, pp. IX-XXVII.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. IX.

the Fathers and his magnificent *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, he never lacked critical awareness.

The fact that Fr. Dumitru is patristic in spirit does not mean that he is enclosed in the past. On the contrary, he totally rejects a theology of mere repetition. He acknowledges that the Early Fathers are by no means exhaustive. In certain areas, he believes – most notably, in our understanding of the human person and of interpersonal relations – modern thought has given us new and vital insights not to be found in the writers of the ancient Church or of Byzantium. He sees tradition as open-ended and constantly creative, “not a sum of propositions learnt by heart, but a lived experience.”⁷⁴

I would like to say that Metropolitan Kallistos Ware is almost completely right in what he argues here, but I also have to criticize two of his insights. First, Stăniloae was never really able to go ‘beyond’ the Fathers. He never criticizes any aspect of their works. He never even alludes to the fact that the Fathers could be wrong in a certain aspect or another. In fact, I am convinced that the only persons that are criticized by him are either the heretics, or different important figures in the history of the Church that were condemned post-mortem (as it is the case with Origen or Theodore of Mopsuestia), as well as several Western scholars. Thus, it is not quite correct to present Stăniloae as a theologian that considers that the Fathers are not ‘complete’ in every way and that their writings are not all that we need in order to find out important answers. It is true that Stăniloae had a critical awareness and he was more or less convinced that the fruits of modern scholarship are useful as well in order to provide solutions to the actual problems of

⁷⁴Kallistos Ware, *Foreword*..., p. XVII.

Christianity, but I do not believe that he ever thought of the fact that the Fathers might not be enough from the theological point of view. I strongly consider that Stăniloae was not so much the person presented here by Metropolitan Kallistos, especially when I turn to another important quote such as this one:

*For Fr. Dumitru, tradition represents in this way the critical spirit of the Church. A “traditional” theologian, if he is genuinely such, is called to be bold and prophetic. He needs to ask not just “What did the Fathers say long ago?” but “What would they say if they were alive today?” Our aim as Patristic theologians, rather than mere historians of doctrine, is not just archaeological exactness but “pneumatic anamnesis”. We seek to present not just the letter of the Fathers but their vital spirit, their mind or phronema, what has been termed their “eternal youth.”*⁷⁵

The works of Stăniloae do not demonstrate that he achieved this dimension as well from the practical point of view. Of course, there are many instances in which Stăniloae seems to encourage theologians to be prophetic, *but never bold*. He is never bold. He is never as critical as a Western theologian expects this critical awareness to manifest. He never questions the Fathers except in a positive manner. He never ever considers that there are certain arguments in their works that simply are not of use anymore. Let us take just an example. When Stăniloae comments different important arguments from the writings of the Fathers, either in his monumental *Philokalia* or in other translations, he always seems to try to identify a *positive* understanding and meaning of the texts. This is a very good achievement, but sometimes it does seem unrealistic. Yes, we could say that Stăniloae tries to identify the “mind of the Fathers”, but

⁷⁵Kallistos Ware, *Foreword*..., p. XVII.

sometimes he seems to be the prisoner of the letter. He seems to know that he must criticize some opinions, but he lacks this courage. We cannot call this particular action a *bold one*.

Although I disagree with the arguments used by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware which were presented until now, I strongly agree with two other facts that he mentions. The first one is about the fact that Father Stăniloae was not only an academic scholar, but also a very good priest:

*His life has been devoted to researching, writing and teaching, and yet he has never been an “academic” in the narrow sense. He is not only a professor, but a priest who loves the Liturgy, not only a scholar, but a spiritual father. This link between theology and prayer, so often underlined in his works, is evident also in his own person. Theology is not merely what he studies, but what he lives and is. He speaks with the wisdom of the heart.*⁷⁶

Thus, we have here once again a testimony for the importance that spiritual life played in the research of Father Stăniloae. His theology has something liturgical in it. His research on the Fathers is matched by his inner prayer.

The second aspect that Metropolitan Kallistos Ware stressed in his important *Foreword* is the influence of Gregory Palamas on the theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware acknowledges that Stăniloae’s work on Gregory Palamas⁷⁷ was the first truly ground-breaking study that appeared in the Orthodox world and one far better than the one written by B. Krivocheine. Stăniloae’s study was more accurate and was based on the unpublished manuscripts of Gregory Palamas while the study written by Krivocheine lacked this

⁷⁶ Kallistos Ware, *Foreword...*, p. XV.

⁷⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2006). It was first published in Sibiu in 1938.

significant aspect. Furthermore, Stăniloae remained interested in the subject even after he published his important book, while Krivocheine followed in a different direction. Metropolitan Kallistos remarks that: “Stăniloae has always remained a theologian in the Palamite tradition, ascribing central significance to the distinction that Palamas made between the essence and the energies of God.”⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Metropolitan Kallistos observes that Stăniloae is the first Orthodox scholar that uses extensively the works of St. Gregory Palamas in his dogmatic treatise.

*To express this saving dialectic of God’s otherness yet nearness, Fr. Dumitru employs the Palamite distinction-in-unity between God’s essence and His uncreated energies. The central place that he assigns to this distinction is a new and significant development so far as the works of modern dogmatic theology are concerned. The Palamite teaching is ignored in the Dogmatic of Andrioutsos and allowed no more than a passing mention in that of Trembelas. There is no reference to it in the main text of Fr. Michael Pomazansky’s Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, although a few lines are devoted to St. Gregory Palamas in an appendix. Fr. Dumitru’s is thus the first dogmatics in which the distinction is seen as fundamental to the Orthodox understanding of God.*⁷⁹

Thus, the Neo-Palamite contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is acknowledged and considered to be one of the most important developments in this direction. This distinction between the essence and the energies of God is considered to be in the heart of the dogmatic

⁷⁸ Kallistos Ware, *Foreword...*, p. XII.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. XXI.

treatise of Fr. Dumitru by Metropolitan Kallistos. However, the main researchers of Stăniloae's contribution would not totally agree with this view, simply because it is widely recognized that the Church Father with the greatest influence on Stăniloae is Maximus the Confessor and not Gregory Palamas. I will get back to this aspect when I will discuss the Palamite influence on the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* treatise.

The third author that provides some interesting insights about Stăniloae's Neo-Patristic synthesis is Emil Bartoș. He is one of the few Romanian theologians who were able to develop a critical approach towards Stăniloae. Although belonging to a different confession (Bartoș is a Baptist and not an Orthodox), he was able to identify and present thoroughly Stăniloae's contribution to the concept of deification.⁸⁰ The first important insight that Bartoș provides about the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Father Dumitru stands in describing the negative approach that Stăniloae took towards the 'Orthodox' theologians of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century. Bartoș argues that "Stăniloae struggles to liberate Romanian Orthodox theology from these influences (rationalism, theosophy, positivism and scholasticism) combining the modern approach to philosophical and dogmatic studies with an emphasis on Patristic sources."⁸¹ However, this argument of Bartoș has to be taken not at face value. Stăniloae was concerned by the fact that Orthodox theology was becoming scholastic under Roman-Catholic influence, but he never criticises even once a previous Orthodox theologian for being overwhelmed by Western influences in his own work. What Stăniloae did differently from his predecessors was that he

⁸⁰ Emil Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (New York: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006) and in a previous study as well: 'The Dynamics of the Deification in the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae', in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 207-249.

⁸¹ Emil Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*..., p. 3.

returned mainly to the Patristic sources. For him, Patristic studies became the primary goal before all other possible areas of theological research.

Bartoş goes on by providing two important insights about the way in which Stăniloae's Neo-Patristic synthesis was articulated. The first one lies in the fact that Stăniloae gave much attention "to the need for a re-evaluation of certain theological formulations in the light of the writings of the Fathers and Christian mystics."⁸² The second one consists of the Patristic perspective that Stăniloae had when he analysed the Western contribution. "Stăniloae's openness to the West is supplemented and balanced by a Neo-Patristic spirit."⁸³ However, Bartoş goes too far when he argues that Stăniloae "tries to show that certain Orthodox theologians of the modern period have failed to do justice to the Patristic tradition of the Church."⁸⁴ The only evidence that Bartoş has for this very bold argument is given by the somewhat critical attitude that Stăniloae had towards a few aspects of Vladimir Lossky's presentation of apophatic theology and his rejection of the sophiology of Father Bulgakov. Stăniloae was more than enthusiastic about the Patristic revival and the contribution of 'modern' Orthodox theologians.⁸⁵ Another bold but mistaken argument brought by Bartoş stands in the idea that "Stăniloae (...) serves as a mediator between the thought of the Greek Fathers and modern Orthodox theologians", an argument which is simply exaggerated.⁸⁶ Bartoş argues that this can be seen from

*Stăniloae's stress on the Neo-Patristic spirit and philokalic practice, in
abandoning the scholastic schemes of nineteenth century Orthodox theology*

⁸²Emil Bartoş, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology...*, p. 5.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁵ See note 41 and the quote given there in which Stăniloae highly praises the Russian theologians.

⁸⁶ Emil Bartoş, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology...*, p. 6.

*and promoting a revitalising return to the Patristic and Byzantine tradition
with its spiritual inheritance of hesychasm and Palamism.*⁸⁷

We want to remind readers here that probably the first ‘modern’ Orthodox theologian is Aleksey Khomyakov (1804-1860) and, generally speaking, Stăniloae is not critical of any of the nineteenth century Orthodox theologians. Furthermore, he is quite open towards the works of Russian and Greek theologians of the twentieth century. These theologians were already trying to go beyond any scholastic approach and they were themselves highly critical towards Western influence on Orthodoxy. Stăniloae did not need to preach the importance of Patristic theology to anyone of the Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century. Bartoș tried to emphasize the influence of some of the Church Fathers on Stăniloae in his important work, but he failed to offer a general view in this direction.⁸⁸

A more fruitful and critical approach is given by the book written by Jürgen Henkel.⁸⁹ Here, Henkel analysed an entire writing⁹⁰ of Father Stăniloae from every possible point of view (historical development, sources, subjects, influences etc.). He offers some fresh perspectives on how Stăniloae used the Fathers, especially the Fathers of the *Philokalia* in his important synthesis. Henkel is one of the first scholars, or probably the first one, who considered that Stăniloae is highly uncritical towards patristic texts and that he takes them as having an absolute authority.

⁸⁷ Emil Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*..., p. 6

⁸⁸ See for example *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43 and 178-187.

⁸⁹ Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics in the Orthodox Spirituality, Ascetics and Mystics of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Rom.], translated by Ioan I. Ică jr. (Sibiu: Deisis, 2006).

⁹⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* [in Rom.], (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2006).

The constant references from the Philokalia that Father Dumitru Stăniloae provides in his book are given consequently and thematically by the fact that he wants to insert himself in the Orthodox doctrinal tradition. The texts of the Philokalia represent absolute authorities for him. He discusses at the most the historical relation of the texts that they have between themselves, but he receives them integrally, without a critical reflection upon them. Through this, he creates a special method that could be named as “the philokalic argument”. Father Dumitru Stăniloae does not know what a critical distancing from the texts really means. These texts serve for him as evidence with almost the same rank as the quotes from the Scriptures.⁹¹

Henkel seems a bit outraged by the fact that an international scholar such as Father Stăniloae could make such a mistake as relying and believing too much in the Patristic texts. He seems surprised that Stăniloae really considers the Patristic texts as having almost the same authority as the Scriptures. However, what Henkel seems to consider as a minus, Stăniloae always considered as being his main and most important achievement. Furthermore, Stăniloae does not try to get inside the flow of the Tradition of the Church simply by quoting many Patristic sources so as to seem ‘correct’ in his views and be accepted as an authoritative voice. However, we must give credit to Henkel and to his realistic approach from another point of view. Generally speaking, Stăniloae indeed lacks a critical approach to Patristic texts. Not only does he not interrogate some of the Patristic points of view that really seem outdated, but he also takes them as being correct and important, uncritically. A fundamental question arises here: how can we speak of a Neo-Patristic Synthesis when Stăniloae does not know how to *synthesise* the Patristic arguments?

⁹¹ Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...* [in Rom.], pp. 242-243.

The answer may be that although Stăniloae lacks a critical approach, he does not lack a good view of Orthodox Patristic scholarship and the way in which this differentiates itself from its Western reading. Orthodox Patristic scholars are not keen on pointing to mistakes, outdated elements and subjective opinions in the texts of the Fathers. They first want to see the spiritual progress of Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, from this point of view Stăniloae is very successful. Patristic texts have a great significance for him. He seems to consider the Fathers as his own spiritual Fathers guides. Thus, as one person refrains more or less from criticizing someone close to his heart, so does Stăniloae when speaking about the texts of the Fathers.

Henkel proves to be extremely accurate, however, in a different essential point and this is the Neo-Palamite contribution of Stăniloae. Henkel gives us the opportunity to discover what St. Gregory Palamas really meant to Stăniloae and how we can assess the Neo-Palamite contribution of the latter.

Henkel considers that Stăniloae's turn to the writings of Gregory Palamas at the very beginning of the '30s marked "his definitive rejection of the 'Orthodox' theology that carried a certain rationalistic imprinting due to the Western influence."⁹² Furthermore, Henkel considers that Stăniloae started the "movement of neo-hesychasm" through his writing on St. Gregory Palamas, published in 1938, and his very first translations of the philokalic texts.⁹³ However, Henkel recognizes that, although Stăniloae was the first one⁹⁴ to write a major work on Palamas, the

⁹² Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...*[in Rom.], p. 273.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

⁹⁴ If we exclude here the little brochure signed by B. Krivocheine, *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas*, (London: Geo. E. J. Coldwell, 1954) and which was published first in Russian in 1934 and of course the writing of G. Papamichael, published in 1914.

most renowned Palamite scholar is Father John Meyendorff.⁹⁵ Without agonising too much on the differences and similarities between Meyendorff and Stăniloae, Henkel jumps to an interesting conclusion. Agreeing with F. Von Lilienfeld, Henkel considers that Stăniloae is the most significant figure among modern Orthodox theologians who “considers the Palamite hesychasm as an authentic Orthodox way of thought.”⁹⁶ Henkel goes on and argues that:

*The personal orientation of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, which was massively influenced at the beginning by Christos Andrutsos, towards the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas, is more than a simple enlargement or a new accent of his research interest. Father Dumitru Stăniloae has recognized in Saint Gregory Palamas and in hesychasm the doctrinal tradition in its authentic Orthodox feature and, thus, he decided to turn his back to the theology that had imprinted the mark of the occidental rationalism.*⁹⁷

Thus, Henkel considers Stăniloae to be not only one of the greatest Palamite scholars of all time, but also *the first one* who undertook the mission to present the important features of the writings and life of St. Gregory Palamas. Nonetheless, Stăniloae’s work on the Palamite legacy has taken him away from the scholastic features that accompanied the Orthodox theology of his time. Stăniloae was one of the first theologians to ask why Gregory Palamas had not yet been taken into consideration by the main modern theologians of the Orthodox Church.

However, although he considers Stăniloae to be a great Patristic researcher and one of the first theologians who tried to identify the importance of the writings of Gregory Palamas, Henkel is of

⁹⁵ Who published his ground-breaking thesis entitled *Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas* in 1959.

⁹⁶ Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...*[in Rom.], p. 275.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

two minds about Stăniloae's critical attitude towards Patristic texts. Although above he certainly considered Stăniloae's methods of critical approach as being more or less inconsistent, Henkel softens his earlier view:

*The multitude of the Patristic material that enters in the presentations of Father Dumitru Stăniloae demonstrates that he transmits faithfully the hesychast and mystical tradition of the Eastern Church. His way of working with these texts is a traditional one. He uses them as a support of his own arguments and develops many of his ideas from the constant dialogue with these traditions. The greatness of this approach stands in the fact that he ties in a general frame such a large multitude of traditions and presents thus a synthesis of the Orthodox hesychast and mystical theology. He synthesises thus corresponding texts from the most different eras and backgrounds.*⁹⁸

Thus, Stăniloae offers a very interesting example of Neo-Palamite Synthesis although Henkel does not name it so in his own account on this matter. Henkel appreciates that Stăniloae is faithful in transmitting the hesychast tradition, but he is clearly unfavourable towards the way in which he chooses to do so and we will see below that the word 'traditional' used to characterize Stăniloae's manner of approaching the Patristic texts is merely a euphemism. However, Henkel seems to be positive towards the way in which Stăniloae developed some of his arguments, closely relating them to the Patristic ones, although above he seemed somewhat annoyed by the same fact. Henkel considers that Stăniloae must be praised for the way in which he managed to create a synthesis of the hesychast and mystical tradition of the Eastern Church, but only because he strongly considers (and argues this elsewhere) that hesychasm was not a unitary movement,

⁹⁸ Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...*[in Rom.], p. 283.

but one that had many different ways of manifesting itself.⁹⁹ In Henkel's view, Stăniloae has, thus, the merit of creating an original synthesis that puts together movements and ideas that had something in common but were not necessarily the same in every other aspect. However, Henkel presents afterwards as well what he considers to be the limits of Stăniloae's method of critical approach:

*If this synthesis seems partially artificial and the dialogue with it is not as alive as the one with the modern traditions, this fact appears because of the method used which is predominantly one of transmission and recording. The efforts that Father Dumitru Stăniloae made in order to prove the authenticity of the hesychast and mystic thesaurus of ideas take place occasionally with the price of sacrificing the necessary critical distance towards the texts.*¹⁰⁰

Henkel considers that Stăniloae's synthesis seems to be artificial in some points and this happens in his opinion because the critical method is insufficiently employed by the Romanian scholar. I agree with this opinion up to a point. The main reason for which I disagree is the fact that Stăniloae never tried to present an objective and distanced position towards the texts taken from the writings of the Church Fathers. His theology is one of spiritual experience, more or less an existential theology. Thus, he tends to reject from the start not only as limited, but also as inappropriate, the method of approaching the texts of the Fathers simply with a critical view. However, I believe that Henkel is right when he argues that Father Stăniloae is limiting his credibility and the quality of his synthesis by rejecting this critical approach. At the same time, if

⁹⁹Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics*...[in Rom.], pp. 240-241.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

we think about the way in which Stăniloae considered that Orthodox Patristic research should take place his synthesis seems to be quite an important one.

Charles Miller is another author who published an important work on Father Dumitru Stăniloae and he offered some insights on his Neo-Patristic Synthesis as well.¹⁰¹ This important book was one of the first that appeared on the theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, though it was highly limited in its own results by the lack of materials existent in other languages than Romanian at the time of its publication.¹⁰² Charles Miller does not say much about the important influence that St. Gregory Palamas had on the theological contribution of Father Stăniloae, although he argues that: “*The Life and Teaching of Gregory Palamas* (1938), constitutes one of the earliest attempts to revive the theological insights of Gregory Palamas within Orthodox tradition, and that influence continued as a fundamental component of Stăniloae’s perspective.”¹⁰³ Thus, Miller acknowledges the fact that the writings of Gregory Palamas played a significant role in the theological contribution of Stăniloae. Unfortunately, he does not expand further on this idea. The most probable explanation for this choice remains the scarcity of sources that could have helped him to deepen his own analysis of Stăniloae’s contribution. However, Miller identifies a very important quality of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Father Stăniloae, namely its liturgical feature.

Theology becomes what Ion Bria, describing Stăniloae’s vision, calls ‘an intellectual liturgy’, a form of doxology whose symbolic language evokes the language of prayer. (...) For the theologian there can be little fidelity to the

¹⁰¹ Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 2000).

¹⁰² At that time, only the first volume of his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* from all his significant works of synthesis had been published in an English translation and also a collective study volume entitled *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980).

¹⁰³ Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World...*, p. 13.

*Church's dogmatic tradition, little appreciation of its role as a window through which we peer into divine Person's unfathomable depth, unless it is experienced within the ongoing life of the liturgical tradition where its metaphorical and symbolic quality and power are secure. There the liturgies not only of the human intellect, but of the human heart and body are united in the worship of Christ, the living dogma, in whom true theology has its beginning and end.*¹⁰⁴

Charles Miller observes that Stăniloae's way of presenting his theological contribution has a highly liturgical quality. Thus, his Neo-Patristic Synthesis claims also a significant liturgical quality. This liturgical feature resides in the fact that his theological texts have a prayerful tone. Their language is the language of prayer. They were born from a life of deep prayer and they are addressed to persons who are deeply involved in prayer.

Maciej Bielawski offers an important study dedicated to the translation of the *Philokalia* undertaken by Father Dumitru Stăniloae especially in the Communist period.¹⁰⁵ The conclusions of this study contain two important aspects for our subject. First, Bielawski speaks about the methodology employed by Stăniloae in his translation:

As much as possible, Stăniloae based his translations on the most critical editions. Since his work took many years, however, not always were critical editions accessible or used. Thus, even his edition suffers from inconsistency, especially the first volumes, which in turn should require corrections. Such

¹⁰⁴Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World...*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁵ Maciej Bielawski, 'Dumitru Stăniloae and His Philokalia', in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 25-53.

*irregularities, however, do not take away from the valuable contributions he made concerning textual questions in many of the works.*¹⁰⁶

I agree with the opinion expressed by Bielwaski here because Stăniloae did not use, at least in the first volumes of his monumental translation of the *Philokalia*, very good critical editions. However, this did not happen because he lacked the necessary competence to identify and use them. It was simply because the circulation of the necessary books was not as easy then as it is nowadays. Furthermore, the establishment of the Communist regime at power in Romania made even more difficult the gaining of important materials from the Western Europe. However, this did not impede Stăniloae from becoming a very skilful scholar, capable of analysing in great depth the Patristic texts:

*His use of the original texts and his introductions and notes, especially in the more recent volumes, are valid not only for consideration by experts but also by the public at large. The very original way in which Stăniloae sought to render his Philokalia accessible to people is an example to be followed in future editions. Father Dumitru was successful in achieving a harmonious balance between a critical or academic level and a popular one. In fact, the latter seems to have been his true objective.*¹⁰⁷

Thus, Bielawski observes something that many modern researchers on Stăniloae failed to point out and take into consideration¹⁰⁸ and that is the principal aim of his Neo-Patristic Synthesis. What Bielawski says here only for the translation of the *Philokalia* can be used as well for all the

¹⁰⁶Maciej Bielawski, 'Dumitru Stăniloae and His Philokalia...', pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁸ I am referring here especially to the work of Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...*[in Rom.] which has been analyzed above.

fundamental concepts of Neo-Patristic Synthesis that forms the background of Stăniloae's theological contribution. Stăniloae does not transform the results of his Neo-Patristic Synthesis in aspects dedicated only to scholars. He wants all Christians to read and understand why the Fathers are useful for their spiritual life. His Synthesis is full of Spirit rather than critical perspectives. Although sometimes he seems to lack the methodological attention that someone might expect from a renowned scholar such as him, the profoundness of his theological contribution and Patristic interpretation goes beyond the usual scholarly rules. Bielawski even speaks of a certain 'spirit' of Stăniloae's *Philokalia*.¹⁰⁹

*Stăniloae was deeply marked by the Philokalia, but by his own spirit he also deeply marked the Philokalia. It is this mysterious "synergy" (Philokalia-Stăniloae) – probably generated by the Holy Spirit – that enables us to talk about a Philokalia of Stăniloae and about his theology being philokalical. To use another theological and classical term to describe the dynamic, there seems to be a certain "perichoresis", a mutual, deep and interior interpenetration, between Father Dumitru and the Philokalia. Perhaps, then, it would not be exaggerated to ascribe Father Dumitru Stăniloae with the title "Doctor Philocalicus."'*¹¹⁰

I have to say that *perichoresis* seems to be the best term that describes the relation between the Patristic texts and Father Dumitru Stăniloae. He enclosed them in his own heart but, nonetheless, he bore fruit and offered fresh insights. However, Stăniloae is not merely a *Doctor Philocalicus*, as M. Bielawski tries to describe him here. Although all Philokalic texts played an important role

¹⁰⁹ Maciej Bielawski, 'Dumitru Stăniloae and His Philokalia...', p. 51.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

in his synthesis, almost all researchers agree that Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas took the biggest share and had the most profound influence on his thought.

Another important study that discusses the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Father Stăniloae but concentrates especially on the significant influence that Dionysius the Areopagite had on his contribution is the one of Fr. Gheorghe Drăgulin.¹¹¹ Father Drăgulin is one of the most important Romanian theologians that undertook significant research on the life and important theological insights of Dionysius the Areopagite. However, at the beginning of his study, after he quotes a fragment from the short introduction given by Father Stăniloae to his major work *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Drăgulin argues that:

*It is, thus, evident, that, in his opinion, the new foundation and “spiritual significance of the [Orthodox] dogmatic teachings should be sought in the theological works of a number of Church Fathers and other Byzantine authors such as John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria and Gregory Palamas.”*¹¹²

After Drăgulin begins his analysis on the influence that Pseudo-Dionysius had on Stăniloae, he makes one more important discovery: the fact that Stăniloae was extremely interested in the ‘Dionysian’ arguments that appeared in the conflict between Palamas and Barlaam of Calabria.¹¹³ However, Drăgulin seems to over-estimate the interest that Stăniloae had in this particular aspect, because he believes that Stăniloae used this as a “pretext to accompany the

¹¹¹ Gheorghe Drăgulin, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Dumitru Stăniloae’s Theology’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp.71-83.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

translation from Palamas¹¹⁴ with rich notes making reference to the Areopagitic theology.”¹¹⁵

This is disputable, but, nonetheless, it represents an argument for considering that Stăniloae was extremely aware not only of St. Gregory’s main works or about the details of his life. He also knew extremely well the main Patristic sources that he used during his life and took an interest in reading and using them in his works, a fact underlined by Drăgulin in the end of his study, when he speaks about the influence that Dionysius had on Stăniloae:

*This is evident in his writings which range from modest historic-theological notes to Romanian translations of Dionysius and other Church Fathers to his main theological papers and his original system of Orthodox dogmatic theology. This interest was increasingly associated in his theology with interest in the thought of Saints Gregory Palamas and Maximus the Confessor.*¹¹⁶

Although this is more or less just a general statement, it underlines the fact that Gregory Palamas played a very important role in Stăniloae’s Neo-Patristic Synthesis.

Emil Bartoș offers a very important opinion in his study that appears in the same volume as the one of Father Gheorghe Drăgulin.¹¹⁷ He argues that all the concept of deification that appears in the theological contribution of Father Stăniloae resides mainly on the distinction between the essence and the energies of God employed by Saint Gregory Palamas in his works. He argues that:

¹¹⁴ He is speaking here about the texts that were included in volume VII of the *Romanian Philokalia*.

¹¹⁵ Gheorghe Drăgulin, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Dumitru Stăniloae’s Theology...’, p. 75.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹¹⁷ Emil Bartoș, ‘The Dynamics of the Deification in the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 207-249.

*Among all the Church Fathers, however, none had a greater influence on Stăniloae's thought than Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, perhaps because they were the most creative and daring Eastern theologians after the Cappadocians. The main motif in Maximus' writings is the submersion of the concept of deification in the ocean of Christology: through a double transfiguring motion: the Incarnation of the Logos first justifies and then determines the deification of the human person. Finally, the model employed by Stăniloae receives its final form from Gregory Palamas, through the involvement of the personal uncreated energies in the process of deification.*¹¹⁸

Thus, Bartoș seems convinced that, although the main Church Father that provides the Christological background to the concept of deification in Stăniloae's work is clearly Maximus the Confessor, the final results would not be possible without the mediation that Palamas gives through his clear distinction between the essence and the energies of God. We will get back to this idea over and over again in the subsequent chapters.

Father Calinic Berger offers some important pieces of information in his studies¹¹⁹ and reviews¹²⁰ dedicated to the theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. In his study dedicated to the comparison between Stăniloae's and Zizioulas' ecclesiology he makes two

¹¹⁸Emil Bartoș, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology...*, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ Calinic Berger, 'Does the Eucharist make the Church? An Ecclesiological Comparison of Stăniloae and Zizioulas', *SVTQ*, 51 (2007), 1, pp. 23-70. For a similar study in this direction see Lucian Turcescu, 'Eucharist Ecclesiology or Open Sobornicity?', in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 83-104.

¹²⁰ Idem, 'An Integral Approach to Spirituality: The *Orthodox Spirituality* of Dumitru Stăniloae', *SVTQ*, 48 (2004), 1, pp. 125-148.

fundamental observations. First of all, he argues that the main sources of Stăniloae's ecclesiology are patristic:

Stăniloae draws his Pneumatology from both early Fathers (including Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril of Alexandria, John Chrysostom and John Damascene), and most especially the later Byzantine theologians (Gregory II of Cyprus, Gregory Palamas and Joseph Bryennios). From these Fathers, Stăniloae elucidates a synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology.¹²¹

Thus, Berger argues that Stăniloae's sources are mainly Patristic and that he creates a very interesting synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology based on them. However, this is not all the case. Berger considers that this approach helped Stăniloae to achieve better results than Zizioulas or Lossky and gave him the possibility to create a firmer base for the Orthodox ecclesiology. Berger argues that:

Both Lossky and Zizioulas have made invaluable contributions to Orthodox ecclesiology. However, neither of them explicated the precise relation between the Son and the Spirit in the Holy Trinity, which is the foundation of any synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology, and which in turn grounds ecclesiology. It is Stăniloae's primary contribution that he has explicated this relation, and has provided a robust synthesis of Christology

¹²¹ C. Berger, 'Does the Eucharist make the Church?...', p. 9.

*and Pneumatology firmly based on Patristic Triadology, upon which his ecclesiology is built.*¹²²

The Patristic doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be Stăniloae's main basis for developing his ecclesiological approach. Thus, Stăniloae was able to offer an excellent synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology and develop a distinct ecclesiology, more complete than the one developed for example by Lossky or Zizioulas. However, what is more interesting in the arguments of Calinic Berger is the fact that he is one of the few to include Gregory Palamas in the list of Church Fathers that influenced Stăniloae's ecclesiology. On the other hand he is making a mistake when he includes names like Irenaeus or John Chrysostom in this list. As far as we are concerned Stăniloae used their writings extremely rarely. We do not see much of the Cappadocians either. The main arguments that Stăniloae draws from the Church Fathers to build his ecclesiological approach are expressed either by Gregory Palamas or Gregory II of Cyprus. However, Berger belongs to a small list of researchers that were able to identify correctly at least some of the names that influenced Stăniloae's ecclesiology.

In a review article¹²³ that analyses the writing *Orthodox Spirituality*¹²⁴, Calinic Berger praises the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae and considers him to be "one of the premier translators and experts of patristic literature in the Orthodox world."¹²⁵ This is something relatively shocking because every time a Romanian theologian begins to speak of Stăniloae, he usually starts with the fact that he was a...systematic theologian! This is a very good beginning

¹²²C. Berger, 'Does the Eucharist make the Church?...', p. 69.

¹²³ See note 120.

¹²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*, translated by Archimandrite Jerome Newville and Otilia Kloos (New York: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 2002).

¹²⁵ Calinic Berger, 'An Integral Approach to Spirituality...', p. 125.

from Calinic Berger. However, he has more to say in this direction. He considers that Stăniloae's piece of work "is a wealth of patristic knowledge, encompassing the full spectrum of the Eastern tradition from the Cappadocians, through Dionysius, Maximus, Gregory Palamas and the writings of the Philokalia."¹²⁶ Nonetheless, Berger is realistic about Stăniloae's methodological limitations although he insists rather discreetly on this aspect only in one of his footnotes. Here, he underlines the fact that:

*Dealing with the multitude of citations in Stăniloae's work is a difficult task, when one considers that (a) Stăniloae cited passages from memory, and even paraphrased some patristic citations; (b) quotation marks are occasionally missing or misplaced; (c) many of his citations cannot be found (even from the Romanian Philokalia, e.g. 158 n.149); (d) many of the works he cites are long out of print, if not entirely, in the edition he used; (e) many works he cites extensively have not been translated into English (e.g. Binswanger, Koepgen, and even much of Maximus).*¹²⁷

Berger does not forget, thus, to indicate discreetly the mistakes of Stăniloae's work. However, he does this in a very nice manner, observing it rather indirectly and concentrating for example on the reasons why it is hard to translate any of Stăniloae's writings in English. This fact does not mean, however, that one can overlook the methodological limitations of the book. Nonetheless, this does not also mean that the methodological misappropriations have impeded Stăniloae from creating a wonderful piece of Neo-Patristic Synthesis as I shall explain in detail in the chapter that will be dedicated to this particular book.

¹²⁶Calinic Berger, 'An Integral Approach to Spirituality...', p. 126.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 147, footnote 32.

The last piece of the literature-review puzzle is a relatively consistent Romanian contribution in this direction. Before the death of Father Stăniloae, Romanian theologians wanted to write a *Festschrift* for him in two subsequent volumes. However, this turned out to be, in the end, a *Gedenkschrift*, as Stăniloae died before its publishing.¹²⁸ The volumes were entitled *Person and Communion* [*Persoană și Comuniune* in Romanian]. The main articles were written by Romanian theologians, in Romanian. Thus, most Western researchers lack access to them. However, there are surprisingly few references to Stăniloae as a Patristic scholar and to his important Neo-Patristic Synthesis. Except for some general points of view that speak about his translations and the fact that he is recognized as the greatest systematic scholar in Romanian history, there are not many passages that could be of interest for my research. However, I found out a few statements that could be useful in order to present better his Neo-Patristic Synthesis and its subsequent elements.

Fr. Dumitru Radu, observes that:

The vigorous beginning of his new theological discourse is marked by The Life and the Work of St. Gregory Palamas” [in Rom.], Sibiu, 1938, a monographic study of profound research on the Palamite contribution on the [distinction between the] essence and the divine uncreated energies. This work represents, in fact, the first profound theological research on the Palamite contribution in general, before the studies of theologian John Meyendorff, but it also represents the first contribution of the Romanian theological literature that had an impact on the dogmatic thinking and on Romanian Orthodox ascetical and mystical spirituality. Through this work,

¹²⁸ See Andrew Louth, ‘The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae...’, p. 54.

*Fr. Stăniloae opened the way for the Patristic coordinate of the studies of Orthodox Dogmatics in our academic theological literature.*¹²⁹

Although the statement of Fr. Dumitru Radu is highly general, it includes two important aspects. The first one is that Stăniloae's monograph on Palamas opened the way for another perspective in Romanian theology. Before this monograph, the Patristic coordinate could not be seen in the Romanian theology. Relatively few theologians used the Fathers for something other than generous quotes when they needed to support their own views. Study of the Fathers was not extensive. In fact, there were only two persons that were capable of publishing works that appeared to draw back to the perspective of the Church Fathers: Nichifor Crainic and I. G. Savin. However, Crainic was highly indebted in many ways to Roman-Catholic sources and Savin lacked the capacity of providing a Neo-Patristic Synthesis in the strong sense of the expression. Thus, Stăniloae's monograph was truly a ground-breaking point not only in the direction of Neo-Palamite studies, but also for the future directions of the Romanian theology. The second aspect relies in the fact that Stăniloae was original also in providing a 'combination' between Patristic and systematic studies. The Fathers were no longer providing just simple bibliographic quotes for theologians, but truly important models whose spiritual experience needed to be pursued.

Ion Bria, another important Romanian priest and theologian observes a significant feature of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis:

Stăniloae refers repeatedly to the notion of God, trying to find a new possibility to speak and to accept God beyond the intellectual separation

¹²⁹ Dumitru Radu, 'Coordinates and Permanent Aspects in the Theological Contribution of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae' [in Rom.], in: M. Păcurariu & Ioan I. Ică jr. (eds.) *Person and Communion* [in Rom.] (Sibiu: The Publishing House of the Archdiocese of Sibiu, 1993), pp. 138-139.

commonly accepted in western rationalism, between the transcendence of divine essence and its presence. He underlines the organic synthesis between God's transcendence and his reality in creation, history and humanity, referring to the uncreated divine energies as formulated by St Gregory Palamas, which flow from God's essence and presence. God's nature comprises both an incomprehensible essence and an accessible energy. Theosis — deification, a notion which defines the heart of Orthodox soteriology — is based exactly on this discovery and continuous flowing of the nature of God, enabling constant and real human participation in the divine mystery.¹³⁰

Thus, Bria is able to acknowledge that the Palamite distinction between the essence and the uncreated energies of God stands at the core of Stăniloae's theological contribution. Without this central distinction the relation between God and humanity or God and the created sphere in general would not seem to be possible or it would be highly affected. This distinction represents a basis for the doctrine of deification, the doctrine of the creation of the universe and the human person and, generally speaking, represents an acknowledgment of God's work throughout history. Without it, the theological 'system' created by Father Stăniloae would collapse immediately.

Ivana Noble is the single scholar who spoke about the Palamite influence on Stăniloae's contribution to the theology of creation. She argues that:

¹³⁰ Ion Bria, 'The Creative Vision of D. Stăniloae. An Introduction to his Theological Thought', *The Ecumenical Review* 33 (1981), 1, p. 55.

*Referring to the insights of the Greek Fathers, especially Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas, Stăniloae expands on the aspects of the theology of creation that have been overshadowed by too one-sided emphases on a pessimistic doctrine of the world and especially pessimistic anthropologies, understandable as reflections of different enslavements by 20th century ideologies, yet insufficient in their outcome.*¹³¹

Thus, another aspect of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis is represented by the theology of creation. Although, here, Stăniloae has been influenced by Maximus the Confessor and Gregory of Nyssa, he draws as well from the Palamite writings important ideas and concepts as we shall see when will analyse this particular theme in his work *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*.

Ivana Noble also reveals the fact that Stăniloae was influenced by Gregory Palamas, in her discussion concerning the image of God in the human being. She argues that:

He speaks about "the heart - where the mind (νοῦς) must gather itself in order to experience there the grace of God", the heart as "the innermost organ of the body...as the centre of the encounter between body and soul and as the governing organ (ἡγεμονικόν ὄργανον). Stăniloae comments: "This means that it is not pure intelligence that governs man or encounters God, but the entire man in whom understanding and feeling make up a single whole." For this entire human being he borrows another Palamite concept, namely the "living soul", and with the help of it expresses the notion of the

¹³¹ Ivana Noble, 'Doctrine of Creation within the Theological Project of Dumitru Stăniloae', *Communion Viatorum*, 49 (2007), 2, p. 191.

divine image holistically and relationally. For Gregory Palamas, God inbreathed the “living soul” in people and that is not only “the intellectual soul”, but includes body, mind and spirit. With this insight Stăniloae moves back to his notion of the image of God, and says that the character of the image “is not applied to either soul or body separately, but to both, since together they have been created in the image of God.”¹³²

Ivana Noble identifies, thus, the fact that Stăniloae borrowed more than it was believed from Gregory Palamas in order to present accurately his own contribution in regard to the divine image that exists in the human being. I will get back to this aspect when I discuss the same concept encountered in the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Rom.] and *The Ascetic and Mystic Life of the Orthodox Church* [in Rom.].

The last contribution in this direction that I include in my literature review is the one with which I disagree most, namely the book written by A. N. Williams.¹³³ Although the book itself is a very vigorous piece of writing and certainly opens a gate towards many interesting developments in the relation between Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas, three out of the four passages in which Stăniloae is mentioned have some problems. First, Anna Williams argues that “Stăniloae, author of one of the few and also most widely noticed Orthodox systematic theologies of our time, treats the distinction with great circumspection and seems to regard Palamas as holding a view similar to his own.”¹³⁴ Anna Williams is firmly convinced that Stăniloae considered the distinction operated by Palamas between the essence and the uncreated energies of God as being

¹³² Ivana Noble, ‘Doctrine of Creation...’, p. 196.

¹³³ A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

‘circumspect’. We were unable to see that ‘circumspection’ in the works of Stăniloae. The argument of Williams resides in the fact that:

Stăniloae tends to speak of God's being and his works (being and operations in the English translation of his dogmatics, The Experience of God; and Wesen and Werke in the German translation, Orthodoxe Dogmatik), rarely using energies. He holds firm to the notion that we have access only to the divine as it is manifested in the created realm but seems to regard the distinction as notional, articulating a position that sounds rather Thomistic: “It is from God himself that the operations originate which are productive of new and various qualities in the world. But we only know them through the prism of the effect they produce in world. God himself changes for our sake in his operations, remaining simple as the source of these operations and being wholly present in each one of them” (The Experience of God, p. 126). Note also that Stăniloae strongly insists on divine simplicity throughout this chapter, which treats God's operations. Indeed, he comes close to identifying God's simple being and his operations: “The words which have reference to divine operations can also serve as names for God's being.”¹³⁵

I have offered this lengthy quote because it represents one of the (few) instances in which Stăniloae’s works can become ambiguous if read only in the English translation. The fact that Stăniloae speaks about God’s being and His works has no difference whatsoever in his mind from speaking about God and His uncreated energies. For Stăniloae, energies or works are just synonyms. He prefers this translation not because he is circumspect in any way towards this

¹³⁵ A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union...*, n. 80, p. 200.

particular Palamite distinction, but only because he prefers to translate the Greek word in several manners. Williams observed this, but she was unable to also notice (probably because of the translation) that Stăniloae does not think of ‘energies’ and ‘works’ as different features surrounding God’s being.

However, the place where I totally disagree with A. Williams is the fact that Stăniloae could consider even for one second that the distinction is simply ‘notional’ and that “we have access only to the divine as it is manifested in the created realm.”¹³⁶ What about the eschatological experience of God in the Liturgy or the sight of the divine light? At least in the last example we cannot speak of an experience that takes place in ‘the created realm’. We are beyond our own senses; we are beyond any rational thinking. We are immersed in the ocean of God’s love, in the tenebrous of light.

The argument which really lacks any evidence in Stăniloae’s works runs like this: “Indeed, he comes close to identifying God’s simple being and his operations: “The words which have reference to divine operations can also serve as names for God’s being.”¹³⁷ There is no evidence in the words of Stăniloae that he tries to ‘identify’ the divine works as God’s own being. The fact that a divine operation can be described in a certain way and the fact that this way is also appropriate in order to describe the divine being does not mean that the divine being and its operations are one and the same. A good act and a good person are not the same just because they share goodness.

Furthermore, there is one more idea that seems extremely strange and which is employed by Anna Williams with regard to the style of Stăniloae’s writing. She argues that: “Damascene and

¹³⁶ A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union...*, n. 80, p. 200.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Stăniloae write more in the manner of Thomas than Gregory; Augustine and Balthasar are methodologically more similar to Gregory than Thomas.”¹³⁸ I give credit to Dr. Williams for the fact that Damascene and Aquinas are similar in their style, but I cannot agree with the fact that Stăniloae shares the same style with Aquinas. Stăniloae’s style was influenced by Maximus the Confessor. Now, Maximus is the opposite of Aquinas. While Aquinas has measured phrases and systematic exposition, Maximus lacks both. It would more appropriate to say that Stăniloae follows Gregory Palamas in style than to say that it resembles Aquinas. To believe, even for one second, that Stăniloae’s style of exposition can be similar with the one of Aquinas is simply inexplicable, unless we can offer the argument that either Williams never read attentively Stăniloae’s works (which is highly improbable) or the translations are either too few in order to catch a glimpse of Stăniloae’s style or not respectful towards the original exposition (which is not the case).

Conclusion

The general idea that one may get after one reads the current research on Stăniloae’s life and work is that there is still place for improvement in many different areas. However, if we restrain our view on his Neo-Patristic Synthesis we find out that there have been several researchers who have noted the influence of the Church Fathers in his work. In addition, some of them (A. Louth, K. Ware and C. Berger) were even capable of arguing that Stăniloae should not be viewed just as a systematic theologian, but also as an important Patristic scholar. This is a major shift from the cliché that Stăniloae was an extremely important systematic scholar that has just borrowed a few

¹³⁸A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union...*, p. 169.

ideas from the Fathers and made some translations of their works in his free time. However, it is not enough just to acknowledge the influence that the Fathers had on Stăniloae. I also have to say what were the themes that influenced him, how great was this influence and, in addition, *what was Stăniloae's own contribution to Patristic studies*. Although these facts are sketched in the studies and reviews of the three scholars mentioned above, one cannot be satisfied just with these piecemeal results. There is plenty more to be discovered and this thesis aims clearly not only to provide a new perspective, but also a wider one.

Something else that research on Stăniloae has shown is the fact that he clearly lacked a critical approach towards the writings of the Church Fathers. Although Romanian theologians have praised him many times, they seem reluctant to assume a critical position towards his work. No doubt that Stăniloae was a great theologian; no doubt that his research contained many groundbreaking features; no doubt that he has written more than others read in their lifetime. No doubt about it. However, what he really lacked was a critical approach. Sometimes his works seem to accept everything that the Fathers said, without a necessary discernment between what can be used and what cannot be used any longer. J. Henkel has sounded an alarm notice in this direction stating the 'artificiality' that sometimes one can notice in the synthesis of Stăniloae:

If this synthesis seems partially artificial and the dialogue with it is not as alive as the one with the modern traditions, this fact appears because of the method used which is predominantly one of transmission and recording. The efforts that Father Dumitru Stăniloae made in order to prove the authenticity

*of the hesychast and mystic thesaurus of ideas take place occasionally with the price of sacrificing the necessary critical distance towards the texts.*¹³⁹

Thus, although Stăniloae offered an excellent example of Neo-Patristic Synthesis, the lack of critical approach sometimes makes the reader feel as if he is before a beautiful system, but that this system lacks some sort of progress and movement towards a goal. It is as if he is saying that the Fathers said everything and now we just need to be humble and respect their legacy. Sometimes, Stăniloae seems to draw back to what he criticizes often: traditionalism.

With regard to the Neo-Palamite Synthesis, what one might call a sub-chapter of the concept of Neo-Patristic Synthesis, we observe that many researchers acknowledged the fact that Palamas had a lasting influence on Stăniloae. However, very few of them drawn further on this insight and tried to explain which the main features of this important theological contribution are. Ivana Noble, Emil Bartoș and J. Henkel have tried to explain, even briefly, why is it important to read Palamas in order to understand some choices that Fr. Stăniloae made during his entire theological activity. Nonetheless, what I could observe is the fact that this kind of research that I am now undertaking was not done previously. There are some insights from where I can begin, but what I can tell from the very starting point of my analysis is the fact that I am closer to the scratch than to different systems that have already been created and which need just some refurbishment.

I strongly consider that Stăniloae must be viewed as a Patristic scholar as well. I hope that the Introduction of this thesis has demonstrated that I am not the only person that considers that he was not just a systematic theologian but also a Patristic scholar. Furthermore, I consider that

¹³⁹ J. Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...* [in Rom.], pp. 283-284.

another cliché that needs to be surpassed lies in the argument that only Maximus the Confessor played a strong influence on his theological contribution. This is why I have chosen Palamas and, if this analysis will achieve its purpose, I will try later on to do the same with Cyril of Alexandria, a figure even more absent from the perspective of most researchers when they speak about the Patristic influence on Stăniloae's work. I shall begin with the first important work of the Neo-Palamite current: *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas*.

CHAPTER I: THE FIRST MODERN MONOGRAPH ON GREGORY PALAMAS IN THE ORTHODOX WORLD

When Stăniloae published his major monograph entitled *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas* (1938), there was no such writing in Eastern Orthodoxy. There was no such interest among the scholars in Gregory Palamas, who was considered more or less just a heretic in Western Europe and an uninteresting figure by the Orthodox scholars. The only publications that existed at that time, were the ones of Papamichael (1911)¹⁴⁰ and Krivocheine (1938).¹⁴¹ However, Papamichael was presenting Palamas more from a Western point of view, while Krivocheine wrote what may be described as a study rather than as a monograph. Thus, the field was open for a major work and Stăniloae grasped the opportunity a long time before Meyendorff (1959).¹⁴² However, the fact that he wrote his contribution only in Romanian made Stăniloae

¹⁴⁰ Gregorios Ch. Papamichael, "Ho hagios Grēgorios Palamas Archiepiskopos Thessalonikēs (1296-1369)", (Patriarchiku typographeiu Alexandreias, 1911), 294 pp.

¹⁴¹ The work was republished as a brochure under the name *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas*, (London: Geo. E. J. Coldwell, 1954).

¹⁴² J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1959).

virtually unknown to the academic world outside Romania. Unfortunately, his book has not been translated up to this day. Although there are many scholars that recognise the fact that Stăniloae's monograph was the first one written on the life and work of St. Gregory Palamas, they cannot say much about its content. I will try to offer as many details as possible about the work, because although Romanian and non-Romanian theologians always praised Stăniloae for his achievements, they rarely discussed the importance of this particular work. I will start by describing the reasons that convinced Stăniloae to take on this important research.

Why Gregory Palamas?

This is a question that many people have tried to answer when they researched Stăniloae's massive achievements.¹⁴³ The answer, however, is a very simple one. Stăniloae read the book of Papamichael which was published in 1911 and he was astonished by the fact that Gregory Palamas was having such a bad treatment in Eastern Orthodoxy. He planned to read more about him, but soon discovered that there was no other book on Palamas, only Roman-Catholic studies, especially the ones written by M. Jugie.¹⁴⁴ He was deeply unimpressed by the achievements of the scholars on the Palamite legacy and decided that it was time to dig deeper. He first got the reading of Papamichael when he was in Munich. He decided to find out more from the texts of Palamas himself. Unfortunately, there was no edition in print during that time (1927-1929). He decided to consult the manuscripts of Palamas' works that were kept in Paris at the National Library. So there he went for three months photocopying the manuscripts. He began his work on

¹⁴³ See for example the study of Dumitru Radu

¹⁴⁴ For a list of the writings of M. Jugie in this direction see John Meyendorff, 'Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 42 (1988), p. 158, footnote 2.

them right after he finished his studies in 1929, and published two studies that also contained some translations from Palamas' *Triads* in 1932. Thus, he worked more than 10 years searching for material and developing a strong bibliography before he published his monograph. This delay might be explained partly through the fact that Stăniloae was appointed during that period of time as dean of the Theological Institute in Sibiu and director of the *Romanian Telegraph* newspaper. Thus, he did not have much time for creative insights. This is the explanation for his lack of extraordinary achievements in the first 35 years of his life. He went on to 'a creative explosion' right after the beginning of the 1940s and the publication of his first major translations of the Church Father's works.

So, I can argue that Stăniloae chose Palamas for two main reasons: the fact that he was a major figure of Eastern Patristic thought who did not receive enough attention, and the fact that he was the main point of dispute between Eastern and Western Christian thought, in his opinion. For the second reason, I offer the main arguments given by Stăniloae in the preface of the second edition of his book:

The hesychastic controversy was the most important episode in the history of Orthodox spirituality after the Patristic era. This controversy produced through the collision between Western scholasticism, which already reached its culminant point in the fourteenth century, and the Eastern traditional religious thinking, and made way for a last refurbishment of Orthodoxy's doctrinal characteristics and its position towards the new thinking of Western Europe. Inasmuch as the doctrine of Gregory Palamas grew from the theoretical and practical Eastern religious environment, it described and developed in its turn the characteristic of this environment, so that today we

*cannot say anything serious and concrete about Orthodoxy without taking into account the contribution of this profound Eastern theologian.*¹⁴⁵

Stăniloae really considered that the hesychastic controversy was a major point of conflict between the Eastern and the Western theological perspectives.¹⁴⁶ Scholasticism and hesychasm had confronted each other in the fourteenth century and Palamas' works were on the Eastern side. In Stăniloae's view, Palamas was probably the most prominent figure of the Eastern Orthodoxy. Thus, the main 'evil' that he was fighting against was the most important figure of scholasticism, albeit Thomas Aquinas.¹⁴⁷ I believe that A. Louth was right when he argued that Stăniloae lacked a clear view of the Western theological contribution, but, in this particular case Stăniloae is defended by the fact that he was raised in an environment that was always suspicious towards the Roman Catholic confession. Transylvania was the Romanian province where Roman Catholics tried more than once to convert the Orthodox either through religious debates, or through political enforcement. Thus, this strand of aggressive presentation of Roman Catholicism as just a source of scholasticism, full of philosophy and emptied of any religious experience was all that Stăniloae was ever capable of producing in his writings. He is not simply criticising Roman Catholicism, he transforms it in an 'enemy', a 'plague', the worst adversary of Orthodoxy.

This is the main reason why Stăniloae never had the pacifist views of scholars such as A. N. Williams.¹⁴⁸ He was never concerned with the similarities that one might find between Aquinas

¹⁴⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.], 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Scripta, 1993), p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ A view shared up to some point by John Romanides, but clearly denied by John Meyendorff who considered that the conflict took place between Byzantine theologians and humanists. See John Romanides, 'Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics', *GOTR*, Vol. 6 (1960-1961), pp. 186-187 and John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, translated by George Lawrence (New York: SVSP, 1998), p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.], (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2006), p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford University Press, 1999)

and Palamas, between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.¹⁴⁹ He is always keen on observing the differences and criticizes harshly and perhaps unrealistically many views of Western theology, without using more elaborate arguments other than slogans like ‘scholasticism equals evil’. Furthermore, Stăniloae had not realized the importance that people such as Augustine had on Gregory Palamas.¹⁵⁰ Even if he had, I would argue that he would have left it aside or tried to explain it from other points of view so that Gregory Palamas would not seem influenced by a person whom he considered to be dangerous from many points of view.

Thus, Stăniloae put at odds the scholastic ‘doctrine’ and the Palamite synthesis throughout his monograph. He argues that the scholastic ‘doctrine’ represents “philosophy and not religion”.¹⁵¹ This is a very general and extremely polemical point of view that can be counterattacked extremely easily. However, Stăniloae tries to give it a rational dimension as well and not only a pure sentimental one when he argues that: “the Eastern doctrine of Gregory Palamas is totally in conformity and satisfying for the religious life and nonetheless more profound [than scholasticism].”¹⁵² This kind of view should not make us raise our eyebrow too much because it is also shared by Meyendorff in many of his points and, generally speaking by the majority of the Orthodox modern scholars, such as Yannaras, Florovsky or Popovitch. Unfortunately, Orthodox scholars began simply by blaming all the mistakes that have existed in the Orthodox doctrine in

¹⁴⁹ This is the main purpose of the book written by A. N. Williams.

¹⁵⁰ See for example the analysis of John Meyendorff on this particular point in *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, p. 118. A totally different opinion is expressed by John Romanides, who harshly contradicts Meyendorff in this direction arguing that: “In view of the obvious *similarities* which have been and will be indicated between Barlaam and the Augustinian tradition, Father Meyendorff’s repeated mention of the alleged Augustinianism of Palamas on certain doctrines is indeed very strange.” See John Romanides, ‘Notes on the Palamite Controversy...’, pp. 196-197. However, I tend to disagree with Romanides because he provides only the example of the different conception concerning the rapport between human will and grace in the works of Augustine and Palamas. Furthermore, Romanides tends to have a polemical tone in his disagreement with Meyendorff’s opinions which sometimes seems to lack objectivity.

¹⁵¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 6.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

the last four centuries on Roman Catholic influence. This is very convenient and somewhat cowardly at the same time. Of course, one might argue that the Orthodox who were educated in Western Europe came back with different opinions and changed the Orthodox 'spirit' with the theological 'rationality' of the West, as Stăniloae and many others argue.¹⁵³ However, my opinion is that many Orthodox scholars are acting more or less inconsistent with the Orthodox 'spirit' that they proclaim so much. Not only Stăniloae, but many Orthodox scholars share this mediocre way of attacking harshly and without clear justification Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, without knowing much about either confessions and struggling to maintain this approach through an appeal to 'critical views'. A critical view however has nothing to do with apologetics and polemical spirit. From my point of view, if I may say this, Stăniloae is sometimes acting like an Orthodox M. Jugie.

However, this does not mean that Stăniloae did not offer a tremendous contribution to Palamite studies, one which, if it were translated, would have defined the face of the Palamite studies long before the one written by Fr. John Meyendorff. Unfortunately, all that I can offer here is a late summary and critique of an important book that still lies unapproachable to all important scholars only because it was not published from the beginning in a more accessible language, or at least translated afterwards.

I will return now to the basic conflict that Stăniloae identifies at the beginning of his work between the Palamite synthesis and the doctrine of 'scholasticism'. Stăniloae argues that the distinction between the essence and the energies of God is the most important feature of the Palamite synthesis. He argues that:

¹⁵³Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 7.

*This is a theological conception of great profundity. God is an unreachable, incommunicable and unchangeable in His essence. However, from this essence sprang out powers and actions in which the essence itself does not suffer a loss. These are different from the essence and can be innumerable, because the depth of the essence is infinite. God can launch and revoke them. His will is sovereign. The changing of manifestations does not affect the essence. Only thus God masters as well the changing, although He is a Person.*¹⁵⁴

Stăniloae puts thus the distinction between the essence and the energies of God at the centre of the Palamite synthesis. In his subsequent works this distinction played the leading role as I shall argue later on. What we must retain from the words quoted above is that Stăniloae is highly careful in distinguishing not only the essence from the energies, but also the manner of their rapport. The essence of God does not transmit itself in the energies, but somehow, these energies remain ‘personal’ actions. I shall develop this idea as well, when I shall come to the passages where Stăniloae examines it more profoundly. However, in the end of his presentation, Stăniloae remarks the fact that this distinction was highly despised not only by Roman Catholic but also by Orthodox theologians. Of course, he blames the fact that these Orthodox theologians (whom he does not name!) studied in Western Europe and followed the views of academics who had expressed views against Palamas and his theological contribution. However, one must not leave aside the fact that Stăniloae highly exaggerates when he argues that:

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

The history of Eastern Orthodoxy – especially from 1054¹⁵⁵ onwards – is perverted by the Roman-Catholic historiography, which tries to accredit the opinion that all the important men of Orthodoxy were either ignorant or full of sins and the only people that were important, cultivated and truly has character were the ones converted to Roman Catholicism.¹⁵⁶

Words that have no basis unless we take into consideration the probable exception of the ‘scientific research’ on Palamism pursued by M. Jugie and which has been criticized as well by Western scholars.¹⁵⁷ I shall try to prove that Stăniloae has in mind specifically Jugie when he criticizes so harshly the Roman Catholic contribution to the research of Palamas’ works and life events.

An Orthodox Saint and a scholastic Greek¹⁵⁸

Stăniloae begins his monograph with a few pages on the life of Gregory Palamas. Unlike Meyendorff who also offered a ground-breaking chapter on the main sources and clergymen who influenced Palamas¹⁵⁹, Stăniloae relies only on the main spring of information for the life of this Saint: namely the *Encomium* written by Patriarch Philotheos. He acknowledges that Palamas was

¹⁵⁵ Seventy years ago it was still believed that the separation between the ‘Orthodox’ East and the ‘Roman-Catholic’ West happened in 1054. However, the research has proven without doubt that there were many other moments that either preceded or succeeded this event and which could be considered as friction points between East and West. See for example: Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) or, even a better perspective, in Henry Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], pp. 7-8.

¹⁵⁷ A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 5

¹⁵⁸ For persons interested in an exposition of the main arguments between Palamas and Barlaam from Palamas’ point of view see Saint Gregory Palamas, *Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite*, translation by Rein Ferwerda (New York: Binghamton University, 1999).

¹⁵⁹ See J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, translated by George Lawrence (New York: SVSP, 1974), pp. 13-27.

highly influenced by Metropolitan Theoleptos of Philadelphia, but he does not go further on to speak about personalities such as Patriarchs Gregory II of Cyprus or Athanasios I of Constantinople, as Meyendorff does.¹⁶⁰ However, Stăniloae offers a good breadth of literature and he uses the works written until then by people such as G. Papamichael, Louis Petit and even M. Jugie. What we can observe from the beginning is the fact that he did not know anything about the important study written by B. Krivocheine which was published in 1938 and republished as a small brochure in 1954.¹⁶¹

There is one aspect that seems highly interesting in the presentation that Stăniloae gives for the life of Gregory Palamas. He argues that Western theological thought (NB: he quotes here only the name of Jugie!) had accused Palamas of not having enough philosophical knowledge. In order to take a position somewhere in the middle, Stăniloae is constrained to argue that Palamas was sufficiently aware of philosophical concepts, but, he adds, “in his polemical disputes, he did not need to use philosophical arguments that much because he based himself almost completely on the analysis of the Patristic quotations.”¹⁶² This is a rather poor argument. Stăniloae fails to see the breadth of Aristotelian philosophy that Palamas uses in some of his works¹⁶³, while, in the same time he is highly convinced that Palamas did not need it anyway in order to clarify different aspects of the polemic with Gregoras and Barlaam. I will get back to this idea when I will discuss these particular disputes.

¹⁶⁰ Neither does he speak about the Patristic legacy that Palamas took further as Florovsky did. See Georges Florovsky, ‘Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers’, *GOTR*, Vol. 5 (1959-1960), pp. 119-131.

¹⁶¹ Basil Krivocheine, *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas*, (London: Geo. E. J. Coldwell, 1954).

¹⁶² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 12.

¹⁶³ Especially the *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts*, in: ‘The Philokalia’, vol. IV, translated from Greek and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1998), pp. 346-418.

Stăniloae does not focus too much on the details of the life of Gregory Palamas. Soon he radically changes the structure of the book and goes on with the main aspects of the different controversies that Palamas had with Barlaam, Akindynos or Gregoras. The most interesting aspect that we find after the presentation of the first 35 years of Palamas' life can be found in the opinion of Stăniloae about Barlaam of Calabria.

Stăniloae argues in a very powerful (and critical of the West) manner that Barlaam was not Orthodox in his youth and, furthermore, he was not even Greek.¹⁶⁴ Using the information provided by G. Schiro in an interesting study¹⁶⁵, he argues that Barlaam cannot be considered either as Orthodox from his youth, or as Greek by his origin. G. Schiro offered arguments only in the direction of considering Barlaam as Greek and Orthodox at the same time. He argued that Barlaam in some of his writings defended the Eastern views against the *Filioque* and the papal primate. Nonetheless, he was named as abbot of a monastery in Constantinople and he was commissioned by the Byzantine emperor to resolve the matter of the union with the Papacy in 1339. Stăniloae turns to the writings of Gregory Palamas and argues that Barlaam was not Greek and not even Orthodox before he came to Eastern Europe. However, the arguments are weak, because Palamas criticizes only the fact that Barlaam was not acting as a true monk.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, in another passage, although Palamas seems to accuse Barlaam of having the same 'nationality' (ὁ μοφύλοις) with the Latins, he does not think that Barlaam is Latin, but probably only born in a Latin place.¹⁶⁷ Stăniloae also takes into consideration the texts of Nicephoros Gregoras. He quotes a passage in which Gregoras describes Barlaam as a "person who took on

¹⁶⁴ This view is not shared by any of other modern scholars, either from the East or from the West.

¹⁶⁵ G. Schiro, 'I rapporti di Barlaam Calabrio con le due Chiese di Roma e di Bisanzio', in: *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania*, Anno I, Fasc. III (Roma, 1931), pp. 325-326.

¹⁶⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the Greek vestments and the name of Barlaam. (...) He was versed in Latin wisdom.”¹⁶⁸ Gregoras also argues that after the defeat suffered by Barlaam in the Synod of 1341, he came back to Italy “to the Latin customs and doctrines, in which he was educated.”¹⁶⁹ However, these arguments are weak, especially if one knows the emphasis that Gregoras was keen to put on the national pedigree of a philosopher and theologian. Gregoras might have exaggerated, and this is not the first time, about the origin and the customs of Barlaam. Stăniloae uses here only the arguments of persons that were in conflict with Barlaam and he tends to give a tendentious view because he is keen on demonstrating that the conflict between Palamas and Barlaam was one between the scholastic doctrine of the West incarnated in the Greek/Latin Barlaam and the Orthodox doctrine incarnated by Palamas.

One might wonder how Stăniloae could reach this conclusion on the basis of such weak arguments:

*Even if Barlaam was not Roman Catholic or Italian beforehand but Greek Orthodox (...) and this is something that can be easily apprehended by his writings, he had a profound scholastic and Roman Catholic [sic] mentality. Thus, the fight against hesychasm was begun by a representative of the Catholic scholastic theology.”*¹⁷⁰

Stăniloae is so keen on demonstrating that the Palamite doctrine was at odds with scholastic theology that he transforms Barlaam in a Roman Catholic figure, who went for a while to Byzantium, got himself into trouble and then flew back to his warm nest in Italy. This is a poor

¹⁶⁸ N. Gregoras, ‘Byzantinae Historiae’, XI, 10, in: *PG*, vol. 148, col. 760-761.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 20.

analysis. Barlaam would have never been sent by the Byzantine emperor in order to obtain a union with Rome if he was a renegade Roman Catholic. I doubt as well the fact that Barlaam would have been received by the Roman-Catholic Church and made bishop, if he had left this Church for the Orthodox one, only in order to come back later on to his former beliefs. Furthermore, my opinion is that Barlaam was highly influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite, even more than Aristotle.¹⁷¹ He quotes him copiously. If one might apply the argument of Stăniloae that Palamas “in his polemical disputes, did not need that much to use the philosophical arguments because he based himself almost completely on the analysis of the Patristic quotations”¹⁷² to Barlaam, he would not be as wrong as Stăniloae is when he considers Barlaam simply as a ‘scholastic’ tool of the West sent in the East in order to corrupt the minds and doctrines of Orthodoxy. This opinion is not shared by J. Meyendorff who argues that:

*When he came to Constantinople about 1330, Barlaam, ‘monk and philosopher’, from Seminaria in Calabria, a Greek by language and sentiment, but western educated and imbued with the spirit of the Italian Renaissance, sought above all a closer knowledge of ancient Hellas, the land of Plato and Aristotle. He was faithful to Orthodoxy as the religion of his Greek ancestors, and Palamas recognized that he had a sincere love of ‘true piety’.*¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ See the argument expressed by M. Begzos, ‘Apophaticism in the Theology of the Eastern Church: The Modern Critical Function of a Traditional Theory’, *GOTR*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (1996), p. 339: “In the fourteenth century it was the theologian of the Western Church [sic], Barlaam, who attempted to base the unification of the Western and Eastern Churches on Dionysios.”

¹⁷² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 12.

¹⁷³ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (Crestwood: SVSP, 2010), p. 42.

This is just an example of how an excellent scholar like Stăniloae can let himself taken away by the same method of polemical attacks and aggressive apologetic structures employed by people like M. Jugie and how it can simply arrive at the same poor results. This represents the weakest point of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis, where Palamas is presented in conflict with the West, when Palamas himself apparently never held such a position.

The main points of the conflict between Palamas and Barlaam

In Stăniloae's view, there are four main areas of conflict between Palamas and Barlaam of Calabria: the value of science, the prayer of the heart, the vision of the divine light and the distinction between the essence and the energies of God.

The first one of those which consists of the comparison of the values given to the role of philosophy in the spiritual life of the believer by both Palamas and Barlaam of Calabria is discussed by Stăniloae solely from the writings of Gregory Palamas. Absolutely all the quotes in this subchapter are from the *Triads* of Gregory Palamas, including the ones that belong to the writings of Barlaam. For Stăniloae there is only one good direction and this is the one taken by Gregory Palamas. It is true that some of the writings of Barlaam were destroyed after the Synod of 1341¹⁷⁴ and Stăniloae had no access to other sources that might offer him the original manuscripts of the writings of Barlaam. However, Stăniloae seems a bit tendentious in his manner of treating the writings of Barlaam in what should be an 'objective' analysis.

For example, when discussing a passage of Barlaam in which the latter argues that the knowledge deriving from Scriptures and the one deriving from philosophy and other sciences is

¹⁷⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 36.

equal, Stăniloae goes further and argues at one subsequent point that the Italian/Greek author considers philosophical knowledge as superior to the Scriptures.¹⁷⁵ Stăniloae seems to constantly paint Barlaam in a negative light. This is not such a grave thing if one thinks about the basis of this monograph: a polemical view of the Palamite synthesis in dialogue with the ‘scholastic’ teaching of the West. It does become serious however, when Stăniloae gets carried away and puts in Barlaam’s mouth words that he had never said, just in order to describe a huge divide between him and Palamas. Another weak point of Stăniloae’s approach can be found in the fact that he does not put anything of his own in this particular sub-chapter, as well as in other subsequent chapters of his monograph. It is true that he was an Orthodox and a Palamite, but to simply quote the works of Palamas and then repeat everything that you have already presented through that quote is not a scientific method and even Palamas would disagree with it. Thus, although we might consider that Stăniloae offers a good summary of different positions in this controversy, we would also be forced to admit that he is superficial in his synthesis or even that he lacks a synthesis up to some point.¹⁷⁶

Stăniloae considers for example that Barlaam argued that the sciences are utterly important for the salvation of the soul, as equal with Scripture and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, while Palamas was concerned with the fact that these sciences are no more than natural gifts that are totally inferior to the knowledge deriving from Scripture and extremely low in comparison with the spiritual knowledge brought forward by the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁷ However, although this summary seems very nice, he does not bring into the discussion other important sources such as Akindynos and Nicephorus Gregoras. They too, offered interesting details in this direction.

¹⁷⁵Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 38.

¹⁷⁶ This is also the position expressed by J. Henkel in his book, *Deification and Love Ethics...*[in Rom.], pp. 240-241.

¹⁷⁷ See also John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, pp. 115-116.

Meyendorff underlines in his work for example, how Akindynos moderated between Barlaam and Palamas at the beginning and through the first part of their dispute.¹⁷⁸

The description of the second theme, albeit the one of the prayer of the heart, begins with an interesting statement of Stăniloae: “we will discuss more the second treatise of the second triad [of Palamas writings] because it gives us more details about the attacks of Barlaam.”¹⁷⁹ However, Stăniloae is preoccupied with the position of Barlaam only because he is keen on pointing out his mistakes without thinking even for one second that this is not something appropriate for a scholar.

Before beginning the description of the attacks of the ‘infamous’ Barlaam on the prayer of the heart, Stăniloae offers a very good summary of the methods of prayer included in the writings of Pseudo-John Chrysostom, Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory of Sinai, Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos and Nicephorus the Monk.¹⁸⁰ He discussed all these in a more descriptive manner in his excellent book entitled *The Ascetic and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*.¹⁸¹ Stăniloae analysed afterwards the arguments brought forward by Barlaam against the prayer of the heart and the counter-arguments of Palamas. While Barlaam proposed a manner of prayer that was more or less just an intellectual exercise, Palamas spoke about the gifts of the advanced prayer that consisted in the shedding of tears, spiritual joy and the controlling of the body through the mind.¹⁸² However, Barlaam counterattacked and considered that if these gifts were overwhelmed by the advancement in spiritual life and the vision of God, this particularly

¹⁷⁸ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁷⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 45.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-67.

¹⁸¹ See chapter two of this thesis and especially the sub-chapter concerning the concept of pure prayer.

¹⁸² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], pp. 70-71.

means that these are not the gifts of God, but merely human achievements.¹⁸³ Palamas speaks against this opinion and considers that the gifts of God do not all have the same value, but this does not mean that the ‘lower’ gifts are no longer gifts.¹⁸⁴ The last theme treated by Stăniloae in his summary is the one of apathy.¹⁸⁵

In this whole sub-chapter, Stăniloae offers only one (!) personal opinion and this proves to be highly mistaken. He argues that:

*The abstract spiritualism of Barlaam, who, in his despise of the body is so close to the vulgar rationalism [sic] and the Protestant sects [sic] and has so little in common with Christianity, is opposed by the deep Christian conception of Gregory Palamas. This conception presents the salvation for the entire human being, because the entire human being is deified. None of the spiritual and bodily powers of the human being is despised and left aside, but all are pointed towards another direction, namely God. Barlaam, who was highly influenced by Western mentality, wanted to give a rationalist blow to Eastern asceticism, which does not pursue the destruction of the body and is not uninterested in it, but cares for his salvation, freeing his powers from under the mastery of sin and pointing them towards virtue.*¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 71.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 72-73. For more information on the disagreement between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam of Calabria on the theme of pure prayer see: John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, pp. 138-140; Idem, *Introduction*, in: Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, translated by John Meyendorff (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 6; the opinion of Barlaam is presented excellently by Georgios Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man. St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, translated by Liadain Sherrard (New York: SVSP, 1984), pp. 91-95. See also the considerations given on this subject by David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 235.

¹⁸⁶Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], pp. 74-75.

It is quite hard to understand at least the first two lines of this argument. What Barlaam has to do with ‘vulgar rationalism’ and ‘Protestant sects’ is extremely hard to explain. Thus, Barlaam is presented as one who despised the human body and Palamas as the person who tried to present the fact that the whole human being (not only soul, but also body) is deified.¹⁸⁷ I am quite sure that Stăniloae is correct about the opinion of Palamas, but I am also sure that Barlaam never considered the human body as something despicable. He only criticized the manner in which some Christians considered that the prayer of the heart should take place. Stăniloae is exaggerating a bit here in his action of presenting Barlaam as a person who simply considers that the body cannot participate in the knowledge of God.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, Stăniloae gives an amusing conclusion when he states that: “I have offered extensive quotes of the opinions of Barlaam. It can, thus, be said, *without any acrimony*, that the point of view expressed by Gregory Palamas is the most righteous and profoundly Christian.”¹⁸⁹ One can just imagine what it would mean from Stăniloae’s point of view to have an *acrimonious* approach.

The third theme, the one of the vision of the divine light, is one where Stăniloae pursues this dialogue of ‘quotes’ between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam. He does not seem bothered too much about the fact that the method employed here gives him no possibility of truly interfering without some modest ‘brave’ remarks in favour of the Palamite writings. Stăniloae summarizes the main themes that Palamas had to counterattack when he read the writings of Barlaam of Calabria. Barlaam was convinced that the light that the hesychasts ‘pretended’ to see was just a sensible one or at the most a symbol, if not a pure fantasy. However, at one point he even argues that that light must be hypostatical; otherwise it cannot subsist on its own. Palamas observes that

¹⁸⁷Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 75

¹⁸⁸Although this opinion is also shared by John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, p. 147.

¹⁸⁹Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 75.

this light is uncreated and springs forth from God, but he also criticizes Barlaam for holding opinions that are not considered true even by the hesychasts themselves.¹⁹⁰

However, although earlier on, in the chapter consecrated to Barlaam, Stăniloae simply considered him as being influenced by science and not by the teaching of the Church, he recognizes here indirectly the fact that he knew up to some point the Church Fathers, although he did not interpret them as well as Palamas. Barlaam quotes Dionysius the Great, Dionysius the Areopagite¹⁹¹ and even Maximus the Confessor¹⁹². He was quite cultivated for an Italian who just knew Greek! However, Barlaam considered that the light of Tabor was just a symbol and that the knowledge of God achieved its highest step in negative theology. Palamas counterattacked and argued that the light that sprung forth from the body of Lord on Mount Tabor was not simply a symbol, but uncreated energy, and the union with God is above negative theology, consisting in the vision of the divine energies. Stăniloae will develop these ideas as well in the last part of his influential work entitled *The Ascetic and Mystical Theology of the Orthodox Church* which will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

In the end of his summary, Stăniloae criticizes again Barlaam and considers that:

He does not admit another way of knowing God except the pure rational one.

In this case, however, there is no difference between Christians and pagans

¹⁹⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 78.

¹⁹¹ For the interpretations given to the Areopagitic corpus both by Palamas and Barlaam see: Alexander Golitzin, 'Dionysius the Areopagite in the Works of Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a "Christological Corrective" and Related Matters', *SVTQ*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2002), pp. 163-190 and especially Julia Konstantinovskiy, 'Dionysius the Areopagite versus Aristotle? The Two Points of Reference for Gregory Palamas in Initial Confrontations with Barlaam the Calabrian', in: F. Young, M. Edwards and P. Parvis (eds.), *Studia Patristica: Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003*, Vol. XLII (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 313-321. See also Joost Van Rossum, 'Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory Palamas: A Christological Corrective?', in: F. Young, M. Edwards and P. Parvis (eds.), *Studia Patristica: Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003*, Vol. XLII (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 347-357.

¹⁹²Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], pp. 82, 88-90.

*and the pagan teachers have had a more profound vision of God than the prophets. The knowledge of the created realm is an inferior and incomplete one. The true knowledge of God is one above senses and mind, which accomplishes through the power of the Holy Spirit when the union with God is undertaken in the [human] heart.*¹⁹³

If Barlaam could defend himself, he would certainly have said that he never considered the pagan teachers above the prophets or that there is no difference between Christians and pagans in what concerns the knowledge of God. In his spurious way of providing a Neo-Palamite synthesis, Stăniloae achieves only a (Neo)-Palamite summary that does not excuse at all his stark conclusions and the way in which he seems to read ‘modern’ ideas and currents in the writings of Palamas’ adversaries.¹⁹⁴

The fourth and final theme of conflict between Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas resided in a subject that was always essential from the fourteenth century onwards for the Eastern Church, namely the distinction between the essence and the energies of God. Palamas took on a different approach in his critique of Barlaam and accused him of introducing Western ideas in his writings. Stăniloae considers that Barlaam introduced into his writings concepts such as created grace and, indirectly, the *Filioque* adage, after his diplomatic visit to Rome in 1339.¹⁹⁵

There is however only one aspect that Barlaam brought into the discussion and which was criticized by Palamas: the fact that only the essence of God is uncreated, while his grace and his

¹⁹³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 94.

¹⁹⁴ Is this ‘better’ than reading modern concepts in the writings of Gregory Palamas as Meyendorff did or just less dangerous from the Orthodox point of view? See John Romanides, ‘Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics’, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 6 (1960-1961), pp. 186-205 and the second part: 9 (1963-1964), pp. 225-270.

¹⁹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 96.

actions are all created. In this resides the main difference between Barlaam and Palamas on this particular point.¹⁹⁶ In spite of his clear forceful attacks on Barlaam that we have identified beforehand, Stăniloae does not give even one phrase of personal account in this sub-chapter leaving it all to the Palamite texts.

After this highly ‘descriptive’ way of presenting the main points of dispute between Palamas and Barlaam, Stăniloae proceeds to a lengthy historical-critical discussion of the different synods that took place between 1341 and 1347.¹⁹⁷

I am interested particularly in the last two chapters of the book that speak mainly about the disputes of Palamas with Akindynos¹⁹⁸ and Gregoras¹⁹⁹. One can observe here the fact that this monograph has two main strands: the historical events and the polemical disputes between Palamas and his three main adversaries. The book is concentrated more on conflicts, on the issues that have sprung forth and transformed the political and ecclesial life of Byzantium for more than a decade in the fourteenth century in a battlefield. Unfortunately, I cannot accept Stăniloae’s opinion or the one expressed by other Orthodox theologians that here we have a conflict between East and West. It is more likely to be a conflict between Christian humanists with a strong philosophical influence (Barlaam, Gregoras, Akindynos) and theologians that had the spiritual experience of the grace (Palamas).²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], pp. 104-115.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-160 (about the Synod of 1341) and pp. 161-209 (about the events that followed the Synod of 1341 up until 1347).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-224.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-260.

²⁰⁰ I share here the opinion expressed by John Meyendorff in his book *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, p. 27 and in his study ‘Doctrine of Grace in St. Gregory Palamas’, *SVTQ*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1958), p. 19.

The dispute with Akindynos²⁰¹

I will pass on to the discussion of the dispute between Akindynos²⁰² and Palamas. Stăniloae used further his method of pure description when he discussed this dispute. He argued first that the main accusation brought forward by Akindynos against Palamas lay in the fact that the latter was a ditheist, because he taught the distinction between the essence and the energies of God. Stăniloae considers that Akindynos taught an “irreducible transcendentalism only in order to save the absolute simplicity of God.”²⁰³ Furthermore, Stăniloae considers that the position adopted by Palamas could be described in just one phrase consisting of three parts:

*1. There is a distinction between essence and energies, 2. but these are not separated from the essence and 3. these do not alter the simplicity and unity of the essence.*²⁰⁴

I consider that Stăniloae offered there a very important summary of the main differences that existed between the position of Palamas and the one of Akindynos. Palamas considered that the fact that a mind is thinking does not lead us to the idea that the mind and its thinking are two different things. Furthermore, he considered that nature cannot exist without working or acting in some sort of way. However, this action cannot be separated from nature and considered as a

²⁰¹ A very good presentation of this particular conflict can be found in Juan Nadal Cañellas, *La Résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec Traduction et Commentaire de quatre Traités édités récemment*, vol. I: 'Traduction des quatre traits de la "Réfutation du Dialogue entre un Orthodox et un Barlaamite" de Grégoire Palamas' (Leuven: Peeters, 2006) and Idem, *La Résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire Palamas. Enquête historique, avec Traduction et Commentaire de quatre Traités édités récemment*, vol. II: 'Commentaire Historique' (Leuven: Peeters, 2006). Unfortunately, I was unable to consult it directly.

²⁰² For a short biography of Akindynos and brief details about the main points of his controversy with Gregory Palamas see Angela Constantinides Hero, 'Some Notes on the Letters of Gregory Akindynos', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 36 (1982), pp. 221-226.

²⁰³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 213.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

second thing.²⁰⁵ Stăniloae seems to be more equidistant in his description of this dispute and even shows some sort of sympathy towards Akindynos.²⁰⁶ He argues for example that:

*Palamas reproached Akindynos that he considers that God is either an essence without energies, thus, without actions and without powers, because the action is the manifestation of power, either a simple energy. However, both alternatives are pure nonsense. There is no being without power and action, and an energy that is suspended in vacuum cannot exist. It is true that Akindynos never argued these things directly. He considered that there is no difference between essence and energies in the sense that God is simultaneously essence and energy and there is no difference between the two: "we consider God as energetic being, for the energy is nothing else but the being." Palamas answered that these are only empty words. There could be no identity between the essence and the energies.*²⁰⁷

Thus, the main difference between Palamas and Akindynos resided in the fact that, for the latter, there was no distinction between essence and energies in God. The essence of God and His energies were one and the same thing. I believe that Stăniloae is right when he argues that Akindynos fell in this trap because he wanted to preserve too much an 'absolute simplicity' of God. I also agree with the position adopted by Stăniloae in what concerns the effects of both doctrines. For Palamas, the relationship between God and the world is maintained through the uncreated energies, which are distinct from His essence. We cannot participate in the essence of God. Furthermore, the 'names' that we give to God (Pseudo-Dionysius takes the medal for this!)

²⁰⁵Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 213.

²⁰⁶ Maybe because he was a friend of Palamas up to some point?

²⁰⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 215.

are not names related to His essence but only to His energies. Thus, in Stăniloae's words, the Palamite doctrine implies that: "God does not represent for us an utterly distant transcendence, but we are neither the product of the essence of God and we are not united with it and do not possess any knowledge of it, otherwise we would be like Christ."²⁰⁸

From the point of view of Akindynos, if the essence and the energies of God are one and the same thing, this has grave consequences on the relation between God and the world. Thus, the world cannot be but created from eternity, because the essence and the energies are one and the same. "If the creative energy is identical with the being of God, it is clear that God created the world simultaneously with His being."²⁰⁹ I cannot agree with Stăniloae on this particular point. I believe that he interprets wrongly here what Akindynos really meant. The fact that the being and the energies are considered by Akindynos to be one and the same thing in God does not mean that the world was created simultaneously with the being of God. It is true that Akindynos considers that the divine being becomes accessible to the human beings, otherwise there would be no knowledge of God and no relation between God and the human beings. However, Akindynos seems to be more like a person that separates God and the world too much and he is conscious of this fact because he tends to transform the attributes of God in some sort of Platonic ideas that stand between God and the world.²¹⁰

Akindynos sometimes considers that what we name as actions and attributes of God as goodness, sainthood, immortality etc. are hypostatic realities, which have their place between the divine essence and the created realm, as

²⁰⁸Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 216.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 216.

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 218.

*some sort of Platonic ideas, created by God, but having their place above angels, in which angels and the other creatures participate.*²¹¹

Thus, Akindynos tries to identify something in the middle between God and the created realm, but this would seem a bit absurd if he considered in the same time that we have access to the divine essence. Why would the creatures and the angels need to participate first in these ‘hypostatic’ attributes that subsist on their own if they have direct access to the divine essence? It is true, on the other hand that is it difficult to correlate this view with what Stăniloae argues, albeit that for Akindynos everything that differs from God is created and, thus, logically speaking, even grace.²¹² Stăniloae seems to exaggerate here at first sight, but I have to give him credit for this particular view because it is clear from the quotes that he is giving from the writings of Akindynos that the latter does not recognise the fact that the essence of God can unite itself in some way with the created nature. Thus, Akindynos maintains the view that God is totally transcendent.

Furthermore, Stăniloae accuses Akindynos of the fact that he shares a similar opinion as Barlaam on the subject of the divine light.²¹³ Akindynos tried to differentiate his own view from the one of Barlaam insisting on the fact that the light that the disciples saw on Mount Tabor was a divine symbol.²¹⁴ However, constrained to admit that this light was of uncreated nature, Akindynos failed to recognise this and, thus, consequently taught that it had a created nature. However,

²¹¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 218.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²¹³ John Meyendorff clearly considers that Barlaam had an influence of Akindynos and Gregoras in what concerns their position about the vision of the divine light. They all considered this vision as necessarily symbolic. See John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, p. 188.

²¹⁴ Barlaam held this position only at the end of his controversy with Palamas. Beforehand, he even sustained that the divine light either is natural, or a mere fantasy.

Stăniloae does not offer us a clear view of Akindynos' teaching because he argues in the end of his descriptive presentation of this particular dispute that:

*Akindynos contested the knowledge of God through the mediation of the energies that come directly from Him. He admitted only the knowledge of God through the created realm, through [logical] deduction. He did not recognise a higher way of knowing God except the natural one, by observing the wisdom that God manifested in their order. However, in this case, the pagan philosophers knew God better.*²¹⁵

One can say from the beginning that Stăniloae forces his argument here. If Akindynos spoke about a created grace and also about some sort of Platonic Ideas represented by the attributes of God and recognised at least the 'symbolic' feature of the light that appeared through the body of the Saviour on Mount Tabor, how can we still argue that he considered the natural (positive) knowledge of God as the only one possible? In this case he would be even lower in opinion than Barlaam, who, at least, recognised the fact that there is such a thing as negative theology. Stăniloae considers that Barlaam, Akindynos and, as we shall see, Gregoras are just some heretics with extremely wrong views and who do not deserve attention in themselves unless we can observe this from the writings of Palamas. This is not a scholarly method, but only a 'confessional' one. Furthermore, one can observe as well the tendentious manner of speaking towards the Roman-Catholic Church, because Stăniloae tries to transform the hesychast disputes, as many other Orthodox scholars, in a massive conflict between East and West. This means reading back in history events that were not there.

²¹⁵Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 224.

The dispute with Gregoras

I will turn now to the last dispute of Palamas, the one with Nicephorus Gregoras.²¹⁶ Stăniloae depicts Gregoras as a person who wanted to make everyone think that he was a victim.²¹⁷ Of course, Gregoras is known for his highly rhetorical style and the fact that he depicted the particular disputes with Palamas in a highly theatrical manner putting his own person in the centre of everything and claiming that he was right all the time. However, one must give at least some credit to the fact that he felt his life threatened during the period when he had the disputes with Gregory Palamas and not claim that he made of all this just a stage play as Stăniloae does.²¹⁸

Stăniloae proceeds to the discussion of the Synod of 1351. Gregoras accused Palamas that he was making an error when he considered that Barlaam of Calabria influenced this dispute. It is known that Gregoras had also a dispute with Barlaam on philosophical themes and defeated the latter, quite clearly diminishing his influence at the imperial court and determining a huge drop of the confidence that the Constantinopolitan nobility had in his intellectual abilities.²¹⁹ Gregoras pursued afterwards the theme of the divine light, but, in the end, Palamas proved that he did not promote either ditheism or a transformation of the body of Christ to pure light.²²⁰

The second part of their dispute took place during the autumn of 1351. Stăniloae considers that Gregoras falsified the content of the discussion in his description of it and, even if one could give him credit that he defeated Palamas in the dialogue, nothing would have changed anyway. The

²¹⁶ Some useful details about Nicephorus Gregoras' life and humanist contribution can be found in the still valuable study of Kenneth M. Setton, 'The Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (Feb. 24, 1956), p. 43, footnote 14.

²¹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 229.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Kenneth M. Setton, 'The Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance...', p. 41.

²²⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 232.

hesychasts had already won their way.²²¹ Stăniloae takes this idea from the first treatise written by Palamas against Gregoras.²²²

Stăniloae presents afterwards the main accusations brought forward by Palamas to Gregoras in the four *Antirrhetikoi* written against the latter. Stăniloae remarks that Gregoras considered Aristotelian logic as something extremely important to be followed in the discussion of dogmas. Palamas was at odds with this view. Thus, Stăniloae argues that:

*The method of Palamas consisted in the commentary of the Patristic quotes. His commentary was ingenious, subtle and discovered ideas and nuances with an extraordinary perspicacity where a less subtle mind would have seen nothing at all. However, his commentary was a theological one which took into account the treasures of Tradition. Palamas did not employ scholasticism anywhere, the formal tools of the Aristotelian logic, its definitions and categories. However, Barlaam and Gregoras used it all the time, because this was their principal occupation. This was not, however, the case with Akindynos.*²²³

There are two highly interesting ideas in this particular quote. First, the fact that Stăniloae considers that Palamas used a very important way of commenting on the Fathers, taking into account the Tradition of the Church that preceded him. This is an example that Stăniloae will begin to follow from the second volume of his translation of the *Romanian Philokalia*. However, although in this volume he also attaches the translation of two treatises of Palamas from the

²²¹Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 244.

²²²*Ibid.*, p. 246.

²²³*Ibid.*, p. 246.

Triads, he does not offer any commentaries, but only proceeds to identifying the biblical quotations that are missing from the text itself.

The second idea is that Stăniloae, carried away by his extreme contrast between the theological contribution of Palamas and the scholastic ‘doctrine’ of the West, goes on and puts forth some awkward arguments about the relationship between philosophy and theology. First, he considers that scholasticism and Aristotelian logic were more or less one and the same thing, failing to see the good points of scholasticism and confounding this somehow important period of time of the Western Church with some sort of logical-philosophical trend that simply took Aristotle as the most important master to follow. He fails to see the importance that the Fathers and Scripture played in the scholastic period. He fails even to observe that scholasticism was part of the Western Church and not a philosophical current! These blind attacks draw back Stăniloae’s work and theological contribution. Furthermore, to argue that Palamas was ‘clean’ of even the tiniest influence of Aristotle is just the bad habit of reading into the works of a Saint only what we like.²²⁴ The work of *Topics*²²⁵ represents a testimony of the fact that Palamas not only read Aristotle, but used him quite copiously when he was in need of ‘scientific’ opinions. Another striking idea is expressed in the last part of quote given above. Akindynos was not an Aristotelian, argues Stăniloae, but can he also be exempted of a Platonic influence? Let us get back to Stăniloae’s words concerning a Platonic feature of Akindynos’ works:

²²⁴ There are many important scholars who have analysed the use of Aristotle and other significant philosophers by Gregory Palamas. See for example: Stavros Yangazoglou, ‘Philosophy and Theology: The Demonstrative Method in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas’, *GOTR*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1996), pp. 1-18 and Leonidas Contos, ‘The Essence-Energies Structure of Saint Gregory Palamas with a Brief Examination of its Patristic Foundation’, *GOTR*, Vol. 12 (1967), pp. 283-294, esp. p. 288.

²²⁵ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts*, in: ‘The Philokalia’, vol. IV, translated from Greek and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1998), pp. 346-418.

*Akindynos sometimes considers that what we name as actions and attributes of God as goodness, sainthood, immortality etc. are hypostatic realities, which have their place between the divine essence and the created realm, as some sort of Platonic ideas, created by God, but having their place above angels, to which participate the angels and the creatures.*²²⁶

Is Akindynos more innocent only because he is Platonist, or does Stăniloae have something to do especially with Barlaam of Calabria and Nicephorus Gregoras? Is Aristotelian logic more evil than the concept of 'ideas' developed by Plato, or is the main problem that Barlaam and Nicephorus Gregoras were not even for one second on the same line with Palamas, while Akindynos protected Palamas and only in the last years of his life attacked him? Given the circumstances of the tendentious feature of Stăniloae's view on Barlaam and Nicephorus Gregoras, I cannot be accused of reading in Stăniloae's texts ideas that are not there. He is considering Akindynos much better than Gregoras and Barlaam only because he did not fight that much against Palamas.

Stăniloae goes on and presents the main ideas of the dispute between Gregoras and Palamas. It is clear that Gregoras shared the same view with Akindynos on the fact that the essence and energies of God are indistinct, identical.²²⁷ Another feature of his attacks consisted in the fact that deification is either something created, or something purely symbolic.²²⁸ Furthermore, he considered that the essence of God was uncreated, while His power was created.²²⁹ Stăniloae also presents the arguments brought by Palamas against these views. Stăniloae keeps the same way of

²²⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...*[in Rom.], p. 218.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

presenting features quoting first from the works of Gregoras and ‘correcting’ him by quoting from the works of Palamas.

Another striking aspect of the monograph lies in the fact that it has neither conclusions, nor even appreciations about different ideas that were expressed in it. The book ends with a brief description of the death of Palamas and his quick canonisation.²³⁰ In a very brief passage, Stăniloae acknowledges the dispute that took place at Mount Athos between the abbots and Prokhoros Kydones, the brother of Demetrios Kydones²³¹, the first person that translated a large part of the writings of Thomas Aquinas to Greek.²³²

The only conclusion that one might find in the last part of the book is this one:

*Gregory Palamas is one of the most criticised Eastern figures by the Catholic historians. The cause lies in the fact that his doctrine was always rejected by the Catholics, while the doctrine of his adversaries was sustained by them during that time (!) and ever afterwards. Furthermore, his adversaries were almost all close to the Catholics.*²³³

It is true that Gregory Palamas was one of the most criticised Church Fathers of the East in Western Europe, but this does not mean that we should transform the hesychastic disputes into a

²³⁰ For more information in this direction see George T. Dennis, ‘The Late Byzantine Metropolitans of Thessalonike’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 57, Symposium on Late Byzantine Thessalonike (2003), pp. 255-264 and Franz Tinnefeld, ‘Intellectuals in Late Byzantine Thessalonike’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 57, Symposium on Late Byzantine Thessalonike (2003), pp. 153-172.

²³¹ Demetrios Kydones’ life and work have been researched deeply in the last period of time. See Francis Kianka, ‘The Letters of Demetrios Kydones to Empress Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 46 (1992), pp. 155-164 and Idem, ‘Demetrios Kydones and Italy’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 49 (1995), pp. 99-110. See also the excellent study of Norman Russell, ‘Palamism and the Circle of Demetrius Cydones’, in: Judith Herrin, Charalambos Dendrinos, Eirene Harvalia-Crook and Jonathan Harris (eds.), *Porphyrogenita: Essays on the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honor of Julian Chrysostomides* (London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), pp. 153-175.

²³² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas...* [in Rom.], pp. 259-260.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

dispute between East and West, especially if the West was never really there. Furthermore, Akindynos and Nicephorus Gregoras were far from being close to the Catholics. I cannot think of many Greeks that were as harsh with Latins as Nicephorus Gregoras was. Even Barlaam was not on the Latin side, at least at the beginning of his conflict with Palamas. Thus, I might ask here: who were those philo-Catholics that Stăniloae criticizes so harshly here? I can only answer that this refers to none of the persons who were so deeply criticised in his monograph. This answer should be enough in order to see how a blind attack on a theme (as it is the case with scholasticism here!) can end up with the result of blowing the credibility of one's thesis.

Conclusion

What are the elements the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Stăniloae in this case? I would say that there are three main features. First of all, he is the first person before Meyendorff that has really searched the manuscripts of Gregory Palamas and tried to offer at least to Romanian theologians the main coordinates of his thinking.²³⁴ However, one must acknowledge the fact that Stăniloae presented the theological contribution of Gregory Palamas only from a 'polemical' point of view.²³⁵ This means that he concentrated all his efforts on the theological and political conflicts that affected the Byzantine Empire during the 1340s.²³⁶ Furthermore, he only presented the importance of the theological views of Palamas from the *Triads* and the *Atirrheticoi* written against Barlaam of Calabria, Nicephorus Gregoras and Akindynos. This 'polemical' manner of

²³⁴ Dumitru Radu, 'Coordinates and Permanent Aspects in the Theological Contribution of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae' [in Rom.], in: M. Păcurariu & Ioan I. Ică jr. (eds.) *Person and Communion* [in Rom.] (Sibiu: The Publishing House of the Archdiocese of Sibiu, 1993), pp. 138-139.

²³⁵ See notes 142 and 150.

²³⁶ For a good description of this period of time see Dirk Krausmüller, 'The Rise of Hesychasm', in: Michael Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. V: *Eastern Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 101-127.

presenting things encouraged him to read ideas that were not there in Palamas works, such as a conflict between ‘Latin’ scholasticism and the Orthodox hesychasm, or to present Palamas only as a fruitful follower of the Fathers, ignoring completely the Augustinian and Aristotelian influence that existed in his works. Thus, I strongly believe that Stăniloae’s monograph lacks a clear view. Stăniloae was drawn back in his achievement by this highly polemical tenor and he interpreted all the conflicts that existed in Palamas’ lifetime as clashes between the East and the West. Although Stăniloae tried to present the contribution of Gregory Palamas as much as possible, this achievement was highly damaged by the fact that he only presented it in a manner of attack-response. Palamas is presented in this work as someone who had to defend himself throughout his life. This is highly contradictory with the view of the author that Palamas was simply following the Fathers. Why does Stăniloae present first the opinion of the adversaries of Palamas? It just gives one the impression that Palamas was always in trouble. One cannot grasp easily the teaching of Palamas. The synthesis lacks. All that one can perceive is the fact that Palamas had to defend himself. This is more like a defensive work, in spite of its aggressive tone set against a scholasticism that was never there in the dispute between Palamas and his adversaries. Thus, I argue that Stăniloae’s monograph fails to present us with a clear view of the Palamite synthesis. Meyendorff did a far better job twenty years later when he not only tried to be more objective in his opinions, but also offered a good summary of Palamas’ opinions, not only extracted from the *Triads*, but also from other significant works.

The second aspect lies in the fact that he presents the works of Palamas as being disdainful of the ‘scholasticism’ of the West. I have to argue here that Stăniloae contradicts himself during his work. On the one hand, he speaks rightly against the Roman Catholic historians (Jugie is here the most known example) who have read ideas that were not in the works of Gregory Palamas.

However, he has let himself influenced by them in what concerns two significant points: a misapprehension of scholasticism just as great as the one expressed by Roman Catholic scholars in what concerns Gregory Palamas and also in the fact that the hesychast disputes of the fourteenth century were representing a clash between East and West. There was no such thing! This happened later on, at the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438-1439 and, also, in the following centuries.²³⁷ Furthermore, one must not forget that Stăniloae argues that all the adversaries of Palamas were philo-Catholics, which is a deep misapprehending of the disputes presented in his monograph. Barlaam was not a philo-Catholic when he began the dispute with Palamas, so he can be counted as thus only in the last years of the dispute, while Gregoras and Akindynos were anti-Catholics! Stăniloae presents as ‘scholasticism’ views like the ‘created’ grace, the insistence on negative theology as the final step of the knowledge of God, the sight of the essence of God. All these were not created by scholasticism itself, but by a stream of tradition in the West. To consider as ‘scholasticism’ all that seems to be influenced by Aristotle or that has a rationalist way of expounding things is just a bad Orthodox habit that needs to be left behind in order to preserve our own objectivity.

The third characteristic of Stăniloae’s Neo-Palamite Synthesis proposed in this monograph lies in the fact that he was, nonetheless, able to identify and present, but not to analyse critically the main subjects that produced the conflict between Palamas and his three major opponents: Barlaam, Akindynos and Gregoras. However, one must read very careful, between the lines, when he comes across the figures of the adversaries. Due to the highly polemical tone of the work, the three figures of Palamas’ adversaries appear distorted. Furthermore, Stăniloae lacks a

²³⁷ See Deno J. Geanakoplos, ‘The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union between the Greek and Latin Churches’, *Church History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Dec., 1955), pp. 324-346 and Alexander Schmemmann, ‘St. Mark of Ephesus and the Theological Conflicts in Byzantium’, *SVTQ*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1957), pp. 11-26.

critical view on Palamas. One might think that he is an Orthodox and, thus, cannot have a critical view on the Fathers because there is no such thing in the Orthodox world. However, even if we can accept this view, which would not be encouraged or sustained by the tradition of the Fathers²³⁸, we cannot encourage the lack of understanding that sometimes the Fathers were also influenced by philosophical and scientific works. Stăniloae considers that Palamas was influenced solely by the Fathers. He seems to present this view because he insists too much on the fact that Palamas' adversaries were highly influenced either by Aristotelian logic (Barlaam and Gregoras), or by Platonism (Akindynos). However, one cannot but wonder what did Palamas other than employ massively Aristotle in one of his works²³⁹ that Stăniloae does not quote even once?

The fourth important aspect of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis that I have not treated above because it really appears only twice in the monograph is the fact that Stăniloae planned up to some point to give a critical edition of the works of Palamas. I appreciate the fact that Stăniloae translated many of the works of Gregory Palamas into Romanian. Two of the nine treatises that constitute the *Triads* were annexed to this work, although they were translated earlier, in 1932. Stăniloae argued in the introductory part of this monograph that:

A critical edition of the works of Gregory Palamas would be necessary and, above all, a translation of them into Romanian. I had this thought in mind

²³⁸ There are some cases in which Fathers correct other Fathers. For example, Photius the Great corrects the style employed by Ephrem the Syrian and Maximus the Confessor, considering that they either 'lack clarity' or have a 'vulgar style' (See the study of Tomas Hägg, 'Photius as a Reader of Hagiography: Selection and Criticism', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 53 (1999), pp. 43-58).

²³⁹ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts*, in: 'The Philokalia', vol. IV, translated from Greek and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1998), pp. 346-418.

*and have worked a lot in this direction, but who knows when and if God will help me to realise it in the future.*²⁴⁰

I consider that, for Stăniloae, a part of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis consisted as well in the translation and commentaries that he gave on some of the works of Gregory Palamas published later on in the seventh volume of the *Romanian Philokalia*. This helped him to know better the works of Palamas and the most important ideas included there.

CHAPTER II: THE ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL LIFE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

*The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*²⁴¹ represents one of the most well-known works of Father Dumitru Stăniloae.²⁴² It is intended to be a description of the spiritual progress of the Christian believer in the knowledge of God. The work is indebted to the spirituality of the Fathers. Henkel affirms that Stăniloae was highly influenced by the Philokalic Fathers in the writing of this work.²⁴³ This is something that was pointed out as well by Maciej Bielawski.²⁴⁴ However, this opinion needs a certain emendation because, although most of the quotes come from the volumes of the *Romanian Philokalia*, some of the Church Fathers quoted are not part of this collection. For example, the *Romanian Philokalia* does not include writings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa or Basil the Great. It is true, however, that

²⁴⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Work of St. Gregory Palamas*...[in Rom.], p. 8.

²⁴¹ Idem, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* [in Rom.], (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2006).

²⁴² It also benefits now from being translated into English: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*, translated by Archimandrite Jerome Newville and Otilia Kloos (New York: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 2002).

²⁴³ Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics*... [in Rom.], pp. 242-243.

²⁴⁴ Maciej Bielawski, 'Dumitru Stăniloae and His Philokalia...', p. 52.

these external quotes represent at most only 10% from the total, but the fact must be acknowledged. Furthermore, as Henkel notes, Father Stăniloae was also extremely indebted to some important Western philosophers such as M. Blondel, L. Binswanger or M. Heidegger.²⁴⁵ Another important influence was represented by Roman-Catholic or Protestant theologians such as Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth.²⁴⁶ What is interesting here is that the *Philokalic* Fathers played a very important role in this particular writing especially because its first version was completed in 1947. By then, Stăniloae already translated the first four 4 volumes of the *Romanian Philokalia*. The second edition was released together with his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* as the fourth volume of this work, although it did not have a direct connection with it, and was entitled *The Orthodox Moral Theology*. This was the result of the censorship that the Communist government enacted on theological writings. The word ‘mystical’ was one of the most ‘evil’ words for the Communist ears. Thus, Stăniloae had to be very careful with the terminology he used in this particular work. However, the differences between the first and second edition are not as great as one might suspect. The main difference that concerns us is the fact that Stăniloae employs more quotes from the writings of Gregory Palamas. The other ones, such as the fact that he totally erased by his own will the chapter on Bulgakov’s concept of sophiology do not concern in any way the main subject of our research.

There are four main subjects in this writing where Stăniloae was highly influenced by Gregory Palamas and where the quotes from the works of this important Church Father appear in great number. These areas are: 1. the distinction between the essence of God and His energies; 2. the method of spiritual prayer; 3. the rapport between cataphatic and apophatic knowledge and the

²⁴⁵Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...* [in Rom.], pp. 218-240.

²⁴⁶*Ibid.*

steps of apophatic knowledge and, nonetheless, 4. the union of the human mind with God, represented by the concept of deification which includes the vision of the divine light.²⁴⁷

The last section of the book, which is entitled *Spiritual Perfection through Union with God or Deification*, and which includes the most quotes from Palamas from all the three parts of the writing and the fact that Stăniloae always uses the writings of Palamas in connection with the final stage of the spiritual life, gives me the impression that the book was modified mostly between the two editions not through the influence of Maximus the Confessor's writings, but through that of Palamas' works. I can find two main arguments for this position. First, I have to observe that, by the time when the first edition was published, Stăniloae had finished the first four volumes of the *Romanian Philokalia*. Two of them included translations of Maximus the Confessor's writings. The only writings that Stăniloae translated from Palamas until that time were included in his important monograph, which was published in 1938. By the time of the first edition of *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*, Stăniloae had left aside the work on Palamas. He dedicated himself to the translation of the *Philokalia* and he began to be highly influenced by Maximus the Confessor. Between the two projects (the book on Palamas and the translation of the *Philokalia*), Stăniloae wrote a significant work on Orthodox Christology.²⁴⁸ This was the first work dedicated to Orthodox Christology from a 'modern' perspective in Romania. He did not employ as many Patristic sources in this book as he did in his subsequent writing, published six years later. He was influenced here by the works of different Western theologians and philosophers such as N. Hartman, K. Barth and K. Rahner. What is

²⁴⁷ However, Stăniloae does not employ too much from Gregory Palamas in the chapters dedicated to the description of passion and virtues. A contribution in this direction is the one provided by Anestis Keselopoulos, *Passions and Virtues according to Saint Gregory Palamas* (Pennsylvania: STSP, 2004).

²⁴⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Restoration of Man* [in. Rom.] (Craiova: Omniscope, 1993). The first edition was published in 1941.

really surprising is the fact that, in his Christological debate, Stăniloae uses mainly two Patristic authors: Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor. He made these particular choices because, on the one hand, Cyril of Alexandria was recognized as one of the most significant Fathers that had developed a detailed Christological analysis²⁴⁹, and, on the other hand, Maximus the Confessor was his main ‘companion’ in that period of time. His daughter, Lidia Stăniloae, affirms that her father was so attached to the writings and concepts developed by Maximus the Confessor that he used to speak about them all the time. One might say that Palamas was not an influence for Stăniloae at this particular time because he did not have a strong Christological contribution. However, it is striking that Stăniloae does not use him very much in the first edition of his *Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* and he prefers using more from the works of St. Gregory of Nyssa. Now, Gregory of Nyssa’s works were employed a couple of times in *Jesus Christ: The Restoration of Man*. However, the published translations from Gregory of Nyssa²⁵⁰ appear much later than the seventh volume of the *Romanian Philokalia* which includes some more writings of Gregory Palamas. It is striking to see that Stăniloae borrows more from Gregory of Nyssa than Gregory Palamas in these two important writings. However, in the second edition of *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*, Stăniloae reverses the tide and considers that Gregory Palamas has more to say than Gregory of Nyssa about deification, but also about *cataphatic-apophatic knowledge*. This is a very interesting choice, and I strongly believe that it was influenced by a careful consideration given

²⁴⁹ He became more interested in the works of Cyril of Alexandria in the late seventies when he translated his main works: Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Selected Writings* [in Rom.], translated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, 4 vols., PSB collection (volumes 38-41) (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1991-2000).

²⁵⁰ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Selected Writings* [in Rom.], translated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, PSB collection (volume 29) (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1982).

to the writings of Vladimir Lossky.²⁵¹ Stăniloae considered Lossky to be the main Orthodox theologian that captured his attention and to whom he was greatly indebted.²⁵² Now, Lossky was highly influenced in his considerations about the stages of apophatic knowledge by Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory of Nyssa. However, he failed to observe the significant contribution in this particular area by Gregory Palamas. I consider that this is one of the possible explanations for which Stăniloae chose to employ more from Gregory Palamas' writings in the second edition of this important book. The second argument is that Stăniloae translated some more writings of Gregory Palamas between the two editions and published them in the seventh volume of the *Romanian Philokalia*. I am strongly convinced that these writings played a very important role in his choice of Patristic sources for the second edition of this book.

The distinction between essence and energies basis for the knowledge of God

From the beginning of his book, Stăniloae seems preoccupied with establishing the right relation between the human being and God. He is concerned with the fact that in Western theology this relation does not seem to be accurately conceived because the particular aspect of the difference between the essence and the energies of God is not employed at all.

In the introductory part of his work, Stăniloae is preoccupied with criticizing what he calls the 'dialectical' school of Protestantism. Mainly, he tries to explain how it is possible for a created human person to have an unmediated relation with the uncreated God. Although the way in

²⁵¹ See the analysis given by Silviu Eugen Rogobete, 'Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation? Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae', in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 167-207. Also see Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (NY: SVS Press, 2002)

²⁵² See note 47.

which Stăniloae criticizes the Western Protestant opinions is more or less arbitrary, this does not impede him from reaching a certain interesting demonstration of how Orthodox Christianity can maintain the doctrine of the distinction between the energies of God and His essence without falling in pantheism. Stăniloae begins by stating that Protestant theologians²⁵³ of the dialectical school reject any union of God except an indirect one through His words. Stăniloae believes that the Protestant ‘dialectical’ school is afraid that, an unmediated union with God would fall into a strange pantheism or, otherwise, in an ‘absorption’ of the human person into the divine being. I will not insist on the precarious nature of these arguments and the fact that Stăniloae exaggerates deeply here, as in other places as well, on reading ideas in Protestant texts that are not really there. What he does want to demonstrate is that an unmediated union between God and human beings is truly possible. Thus, he argues that Orthodox Christianity rejects pantheism, but also a total separation between God and the world. He affirms that the “created reality cannot become uncreated.”²⁵⁴ Thus, the union between God and human beings does not transform the human beings into something uncreated and neither does it sustain some sort of pantheistical representations. Stăniloae goes back to the moment of the world’s creation and argues that, although the world was created out of nothing, it was not the result of a passive ‘emanation’ from the being of God, but was created through His Word. This act was “a manifestation of His power.”²⁵⁵ However, Stăniloae goes even further and argues that, although God did not ‘mix’ His power with the world in a pantheistic manner He had somehow to make an act of kenosis in order for the world to appear. He argues that, if this power of God has not remained somehow in the world, the world would go back to become nothing. Stăniloae realizes that it would have been possible for God to manifest His will ‘at distance’ in order to create and maintain the world

²⁵³ He quotes here only the example of Karl Heim, *Jesus der Herr* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1935).

²⁵⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 18.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

as it is, but he argues afterwards that, in order for a will to manifest, it has to reach somehow the place where its effect will take place.

*“Anywhere where it is produced an effect of a power; the force of that power has to be present. Thus, everything from this world has, in its intimacy, the unmediated presence of an active power of God. Through this active power, each of us stands from the beginning in an unmediated ‘union’ with Him, through who we are and we progress.”*²⁵⁶

In a footnote to this paragraph, Stăniloae argues that this is “the doctrine of Saint Gregory Palamas, which argues that the being of God remains inaccessible, while His energies come down to us.”²⁵⁷ A second footnote²⁵⁸ gives the example of St. Paul’s words: “God is not far from each one of us, for ‘in Him we live and move and have our being’” (Acts 17, 27-28).²⁵⁹ This unmediated union that exists between the uncreated God and the created human person does not, however, transform the human person into something uncreated. Stăniloae appeals again to a Palamite influence when he writes that:

“On the one hand, [the relation between God and the human person] is a ‘union’, but, on the other hand, it is not an identification of the two. God overwhelms our being with His gifts and powers, but these do not become natural gifts and powers of our being. Our being does not become a divine being, because our created person does not become uncreated. Through this

²⁵⁶Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 18.

²⁵⁷*Ibid.*, n.17, p. 19.

²⁵⁸*Ibid.*, n.18, p. 19.

²⁵⁹ All the scriptural quotes are from RSV.

union, our person keeps the conscience that she does not taste through her powers the goods that been given to her, but through God.”²⁶⁰

Although we taste the divine energies, we never become uncreated. The gifts and powers that God gives us through His divine energies, or works, are not meant to become either our *natural* powers or to give us an uncreated ‘feature’. I have offered this quote in order to understand better the epistemological idea that stands at the basis of Stăniloae’s employment of the distinction between the divine essence and her divine energies. In another place, Stăniloae offers a summary in this direction and argues that:

*“The Orthodox teaching remains faithful to the New Testament: it does not transform the mystery of the Trinitarian God into something purely rational. The Orthodox teaching bases upon the experience of God who communicates to us out of love, in the Holy Spirit, through the uncreated energies. It does not keep God distant from us, as the rationalist-monotheists religions (Judaism and Islam) and neither does it lead us to ‘mixing’ with Him, as in the pantheistical religions and philosophies, which recognize a sole essence of one sort of another as their only reality.”*²⁶¹

The fact that Stăniloae provides here this type of ‘balanced’ approach to the Palamite distinction and its importance for the union between God and human being is something that I appreciate. What I cannot appreciate is the fact that he judges so naively other important religions such as Judaism and Islam in order to offer examples of extremes that should be avoided. Stăniloae uses here some sort of nineteenth century ‘Christian’ conceptions regarding other religions. He

²⁶⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 29.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

believes that only the Orthodox have a ‘balanced’ approach through their distinction between the essence of God and His uncreated energies. The mystical life at least of Islam cannot be contested and the fact that Stăniloae believed that it was just a type of ‘*rationalist*’ religion is really frightful.

On the other hand, Stăniloae bases his criticism on the Roman-Catholic conception of the union between God and humans upon some very weak arguments. He quotes very frequently G. Koepgen, a not very well-known Roman Catholic writer, in order to find some sort of proof given by ‘the adversaries’. Koepgen considered that the Roman Catholic Church had a very weak mystical life, because it focused more on the divine essence than the divine persons. Koepgen even offered an interesting comparison between Symeon the New Theologian who described more the Persons of the Holy Trinity in his works and Meister Eckhart who spoke more about the divine essence.²⁶² Koepgen was convinced that the Roman Catholic Church made a mistake by insisting too much on the unity of God and forgetting the fact that there is a Trinity of Persons as well. This led to a mysticism that either had only a rational basis that always tried to reduce God to a concept, or a sentimental one which speaks about a merciful God, who remains at a frightful distance. These somewhat general arguments that may have nevertheless some degree of truth were used by Stăniloae in order to reach a conclusion that seems rather extreme: “This is where the absence of the doctrine of the uncreated energies led in Western theology. This absence is related to conceiving God more as an essence than as a loving communion of Persons.”²⁶³ He also agrees with the idea of Koepgen that Roman Catholicism

²⁶² One can understand that nowadays, this type of general commentaries cannot be of much use. This polemical comparisons lack depth and lead the reader towards what one might call a ‘false’ frame.

²⁶³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 44.

needs to return to “the knowledge of God which is not based on the laws of a deductive rationality, but on the true experience of His or of His power (energy) that works in us.”²⁶⁴

It was amazing for J. Henkel to discover how Stăniloae based his conclusions on nothing else but some writings of a few average Roman Catholic scholars. However, Stăniloae provides here an interesting educated guess, although his sources suffer from a lack of credibility and his critical approach is severely compromised. He considers that the essence-energies distinction preserved Eastern Christianity from falling into an ‘impersonal’ or ‘sentimental’ mysticism. Nonetheless, Stăniloae never forgets to stress the fact that, although we experience only the ‘works’, ‘activities’ or ‘energies’ of God, these are not some impersonal features that come down to us, but truly personal actions of the Trinity. He prefers to speak as well not only about the ‘uncreated light’ of God, but also of the ‘light’ of Christ, or of the Holy Spirit. These energies are truly something ‘personal’ (that comes from a Person, not from an object). Stăniloae argues that:

*“The radiant Trinity (...) cannot be perceived and thought about without her uncreated energies that become more and more active. Love is characterized through this paradox: on the one hand it unites the subjects that love each other and, on the other hand, does not mix them. (...) This paradox cannot be explained otherwise than through the radiation of love, as an energy that communicates itself from one person to another, without exhausting the persons through its communication.”*²⁶⁵

Thus, humans share this distinction as well. They can communicate with one another through the energy of their love. This energy does not exhaust their person. However, this love that we share

²⁶⁴Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 44.

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

does not confuse who we are. We do not become the other, and the other does not become who we are. It unites us up to the point of sharing everything, but it does not confound us. This is a very profound and deeply moving image of how humans can share the same distinction between essence and energies in their own person. However, in the created realm, the being of others does not become inaccessible to us as the divine being, but it remains inexhaustible. Nobody can know another person completely. There is always something new to discover. This is different from the Trinity where, Stăniloae explains:

“The difference between being and energy is overstepped in a way that we cannot understand. The being is energy, without ceasing to be inexhaustible being. The being itself is a communicant energy, but it is so because it belongs to the supreme Persons. The Persons [of the Trinity] communicate their being as energy; they communicate to each other all the being, because this is an energy that communicates from one Person to another. Their love is supreme and their being radiates entirely from One to Another. We cannot live, through the energy that communicates to us from God, all the divine being. It is inexhaustible. Even the energy that communicates to us from that source, having an infinite source as its basis, comes to us from a place that transcends us, because we are finite beings brought to existence in time, through a creative act of God.”²⁶⁶

Stăniloae observes that the being of God communicates to the divine Persons as energy, but he also does not forget to argue that this fact does not mean that this happens only inside the Trinity. Although the energies of God that come down to us have their source in the divine being, they

²⁶⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], pp. 47-8.

are distinct from it, but not separated. God keeps His simplicity, but this simplicity does not put an equal sign between His being and his energies. The divine being is inexhaustible and inaccessible to humans. Although Stăniloae seems at one point here to argue that what we receive through the divine energies is in fact the essence of God, this is not what he really means. Unfortunately, here as in other places as well, the way in which he formulates some ideas seems to imply that we have access to the divine being (essence). In fact, all that he wants to suggest is that the divine energies are not separated from the divine being. However, the way in which the divine Persons share entirely that energy of the divine being is something inaccessible to the human beings.

This is very clearly argued in another place, when Stăniloae speaks about the antinomic character of the knowledge of God. He argues that God is inaccessible and unknowable in his being, but accessible and knowable in his uncreated energies.²⁶⁷ From here arises the need to express what we know about God in paradoxical terms. “God is being, wisdom, power, goodness [and we know that from his actions in the world], but His being, as the infinite source of all these innumerable powers (energies) is none of them and not the sum of all, being entirely indeterminable.”²⁶⁸ Stăniloae stresses that point once again when he argues that “all these powers have their source in the being of God. They are uncreated and inseparable from the divine being, but, nonetheless, they are not identical with it.”²⁶⁹ The being of God is above all those powers or energies or acts, but not as something entirely different as one might think about the distinction between created and uncreated. The divine being surpasses them. In order to illustrate his idea, Stăniloae speaks about the fact that our soul and its manifestations represent a truly analogy of

²⁶⁷Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 287

²⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 288.

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 288.

the distinction between the divine being and the uncreated energies. He argues that we can say that our soul is “mind, will, feeling, movement if we think about its acts”²⁷⁰, but, in the same time, our soul is the source of all these acts and surpasses them, remaining inexhaustible, “always above, as a place distinct from them and indeterminable.”²⁷¹ Thus, the distinction between the soul and its actions could act as a wonderful image of how the being of God is distinct from His energies, but not separated from them. However, the main difference, that Stăniloae inexplicably does not develop here, is the fact that, although the soul cannot be exhausted in its acts, it still can be known at least partially by the persons with whom we enter in contact, while the being of God remains inaccessible to us and it is only accessible to the Persons of the Trinity.

As a conclusion, I can affirm that the distinction between the essence and the energies of God plays a central role in this important writing of Fr. Stăniloae. It represents not only the basis for the knowledge of God but also for the union between God and the human being. Furthermore, Stăniloae considers that this particular distinction represents a fundamental difference between the Orthodox East and the Roman Catholic and Protestant West. Although he does not use the most accurate sources and he lacks critical awareness not only of the Western Christianity but also of other religions such as Judaism and Islam, Stăniloae depicts very well the main features of this distinction and its importance for the way in which we can obtain knowledge of God and become deified. Another important fact lies in the analogy that Stăniloae offers for the distinction between the essence and the energies of God, the one between the actions of the soul and the soul itself. I consider that Stăniloae employs correctly the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God, although sometimes he uses it in a ‘polemical’ fashion that

²⁷⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 288.

²⁷¹*Ibid.*

lacks credibility and makes one wonder how can awesome analogies (like the one described above) exist along such superficial arguments regarding different features of other religions or other Christian confessions.

The steps of apophatic knowledge: Stăniloae and Lossky

Before turning to this main theme, there is another important aspect that has to be developed. A very small, but important detail appears in this book with regard to the significance of faith for the spiritual life. Stăniloae was extremely convinced that faith represents the beginning of the virtues, but also their faithful companion. In the absence of faith, virtues could no longer exist. However, faith also strengthens our knowledge of different important truths that we knew beforehand. Following an important quote of St. Gregory Palamas, Stăniloae argues thus, that:

*Faith gives new evidence for some rational truths that refer to God. This evidence progresses in time and faith becomes more and more a vision. However, right from the beginning, faith brings more evidence to some truths that our reason possessed, and this leads to grounding our reason in some certitudes.*²⁷²

However, although what Stăniloae argues here sounds somewhat strange for a person so enraged against the strict ‘rational’ way of discovering divine truths, he nevertheless does not forget to add that the divine energies play an important role in this direction. Thus, he considers that this evidence comes not from the “powers of reason but from above. Orthodoxy applies here its

²⁷² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 134.

doctrine about the uncreated energies of God. An uncreated energy of God enters like a light in our mind.”²⁷³ Our natural reason cannot, thus, discover through its own powers the meanings that the faith brings to it. Only the ray of the divine energy can open our mind so that we may know God and strengthen our natural knowledge. This is a strong Palamite concept. In fact Stăniloae quotes Palamas who argues that: “Faith goes above the ideas that were born from the contemplation of creatures and unites us with the reason that surpasses everything. Faith is not insanity, but a knowledge that surpasses every rational thought.”²⁷⁴

I have begun the sub-chapter with this important discussion because it anticipates well the rapport between cataphatic and apophatic knowledge that Stăniloae describes shortly afterwards. The writings of Gregory Palamas play an extremely important role especially in the apophatic knowledge of God as Stăniloae describes it. However, before describing this extremely important influence we must give a few details about how Stăniloae describes generally his rapport with the writings of Vladimir Lossky from this point of view.²⁷⁵ I consider that this is a significant fact and needs to be described in order to understand better why Stăniloae’s description of apophatic knowledge was influenced more by Gregory Palamas and not by Gregory of Nyssa or Dionysius the Areopagite.

When Stăniloae at the end on his life was asked which was the most important theologian that he appreciated from the modern era, he gave this answer:

I believe that Lossky is the one to whom I feel the closest. I began to read

Berdyayev first and afterwards Bulgakov, but I realized that Lossky is more

²⁷³Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 135.

²⁷⁴Gregory Palamas, ‘The Third Treatise of the Last Triad’, in: *The Romanian Philokalia*, VII, p. 318.

²⁷⁵For a significant study in this direction see: Silviu Eugen Rogobete, ‘Mystical Existentialism or Communitarian Participation? Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 167-207.

*rigorous [than them]. However, they all had a very important role. It is a pity that we never had such men, neither priests, nor laymen from the Diaspora. Almost all of these Russians were laymen. We never had such men.*²⁷⁶

If one reads the writings of Lossky and Stăniloae one finds oneself caught in a trap, because their style seems sometimes at odds with each other. Lossky is far clearer in style, more analytical and extremely brief on some themes, while Stăniloae is the opposite. However, one might find certain interests that they share and one of them is the theme of the apophatic knowledge of God. Now Stăniloae based his description of apophatic knowledge on two important saints: Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Palamas, while Lossky is especially indebted to Dionysius the Areopagite. What is interesting is the fact that Lossky is probably one of the few Orthodox theologians that Stăniloae admires, but also considers to be limited in some sort of way, while with regard to Bulgakov, for example, Stăniloae appreciated him in his youth, but became somewhat opposed to him in the second part of his life.

Stăniloae argues that V. Lossky was the one who proclaimed again the fact that “apophaticism is a dominant feature of Orthodox theology.”²⁷⁷ The second great achievement of Lossky was of course the fact that he was able to describe the differences between how apophaticism was understood in the West and the East.²⁷⁸ However, Stăniloae does not forget to add the fact that Lossky was too preoccupied with describing the negative terminology of apophaticism, while he put out of view “the essential theme of the Orthodox apophaticism: the vision of the divine light.”²⁷⁹ Stăniloae begins by analysing the way in which Lossky described apophatic

²⁷⁶*Seven Mornings with Father Stăniloae* [in Rom.], (Bucharest, Anastasia, 2002), p. 103.

²⁷⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...* [in Rom.], p. 260.

²⁷⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...* [in Rom.], p. 260.

²⁷⁹*Ibid.*

knowledge. He acknowledges the fact that Lossky never understood through apophaticism a simple intellectual denial of the cataphatic descriptions of God. Stăniloae argues that, in Lossky's view "apophaticism (...) represents a supra-conceptual union with God that has different degrees."²⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Stăniloae summarises his positive appreciation concerning Lossky arguing that: "his presentation is correct, because he sees in apophaticism a general attitude of our conscience towards the divine mystery and a union with God who transforms or deifies the human being."²⁸¹

However, Stăniloae believes that Lossky has made two important mistakes. First, he stressed too much the incognoscibility of God, although he did not deny that we may know God through certain spiritual experiences. Stăniloae considers that, if this knowledge through experience can be accepted, there is no reason to stress that much the "absolute and total incognoscibility of God"²⁸² He argues that Lossky fell into a second mistake represented by considering apophaticism as something more like a dark wall and not as a staircase to light. Lossky did not describe the different "steps" of apophatic knowledge that culminate eventually with the seeing of the divine light.

Stăniloae points out that "this incognoscibility is united mystically with knowledge and, while we progress in the divine mystery, we get filled with more knowledge. Of course, this knowledge is a special one and it is always doubled by the knowledge that the divine nature is above knowledge."²⁸³ Stăniloae underlines afterwards that Gregory Palamas affirms that the experience that takes place on the highest steps of the knowledge of God is not named knowledge not

²⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 265.

²⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 266.

²⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 267.

²⁸³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 268

because the latter lacks, but because it is overwhelming.²⁸⁴ This image is similar with the one of Dionysius who spoke about the darkness caused by the intense light of the divine. Stăniloae also notes that this incognoscibility of God has different degrees on the different steps of the spiritual ascent of the believer. Thus, in the end, Stăniloae argues that the main reasons for Lossky's mistakes lie in the fact that he was unable to include in his analysis of apophaticism the vision of the divine light as described especially by the writings of Gregory Palamas. Stăniloae affirms:

*Saint Gregory Palamas has rejected the idea [formulated] by Barlaam, that above the created nature there is nothing else except the divine nature, which is totally inaccessible and unknowable. Although Lossky knows the distinction between the divine essence and its energies, he does not pay attention to the seeing of the divine light, but speaks in general only about an incognoscibility of God that is somehow experienced [directly], a fact that is also admitted by the modern Catholic theology.*²⁸⁵

From the most respected theologian, Lossky becomes in a few lines not much better than modern Catholic theologians, who are considered quite weak in Stăniloae's view. However, what one may find interesting in the passage just quoted is that between the created nature and the divine nature stand the divine energies and this is the matrix to which apophaticism must be applied. Thus, apophaticism has different steps and intensities and does not include solely an intellectual apprehension of the incognoscibility of God. In apophatic knowledge there are three major steps: negative theology, the apophaticism that appears at the end of prayer and the apophaticism of the vision of the divine light.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Stăniloae considers that the first step appears during the natural contemplation of the divine energies that are hidden in the universe. However, negative theology is linked with knowing that we do not see or know yet what those energies feel like when they are not hidden. When the divine energies are not hidden at all we experience the third level, the one of the divine light that shines upon us, which is linked as well with another type of knowledge: the one of the incognoscibility of the divine being. Between those levels (the hidden and the unhidden energies) there exists a secondary level, one called by Stăniloae ‘hiatus’. This represents “an apophaticism almost unmixed with any positive element of knowledge; it is the intermediary apophaticism in which we have left aside any mental action, even of denial, but we haven’t received the divine light yet.”²⁸⁶ Stăniloae considers that this secondary step of apophaticism represents “a more powerful feeling, but a feeling in the darkness of the divine energies, which has gone above the intellectual negative theology and the apophatic feeling that lies within it.”²⁸⁷ Thus, we have to recapitulate a bit this kind of apophatic ‘scheme’ that seems a bit overwhelming. Stăniloae considers that the first step of apophaticism lies in the fact that we deny every quality that we know about God and which was revealed to us through the natural contemplation. During this action, we feel the fact that we do not know that much about God and we want to progress further. The next step is to go above what we know and deny our mind any action. We produce an interior silence in which we feel that we are in a deep darkness and somewhere near us we can feel the divine energies ‘approaching’. Our mind has left aside any concept. We are just praying that God may reveal Himself to us. This is the second step of apophaticism. The third and final step is the sight of the divine energies, of the divine light. This sight overwhelms our mind and

²⁸⁶Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 268.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

we go beyond any knowledge and we feel as if we are beyond this world. Stăniloae has found inspiration for these steps in the writings of Gregory Palamas. Stăniloae argues that:

*Saint Gregory Palamas makes a distinction between the seeing of the divine light and negative theology, which represents an inferior intellectual action, as the mind thinks about the fact that the affirmative concepts of a certain intellectual content are not fitted to God, although this action is doubled by a certain apophatic feeling. However, the seeing of the divine light is also distinct from the second step of apophaticism, in which every intellectual activity disappears and every thinking stops, surrounded by a feeling of the total impossibility of understanding God with our mind and a feeling of Him in darkness.*²⁸⁸

It is clear from this passage that all the distinctions that Stăniloae operated before between the three steps of apophaticism are inspired entirely from the writings of Gregory Palamas. Stăniloae believes that Palamas offers more important insights in this direction than Dionysius the Areopagite.²⁸⁹ He considers that Lossky, who was inspired especially by Dionysius, believed that the final step of apophaticism is the one described by Palamas, just as the second one. However, Stăniloae is conscious of the fact that Dionysius spoke about all three steps, but Lossky was not attentive enough and did not make the connection between the “supra-luminous darkness” of Dionysius and the vision of the divine energies of Palamas. There are two important texts from Palamas that Stăniloae uses to back-up his opinion. The first one includes a certain distinction

²⁸⁸Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 270.

²⁸⁹ Quite contrary to what Meyendorff believes. Meyendorff even argues that Dionysius plays an extremely important role in what concerns the contribution of Palamas in this direction. See J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas...*, pp. 204-205.

between negative theology and the vision of the divine light which is something different and well above it. Palamas considers that there are a few important reasons for which the negative theology cannot be considered the same with the seeing of the divine light. The first reason lies in the fact that negative theology is a mere intellectual operation and not a union with God, as the seeing of the divine light is. The second reason is that the latter needs an ecstatic state, while the second one does not. The third reason is that negative theology represents just a little more than a mere syllogism, while the seeing of the divine light “works and speaks spiritually and mysterious in the deified person.”²⁹⁰ The second important text of Palamas that Stăniloae uses in support of his significant apophatic distinctions, speaks about the second level of apophaticism. Palamas speaks here about pure prayer and points out the fact that even when we pray, we follow the same steps of apophaticism. First, we purify our prayer from our contact with different conflicts and daily realities. Afterwards, we leave aside the natural contemplations of different good things. The final step is the one of ecstasy. “This getting out of yourself (ecstasy) is higher than negative theology, because it is only proper to the ones that have left aside the passions. However, the vision of the [divine] light does not take place until the Comforter gives the light from above to the one that prays (...) and until He does not kidnap him through a vision towards the seeing of the [divine] light.”²⁹¹

Barlaam of Calabria was making a huge mistake when he considered that the ‘divine darkness’ that Dionysius spoke about is the one produced by negative theology and not the one produced by the seeing of the divine light. However, Palamas is very clear in this direction. The ‘divine darkness’ that Dionysius the Areopagite speaks about is never to be confused with intellectual negative theology. It is simply a supra-abundance of divine light. Stăniloae remarks again using a

²⁹⁰Gregory Palamas, ‘The Third Treatise of the Last Triad’, 35, in: *The Romanian Philokalia*, vol. VII, pp. 308-309.

²⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 306.

text from Palamas, that only the persons that are like Moses become worthy to see the divine light, while negative theology is accessible to any believer.²⁹² Furthermore, negative theology is only “an anticipative icon of the vision of divine light, but it is not one and the same with that vision.”²⁹³

The most interesting aspects that Stăniloae brings into discussion here stand in the way in which he describes how the believers can reach each of these steps of apophaticism. Here he seems to go further than Palamas. He argues that the first two steps (negative theology and the state of pure prayer) can be reached by any believer “through his natural powers and helped, of course, by the grace received through Baptism and Confirmation. Through these steps, the mind goes close to the abyss that separates its knowledge from God, but it still remains in the land of humanity.”²⁹⁴ In order to reach the final stage of spiritual ascent, the believer must be helped entirely by God. He cannot reach that state through his own natural powers:

The final stage of the spiritual life is represented by the fact that the believer is raised beyond the level of his powers not through himself, but through the work of the Holy Spirit. “Our mind goes outside itself and, after it goes beyond everything, it unites with God in its new state”, says Saint Gregory Palamas²⁹⁵, because our mind cannot see “only through the fact that it possesses reason, just as the human eye cannot see unless there is an exterior sensible light that exists apart from it.”²⁹⁶ In the time of this meeting with

²⁹² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 273.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

²⁹⁵ The quote is from Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.], Sibiu, 1938, p. LIII.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

*God, the mind goes above itself and its entire mental works receive a work of God.*²⁹⁷

It seems extremely clear from this passage that the passing towards the final step of apophaticism and, at the same time, the last step that fulfils our deification, it is provided to us only through the work of the Holy Spirit. After the ecstasy brought by pure prayer, the mind is taken above by the Holy Spirit and receives, as Stăniloae observes, “a work of God”. Nonetheless, it is also true that we cannot reach that state through our own natural powers under any circumstance. No matter how hard one person can try, he cannot surpass the ‘abyss’ that exists between us and God and unite with God unless He makes the first step towards her.

Furthermore, the last step of apophaticism is one in which things get a little bit different not only because we cannot reach it and our natural powers do not matter any longer, but also because it implies *a positive content of knowledge and it does not transmit any longer a state of emptiness*. Stăniloae argues that:

This apophaticism is not any longer one that includes emptiness, as the two steps that precede it. It is represented on the one hand by the realizing of the person that sees the divine light that the latter cannot be comprised by concepts and described in words and, on the other hand, in the realizing that above this light there is the divine being which remains entirely inaccessible and, furthermore, that even in the accessible light there is an infinite background. This step, however, has a positive content of knowledge which is

²⁹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], pp. 6-7. The last sentence of the quote is inspired by Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Third Treatise from the Last Triad: About the Holy Light*, in: Codex Coislin 100, f. 185 r.

*above knowledge, of apophatic knowledge, of experience and feeling above the natural experience and feeling.*²⁹⁸

Thus, in the last step of apophaticism, the Christian believer experiences the divine light not only as divine presence, but also as positive knowledge above any knowledge. He also realizes the fact that, beyond this overwhelming knowledge, there is the divine being that remains inaccessible to him. However, what one might ask here is why do you have to experience this feeling of the fact that the divine being is above everything and you cannot reach it? This is probably the part where Stăniloae gave the fewest details but we can still obtain an answer. The believer realizes that the divine being is above any knowledge He was brought to the seeing of the divine light through the exclusive work of God and, thus, does not stand there through himself. I shall resume deciphering this particular aspect of Stăniloae's contribution in a separate sub-chapter dedicated to the vision of the divine light. Now, I shall concentrate on these three steps of apophaticism that Stăniloae develops in his extremely interesting work. The first one will be, of course, negative theology.

Negative theology

There are four different areas in which Stăniloae develops in an interesting manner the concept of negative theology. He affirms that negative theology is an intellectual action²⁹⁹ and gives copious Patristic quotes either from Gregory Palamas or Dionysius in order to sustain his view. The second major aspect consists in the fact that he considers that the main purpose of negative

²⁹⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 276.

²⁹⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], pp. 278-9.

theology is to enrich the mind of the human being with ‘nuanced concepts’.³⁰⁰ The third important area is represented by Stăniloae’s fundamental interpretation of the complementary relation between negative and positive theology.³⁰¹ However, the Palamite influence is more at place than ever in the last of the areas, namely, the employment of the distinction between the essence and the energies used in order to provide a background for the ‘common’ work of negative and positive theology. Although all four areas of Stăniloae’s description of negative theology are influenced by Gregory Palamas, I shall focus mainly on the first and the fourth one, because here Stăniloae provides as well some interesting insights that can scarcely be discovered in the works of other important modern Orthodox theologians who have discussed the apophaticism of the Orthodox Church.

The first important aspect of negative theology is that it represents an intellectual action. Stăniloae affirms that “negative theology is an intellectual action because it researches the content of different concepts and qualities in comparison with the divine abyss to which it gives experiences in some sort of sense, and which it considers insufficient.”³⁰² Stăniloae also gives a quote from Gregory Palamas who observed that “we know that the mind understands, during the [action of] negative theology, the things that are denied.”³⁰³ However, the difference between Stăniloae and Palamas appears when the Romanian theologian goes further and argues that, although up to some point negative theology remains an intellectual action, it still brings some sort of ‘experience of God’³⁰⁴, some sort of intuition of the fact that this ‘denial’ is not the end of the road, but that there is something else beyond it. This feeling has nothing to do with an

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-281.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-282.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³⁰³ Gregory Palamas, ‘The Third Treatise of the Last Triad’, in: *The Romanian Philokalia*, vol. VII, p. 309.

³⁰⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], pp. 279.

intellectual operation. I would say that Stăniloae does not employ a total separation between the three steps of apophaticism. Every step includes not only its own ‘action’, but also an intuition of the next step. Negative theology includes not only the mental operation, but also a feeling of the second step, the one of pure prayer. One can taste the silence that exists there. The step of the pure prayer includes as well important features of the vision of the divine light. Stăniloae describes here the fact that the believer can sense ‘in the darkness’ the divine light. He does not see it yet, but he feels he is close to it. Thus, there are three steps of apophaticism in Stăniloae’s opinion and he is following here Gregory Palamas, but, nonetheless, he does not separate them as much as Palamas. He is concerned with providing a smooth transition between them.

Stăniloae is concerned also with the fact that cataphatic (positive) theology seems to be underestimated in relation to negative theology. He uses here the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God in order to explain that we need both of these ‘intellectual’ operations. He affirms that “the fundamental creative principle which gave existence to the world and can explain it, cannot be as the world, otherwise it would not be the fundamental and transcendent principle; the divine being would not be different from the created world.”³⁰⁵ However, “this principle and source must contain everything that can explain the existence and the content of the world.”³⁰⁶ Nonetheless, God (named as ‘principle’ or ‘source’ in these passages) cannot be as though being utterly transcendent to the world. He has a strong connection with it through his energies. Thus, Stăniloae considers that, negative and positive theology can be based on this important Palamite distinction. God is not wholly transcendent, but

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 282. This is the main fundament of the negative theology.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* This is the principle of positive theology.

also not wholly immanent. Stăniloae affirms that “when we think at the works of God we make positive assertions about Him, but when we think at His being, we deny all our assertions.”³⁰⁷

However, what is interesting and I consider as a unique feature of Stăniloae’s description of Orthodox apophaticism lies in the fact that he strongly argues that negative theology offers ‘nuanced concepts’ to our mind.³⁰⁸ He argues that:

*Negative theology does not leave aside as unimportant or does not lead to a forgetting of the positive concepts taken from the created world. Even if it reaches the conclusion that these concepts are not appropriate for God, only through a comparison with them it concludes that God is above them. The mind thinks at each and every one of these concepts when it denies them. Thus, negative theology enriches our soul with more nuanced and profound concepts. (...)negative theology does not justify a boredom of the spirit, an abdication from rationality, but sustains a further development of the rational schemes so that we can see more and more (...) the infinity of the divine ocean.*³⁰⁹

I strongly believe that Stăniloae was more influenced in this passage by Dionysius than by Gregory Palamas. He does not quote here any of them. Instead, he turns to N. Berdiaev and argues that knowledge of God is infinite and does not have an end.³¹⁰ What is highly interesting in this passage is that Stăniloae considers that negative theology offers ‘more nuanced concepts’ and not only a continuously denial of different concepts. It is a continuous shaping of different

³⁰⁷Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 284

³⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 280.

³⁰⁹*Ibid.*

³¹⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 280.

ideas until, in the end, the soul enters a total silence in which it experiences the divine light ‘through darkness’, as we shall see from the second step of the apophaticism, the one of pure prayer. However, although Stăniloae seems extremely convincing up to some point, there are some ideas here that seem rather ambiguous. If negative theology has as its main tool a denial of concepts, how can we speak about more ‘nuanced’ concepts? This seems rather contradictory. Furthermore, Stăniloae does not explain whether these nuanced concepts remain in the mind or are denied as well in the end. These concepts seem to be just an artificial employment here in order to provide a connection between negative and positive theology. However, from my point of view, their role is superfluous and confuses the reader rather than helps him to understand what negative theology really stands for.

I have already offered a few insights about the last of the four principal areas of negative theology that Stăniloae discusses: namely the importance of the distinction between essence and energies. I add here just two more ideas except the ones already expressed. I have already offered some details about how Stăniloae employs the analogy of the soul and its manifestations in order to describe the distinction between essence and energies.³¹¹ Now it is time to offer the entire passage:

Our soul and its manifestations offer an analogy of this relationship between the being and the energies of God and, thus, an illustration of the necessity to alternate the positive and negative terms in connection with Him. For instance, we could say that the soul is mind, will, sense, movement if we think about its acts of thinking, willing, sensing, and moving. However, we must rectify this opinion right away and argue that it is not thought, will, sense

³¹¹ See note 260.

*and movement, because it is the source of all these acts and it remains above all and does not consummate itself in them, remaining beyond them, as a place different from them and indeterminable.*³¹²

However, this analogy must be connected immediately with Stăniloae's argument about the infinite resource of the knowledge of God. He argues right away that the divine mystery is not something totally enclosed in it, but, although open, it is not finite:

*The [divine] mystery does not stand before our mind as an absolute and immovable darkness. It would be so if it had no manifestation at all. From the divine darkness break forth infinite lights and these lights show its presence and shapes. The mystery represents after all an infinite reserve of truth which, although discovers infinitely its aspects, remains nonetheless an infinite reserve. The mystery represents the spiritual bread of the mind, which shares to all minds, but never ends. Without a being which transcends knowledge and which remains always unending in its manifestations of light and power, we would finish soon our work of knowing the truth. (...) Our being would reach in this case an insupportable boredom and our eternity would become pointless.*³¹³

Let us return first to the double analogy of, on the one hand, the soul and its manifestations, the essence and energies of God and, on the other hand, of negative and positive theology. Stăniloae considers that this double distinction (soul-actions, essence-energies) represents a fruitful analogy as well for the relationship between positive and negative theology. However, the

³¹² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 288.

³¹³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], pp. 288-289.

analogy seems rather forced at some point. Negative theology and positive theology cannot be put in this relation, because negative theology is not simply preoccupied with the being of God, while positive theology is not preoccupied solely with this created world, or the energies of God. Furthermore, Stăniloae himself breaks this idea of relationship because as we have seen, he considers that, up to some point, negative and positive theology are complementary and shared concepts. While positive theology affirms the values of certain concepts about God, negative theology refines them and transforms them in nuanced concepts, continuously denying the results until it reaches the second step of apophaticism: the level of pure prayer. Although I do not share a positive view of Stăniloae's analogies and I consider them rather forced and useful only from an aesthetic point of view, I cannot say the same about the way in which he depicts the divine mystery in the second quote given above. The image is powerful and full of grace. Negative theology seems sometimes to provide an image of divine 'darkness' which is really dark and enclosed in itself. It seems as if we are in front of a monolithic block that does not yield its mysteries to us. However, although Stăniloae considers negative theology as being mainly an intellectual operation, he refrains from affirming that this represents its only content. He strongly believes that we catch a glimpse of the divine mysteries that still lies hidden from our eyes, because we have not attained yet the necessary purification in order to progress to the next step: the stage of pure prayer in which we can feel somehow indirectly the divine energies.

The divine mystery is our spiritual bread and we can taste little pieces of it even at the stage of negative theology, something that Palamas has not underlined enough and which Stăniloae tries to point out in his theological contribution. However, a larger share of the divine lights that spring forth from this 'intellectual' darkness is only available after we have stepped towards the next stage of apophaticism: the attainment of pure prayer.

Pure prayer

This stage is one in which we attain the level of pure prayer. What is this pure prayer? I will quote first a very important text of St. Gregory Palamas, used by Fr. Stăniloae:

*The mind slowly abandons all relations with these things, and even with those superior to them, in order to be separated from all beings through pure prayer. This ecstasy is incomparably higher than negative theology; for it belongs only to those who have attained impassibility. But it is not yet union, unless the Paraclete illumines from on high the man who attains in prayer the stage which is superior to the highest natural possibilities, and who is awaiting the promise of the Father; and by His revelation ravishes Him to the contemplation of the light.*³¹⁴

The ‘things’ are the reasons of creation. The mind goes above positive theology, but also above negative theology. The level of pure prayer is named ‘ecstasy’ by Gregory Palamas, a term that Stăniloae will employ throughout his sub-chapter dedicated to the theme of pure prayer. However, right from the beginning we observe that Palamas offered here an important insight. The level of pure prayer can be attained only by Christians who have already reached impassibility. Without impassibility in place of the passions, we cannot obtain pure prayer. Another important fact acknowledged by Palamas is that this level of pure prayer is not the same as the union with God through the vision of the uncreated light. This stage can be reached only through the help of the Holy Spirit who takes the mind beyond its natural powers. This does not mean that the mind becomes uncreated or that it receives uncreated attributes, but points out the

³¹⁴ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 35, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 65.

fact that *no human being can see and reach the divine light through its own powers*. The Holy Spirit is our ‘mediator’ and the one that has the initiative in this case. All these fruitful Palamite insights will be developed by Stăniloae in his development of pure prayer.

I will begin my analysis in this case with the definition that Stăniloae gives to pure prayer:

*As we have seen from a quote given earlier on, St. Gregory Palamas recognizes pure prayer as a more fully and existential stage of apophaticism, that is superior to negative theology. Pure prayer is an ecstasy of the interior silence, a total stopping of the thinking in front of the divine mystery, before the divine light abides from above in the mind that has stopped, amazed, from all action.*³¹⁵

It is clear from this definition of pure prayer that Stăniloae follows closely Gregory Palamas’ insights without developing them too much. Unfortunately, sometimes Stăniloae seems just to take certain concepts from the Fathers, to stick them in and not develop them further.³¹⁶ This is one of these cases. Fortunately, in many other cases, he takes some courage at least to interpret and develop some fruitful ideas on their basis.³¹⁷

After offering this simple and base definition, Stăniloae goes on to identify and present the main aspects of pure prayer. Throughout the chapter he keeps developing the ideas offered by Palamas in the rich passage I quoted above. He speaks first about the fact that prayer itself has many stages and steps, but, when he speaks directly about pure prayer, he argues that this takes place only “after the mind has gone beyond the contemplation of the created world and beyond the

³¹⁵ The quote we gave before from Gregory Palamas.

³¹⁶ Jürgen Henkel, *Deification and Love Ethics...* [in Rom.], pp. 242-243.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

world of concepts, when the mind does not create any longer its own images and concepts.”³¹⁸ It is interesting to note here that Stăniloae seems to consider positive and negative theology in these two main streams. Positive theology, thus, resides in the contemplation of the world and the world of concepts. Negative theology resides in the denial of the concepts. However, pure prayer is different from both. Stăniloae argues that: “pure prayer can be recognized also from the fact that it does not contain an object any longer, but, after it passed above all through their higher and higher value, the mind, does not ask anything except the mercy of God.”³¹⁹ Stăniloae considers, thus, that the mind goes beyond any concept during pure prayer and does not ask anything except the mercy of God. However, although Stăniloae agrees with Palamas on the fact that the level of pure prayer cannot be attained by Christians who have not reached impassibility, he goes beyond Palamas and speaks a bit about the relationship between pure prayer and incessant prayer. Stăniloae considers that these are different. Pure prayer consists in a total silence, while incessant prayer asks for the help of Jesus Christ. However, he clearly contradicts himself, because earlier he argued that pure prayer can contain at least the invocation of the mercy of God and he seems to repeat that thought later on as well. We cannot explain his contradictory assertions without drawing back to the fact that he enjoys this paradoxical way of presenting ideas, so similar with the one employed by Cyril of Alexandria, whom he probably read during the period when he was writing this essential book. On the one hand Stăniloae affirms that pure prayer is total silence³²⁰, while, on the other hand, he affirms that one of the things in which pure prayer is similar to incessant prayer lies in the fact that both consist of...few

³¹⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 288.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³²⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 292.

words!³²¹ This fact cannot be explained easily unless we give a quote which seems to resolve this matter:

*‘Incessant prayer’ is distinct from the ‘pure or mental prayer’, because in the latter the mind has no idea and no thought except the formless thought of God. Of course, between ‘incessant prayer’ and ‘pure or mental prayer’ there is a close connection. Both of them use the same few words. Furthermore, nobody can reach instantly pure prayer unless he strives always to think about God and if the thought about God has not become something sweet [to his mind]. Thus, pure prayer is nothing else except the flame that rises more and more from the fire of the incessant prayer.*³²²

Thus, pure prayer can, at least sometimes, use a few words, and it does not always consist of pure silence. I can argue here that, at least in some visions described by some saints³²³, we can see that they only speak about being ‘dead for worldly affairs’ and yet not completely silent. The complete silence takes place during the vision of the divine light.

Stăniloae goes further and describes the main conditions that have to be respected in order for a person to achieve the state of pure prayer. Thus, he recognizes as true the principle articulated by Gregory Palamas according to which “the mind must turn its back to the things from outside and

³²¹*Ibid.*, p. 293.

³²²*Ibid.*

³²³ See especially the way in which Seraphim of Sarov depicts those stages in his conversation with Motovilov: “Many explain that this stillness refers only to worldly matters; in other words, that during prayerful converse with God you must ‘be still’ with regard to worldly affairs. But I will tell you in the name of God that not only is it necessary to be dead to them at prayer, but when by the omnipotent power of faith and prayer our Lord God the Holy Spirit condescends to visit us, and comes to us in the plenitude of His unutterable goodness, we must be dead to prayer too. The soul speaks and converses during prayer, but at the descent of the Holy Spirit we must remain in complete silence, in order to hear clearly and intelligibly all the words of eternal life which He will then deign to communicate. Complete soberness of both soul and spirit, and chaste purity of body is required at the same time”, in: <http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/wonderful.aspx>, accessed 7th of February 2012.

focus on its interior, which is its heart, leaving aside any object.”³²⁴ Stăniloae quotes Palamas again here, who argues that “there are, however, those who assert that the mind is not separated from the soul, but is interior to it, and who therefore question how it can be recalled within. It would seem such people are unaware that the essence of the mind is one thing, its energy another.”³²⁵ The second aspect that has to be respected in order to achieve pure prayer resides in the fact that one has to focus on a very short prayer, a prayer that uses few words such as the prayer of Jesus.³²⁶

In order to also describe physical features of prayer, Stăniloae recurses to the ‘methods’ of prayer described by Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian, Nicephorus the Monk, Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Kallistos and Ignatius Xanthopoulos, Nicodemus the Hagiorite and the Russian pilgrim’s anonymous Journal. I shall focus only on the ‘method’ of Gregory Palamas described here by Stăniloae. Stăniloae gives this quote from the writings of Gregory Palamas:

On the other hand is not out of place to teach people, especially beginners, that they should look at themselves, and introduce their own mind within themselves through control of breathing. A prudent man will not forbid someone who does not as yet contemplate himself to use certain methods to recall his mind within himself, for those newly approaching this struggle find that their mind, when recollected, continually becomes dispersed again. It is thus necessary for such people constantly to bring it back once more; but in their inexperience they fail to grasp that nothing in the world is in fact more

³²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 293.

³²⁵ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 2, 5, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 44.

³²⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], pp. 294-295.

*difficult to contemplate and more mobile and shifting than the mind. This is why certain masters recommend them to control the movement inwards and outwards of the breath, and to hold it back a little; in this way, they will also be able to control the mind together with the breath – this, at any rate, until such time as they have made progress, with the aid of God, have restrained the intellect from being distracted by what surrounds it, have purified it and truly become capable of leading it to a ‘unified recollection’.*³²⁷

It can be observed from this lengthy quote that Stăniloae is not highly original when he affirms the two steps that have to be respected in order to attain pure prayer. He is simply borrowing from the writings of Gregory Palamas. Unfortunately, he forgets to quote him and simply tends to summarize his ideas in a fairly simple fashion without deepening too much the Palamite insights. However, Stăniloae provides an interesting opinion about the so-called Palamite method of prayer.³²⁸ He considers that, although Palamas uses clearly Pseudo-Symeon and Nicephorus the Monk in order to support his own arguments, the description of the ‘holding of breath’ could not have been taken from another writer except Gregory of Sinai.³²⁹ However, there is no clue whatsoever that Gregory Palamas and Gregory of Sinai ever met in all their lifetime.

As a conclusion, after the description of the ‘methods’ of prayer, Stăniloae argues that “the prayer in the phases is not yet pure prayer, but only the Jesus prayer. The Jesus prayer becomes pure prayer when there is no more need for words or methods, but when the mind says it

³²⁷ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 2, 7, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, pp. 45-46.

³²⁸ We are absolutely positive about the fact that no other researcher has considered the quote given above as part of a description of a physical method of prayer.

³²⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 314.

incessantly together with the heart.”³³⁰ Thus, he acknowledges again that the Jesus prayer and pure prayer are distinct, but not separate from one another. The silence or the few words of the pure prayer cannot be born unless we first have the Jesus prayer. However, in order to achieve a more concentrated prayer we must work in order to reach our impassibility and this process can take a long time.

After deciphering the difference between the incessant prayer and the Jesus prayer, Stăniloae goes further and speaks about the pure prayer itself and the importance of the latter. He quotes again Gregory Palamas at the beginning of his analysis when he argues that the pure prayer is beyond all images and concepts:

*For in prayer, the mind gradually abandons all relation with created things: first with all things evil and bad, then with neutral things capable of conformity to either good or ill, according to the intentions of the persons using them. It is to this last category that all studies belong and the knowledge that comes through them. Hence the Fathers warn us against accepting the knowledge that comes from the enemy at the time of prayer, so as not to be deprived of that which is superior. Thus, the mind slowly abandons all relations with these things, and even with those superior to them, in order to be separated from all beings through pure prayer. This ecstasy is incomparably higher than negative theology; for it belongs only to those who have attained impassibility.*³³¹

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

³³¹ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 35, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 65.

Stăniloae returns over and over again to this passage. Earlier on I offered a quote that begins with the last lines of this passage. This is the main source that Stăniloae uses in order to offer his ‘personal’ opinion on the pure prayer. He considers that all of the Fathers (including Maximus the Confessor, Diadochus of Photike or Mark the Monk) argue that, in order to attain pure prayer, one must leave aside every image and every concept of this world.³³² Stăniloae draws further on this particular concept and argues that there is a distinction between mind and reason. Our reason is part of our mind, but it is always inclined to search for things that exist outside us. In order to make our mind imageless and beyond every concept, we must unify it by returning our whole attention inside the mind and not outside it. In order to reflect God as a mirror, the mind must be entirely released from every concept or image. We must return to ourselves and not to the exterior things in order to see God.³³³ Thus, the mind becomes transparent. Stăniloae argues that “the Fathers argue that the mind becomes transparent when it begins to look inside itself, because through itself it sees God.”³³⁴ Stăniloae returns again to Gregory Palamas: “God reveals Himself to the cleansed mind as in a mirror, but remains unseen in His essence.”³³⁵ Stăniloae draws his argument back not only to the writings of Gregory Palamas, but also to the ones of Diadochus, Gregory of Nyssa or Evagrius Ponticus. However, when speaking about the transparency of the mind, he is careful to draw a firm line between the mind and God so as not to make the mistake of confusing them. He argues that the mind sees in itself, when it becomes transparent, “Christ, who has entered [in the depths of our mind] since our baptism, there it is the Kingdom of Heaven which lies inside us, there it is the house of Christ.”³³⁶

³³² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], pp. 327-328.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

³³⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 332.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 333. Stăniloae is influenced here by the writing *About Baptism* of Mark the Monk.

During this action of discovering the hidden Kingdom of God that lies within us, the mind experiences a state of bewilderment that stops its actions and which is characterized as “a state of paralysis of its powers that cannot move any longer in a progressive manner.”³³⁷ Describing this bewilderment and, in fact, pure prayer, Stăniloae says: “This moment represents a bewilderment of the mind, a total apophaticism, because the mind does not leave aside only its concepts, but also its actions. After this moment of bewilderment, some people receive the vision of the divine light as a gift from above.”³³⁸

One might even think that this bewilderment or static moment of the mind represents something that pulls us apart and makes us go more or less insane. It is far from that. Stăniloae remembers to describe as well what this bewilderment consists of and manages to offer an accurate and clear picture:

*This [spiritual] bewilderment is not inert as the physical one and does not represent a sleeping of the spirit. Knowledge is implied in it: the experience which is also an understanding beyond understanding of the infinite and impossible to grasp abyss of God, Who is not a limited object, but an infinite and sovereign Reality. (...) This experience is one of a union and interpenetration between God and us, although it does not represent the luminous union that appears in the next step.*³³⁹

This act of pure prayer places us in front of God and makes us feel bewildered, but this bewilderment contains in itself an act of knowledge: we realize that we are not the same with

³³⁷*Ibid.*

³³⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 334.

³³⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 335.

God, but also that we are not totally separated from Him. We unite with Him, but not as much as during the vision of the divine uncreated energies. However, this act of pure prayer is also ecstatic: we go beyond everything, beyond our ideas, our images, our thoughts. We contemplate ourselves and, in the same time, contemplate God ‘through darkness’.

Everywhere, the prayer is the one that renders possible the turning away of the mind from all things and ideas. However, this is not only an act of auto-contemplation for the mind, but also an ecstatic act of the subject, an act through which the subject transcends itself, goes beyond itself towards the supreme and infinite Subject. During the [pure] prayer, the subject is conscious of the fact that it is not alone, but in front of God.³⁴⁰

It is extremely difficult to evaluate Stăniloae’s own opinion about this ecstatic state. He seems to underscore it and he does not pay enough attention to it. Stăniloae does not explain how this ecstasy takes place and why is it important for it to take place now and not when the believer experiences the vision of the divine light. One may wonder why it is important to consider that this ecstasy really takes place. The only possible answer that I can offer and this should be taken at its face value, which is as an educated guess, is that this is the most advanced action that the mind can offer through its natural powers. I am aware of the fact that God collaborates with us towards our salvation, but his collaboration implies the fact that we are doing something as well. Going beyond ourselves, becoming ecstatic, is the maximum that we can offer. Forgetting everything, every image and every concept is what one can offer in order to unite with God.

³⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 336.

However, the second question, to which Stăniloae provides in the end an answer, is: why can we refer to this ecstasy or to total silence as prayer?

Stăniloae in the next chapter concentrates on what he calls the ‘rest’ of the mind. He argues that this ‘rest’ is not some sort of inertia and that the mind experiences more and more powerfully the divine energies, without seeing yet the divine light. Here he makes a clear statement that:

*This state is one of prayer, although this prayer is full of silent bewilderment, of an impossibility to define what it really asks and the One whom it asks from and whom the believer knows that listens to him. Although this state is superior to prayer, it is still named as prayer because it is given to the worthy ones during prayer and takes its source from prayer.*³⁴¹

This ‘prayer’ which does not use anything except a few words and consists almost exclusively in a bewildered silence represents, in Stăniloae’s view, a proof of the soul’s love for God. The love of the soul for God becomes incandescent. However, as I have remarked before, Stăniloae argues that the mind becomes conscious that the vision of the divine light cannot take place unless the Holy Spirit comes and takes the mind to a new level. The mind has reached the limits of its natural power. It has grown in knowledge up to the point in which it can realize that God is above every concept or image. Stăniloae argues furthermore that:

If until now the mind progressed in the knowledge of God using a self-effort of returning towards itself and out of the love of God, once it reached the limit of its interior turned towards God, at the borders of its own territory

³⁴¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 343.

*that leans towards God, it awaits to be taken beyond itself in the union with God, in a state of drunken, passionate and ecstatic love.*³⁴²

Thus, the next step and the last of the apophaticism, lies in the vision of the divine light which takes place when the Holy Spirit comes upon the believer and advance his mind beyond itself, in a vision that goes above any of the natural senses.

The deification of the human being: union with God and the vision of the divine light³⁴³

The first thing that one experiences when stepping towards the final stage of the spiritual life, the deification of the human being, is the fact that prayer stops. The second aspect lies in the fact that the divine light illuminates profoundly the human being. There are two important texts quoted by Fr Stăniloae from the writings of Gregory Palamas before he begins to deal with both these aspects. In the first one, Gregory Palamas affirms about Saint Apostle Paul that:

Under the effect of the ecstasy, he forgets even prayer to God. It is this of which St. Isaac [the Syrian] speaks, confirming the great and divine Gregory [of Nazianzus]: "Prayer is the purity of the intellect which is produced with dread only from the light of the Holy Trinity." And again: "Purity of spiritual mind is what allows the light of the Holy Trinity to shine forth at the time of prayer... The mind then transcends prayer, and this state should not properly

³⁴² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 347.

³⁴³ For good presentations on the doctrine of deification see: Daniel B. Clendenin, 'Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis', *JETS*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1994), pp. 365-379; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Georgios Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man. St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, translated from Greek by Liadain Sherrard (New York: SVSP, 1984); A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford University Press, 1999)

*be called prayer, but a fruit of the pure prayer sent by the Holy Spirit. The mind does not pray a definite prayer, but finds itself in ecstasy in the midst of all incomprehensible realities. It is indeed an ignorance superior to knowledge.*³⁴⁴

The second quote is a very short one: “It is of this that the Fathers speak when they say, “The end of prayer is to be snatched away to God.”³⁴⁵

What bewilders the reader from the beginning is that Gregory Palamas draws more from Isaac the Syrian, than presenting his own view on this particular matter. To present this opinion as a ‘Palamite’ one, as Stăniloae does, is extremely curious. However, as long as for Stăniloae any of the Fathers is an authority in himself and all the Fathers belong to a ‘common’ spiritual Tradition this fact does not seem that curious any longer. Stăniloae argues, after giving these two quotes, that: “thus, the union does not consist in the prayer itself, because in prayer the knowledge of our distinction from God is too evident (!). The union [of the soul with God] is however the product of the prayer, because it takes place when the prayer ends, as a rapture of the mind by God.”³⁴⁶ Thus, it is clear that, for Stăniloae, as well as for Gregory Palamas, prayer ends when the divine light shines upon the believer. However, Stăniloae exaggerates when he argues that this is ‘the product’ of prayer. He contradicts himself again here. He just argued above that the divine light comes upon the believer solely through the work of the Holy Spirit. The mind cannot do anything but wait for the work of the Spirit to come and take it away to the vision of the divine light.

³⁴⁴ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 3, 21, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 38.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁴⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 351.

Furthermore, he goes on and speaks about the ‘uncreated love’ that the human being begins to share when the vision of the divine light appears to him. Stăniloae gets polemical and argues that:

Unlike Catholicism, which does not believe in the existence of the uncreated energies of God and, therefore, considers love as a created gift as well, Orthodoxy believes that love is a uncreated, divine and deifying energy communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, through which we really participate to the life of the Holy Trinity.³⁴⁷

When Stăniloae speaks about this ‘uncreated love’, he does not argue that only this type of love exists and that all the love that humans share between themselves lies is uncreated. He considers that there are two types of love: the one which we experience in a state of sin, and the one that we experience when we taste the grace of God. He affirms that:

We cannot find nature in its pure state. We either find it in a state contrary to nature, or in the state of nature penetrated by grace. Thus, we do not find a natural love as well. The love that a human can experience, outside his connection with God, is not even a natural love. (...) When nature has reached its healthy state, in her love we also find divine grace.³⁴⁸

However, this means that we can experience either a sinful love, or an ‘uncreated’ one. This divine love makes the human being powerful in all her actions and gives her the possibility of sacrificing herself even for sinners. One can understand better this phenomenon of ‘uncreated

³⁴⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 352.

³⁴⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], pp. 352-353.

love' and how it works if we think about the way in which human beings can communicate with God. Stăniloae observes that:

This reciprocal communication of energy takes place differently between two people and between God and a human being. In the latter case, God sends his energy in the human being. The divine Eros that abides in the human being makes her imbibe the projection of the image of God in herself. However, it is also true that after the divine energy communicates itself to the human being, it returns to God and, in its return, embraces the form of the affectivity of the human being, which has been awoken by it. Not only God loves the human being, but also the human being loves God, or sends as well a self-energy and her affection towards God.³⁴⁹

Thus, what we have is a reciprocal communication of energy between God and the human being. God offers us divine energy, which takes the form of uncreated love and, in return, we give through the means of the same divine energy, which acts as a vehicle, our human affection. This is a very interesting change. The human being can receive the divine uncreated love and unite with it. This helps as well our love that we have towards other human beings.³⁵⁰ After we have discovered the divine love, we discover as well the divine image in every other human being. We see that every human being can communicate with God and can establish a connection with Him. Uniting with God, we get closer to others and their inner self. However, all this relation with God and other humans cannot be pursued unless there is not a mutual freedom through which we can

³⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 358.

³⁵⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 371.

have access to their interior. The human being cannot be known unless free access has been given to another subject.³⁵¹

It is time to pass on to the description of the vision of the divine light, where Stăniloae is again highly influenced by Gregory Palamas. Stăniloae speaks first about the role that the mind has during the vision of the divine light. Stăniloae describes the process of the vision of the divine light:

*In that moment, when the mind stops every work in amazement and when our spirit feels to be at the limit of its natural powers, the love of God abides in it and takes it up in ecstasy. This work is entirely a divine one. Our soul realizes that this experience is not the fruit of one of his works. However, this does not mean that the self-consciousness and the awareness about the One who loves it simply disappear.*³⁵²

We have seen above that Palamas speaks about this fact as well. He does not exclude the fact that, although the mind is in ecstasy, it also keeps its self-consciousness. Furthermore, he also argues that this ravishing of the human mind by the Holy Spirit is entirely a divine work. The human being cannot reach the ecstasy of the vision of the divine light through its natural powers. This is why Stăniloae insisted so much on the idea of the uncreated love of God and the way in which this communicates to our being. Palamas describes this process in extremely vivid words. However, what is highly interesting for our theme lies in his description of the way in which the saints communicate further to other humans the content of their visions:

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 381.

*As I have said, it is because of their love of men that the saints speak, so far as it is possible, about things ineffable, rejecting the error of those who in their ignorance imagine that, after the abstraction from beings, there remains only an absolute inaction, not an inaction surpassing all action.*³⁵³

The mind of the human being receives a super-abundant knowledge and not a state of inaction which simply does not offer any other progress except a total bewilderment. Stăniloae remarks that the effort which the mind made before reaching the vision of the divine light is not left unused. The level of impassibility and pure prayer that the mind achieved before the vision of the divine light helps it here. The mind receives the divine light in direct proportion with the capacities that it had already achieved before through natural effort.³⁵⁴

Furthermore, the ecstasy that the mind achieved through its own natural powers during the step of pure prayer is now replaced by the ecstasy provided through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, the human mind, in Stăniloae's words "has the capacity of making the divine work its own, it is *capax divini*. This capacity has become practical and is not only potential anymore through the cleansing from passions."³⁵⁵ This is an extremely interesting argument. Stăniloae considers that the role of the mind is not diminished when the divine light appears to it. Although the mind sees the divine light through the help of the Holy Spirit, it does not participate in it passively, as a simple spectator. The mind 'borrows', and appropriates the work of the Holy Spirit. This capacity became practical because the mind was cleansed before from the passions and has already attained impassibility. Stăniloae argues that Gregory Palamas and Dionysius the

³⁵³ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 3, 19, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 36.

³⁵⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 382.

³⁵⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 382.

Areopagite both described this important union between mind and God attributing to the mind not only the “natural activity oriented towards the created things, *but also the power of entering into union with God, of accepting the union and the spiritual feeling of the union with God.*”³⁵⁶ The mind accepts the union with God in total freedom. The mind gives the will, while the Holy Spirit gives the work, the state of grace in which the mind can participate to the divine light. Stăniloae quotes here an important passage of Gregory Palamas: “If our mind would not be capable of going beyond itself, it would not have vision and understanding beyond its actions.”³⁵⁷ This interesting fact was used by Stăniloae in order to support his opinion that the mind has a thirst that is never satisfied. He considers that the human mind always tries to go beyond itself. This is why, after leaving behind the created things, the human mind thirsts after the union with God. However, Stăniloae is sure that this ecstasy cannot give through itself the vision of the divine light to the mind. This only takes place when the work of the Holy Spirit gives to the mind the eyes to see and the ears to hear. In Palamas’ words:

Do you now understand that in place of the intellect, the eyes and the ears, they acquire the incomprehensible Spirit and by Him hear, see and comprehend? For if all their intellectual activity has stopped, how could the angels and angelic men see God except by the power of the Spirit? This is why their vision is not a sensation, since they do not receive it through the senses, nor is it intellection, since they do not find it through thought or the knowledge that comes thereby, but after the cessation of all mental activity. It

³⁵⁶*Ibid.*

³⁵⁷*Ibid.*

*is not therefore, the product of either imagination or reason; it is neither an opinion nor a conclusion reached by syllogistic argument.*³⁵⁸

Thus, the mind receives the work of the Holy Spirit and, through this grace, sees the divine light. However, Stăniloae identifies another important aspect of the union between the human mind and the divine light, namely the fact that there is a progress in the vision of the divine light. The human mind does not share the super-abundant knowledge of the divine light entirely. This participation is gradual. This is an enormous step ahead given by Stăniloae. The role of the mind in the union with the divine light resides not only in the expressed will, the actual freedom and the interior capacity for this union, but also in the fact that it *progresses* into the vision. More clear visions, more abundant knowledge comes to the mind. The mind progresses in the knowledge given through the gift of the Spirit. Stăniloae is careful to point out here that:

*This does not mean that the human subject produces this function. This function comes from above, but the human subject has prepared himself beforehand, through the enlargement of his natural action so that he might be capable of receiving more and more functional power that comes from above.*³⁵⁹

The mind has enlarged its capacity of receiving the vision of divine light through all the actions that preceded this vision. The mind has understood that no knowledge is enough to express God. It has reached the stage of pure prayer. It has gone beyond itself in a ‘natural’ ecstasy. Now, it has received the grace of the Holy Spirit and, through this grace, but also through its natural

³⁵⁸ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 3, 18, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 35.

³⁵⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 383.

enlargement, has received the vision of the divine light and the super-abundant knowledge that comes with it. However, this road does not know an end. The mind never reaches the end of this super-abundant knowledge provided by the divine light. Stăniloae points out an important text of St. Gregory Palamas that provides us with an interesting summary on this particular aspect. Gregory Palamas argues that it is impossible for a created being to encompass all the infinite power of God. Furthermore, although the spiritual eyes of the mind grow and receive more and more sight of the divine light and more knowledge, they cannot finish all this knowledge and cannot reach the end of the divine light.

Stăniloae goes on and speaks in a few pages about the significance of the divine light. He observes that “this light is also knowledge, but the light of knowledge is the fruit of love. However, a light or knowledge that spring forth from love and which is nothing else but an expression of the state of love is, in the same time, life.”³⁶⁰ Thus, the divine light is love and knowledge and life. Stăniloae points out the interpenetration of those qualities of the divine light. The knowledge which represents also a life in love must have an existential character.³⁶¹ After he quotes two texts taken from Maximus the Confessor in which the latter speaks about the ‘existential’ character of knowledge, Stăniloae offers an interesting quote from Gregory Palamas. Palamas summarized in this paragraph all the steps of the spiritual life, beginning with cataphatic and apophatic theology, continuing with the stage of pure prayer and ending with the sight of the divine light. I shall offer here only the last part of it:

In this way he completely goes out of himself and becomes wholly of God; he sees a divine light inaccessible to the senses as such, but precious and holy to

³⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 385.

³⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 386.

*pure souls and minds; without this vision the mind couldn't see by being united with the things above it, only by its mental sense, just as the body's eye cannot see without perceptible light.*³⁶²

It is extremely interesting how Stăniloae speaks further on about this union between the human mind and God during the vision of the divine light. Stăniloae argues that the human mind has a different view from what it has at the time of pure prayer. During the stage of pure prayer the mind becomes transparent and observes itself directly, while God is seen in a more indirect way. Stăniloae argues now that, during the vision of the divine light, a reverse movement produces: the mind sees itself only indirectly, while it sees God in a direct manner. Furthermore, Stăniloae argues that not only the mind, but also God becomes ecstatic. However, he carefully argues that this ecstasy of God should be understood as a form of kenosis. If the human being encloses in herself, she becomes egotistical. God can be enclosed in Himself and be without egotism in the same time, because He is a Trinity of Persons and can live His supreme life in communion. However, God chooses this kenotic approach because He wants to give us a gift. He does this without being forced to do it.³⁶³

One might ask however, why is it necessary for God to become ecstatic, when all we can perceive is the vision of the divine light? Well, one must take also into consideration the fact that Stăniloae is influenced in these particular passages by Symeon the New Theologian. Now, Symeon the New Theologian does not speak only about the vision of the divine light, but also

³⁶² Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 3, 46, in: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*, translated by Archimandrite Jerome Newville and Otilia Kloos (New York: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 2002), p. 332.

³⁶³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 389.

about seeing Christ in the divine light. Thus, a Christian does not experience solely a vision full of light and no Person present there. In the light, we meet Christ.

Stăniloae quotes in order to support his view a text of Gregory Palamas:

*So our mind goes out of itself and so is joined to God, becoming above itself. On the other hand God too goes out of Himself and so unites Himself thus with our mind, but He does this out of condescension. In other words it is as though He were driven by Eros and by love and goes out of Himself, however not communicating His depth, nor leaving His transcendence, by the abundance of His goodness and unites Himself with us through that union above understanding.*³⁶⁴

Stăniloae explains this ecstatic action of God. He argues that God goes out of Himself (this expression is certainly one that Dionysius would approve!) just in order to get the created mind close to Him. However, although God makes this ecstatic action, all that we receive is His divine uncreated energy and not His being.³⁶⁵ This is why, argues Stăniloae, “we do not become gods after being, [but only in grace].”³⁶⁶ Furthermore, Stăniloae speaks about something that does not appear anywhere in Palamas: the double meaning of the descent (ecstasy) of God. Stăniloae considers that God gives us first the energy of the divine love and, afterwards opens himself towards our love that searches now for Him after our natural action has been united with it. Nonetheless, Stăniloae observes also that the ecstasy of our mind does not represent an ‘ontological’ ecstasy. The mind does not reach another ontological dimension. It solely has its

³⁶⁴ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 3, 47, in: Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*, translated by Archimandrite Jerome Newville and Otilia Kloos (New York: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 2002), p. 334. I have corrected a few minor aspects of the translation.

³⁶⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 389.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

natural activity ‘replaced’ by the divine one so that it can see the divine light. The mind experiences an ‘interior’ ecstasy. It does not reach outside to something that exists in the created realm. God is inside us and the mind reaches ecstasy inside itself.

Thus, the divine light does not spring forth from outside so that the mind can participate to it somehow in an external fashion. It springs forth as well from the interior of the mind. Gregory Palamas argues that:

*The mind does not simply contemplate some other object, or simply its own image, but rather the glory impressed on its own image by the grace of God. This radiance reinforces the mind’s power to transcend itself, and accomplish that union with those better things which are beyond understanding.*³⁶⁷

Thus, the divine light springs forth, as Gregory Palamas observes, not only from outside the mind but also from inside it. The ‘radiance’ that comes from inside the mind takes the mind towards higher steps of spiritual knowledge and unites it with God more and more. Stăniloae was absolutely right when he argued that the mind has an insatiable thirst and longing for God. The mind always craves for more. The source is infinite and has always something new to present to the mind. Stăniloae also draws on the opinion of Vladimir Lossky that the sight of the divine light leads to an increase of the self-consciousness.³⁶⁸ If the sin leads to the ‘sleep’ of our soul, the divine light leads us to a total awakening of it.

³⁶⁷ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 11, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 58.

³⁶⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 393.

However, Stăniloae does not forget to insist as well on the fact that the divine light is not a natural light, but a spiritual one. He was not the first to insist on this particular aspect. Basil Krivocheine had already done that four years earlier in his essay dedicated to Gregory Palamas.³⁶⁹ In order to prove that the divine light that the hesychasts see is not a material, but a spiritual light, Stăniloae simply provides a few passages from Gregory Palamas' writings.³⁷⁰ However, Stăniloae provides here a few useful insights, affirming for example that the vision of the divine light is not available through the bodily eyes, unless there is a divine power that can help us to see it. As an argument he mentions that although the three Apostles that were at Mount Tabor saw the divine light, other people were not able to see it in the same time. He quotes here Gregory Palamas who argues that: "If the Apostles were able to see with their bodily eyes this light which is not a material one, then they were capable to do this through a power which is beyond the created realm."³⁷¹

Stăniloae turns afterwards directly to the fact that the vision of the divine light is not a mere contemplation but provides us with a super-abundant knowledge. Stăniloae argues that Palamas names sometimes the vision of the divine light as 'ignorance.'³⁷² This does not happen because there is no knowledge in the vision of the divine light, but only because this knowledge is super-abundant.

This knowledge is beyond knowledge, because it is above the human being.

*This knowledge is above everything that we can experience in the limits of
our natural powers of knowledge. We cannot achieve it through the powers of*

³⁶⁹ Republished in: Basil Krivocheine, *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas*, (London: Geo. E. J. Coldwell, 1954), pp. 33-46.

³⁷⁰ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 24; I, 3, 28; I, 3, 46; II, 3, 56; II, 3, 33, I, 3, 31; I, 3, 27. See Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], pp. 394-398.

³⁷¹ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, I, 3, 27, in: *Ibid.*, p. 398.

³⁷² Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 48, in: *Ibid.*, p. 399.

*our intellect, no matter how much these can develop themselves, because no evolution can help the mind to unite with God, Who is transcendent to the creation and its powers.*³⁷³

Stăniloae observes that this super-abundant knowledge cannot be achieved through our will and achievements and, thus, is highly different from the conception of important philosophers such as Plato, Plotinus or Hegel. The main difference that he observes here remains the fact that the mind is ravished by the Holy Spirit in order to come to this knowledge beyond knowledge. The final ecstasy cannot be achieved through natural efforts but only through a supernatural gift of grace from the Holy Spirit. The important passage taken from Gregory Palamas runs like this:

*Since the Reality which transcends every intellectual power is impossible to comprehend, it is beyond all beings; such union with God is thus beyond all knowledge, even it be called “knowledge” metaphorically, nor is it intelligible, even it be called so. For how can what is beyond intellect be called intelligible? In respect of its transcendence, it might better be called ignorance than knowledge. It cannot be a part or aspect of knowledge, just as the Super-essential is not an aspect of the essential. Knowledge as a whole could not contain it, nor could this knowledge, when subdivided, possess it as one of its parts.*³⁷⁴

What Stăniloae remarks on here is the fact that this super-abundant knowledge can have not only positive, but also negative ‘names’. When a person tries to describe this knowledge beyond

³⁷³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 399.

³⁷⁴ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 33, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 64.

knowledge, he is forced to do the same thing as he would when he was at the beginning of his spiritual life with cataphatic and apophatic theology. This knowledge is light, but also above light. This knowledge is love and freedom, but also beyond love and freedom. Stăniloae does not stop only to this important idea, but draws even further and affirms that one of the reasons for which this super-abundant knowledge is different not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively from the usual natural knowledge of the human being, lies in the fact that it is a 'supra-conceptual' knowledge.³⁷⁵

This 'supra-conceptual' knowledge means that the believer cannot but 'see' what happens before his spiritual eyes. He cannot grasp the 'meanings' and, furthermore, transform them in concepts while experiencing it. However, after the vision ends, he can try to do it. Stăniloae stresses that:

*When the person who has had that vision [of the divine light] goes out of his ecstatic state, he tries to capture into concepts and images what he has seen, but he realizes at the same time that he can catch only glimpses of that vision. This is why he chooses to express himself in contradictory concepts (sight – beyond sight, knowledge – ignorance etc.). Thus, although that [divine] light is supra-conceptual, it also 'suggests' concepts and images, just as the contemplation of the person that we love is beyond concepts in the ecstatic moments, but provokes us afterwards to describe it in concepts which must be developed together with the consciousness of their transparency or of their symbolic character.*³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 402.

³⁷⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 402.

However, Stăniloae does not explain to us how these ‘supra-conceptual’ images or concepts relate further on with our natural knowledge. He seems rather confused and bewildered by his own arguments and declares that he does not know of what they consist. However, Stăniloae develops here an interesting image. We receive these ‘supra-conceptual’ images or concepts during our vision of the divine light. After the vision ends, one tries to explain them to other people but this is hardly possible because all that one can express are only disparate fragments. It is difficult to translate back a spiritual experience in images, ideas or concepts. This is why Stăniloae insists that even these fragmentary concepts have to be perceived in a strongly symbolic light. These concepts are only fragments of the initial visions and the paradoxical language used to express them underlines the fact that they are mere descriptions which are far from the reality of the things seen or heard.

In order to offer an answer on how these visions still remain in the memory and what effects they have on the mind of the human being, Stăniloae returns again to the texts of Gregory Palamas and begins to speak about the spiritual seals (τύπους νοητούς) that the mind receives when it rises to the vision of the divine light. The divine light leaves a seal on the mind of the believer. This seal is different from the one given by the sight of the created world or our own imagination. Gregory Palamas offers the example of the Holy Prophets, who were able to prophesy only after the Holy Spirit modeled (sealed) their mind. Thus, Stăniloae is able to speak again about the fact that during the vision of the divine light we experience certain supra-conceptual concepts and images. This is possible because this vision is also organized through certain structures. However, these structures are highly different from the ones of the created realm. Thus, this is the reason why one must be able to leave aside all the concepts of this world and receive afterwards the spiritual seals through the work of the Holy Spirit. “These spiritual

structures are not closing the mind again in the finite form of the images and concepts, because each of these is infinite.”³⁷⁷ Stăniloae highlights again the fact that these structures have an infinite content and that they differ from the concepts that the mind can have in relation with the created realm. However, he points out next that these forms never keep a fixed feature and that they constantly change and invite the mind to a continuous progress in order to reach new spiritual heights. “This is the constant transformation of the human made by the Holy Spirit, which makes him to resemble God more.”³⁷⁸ In spite of the fact that this continuous transformation and progress gives the human being access to new spiritual heights, it does not transform his created nature into an uncreated one. The ontological distance between the human being and God is, thus, preserved. Furthermore, although all that the human can grasp inside this continuous ‘formatting’ process is that he is entering in even greater depths, this does not mean that he is unable to discover the fact that these supernatural forms do not possess an internal structure.

*Together with the forms and the precise delimited meanings, the spiritual human grasps as well the mysterious background of the transcendent reality. However, he does not grasp this in a chaotic way, but structured in different forms and steps of love.*³⁷⁹

Thus, Stăniloae considers that these spiritual forms through which the human being receives the super-abundant knowledge do have a positive meaning that can be grasped by the human person. However, this is a supra-conceptual meaning that cannot be translated easily into the concepts and ideas that we usually use during our ‘natural’ life-time. Furthermore, the forms that provide

³⁷⁷ Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 420.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 421.

new spiritual meanings are constantly changing, forcing the human mind to reach a new progress, to go towards new heights of spiritual knowledge.

This happens as well because the vision of the divine light is a “state of supreme spirituality for the one who experiences it.”³⁸⁰ The person who experiences the vision of the divine light becomes light himself in a certain manner. St Gregory Palamas argues that:

*For it is in light that the light is seen, and that which sees operates in a similar light, since this faculty has no other way in which to work. Having separated itself from all other beings, it becomes itself light and is assimilated to what it sees, or rather, it is united to it without mingling, being itself light and seeing light through light. If it sees itself, it sees light; if it beholds the object of its vision, that too is light; and if it looks at the means by which it sees, again it is light. For such is the character of the union, that all is one, so that he who sees can distinguish neither the means nor the object nor its nature, but simply has the awareness of being light and of seeing a light distinct from every creature.*³⁸¹

Gregory Palamas explains here how the mind of the believer becomes itself light when it receives the vision of the divine light. I have presented before, on the basis of Gregory Palamas and, subsequently, on that of Stăniloae, that the divine light does not come solely from ‘outside’ the mind, but also from inside. The mind becomes itself light. Nonetheless, in order for the mind to see the divine light, the Holy Spirit ‘lends’ to it His own work, which is the light of grace. The

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 36, in: John Meyendorff (ed.), Nicholas Gendle (transl.) (New York: Paulist Press), 1983, p. 65-6.

mind does not see anything else except light. When it looks at itself, it sees light, when it thinks about how it is possible to see this uncreated light, the only answer is that it has light as its means of seeing. Furthermore, ‘outside’ there is only light. However, this does not mean that the mind becomes uncreated or that the divine light is mixed and confused with the created nature of the mind. Stăniloae interprets the passage from Gregory Palamas by stating that:

*Gregory Palamas has frequently repeated that this does not mean a material light, not even a light of natural intelligence. It is a light of love beyond nature, in which the very being of the one who sees has been transformed. It is the state of culminating spiritualisation, of purity, of overwhelming the bodily sensations, of surpassing the severe impulses of egotism; it is a state of supreme goodness, mildness, understanding, love, it is a feeling of spiritual delicacy and ease. This is the state of deification, of likeness to the divine Spirit.*³⁸²

Stăniloae considers that the vision of divine light is not one of a natural or intelligible light. Thus, the very being of the human person becomes transfigured. The passions, which were already overwhelmed in the spiritual battle, are now taken apart from the soul. This vision of the divine light represents the final step of the spiritual life. Although it always represents a constant and continuous progress, this does not mean that we have here another ‘cryptic’ spiritual stage. We have reached the end of the ladder, an end without end that represents the deification of the human being, the continuous likening of the human being to the divine Spirit.³⁸³

³⁸² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar...*, p. 361.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

Stăniloae explains afterwards the different ‘steps’ and features of deification. He considers that there is no such thing as a ‘pure human nature’. He seems concerned with the fact that sin has led us to a position contrary to nature. However, when we receive the help of God and overcome at least partially the passions, we find ourselves in a position above nature. Thus, the human being is never in a state of pure nature. He is either contrary to nature if he chooses sin or above nature if he opens himself to the work of the Holy Trinity. In order to support his view Stăniloae comments on an important text of Gregory Palamas. The text of Gregory Palamas runs like this:

*We have a natural wisdom in ourselves which we can develop further on through our perseverance. However, the saints also are given the wisdom of the Spirit which speaks through them, in conformity with the promise of the Gospel.*³⁸⁴

Stăniloae seems to force the text to support his interpretation. I am not sure whether his argument can be really a correct one, although I certainly agree with another idea that seems to provide a better view: “during the process of deification for a long period of time the human being does not reach the level of full sanity of his nature, but, in other instances, he goes beyond the pure natural level through the divine grace.”³⁸⁵ Furthermore, even though Stăniloae speaks about deification more in the last pages of his book he argues here that deification begins with the sacrament of Baptism and includes as well the levels of purification and illumination and not solely the last stage of the spiritual life. He does seem again to speak against his actual intentions when he argues that deification consists mainly of the “progress made by the human being beyond the limits of its natural powers, beyond the borders of its own nature, in the divine plan that lies

³⁸⁴ Gregory Palamas, *Adversus Akyndinos*, V, Cod. Paris. Gr., 1238, f. 152 apud Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* [in Rom.]..., p. 426, n. 597.

³⁸⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*...[in Rom.], p. 426.

beyond nature.”³⁸⁶ This is highly ambiguous. On the one hand Stăniloae affirms that deification begins when the believer receives the mystery of Baptism, but, on the other hand, he argues that deification consists mainly in the last step of apophaticism: the vision of the divine light. It is hard to explain how he achieved such a contradictory view in just two pages. In the end, Stăniloae reaches somehow a conclusion and argues that:

*If in the course of the spiritual ascent of man, right up to the full development of his natural powers by their cooperation, divine grace would not give any other help except [to see] that they develop to their limits, the name of deification for this process would hardly be justifiable, although it is accomplished with the help of divine power. Grace also produces in man, even in the course of his ascent, effects which surpass the limits of pure nature. This represents also an important reason why the name of deification cannot be refused for this spiritual ascent that takes place before the ultimate attainment of the natural powers of man.*³⁸⁷

Thus, Stăniloae considers that the name of deification should be kept as well for the first two stages of the spiritual ascent (purification and illumination) because here the human being can also experience and prove that there are supernatural actions that happen in his life. However, Stăniloae is keen on observing that the term of deification should be used more appropriately for the last stage of spiritual ascent, the one in which the natural powers cease and are replaced by the work of the Holy Spirit. However, Stăniloae is adamant on observing as well that this ‘replacement’ does not mean that the human being does not act any longer. The human being is

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 427-428.

³⁸⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar...*, p. 364. I have slightly corrected the translation.

still active, at least active in ‘receiving’ the divine light and all the super-abundant knowledge that comes together with it. The natural attributes of the human being are overwhelmed by the divine work of the Holy Spirit.³⁸⁸ However, although Stăniloae follows here Palamas and argues that the human being ceases his natural works either in soul or body, he is also careful to point out an extremely important Palamite passage in which it is argued that the only different thing that remains between God and the deified human being resides in the difference according to nature.³⁸⁹ The human being participates solely to the deifying graces of the Holy Spirit and not to the divine nature.³⁹⁰ Stăniloae concludes that:

Deification is the passing of man from created things to the uncreated, to the level of divine energies. Man partakes of these, not of the divine essence. So it is understood how man assimilates more and more the divine energies, without ever reaching an end in this action, since he will never assimilate their source, that is the divine essence and become God by essence or another Christ. In the measure in which man increases his capacity to become a subject of ever richer divine energies, these energies [that spring from] the divine essence are revealed to him in a greater proportion too.³⁹¹

Thus, in the end, Stăniloae considers that deification represents the final stage of the spiritual life in which the human tastes the divine light and begins to partake in it. However, there is here an amendment which is strongly Palamite in its nature: the distinction between the divine energies and the divine essence. Although the divine energies spring forth from the divine essence, the

³⁸⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 433.

³⁸⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 438.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar...*, p. 373. I have slightly corrected the translation.

human being partakes only of them, but never of the divine essence. This is the main reason why the human being never becomes uncreated and also why it can never reach the end of its deification. However, this progress can be faster or slower according to the manner in which the human being is prepared to receive more or less the super-abundant knowledge that comes together with the divine energies, a manner which has been accomplished beforehand during the stages of purification and illumination. Nonetheless, another aspect which has been underlined by Stăniloae resides in the fact that the partaking of the human being in the divine uncreated energies begins not with the stage of deification but earlier on, with the contemplation of the reasons of things. He argues that:

*It can also be said that the things of the world are images of the logoi of the divine Logos which are at the same time energies. God has put a part of His infinite possibility of thought and of energy into existence through creation, in a form specific for the level of the understanding of human creatures. He did this in order to permit a dialogue with men in which they might progress higher and higher towards the likeness with God and union with Him.*³⁹²

Stăniloae identifies here the *logoi* of creation with the divine energies. Thus, the human being partakes in a small part of the divine energies from the beginning of his spiritual life. Positive and negative theology are also parts of the partaking of divine energies. This is the main reason why Stăniloae considered that the term of deification could be given to the first two stages of spiritual ascent as well. Nonetheless, Stăniloae observed again an aspect that he did not insist on too long before: the contemplation of Christ as the source of divine energies:

³⁹² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar...*, p. 374. I have slightly corrected the translation.

*The Incarnation of the Word confirmed the value of man and of these images of reason and energy measured by Him. But it also gave man the possibility to see in the human face of the Logos, concentrated anew, all the logoi and divine energies. Thus, final deification will consist in contemplating and living all the divine values and energies conceived in and radiated from the face of Christ, according to the supreme measure of man. But by this, in the face of each man, by the logoi and the energies gathered in him will be reflected luminously the logoi and the energies of the Logos. Eternal bliss will be the contemplation of the face of Christ.*³⁹³

Unfortunately, it is a pity that Stăniloae did not develop the ‘Christological’ aspect of the vision of the divine light. Sometimes, all that one can observe from the description that Stăniloae provides about the vision of the divine light by the human being is that everywhere it is light. This is not wrong, but it is relying too much on the Palamite texts ignoring the more ‘personal’ feature of the visions of St. Symeon the New Theologian for example. One can see that Symeon describes the vision of Christ as well, and not only of the divine light. The divine light springs forth from the body of Christ. Stăniloae quotes a couple of times the writings of Symeon the New Theologian, but he relies too heavily on the Palamite texts in his interpretation of the last stage of the spiritual ascent, namely that of deification. The ‘Christological’ feature can be observed mainly in his work entitled *Jesus Christ – The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being*.

³⁹³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar...*, p. 374.

Conclusion

Stăniloae gave in *The Ascetic and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* one of his most impressive examples of Neo-Palamite synthesis. However, not all of these examples are well presented. The first example, the importance given to the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God as a very important point of doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church, is affected by the way in which Stăniloae attacks polemically the absence of it in Western theological thought. For Stăniloae, the absence of this distinction in the Roman Catholic Church and in Protestant Churches is the main reason for the absence *of the relation between God and the human being inside those Churches*. Furthermore, Stăniloae bases his arguments in this direction on some very weak presentations of Western theologians (such as Georg Keopgen) who have not played a significant role in the theological discussions between East and West. Nevertheless, from the way in which Stăniloae presents the Palamite distinction as a basis for the knowledge of God and as a basis for the relation between human and God, one can also observe some positive aspects. This distinction offers to Stăniloae the possibility of developing his explanations about the apophaticism of the Orthodox Church and its steps. Here lies the most important aspect of his Neo-Palamite synthesis inside this particular work.

When speaking about apophaticism, Stăniloae divides it into three steps, namely: negative theology, pure prayer and the vision of the divine light. All these three steps are connected with each other. During the step of negative theology, we deny that any description is appropriate to God. We sense that there is more behind a mere description and that God surpasses everything we believe to be true about Him. This leads us to the step of pure prayer. In our prayer, we begin to use less and less words until we reach almost a total silence, standing in bewilderment in front of God's mystery. However, here, Stăniloae makes a little contradiction. On the one hand, he

posits that pure prayer does not contain any words, on the other hand he considers that it contains a few words. Nonetheless, he differentiates this pure prayer from incessant prayer. I consider that this pure prayer can include some words as well, following here the fact that only during the vision of the divine light, the prayer stops totally, as Gregory Palamas and other spiritual fathers (especially Seraphim of Sarov) argue. The stage of pure prayer represents the highest stage where we can arrive through our natural powers. However, in order to reach the final stage, the one of the vision of the divine light, we need to be caught up in ecstasy by the work of the Holy Spirit. In this last stage, we experience the vision of the divine light *through the work of the Holy Spirit* and not through our natural powers. We cannot reach the end of the super-abundant knowledge given through the vision of the divine light. However, when the vision stops, one can describe up to some point the experience he had, but only in an incomplete fashion. The vision is intelligible and rational, but the knowledge that comes from it is generally above our knowledge. It is a lived mystery.

Stăniloae criticised Lossky for not being able to divide apophaticism to its particular steps. Lossky was not influenced so much by Gregory Palamas, but more by Dionysius the Areopagite. Thus, he considered that apophaticism consists mainly of two steps: negative theology and, in the end, the vision of the divine light. He completely ignored the stage of pure prayer. Stăniloae, however, chose to follow the Palamite insights and reached a very interesting exposition of the steps of apophaticism, which represents quite a unique feature among Orthodox theologians.

Another interesting aspect lies in the fact that Stăniloae considers that deification does not begin solely with the last step of apophaticism, namely the vision of the divine light. He is convinced that deification begins with our Baptism. Furthermore, he points out the fact that the three stages of apophaticism contain somehow one another. Thus, when we deny to God every quality, we

sense somehow that there is something more to know about Him. Thus, we move to the stage of pure prayer. Here, we sense somehow the divine energies, but only *through darkness*. Furthermore, when the vision of the divine light comes upon us, we can receive it only inasmuch as we made ourselves capable to through the previous stages of negative theology and pure prayer.

Stăniloae offers thus some very useful insights about the Palamite vision on apophaticism and gives us the possibility of viewing the steps of apophaticism explained in a very clear manner. Unfortunately, the dense style and the uncritical manner of presenting the quotes from the works of Gregory Palamas makes me believe that sometimes he was unable to point out clearly where his own contribution began. However, I credit him with being the first Orthodox theologian to explain quite clearly the three steps of apophaticism and the way in which the vision of the divine light takes place. Furthermore, Stăniloae is one of the Orthodox theologians that have insisted on considering the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God as the basis for the relation between human beings and God.

CHAPTER III: THE *ORTHODOX DOGMATIC THEOLOGY*: WHERE IS GREGORY PALAMAS?

In the Introduction of this thesis I offered a literature review from which one can easily perceive that the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*³⁹⁴ is the most renowned and most read book of Stăniloae,

³⁹⁴ I will use for this chapter the third edition of the book entitled *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Rom.], 3 vols. (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2003).

not only in Romania, but also in Western countries. Most of the researchers quote from it and praise it as a work that presents a true example of Neo-Patristic Synthesis.³⁹⁵ However, one can only be astonished when one reads this book and discovers that the quotes from Gregory Palamas are extremely rare and that Stăniloae was influenced not only by Maximus the Confessor, but also by Cyril of Alexandria, Dionysius the Areopagite, Nicholas Cabasilas or Symeon the New Theologian. This is astonishing especially if we turn to some researchers such as E. Bartoș who used more this work than *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*³⁹⁶, in order to analyze Stăniloae's position on deification. Given that the concept of deification is highly influenced in Stăniloae's works not only by Maximus the Confessor, but also by Gregory Palamas, as one can observe from the previous chapter of this thesis, I cannot but agree with the opinion of J. Henkel that Bartoș missed the point on some significant themes. Furthermore, I cannot but praise Fr. Andrew Louth³⁹⁷ for naming Gregory Palamas at the beginning of his list of Fathers that highly influenced Stăniloae in providing this magnificent piece of Neo-Patristic Synthesis on subjects of systematic theology.

Nonetheless, one can understand why Stăniloae refused to employ more of Gregory Palamas' works in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. The main reason is that a second edition of *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* appeared as the fourth volume of the first edition of the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* in 1973. Thus, it would have been pointless for Stăniloae to repeat once again the ideas of the 'fourth volume' in the first three volumes. He did not insist on the same ideas anymore, but tried to point out when he had dealt with similar

³⁹⁵ See the literature review, especially the passages dedicated to Fr. Andrew Louth, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware and Jurgen Henkel.

³⁹⁶ A position for which he got heavily criticized by J. Henkel in the latter's book entitled *Deification and Love Ethics* [in Rom.].

³⁹⁷ Andrew Louth, 'The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Fr. Stăniloae' ..., p. 57.

subjects (such as the cataphatic and apophatic theology or the deification of the human being) before and used already the writings of Gregory Palamas. This is why, when speaking about these themes, he makes more use of Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor or Symeon the New Theologian. Dionysius is used more when Stăniloae speaks about the relationship between cataphatic and apophatic theology, while Symeon the New Theologian is quoted often when Stăniloae wants to say something about the vision of the divine light. One cannot but praise this important decision of Stăniloae which gave him the possibility of diversifying his arguments and transforming this particular work in a more consistent piece of Neo-Patristic Synthesis than was, for example, the monograph dedicated to Gregory Palamas and which I have already discussed in the first chapter of the thesis.

Furthermore, Stăniloae is not as polemical as he used to be either in the monograph dedicated to Palamas or in the introduction to *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*. He still criticizes different features of Western theological thought, but, now, he concentrates more on what the Fathers have to say. Unfortunately, he still lacks a critical approach and, in some points, the book seems to be just a simple commentary on different quotes taken from the works of the Fathers. However, Stăniloae transfigured his weakness into a very strong quality. He managed to transform and shape his style in such a way that a person can observe from his results not a rationalist and cold view, but a warm, spiritual, deep and doxological way of expounding the teaching of the Orthodox Church. I will analyse in what proportion was Stăniloae able to lack a critical spirit and still achieve some really good results after I will go through all the themes in which he was influenced and developed the insights of Gregory Palamas. I will begin with a theme that I already analysed in the subsequent chapter, namely the cataphatic and apophatic knowledge of God.

The cataphatic and apophatic knowledge of God

I remarked above that Gregory Palamas is not employed as much here as he was for example in *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*. In the latter, all the aspects concerning apophatic theology were drawn from his works. Stăniloae changes his approach here. He begins by employing concepts from Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Symeon the New Theologian. He insists more on the importance of cataphatic theology than he did in his previous work. However, one can still read between the lines and observe different Palamite ideas that, even though they do not resemble totally one quote or another from the writings of Palamas and do not receive a footnote stating this aspect, could still be considered as having a Palamite source. For example, when speaking about the relation between God and His attributes, Stăniloae argues that:

Neo-Platonism held divinity to be identical with her attributes and hence confused divinity with the essence of the world or of the human spirit, reckoning that the human spirit, once raised up from its preoccupation with the multiplicity of things, would actually identify itself with divinity as a unity and simplicity that were devoid of all determination and, hence, apophatic. Neo-Platonism held, therefore, that divinity is known in its essence. This was the basis for the Eunomians' claim to have the exact knowledge of the being of God. If God is transcendent, he is personal. Christian apophatic knowledge implies that God came down to meet man's capacity to grasp him as much as it also implies God's transcendence. God comes down through

*his energies while his personal character assures his transcendence. His person transcends even his infinity.*³⁹⁸

This is a striking view. I remember here that Stăniloae accused Akindynos that, in his dispute with Palamas, he affirmed that the attributes of God are hypostatically different from His essence. Stăniloae considered that Akindynos was nothing but a Platonist in his view. Now, Stăniloae considers that Neo-Platonism confused the attributes of God with His essence and, thus, divinity with the world and the human soul. He accuses Neo-Platonism of presenting a pantheist view. Furthermore, Stăniloae is convinced that the ‘apophatic’ knowledge put forward by Neo-Platonism is highly mistaken, because the human being has to renounce the multiplicity of created things in order to immerse himself afterwards in the ocean of divine simplicity. Stăniloae is right when he argues that Eunomians were highly influenced by this philosophical strand when they considered that they had access to the essence of God.

One is bewildered by the manner in which Stăniloae jumps with conclusions out of nowhere. He argues directly that *if God is transcendent, He is personal*. What is the connection between the two and how did he reach it? I agree only with the last part of the quote where Stăniloae presents a highly Palamite influence:

Christian apophatic knowledge implies that God came down to meet man’s capacity to grasp him as much as it also implies God’s transcendence. God

³⁹⁸Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, translated by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, vol. I, (Massachusetts: Holy Cross University Press, 1994), p. 102.

*comes down through his energies while his personal character assures his transcendence. His person transcends even his infinity.*³⁹⁹

Stăniloae remarks that apophaticism does not consist only in our effort of progressing in spiritual life but also in the kenotic movement of God who abides in us. However, it is hard to understand why the personal character of God grants him transcendence. In the person of Christ, this transcendent characteristic is overcome. Stăniloae is the first to recognise it, but he is always keen on underlining the fact that we need to understand that the Persons of the Father or of the Holy Spirit are not accessible to us. Even the divine hypostasis of the Son of God is ‘accessible’ to us solely through the human nature of Christ and not in totality. The Trinity transcends everything. We can receive the divine energies and progress in the super-abundant knowledge which comes through them, but we do not have access to the essence of God. This spiritual progress is dependent on our purification from sins:

*Because God is person, knowledge of Him through experience is related to the extent of our purification from the passionate and blind attachment to finite things. But this is precisely what makes us see that, beyond ever new richness we perceive, its source exists and this source does not enter within the range of our experience.*⁴⁰⁰

Stăniloae ‘Christianizes’ here the Neo-Platonic features described above. We must go beyond the multitude of created things and rise to the uncreated energies. Yet, we do not rise to the simplicity of God, but only to His uncreated energies. We cannot see or know His essence. We can grasp the fact that, beyond the divine energies there is a source, but what this source is and

³⁹⁹Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 102.

⁴⁰⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 103.

how it functions is beyond our understanding. Furthermore, Stăniloae begins to speak about different steps of apophaticism although in a highly different manner from the way in which he described them in *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*:

We can say that there are two kinds of apophaticism: the apophaticism of what is experienced but cannot be defined; and the apophaticism of that which cannot be even experienced. These two are simultaneous. What is experienced has an intelligible character also, inasmuch as it is expressed in intellectual terms – though these are both affirmative and negative. Yet, this intelligibility is always inadequate. The being which remains beyond experience, which yet we sense to be the source of everything we experience, subsists in person. Subsisting as person, being is a living source of energies or of acts which are communicated to us. Hence, the apophatic has, as its ultimate basis, person; and thus even this apophaticism does not mean that God is wholly enclosed within Himself.⁴⁰¹

Stăniloae speaks here about the ‘double’ sensation a person has on every step of apophaticism. When we begin to deny to the concepts the fact that these can describe God, in the same time we have the feeling that no concept is enough for describing God and we want still to progress further. When we reach the step of pure prayer, in which no concept appears in our mind any longer, we still feel that we have to experience God somehow directly. When we have the vision of the divine light we realize that we are in a continuous progress that will never end, but, at the same time we know that the divine essence is something even greater than the vision of the divine light, only that it is beyond our understanding. This is why Stăniloae speaks here about the

⁴⁰¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I., p. 103.

apophaticism of what is experienced but cannot be defined (negative theology, pure prayer, vision of divine light) and the apophaticism which cannot even be experienced (the vision of the divine essence). Furthermore, we can describe even the vision of the divine light in some negative or positive terms, but the divine essence cannot be described in any way because it is always inaccessible. However, Stăniloae points out that the divine essence subsists in Persons and does not exist on its own. We have not only a sole divine essence, but also three Persons that possess it entirely in themselves. Thus, the actions and energies of those persons come down to us. We have a huge shift here from the rather ‘impersonal’ character that Stăniloae attributed to the divine energies in his monograph on Gregory Palamas. These uncreated energies are in fact personal acts of the divine Persons. Furthermore, Stăniloae draws on his ideas and reaches a fundamental conclusion: the last step of apophaticism is not one of essence, but one of person. Thus, even this last step of apophaticism draws us further: from the acts of the person we can still grasp up to some point what kind of a person we have in front of us: “even this apophaticism does not mean that God is wholly enclosed within Himself.”⁴⁰²

At the end of the chapter dedicated to the apophatic knowledge of God, Stăniloae reviews different Patristic texts which speak about this particular stage. He speaks first about Gregory of Nyssa⁴⁰³, then passes to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite⁴⁰⁴, Symeon the New Theologian⁴⁰⁵ and, in the end, he arrives at Gregory Palamas.⁴⁰⁶ He presents a few quotes from the works of Gregory Palamas that illustrate every step of the cataphatic and apophatic knowledge of God. Thus, Stăniloae considers that Palamas put as the first step the rational knowledge of God that

⁴⁰²Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I., p. 103.

⁴⁰³*Ibid.* pp. 103-106.

⁴⁰⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 106-113.

⁴⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁰⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 114-116.

even pagan philosophers had.⁴⁰⁷ Afterwards, there was the knowledge through faith expressed by the Jews and the Old Testament in general.⁴⁰⁸ Further on, we have the vision of God in light, which is a feature of the New Testament.⁴⁰⁹

It comes, thus, as a surprise to see that Stăniloae employs this scale in the end of the chapter as a summary to all that he has discussed. Although Gregory Palamas is employed solely in the last part of this chapter and only a couple of times, he is the main influence on Stăniloae's thought and conclusions. Thus, Stăniloae considers that the first step of the knowledge of God consists in the fact that "there is a natural capacity for a rational knowledge of God that is both affirmative and negative, but apart from supernatural revelation and grace this capacity is hardly maintained at all. This same capacity also owes its existence to a certain self-evidence of God in the world."⁴¹⁰ Note here the fact that Stăniloae considers that positive and negative are features of this natural capacity. Thus, negative 'theology' is somehow beginning here. This is one of the reasons why Stăniloae considered that, at least in some ways, we can speak of a pagan 'apophaticism'.

The second step is knowledge through faith. This is based on supernatural revelation which makes us develop the knowledge that we had from natural 'revelation'. Stăniloae argues that:

This knowledge contains within itself a certain conscious experience of God, like that of a pressure exerted upon the human persons by God's personal presence. This experience is superior to that which comes from natural knowledge, and, as such, is something which transcends rational knowledge

⁴⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴⁰⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

⁴¹⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I., p. 116.

*both affirmative and negative, although it has recourse to affirmative and negative terms in order to give itself a certain expression.*⁴¹¹

This knowledge through faith seems to encompass equally positive and negative theology although also a feeling that beyond it there is a superior step of knowledge. The presence of God becomes more intense. It seems to be somewhere in the middle between negative theology and pure prayer. However, in order to attain the level of pure prayer a person must first reach impassibility and this is something that Stăniloae does not forget to point out here.

*Through purification from passions, knowledge that comes from faith develops into a participation in things communicated to us by God who is above knowledge. This knowledge might rather be termed ignorance, or apophatic knowledge of a level higher than that of the apophatic knowledge through faith mentioned above, because it transcends everything that we are able to know through senses and through mind, and involves more than the mere pressure exerted by the presence of God as Person.*⁴¹²

Stăniloae seems to speak here of the level of pure prayer where any concept is left behind and the believer experiences a deep feeling of God. We begin to participate somehow in the divine energies, although we do not yet see the divine light. However, Stăniloae does make a mistake in his description when he adds that even here we can express in positive and negative terms what we feel. He contradicts himself stating this and adds afterwards that “the content of what is

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I., pp. 116-117.

known here transcends the content of such terms to a much greater extent than the knowledge of God through simple faith.”⁴¹³

The fourth and final step expressed by Stăniloae consists in the vision of the divine light:

*One who has the vision or experience of God is simultaneously aware that, in his essence, God transcends the vision or experience. This is the most intense experience of the relationship with God as Person, who as such cannot be defined being totally apophatic.*⁴¹⁴

Thus, although all that the believer experiences are the divine energies he feels that these energies are communicated to Him by a divine Person and not by an impersonal essence. We see the divine light that comes forward to us through the work of the divine Spirit, but we also see Christ in the middle of the light. However, the believer is aware that the essence of God cannot be known and all that he can receive are the divine energies and the super-abundant knowledge which they give to him. Unfortunately, in spite of a very clear presentation until now, Stăniloae cannot let himself end without an ironic statement regarding Western theology:

In general, the apophatic experience of God is a characteristic that gives definition to Orthodoxy in its liturgy, sacraments and sacramentals and is superior to Western experience which is either rational or sentimental or both at once. The apophatic experience is equivalent to a sense of mystery

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

*that excludes neither reason nor sentiment, but it is more profound than these.*⁴¹⁵

Stăniloae does not seem to have read John of the Cross or Theresa d'Avila and, although he had read Aquinas at least up to some point, he does not seem to have read him very deeply, because he seems to be unaware that some aspects of the apophatic theology of the Eastern Church are known to the mystics and theologians of Western Europe, more than many Orthodox think. However, a positive thing one can say about the conclusion that Stăniloae provides at the end of his chapter on the apophatic knowledge of God is that he identified apophatic knowledge not as an 'intellectual', but as a liturgical feature of the whole Orthodox East. This, however, is not due any longer to the influence exerted on him by Gregory Palamas but by Dionysius the Areopagite.

The relationship between the essence and the attributes of God

One might wonder why there is still a need to speak about the attributes of God when a) we already have the distinction between essence and energies and b) negative theology denies to God every quality. However, what we must understand is that the energies of God reveal something positive about Him and they must be acknowledged as His attributes. These attributes however, must not be considered as separated from the being of God as hypostatical entities (as Akyndinos considered) and also not confused with the being of God. When speaking about them, Stăniloae is aware of the fact that they have been described well in the writings of Gregory Palamas:

⁴¹⁵Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I., p. 117.

*The Eastern Fathers have made a distinction between the being and the operations of God. Saint Gregory Palamas did nothing more than hold fast to this distinction between the being of God and the uncreated operations flowing from it. Nevertheless, while speaking of the variety of the divine works, we can sometimes forget to observe that, through each of these operations, it is the God, who is one in being who is at work. We must always keep in mind, however, the paradoxical fact that, although God effects something on each occasion through a particular operation, yet he is wholly within each operation.*⁴¹⁶

Stăniloae considers that the main danger that one can experience when observing the variety of the divine operations (works, energies) of God is to consider that God is somehow separate from them. Stăniloae stresses what Palamas did only up to some point: the *personal* feature of the uncreated energies. The uncreated energies spring forth from the divine being, but the divine being exists in a Trinity, a communion of three Persons. However, at the same time Stăniloae gets a bit carried away and does not stress so much the fact that even if these energies, acts or operations are ones in which the entire Person acts this does not mean that we can grasp the entire meaning of the divine Persons and that we have access to the common essence. Stăniloae goes on and speaks about what are the divine attributes:

On the other hand, through each operation God produces and sustains a certain aspect of reality; consequently this aspect of reality has its cause in something corresponding to it, though, in an incomprehensible way in God Himself. The operations which produce the attributes of the world are,

⁴¹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 125.

*therefore, bearers of certain attributes found in God in a simple and incomprehensible way. The operations, therefore, are nothing other than the attributes of God in motion – or God himself, the simple One in a motion which is, on every occasion, specific, or again, in a number of different kinds of motion, specified and united among themselves.*⁴¹⁷

The attributes of the world are an icon of the attributes of God. However, Stăniloae does not stop to this particular point simply for the reason that, when we pass beyond negative theology and enter the stage of pure prayer, these icons disappear from our mind. Thus, he is almost obliged by his argument to argue that the energies or operations of God are nothing else but *attributes in motion*. This is a very deep idea that can be traced back to Dionysius the Areopagite. However, one cannot leave aside the fact that Stăniloae began this passage with Gregory Palamas and not with Dionysius. He argues further on that:

*God himself is in each of these operations or energies, simultaneously whole, active and beyond operation or movement. Thus, his operations are what makes God's qualities visible in creatures, creating these with qualities analogous, but infinitely inferior, to God himself, and then imparting his uncreated operations or energies to them in higher and higher degrees.*⁴¹⁸

Stăniloae does not forget to add here the fact that, although God is the agent behind all his operations, this does not mean that we can grasp him entirely. We do not have access to his essence. However, the seal of his actions (attributes) are on Creation and can be discerned by the human being. Furthermore, the fact that we have the divine seal means that we can participate in

⁴¹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 125.

⁴¹⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 125.

the uncreated acts or operations of God. However, this participation is gradual and, as Stăniloae stated many times before, always in progress.

Stăniloae proceeds afterwards to the discussion of different attributes of God and *the way in which we participate in them*. This underlines the fact that the distinction between the essence and the energies of God is employed from the beginning. The attributes of God can be experienced through our experience of the uncreated energies. However, Stăniloae employs rarely this distinction in order to make his point. He does it once while he speaks of a sensible subject for Eastern Orthodoxy since the time of Palamas: the unity of God and the diversity of His actions or works. This quote appears somehow strangely in the chapter concerning the ‘eternity’ of God. He argues that:

*The Eastern Fathers have succeeded in achieving a synthesis of two concepts: the changelessness of God and His life and activity in regard to creation. This synthesis found its most pregnant formulation in the Palamite doctrine of the uncreated energies which do change although they come forth from the essence of God which remains unchanged.*⁴¹⁹

Stăniloae was always concerned with the fact that the ‘scholastic’ dogmatic manuals of Orthodoxy stated at the beginning of the twentieth century that God remains unchanged in Himself no matter what the human being does. Either if we behave in a good or in a bad way, God remains unchanged. Stăniloae considered that this cannot be an Orthodox opinion even before he translated the writings of many Fathers. He pursued even more this theme after he completed a couple of translations, especially of the works of Palamas and Maximus the

⁴¹⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 150.

Confessor. Thus, he was able to achieve an interesting position. Basically, only the essence of God remains unchanged, while his divine energies that come down to us and in which we participate progressively change themselves according to our power of receiving them.

This doctrine – actually a more precise formulation of the thought of the Fathers – took seriously the fact that God has a personal character and as such can, like every person, live on more than one plane, or better, on two principal planes: the plane of existence in oneself and the plane of activity for the other. A mother, for example, can play with her child, bringing herself down to his level, yet, at the same time she preserves her mature consciousness as mother. God, in Himself, who is above time, meets with the creatures of time in His energies.⁴²⁰

Now, this distinction between the changelessness of God's essence and the changeability of His energies does not mean that these energies become something between uncreated and created. They do not receive created qualities. They only receive the possibility of revealing themselves gradually to the human being according to his capacity of receiving their super-abundant knowledge. This communion with God is always progressive and does not know an end. This means, however, that we have an unsolved problem here that Stăniloae left aside: how can we speak of changeable energies coming from an unchangeable essence? Does not that affect the essence as well? Although I cannot bring here an argument from Stăniloae, I can argue that this is not possible because the essence of God is above the divine energies themselves. It represents their source, but still it is distinct from them. Thus, it can remain unchanged although the energies are changeable *in conformity with the human being*. I stress the last point here because

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

the energies remain unchangeable unless there is a human being that progresses in the super-abundant knowledge. I would even argue that they are always unchangeable, and only we perceive the fact that the divine energies are revealed to us progressively and only appear to change before us.

The second point where Stăniloae uses the distinction between the essence and the energies of God appears when he discusses the omnipotence of God and the way in which we participate in it. Stăniloae argues that:

If creatures were to present themselves only within individuations which benefit from a created power, then the existence of God as one distinct from nature and enjoying a real omnipotence could be disputed. But creation participates in the power of God not only in its created form, but also in its uncreated form. This is equivalent to direct, always new, and infinite participation in God as person. Only participation in God through grace proves his existence as something distinct from nature. Here lies the importance of the participation of the creature in the uncreated energies of God.⁴²¹

Stăniloae uses here two arguments in order to prove that we somehow participate in the omnipotence of God. First, he is highly critical towards the idea that one might participate in God solely through the ‘created’ powers that he receives through his human nature. God is above nature and we could not participate in His omnipotence solely by having the ‘image’ of his power. The human being is, after all, the crown of creation and, although at first sight seems to

⁴²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 185.

be weak in comparison with other creatures, is capable of controlling Creation. However, even if the human being has total power and is able to control and manipulate the entire universe (which is far from reality – at least for now) he still would not participate totally in the omnipotence of God. He has to participate as well in the divine uncreated energies and receive uncreated power. What does that mean? Does it mean that the human being would be able to have an uncreated energy at his own disposal? Does it mean that the human being will become uncreated up to some point? The human being simply participates in the divine uncreated energies and sometimes he receives a power above nature, like the one we see at action in miracles. This is just a power ‘lent’ to the human being, but still represents an act of God and not a personal act of the human being.

Stăniloae employs as well the distinction between the essence and the energies of God when he speaks about the wisdom of God and the way in which we participate in it. Mainly he is concerned to describe the manner in which the plan of God develops inside the world. He considers that the first quality of this plan stands in the ‘kenosis’ that God has to employ in order to “descend to the dimensions, possibilities and necessities of the world.”⁴²² Although Stăniloae clearly employs here the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God, he goes on to explain the participation of the human beings to the wisdom of God using a terminology that highly resembles the one employed by Dionysius the Areopagite:

Through wisdom God creates and sustains a harmony among the components of the world and through this harmony he preserves all of them without confusion or separation. This too reflects the intrinsic unity and distinctiveness of God. But in seeking the greatest and definite good of all the

⁴²² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*..., vol. I., p. 212.

*components of the world and of the world as a whole, God can only see this good – their closest and yet unconfused union – when, to the greatest possible extent, they come to abide in himself.*⁴²³

This language of ‘union’ resembles more the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, but, as we shall see next Stăniloae turns again to Gregory Palamas and his essential distinction. However, one can perceive from the quoted excerpt that this descent of God in the world does not simply consist of a more profound unity of the world and in a stronger connection between the created things. It also means a return of the world to God and an infinite progress in the unity with Him:

*That is why God’s wisdom is not only his coming down to the world, to everyone and everything within it; it is also a totality of actions adequate to raise the world up continuously to a common and harmonious participation in the divine life and happiness.*⁴²⁴

This ‘totality of actions’ that God employs in order not only to increase the unity of the created things in the world but also in order to bring them to a higher unity with Himself are nothing else but the divine energies. Thus, if we transfer this action only to the human beings, we obtain the fact that, first, God unites the human beings between themselves and, afterwards, he raises them to a continuous unity with Him through His uncreated energies. We have here in just two phrases the meaning of the Church and the one of the eternal life.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I., pp. 212-213.

The fourth attribute of God where we see the Palamite distinction employed directly is represented by the holiness of God. However, here Stăniloae employs as well the steps of apophaticism, arguing that:

*The holiness of God both expresses a quality of God in Trinity and is also manifested in the world and becomes a quality in which human beings participate. Under the first aspect it is entirely apophatic and indefinable, while under the second, it is perceived, though in a manner that is difficult to define rationally, in an apophatic-cataphatic manner. Under the first aspect we ought rather to call it supra-holiness, while under the second, as the relationship of God with his creatures, we should call it simply holiness. In this section we are speaking rather of the holiness that has been revealed and manifested in the world through God's condescension to it, through His uncreated energies.*⁴²⁵

Stăniloae seems again to hesitate here between the 'steps' of apophaticism. He does not seem to be sure where he can employ the action through which we perceive the holiness of God: is it at the level of pure prayer, the vision of the divine light, the negative theology? Probably the holiness of God is sensed in all the levels of apophaticism, but there is a different participation to it. Furthermore, one can understand from the quote given above that Stăniloae makes a difference between the supra-holiness that exists inside the Holy Trinity and the holiness of God in which we participate. He employs again the fact that God condescends to the world through His uncreated energies and this is the manner in which His holiness is revealed to us. However, what I cannot make up from this passage is how Stăniloae can consider that the holiness of God

⁴²⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. I, p. 222.

can be perceived “in a manner that is difficult to define rationally, in an apophatic-cataphatic manner.”⁴²⁶ This simply does not make any sense. It can be understood in two different ways. Either we participate in this holiness of God during the first steps of our knowledge of Him (positive and negative theology) which would seem absurd, or that we participate in it on the last levels of apophaticism and, after the vision of the divine light or the pure prayer has been interrupted for a while, we just try to explain in positive and negative terms what our vision or prayer offered to us. If the latter is true, this means that Stăniloae employs here again the results of his research on the way in which we can describe the super-abundant knowledge given by the vision of the divine uncreated energies. The supra-conceptual vision has some forms in which we perceive it and which we can try to describe after it has ended. However, our descriptions will always be fragmentary because the words and the concepts that we employ with success to describe the created realm are weak and useless when we come to the vision of the divine uncreated energies and their super-abundant knowledge.

As a conclusion to this section which presents the main aspects of the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Dumitru Stăniloae in what concerns the apophatic and cataphatic knowledge of God and the difference between the essence and the attributes of God, I would like to argue that the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God stands at the core of Stăniloae’s contribution in these directions. Furthermore, Stăniloae employed also the scale of knowledge described by Palamas in some of his works (natural knowledge – knowledge through faith – apophatic knowledge gained through purification from sins – vision of the divine light). Nonetheless, Stăniloae also discussed the importance of the distinction between the essence and the energies of God for the differentiation between the essence and the attributes of God.

⁴²⁶*Ibid.*

Practically, the divine energies communicate to us through their super-abundant knowledge the attributes of God and they give us the possibility of participating in them. The human being does not transform into a supernatural being with uncreated or divine attributes, but it is made capable to participate up to some point to the divine attributes through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The human being as image of God

One surprising aspect of the influence of Palamas on Father Stăniloae lies in the way in which Stăniloae presents the human being as the image of God. It comes as a surprise, especially because Stăniloae employs so much of the thought of Maximus the Confessor and Cyril of Alexandria throughout his work that one might think there is no need for Palamas any longer in order to present the main aspects of this particular area.

When he speaks about the passage from the beginning of the Book of Genesis, where God gives the human being the breath of life (2:7 – “then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”), Stăniloae argues that:

Our being appears and therefore continues as an image of God because of the living relationship, and this relationship in turn is possible because from the beginning God has made man akin to himself and hence capable of a relationship with himself. In other words, God placed man from the beginning in conscious and free relationship with himself through the very act of breathing into him the living soul (...) for the Fathers say that through his inbreathing God implanted in man not only the intellective soul, which is

akin to God, but his grace also, as manifesting his relationship with man.

And it is this grace that calls forth man's response to the act of God that establishes the relationship.⁴²⁷

Thus, Stăniloae's opinion is that, at the creation of the human being, God inbreathed not only our soul, but also grace. When God calls us, this grace moves us to respond to his call. This represents an extremely interesting idea but it has its weak points. For instance, if it is only the grace within us that motivates our answer to God, then what is our own contribution during the process? Are we moved from within by something that belongs to God in order to give him a response? Do we as human beings ever give a response to God from our own initiative, or all our acts in this direction are plainly the acts of grace? One cannot give an answer unless we give here the quote from Gregory Palamas that Stăniloae used in order to support his idea:

Then the eyes of the angels looked upon the human soul, united with the senses and with the flesh and they saw another god, not merely fashioned on earth as mind and flesh through the divine goodness, but given form through the abundance of the same goodness and according to God's grace (κατά θεοῦ χάριν μεμορφωμένον) so as to be the same body and mind and spirit, and to have the soul exist according to the divine image and likeness as perfectly single in mind, reason and spirit.⁴²⁸

This represents a very rich text which gives us the possibility of understanding better what this divine image of the human being represents. Gregory Palamas, along with the majority of the

⁴²⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, pp. 82-83.

⁴²⁸ Gregory Palamas, *The Procession of the Holy Spirit* 2.9, in: B. Bobrinskoy and P. Christou (ed.), *Grigoriou tou Palama. Syggrammata*, vol. I (Thessaloniki, 1962), p. 85.

Fathers, considers that the image of God lies in the human soul. The human soul is considered as being given form by the grace of God. Stăniloae concludes thus that: “our being has its kinship with God through the spirit it has received, but it receives the spirit because it is fitted for this and can receive it and because it is capable of a conscious relationship with God.”⁴²⁹ In order to explain better his position Stăniloae goes on and argues that the divine image resides in the soul of the human being. He considers that the primary purpose for the creation of the human being stood in the possibility of the dialogues between it and the Holy Trinity. Grace, on the other hand represents the divine uncreated energy of the Holy Spirit which makes possible our “active communion with God”.⁴³⁰ In order again to provide proof for his position Stăniloae quotes Palamas:

*What did he breathe in him? The breath of life... ‘The first man...became a living spirit.’ But what does ‘living’ mean? Eternally living, immortal, which is the same as saying rational...it is also endowed with divine grace. For such is the truly living soul. And this is identical with ‘in the image’ and, if you like, ‘in the likeness’ too.*⁴³¹

Thus, the human being received the image of God through its soul. Does that mean that our body does not participate as well in the grace of God? Stăniloae does not address this question, because he is too preoccupied with the arguments brought forward by Gregory Palamas. However, by looking at the tradition of the Fathers in this direction, we can see that Gregory

⁴²⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 83.

⁴³⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 83.

⁴³¹ Gregory Palamas, *The Procession of the Holy Spirit* 2.8, in: B. Bobrinskoy and P. Christou (ed.), *Grigoriou tou Palama. Syggrammatai*, vol. I (Thessaloniki, 1962), p. 85.

Palamas is following here the main stream that came forward through Cyril of Alexandria or Maximus the Confessor.

Stăniloae treats in a Palamite way also the question of what was lost during the fall of Adam and Eve. He considers, as Palamas does, that the image of God was not affected, but that we lost the likeness to Him.⁴³² He argues furthermore that:

*St Gregory Palamas held that the image has remained, but we have lost its stability, which is identical with the likeness. An image is complete, however, when it manifests itself fixedly as image or becomes active in the likeness. An image without likeness reveals itself as image in an altered, not in an integral way. The paradox lies in the fact that the image is image and yet can neither manifest itself as image in a fixed manner nor reveal itself clearly. Instead, a certain ambiguity or duplicity has been introduced within.*⁴³³

Stăniloae posited earlier that the image of God which exists within us through our soul and the uncreated grace leads us forward to our final purpose: deification. Thus, when the human being lost its likeness with God, it also had its own purpose affected. When the human being lost likeness with God, it lost its stability and ‘covered’ in some sort of way the image of God within itself. However, the ‘backward’ process can be followed because the human being has not lost either the grace of God or its soul during the fall. Another aspect of the fall consisted in the fact that the human beings also lost the communion that existed between themselves. The image of God in the human being is not one of only the Son, the Holy Spirit, or the Father. It represents

⁴³² *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

⁴³³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 92.

the image of the Holy Trinity.⁴³⁴ The human being represents, thus, a communitarian being, that enjoys and grows spiritually not only through the communion with God, but also through the communion with other humans.

Another interesting idea presented by Stăniloae and which is highly indebted to Gregory Palamas and other Church Fathers such as Maximus the Confessor, Niketas Stetathos and Basil the Great lies in the determination of the period of time that existed between the creation of Adam and Eve and their fall in sin. Stăniloae quotes Gregory Palamas who observed that:

*Consequently, our ancestors – who since they dwelt in the sacred land of paradise, should never have forgotten God – ought first to have acquired more practice and, so to speak, schooling in simple, genuine goodness and to have gained greater stability in the life of contemplation. Being still in an imperfect and intermediary state – that is to say, easily influenced, whether for good or evil, by whatever they made use of – they should not have ventured on the experience of things pleasant to senses.*⁴³⁵

Stăniloae concludes that the primordial state before the fall in sin was a very short one, because, in order to progress further in the likeness of God the human being should have shown obedience to the commandment given of not eating from the tree of knowledge.⁴³⁶ However, the first thing that Adam and Eve did was to fall at the very first temptation and, thus, they lost not only the likeness with God and the progress in this direction, but they also acquired this continuous temptation of considering the world as an end in itself. “Had they shown themselves obedient

⁴³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴³⁵ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts*, 50, in: ‘The Philokalia’, vol. IV, translated from Greek and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1998), p. 370.

⁴³⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 164.

over a period of time, they would have begun to be habituated to good, and so the Fall would have become a more difficult thing. It would seem, therefore, that they let themselves be overcome at once by the temptation to disobedience.”⁴³⁷

The angels as servants of the human beings

One of the most striking ideas that one might find in the homilies of Gregory Palamas lies in the fact that the angels are not superior to the human beings, but inferior to them. The angels are our servants and they were created in order to serve not only God, but also the created realm. Stăniloae argues that: “The human being was given the capacity to be master over the material order, and it is in this capacity that he is, more than angels, in the image of God, as both St. John of Damascus and St. Gregory Palamas put it.”⁴³⁸ Thus, the human being shares more in the omnipotence of God than angels do. “The angel is only a servant of God and of the human being, while the human being is, in addition, master (*archon*).”⁴³⁹ St. Gregory Palamas argued for example that:

The angels are ordained to serve the Creator effectively and their appointed rule is to be ruled by God. But they are not appointed to rule over beings inferior to themselves unless they are sent to do so by the Sovereign Ruler of

⁴³⁷*Ibid.*

⁴³⁸Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 123.

⁴³⁹*Ibid.*

*all. (...) Man was appointed not merely to be ruled by God, but also to rule over all creatures upon the earth.*⁴⁴⁰

This means that the human being possesses the power to rule that the angels can possess only if God gives it to them in certain situations. This is why Gregory Palamas considers that the human being is above the angels. However, Palamas offers one more argument in this direction, that Stăniloae does not forget to put forward, when he argues that: “The manifold and numberless multitude of angels was created for the sake of man.”⁴⁴¹ Thus, the human being is served by angels and not the other way round. Although angels are stronger in goodness than the human beings and they have spiritual bodies and supernatural powers that humans do not possess, this does not mean that they are superior to humans. However, one must understand as well that this is not some sort of competition between angels and humans and Stăniloae stresses this point as well insisting on the fact that what makes one superior is the humble serving of others.⁴⁴²

Nonetheless, angels and human share the knowledge of God that they receive. Angels are the ones who help humans to understand different visions received from God. The example of the prophet Daniel who receives the help of Archangel Gabriel is a very well-known one. However, Palamas tries to understand in a different manner the position of Dionysius the Areopagite who argued that the knowledge of God is mediated through angels for humans. Stăniloae is conscious that Palamas is not breaking here with the Areopagitic texts, but just tries to point out an aspect that is not so clear sometimes there but nonetheless exists: the direct knowing of God by the human beings. Stăniloae argues that:

⁴⁴⁰ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts*, 44, in: ‘The Philokalia’, vol. IV, translated from Greek and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1998), p. 366.

⁴⁴¹ Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 36, PG 151, 449 D.

⁴⁴² Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 122.

*St. Gregory Palamas retained from Dionysius the notion that visions are produced directly by God as means through which he makes himself known but that their explication occurs through angels. He thereby emphasized the idea of reciprocity between angels and humans in regard to the knowledge of God. In particular, men have part in a direct revelation of God, beginning from the Incarnation of the Son of God, while the angels also come to know this revelation through the agency of men.*⁴⁴³

This surprising feature of the Palamite theology is pointed out by Stăniloae long before the studies given by Bishop Alexander Golitzin⁴⁴⁴ or Fr. Andrew Louth⁴⁴⁵. However, this passed almost unnoticed because of two issues mentioned before: the lack of a translation of Stăniloae's works in an 'international' language and his own way of expounding things in a more poetic rather than an academic manner.

Thus, human beings are helped by angels in order to understand better the visions that they receive from God, but they also help the angels to understand better the purpose of the Incarnation of the Lord and all the Revelation that surrounds it. It is the merit of Stăniloae to have observed this particular feature pointed out earlier on by Gregory Palamas. Stăniloae observes furthermore that the direct visions of God were made possible through the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ:

In Christ, the risen body becomes so transparent a medium for divinity that even those who are lower down see this divinity and consequently do not

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁴⁴ Alexander Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei: the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagite* (Thessaloniki: Analekta Vlatadon, 1994); Idem, 'The Mysticism of Dionysius Areopagite: Platonist or Christian?', *Mystics Quarterly*, (19:3, 1993), pp. 98-114.

⁴⁴⁵ Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Chapman, 1989).

*have need for explanation from the angels who are higher up; indeed in some fashion the lower ones even come first, for the humanity that Christ has in common with them is a further source for their knowledge of the divinity. It is rather the depths of the divinity that the angels know, whereas for humans it is the mystery of the divinity made evident through Resurrection.*⁴⁴⁶

The risen body of Christ becomes the source of divine light for the angels and human being alike. This means that the human beings have the possibility of having an unmediated knowledge of God that was still possible in the Old Testament as well, but needed to be explained always by angels in order for humans to understand better what the vision really meant. This is not the case any longer. Human beings share the same human nature with Christ and they do not need the mediation of the angels. However, there is a “reciprocal completion of knowledge between angels and human beings.”⁴⁴⁷ This means that the human beings help the angels to understand better and progress in the knowledge of God, a thing that was more or less impossible before the Incarnation of Christ, but which now has suffered a huge modification. Nonetheless, the fact that the human beings now have the possibility of helping angels progress in their knowledge of God does not mean that the celestial and human hierarchy has disappeared. Stăniloae considers that Palamas was able to create a powerful synthesis between two things that seem at first sight to be at odds: direct knowledge of God and the hierarchical transmission of this knowledge. “St Gregory Palamas stressed the *flexible* character of the hierarchical order of the knowledge of

⁴⁴⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 131.

⁴⁴⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God...*, vol. II, p. 131.

God even more. He reconciled hierarchical order with direct contact with God and also with direct knowledge of God in the persons of those placed in the lower hierarchical levels.”⁴⁴⁸

Stăniloae gives an extensive quote from one of the treatises of Gregory Palamas in order to support his view in this direction. I will just present some of the main ideas:

*Thus, not only in angels, but also in us direct visions of God take place, not merely indirect visions or those mediated through others; they are visions that do not reach those in the second rank by being conveyed from those in the first. For the Lord of Lords is not subject to the laws of creation.*⁴⁴⁹

In order to support his view, Gregory Palamas gives the example of Archangel Gabriel who was the only angel who knew about the Incarnation of the Lord and who brought the news to the Virgin Mary.⁴⁵⁰ The Incarnation of the Lord is considered as one of the moments in which the hierarchy begins to be modified and the lower hosts are capable of receiving direct visions that are not always given to the higher hosts. However, Palamas is careful to point out that this happened also before the Incarnation of the Lord and that at least some visions were given directly even to humans without the mediation of angels:

For He is the Lord of powers and the King of glory, capable of all things, and able, should He wish, to make the last greater than the first. But before the appearance of God in the flesh, we learned of nothing similar among the

⁴⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 29-30, in: P. Christou (ed.), vol. I, p. 563.

⁴⁵⁰Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 29-30, in: P. Christou (ed.), vol. I, p. 563.

*angels (...) [Now that grace has been revealed,] there is no need for mediation.*⁴⁵¹

Gregory Palamas quotes here two scriptural passages namely Ephesians 3,10 and 1 Peter 1,12 in which Apostles Paul and Peter explain that the wisdom of God which is made manifold through the Church is something that even angels try to grasp and understand. Thus, the Incarnation of Christ, although it represents an embodiment of the Lord and, thus, the assuming of an inferior nature to the ones of angels, is transformed into a mystery that surpasses even the understanding of angels.

*In this way the lesser ones are made greater by grace and harmonious order is maintained in a sure and marvellous way. (...) You may then see that while the grace of knowledge is mostly given through mediation, most visions of God are seen directly. This is why Scripture says that in the time of Moses the model of the law was given through angels, but not the vision and appearance of God; it was the explanation of the vision that came through the angels.*⁴⁵²

From my point of view, Stăniloae takes a great shift here from the way in which he presented for example the vision of the divine light in his monograph dedicated to Gregory Palamas and in his presentation of the ascetic and mystical aspects of the Orthodox Church. He begins to see the influence that Dionysius the Areopagite exerted on Gregory Palamas and he draws some interesting conclusions from this point of view. Unfortunately, he never wandered in presenting the importance that the writings of Dionysius played in the dispute between Palamas and

⁴⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 563.

⁴⁵²Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II, 3, 29-30, in: P. Christou (ed.), vol. I, pp. 563-564.

Barlaam of Calabria or on different other Palamite aspects such as this paradox of hierarchical interpretation and direct vision/knowledge of God.

The Ascension of Christ

While the first volume of the Romanian edition of the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* brings a few subjects of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis, the other two lack the Palamite influence. For example, I was unable to identify more than one quote from the works of Gregory Palamas in the third volume, while in the second there are fewer than 10 quotations and, generally speaking, there is not much to say about any of them. However, it is important to point out the themes that still exist and explain why Stăniloae chose these particular ones instead of others.

The first one of these themes lies in the discussion of the Ascension of Christ. Stăniloae uses mainly the 21st and the 22nd homilies of Gregory Palamas that were dedicated to this particular event of the life of Christ. Stăniloae considers that the body of Christ reached its total 'spiritualisation' or 'pneumatisation' after the Ascension. Stăniloae considers that it is wrong to speak about a 'ubiquity' of the body of Christ, because:

*The state of pneumatisation is different from the spatial ubiquity. This constitutes a presence of great depth and spiritual height, which makes itself sensible in different degrees of intensity in conformity with the degree of spiritual sensing or of faith of the person that becomes open to Christ and, through this, 'opens' to him and feels Him in herself.*⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Rom.], vol. II, (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2003), p. 191.

The spiritualised body of Christ remains still a human body, yet one that is totally deified through the operation of the divine uncreated energies. This is why this body can be sensed in a highly different manner from the way in which we sense the body of another human person. This presence of Christ can be sensed not only in ourselves, but also as a ‘link’ of unification with other people.⁴⁵⁴ The body of Christ is now together with the Father, having ascended into heaven and sitting at His right hand.⁴⁵⁵ Stăniloae quotes here Palamas who observed that:

*God ascended into heaven (...) entered into glory and in the Holy of Holies and sat at the right hand of the Father, making our body to sit together with God and god (ὁ μὴ θρονον καὶ ὁ μὴ θεον).*⁴⁵⁶

The spiritualised body of Christ represents our final destination in deification. The final target, that never ends, lies in making our whole being as the human nature of Christ. However, in order for this aspect to be achieved, Christ must abide in us and unite us more and more with Him.⁴⁵⁷ Although all human beings will be able to participate in the Resurrection of Christ, because all of us shall be resurrected at the end of time, before the Final Judgement, not all of us will partake of the Ascension of Christ and of the eternal unification with Him.⁴⁵⁸

Unfortunately, Stăniloae leaves behind at one point this magnificent interpretation and turns against Roman Catholicism, just in order to note that for the Western theological thought the Ascension of Christ represented His transformation into a Lord who is somehow external to the world now. However, he leaves aside this mediocre attack and goes on to expand his fruitful analysis by stating that:

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ Gregory Palamas, *Homily 21*, PG 151, 280 D.

⁴⁵⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology...* [in Rom.], vol. II, p. 195.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The Ascension of Christ is our own ascension, from our passions to our union with Him, which was began when He ascended to heaven, but which will continue until it will be perfected in us. (...) [As Gregory Palamas observes] “all of us partake and will partake in the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord.”⁴⁵⁹ (...) The divine throne is the supreme step of existence, the supreme transcendent step and the spring and the ultimate and unending meaning where all have their beginning and cause.⁴⁶⁰

Stăniloae considers that the ‘coming’ of Christ and the Father to us does not represent a moving of their own Persons from where they are, but only a prolongation of their action inside us, which still preserves their distinction from us.⁴⁶¹ We do not transform into what the Son of God or the Father are, but only tend to participate more and more in their uncreated energies and to become as deified as the human nature of Christ is. Stăniloae concludes that “the result of this work of Christ that takes place inside our hearts, through the Holy Spirit, is the Church. (...) There can be no separation between it and the Church.”⁴⁶²

Our being and its ‘energies’

There are only two other instances in which Stăniloae follows Gregory Palamas. The first one appears when Stăniloae begins to speak about the way the Holy Spirit remains unified although it imparts many gifts and performs simultaneously different actions.⁴⁶³ However, this is just a

⁴⁵⁹Gregory Palamas, *Homily 21*, PG 151, 277 D.

⁴⁶⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology...* [in Rom.], vol. II, p. 197.

⁴⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁴⁶²Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology...* [in Rom.], vol. II, p. 198.

⁴⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 333.

quick passage overview and does not deserve too much attention. The other instance is more important because Stăniloae employs again the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God, this time in order to present how the human being and its actions are different. He argues that:

The human nature is always in movement and always the same in its essence.

*The polarity substance-energy has the same values here as well. The human essence is always in movement, but does not cease to be the same in essence and does not end up in any action.*⁴⁶⁴

In order to support this view, Stăniloae offers a quote from Gregory Palamas:

*Action is a characteristic of every being (...) a being is not complete unless it has no will and no action and unless it does not show its existence through them, although these are distinct from the being.*⁴⁶⁵

Thus, the human being is not complete without his will. However, the action and will that we employ in our everyday life are not the same with our being, which, although it is always in motion, does not come to an end through its own actions and to its endless motion. This idea is extremely interesting and was employed by Stăniloae as well in different parts of *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*.

Conclusion

⁴⁶⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 366-367.

⁴⁶⁵Gregory Palamas, *Antirrheticum I contra Akyndinos*, in: P. Christou (ed.), vol. III. p. 50.

The influence exerted by Gregory Palamas on Stăniloae is highly diminished in *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* in comparison with the one exerted in *The Ascetic and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*. All researchers considered that *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* represents the most important piece of Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Unfortunately, the section of Neo-Palamite Synthesis is not one that is presented extremely strongly here. Maximus the Confessor, Dionysius the Areopagite, Cyril of Alexandria, Nicholas Cabasilas, Symeon the New Theologian takes the lion's share, leaving the rest to Gregory Palamas and different *Philokalic* Fathers such as Mark the Monk, John Klimakos and Diadochus of Photike. Can we speak of some aspects of Neo-Palamite Synthesis in these conditions? Yes and no.

One can understand better why Stăniloae refused to employ Palamas as much in this work as he did in his previous one. The second edition of *The Ascetic and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* appeared as the fourth volume of *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. I have already presented the massive influence that Gregory Palamas played on this important work of Stăniloae. Stăniloae tried not to repeat the same ideas here and developed other subjects from the works of Palamas. For instance, he concentrated on another scale of presentation for the cataphatic and apophatic knowledge of God (natural knowledge – knowledge through faith – pure prayer – vision of the divine light). Instead of insisting again on the different steps of apophaticism and the spiritual ascension of the soul to God, Stăniloae tried to employ as well the rapport of Palamite synthesis with other Church Fathers that spoke of the same subject such as, for instance, Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory of Nyssa. Nonetheless, he also brought into attention other important Palamite contributions such as the conception of Palamas of what concerns the image of God in the human being. What is different in Stăniloae's strategy this time is that he always puts Palamas in connection with other Church Fathers. He does not use him

copiously as he did at least in the last part of *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*. Furthermore, Stăniloae identifies for the first time the essential influence that Dionysius the Areopagite played on Gregory Palamas and how the latter was able to develop important aspects of the theological contribution of the first. Stăniloae is one of the first researchers that tried, although superficially, to present some aspects of this particular link between two important Church Fathers.

Nonetheless, another important Palamite theme is of course the distinction between the essence and energies of God which gives Stăniloae the possibility of speaking in detail about how we can partake in the attributes of God. Stăniloae develops an entire system in which the divine energies give the human beings a super-abundant knowledge in this direction and also offer to them the possibility of partaking to the divine attributes of God to a certain extent. This does not transform the human being into something uncreated, but solely gives the possibility of not just tasting, but also acting united with God.

Furthermore, Stăniloae was able to discover some important Palamite themes that had not been observed until then, namely the relationship between the angels and the human beings in what concerns knowledge of God. Stăniloae followed the Palamite contribution that the human beings can be considered as being superior to the angels at least from two points of view: the fact that they are not just servants, but also masters of creation, a quality given through the fact that they represent images of God and, furthermore, that Christ took on a human body in his Incarnation in order to save the world. The hierarchical relationship which is deeply detailed by Dionysius the Areopagite in his works, is preserved in accordance with the direct visions that humans and low-ranking angels can have. The celestial hierarchy does not exist any longer in order to mediate

visions after the Incarnation of Christ, but only in order to interpret the super-abundant knowledge of God that comes through the visions.

In conclusion, I can argue that, despite the modest role played by the writings of Gregory Palamas in this magnificent piece of Neo-Patristic Synthesis represented by *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, his influence still has to be taken into consideration. Even if at first glance the areas in which Palamas influenced Stăniloae do not seem to be wide, they are still important in that they can help us determine the content of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

CHAPTER IV: JESUS CHRIST: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD AND THE DEIFIER OF THE HUMAN BEING AND GOD'S IMMORTAL IMAGE

In the last years of his life, Stăniloae was extremely prolific and translated not only some important writings of Church Fathers such as Athanasius the Great, Gregory of Nyssa or Maximus the Confessor, but he also began to shape his final theological message, taking the doxological style employed in *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* and developing it in other important writings.⁴⁶⁶ Gregory Palamas did not play the same important role in all of these late writings. The writing in which he appears most, together with Symeon the New Theologian, is entitled *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being*.

⁴⁶⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image* [in Rom.], 2 vols. (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 1987); Idem, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* [in Rom.], (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993); Idem, *Studies of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Rom.] (Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, 1990).

This writing is quite different from the previous ones written by Stăniloae. If in the monograph dedicated to Gregory Palamas and in the presentation of the ascetical and mystical life of the Orthodox Church one could see sometimes massive footnotes and a breadth of secondary bibliography; now things changed dramatically. Stăniloae took on a different style and decided to renounce massively the secondary sources. He wrote now in the style of the Fathers of the Early Church, who were not so preoccupied with giving many quotes except from Scripture and, sometimes, from other important Church Fathers. One can see in this change a kind of writing that allowed him to write in a more theological way, but, in the same time, a lack of academic style. However, the theological contribution of Stăniloae is still extremely important, although, as I have underlined, there is no secondary literature any longer. We have the Fathers and we have the Scriptures. No more, but no less.

Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being

Stăniloae has a massive Neo-Palamite contribution in his book: *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being*. However, the quotes from Gregory Palamas are not very extensive. Stăniloae took on the Palamite descriptions and formulated them in his personal style. The writing is full of 'light'. The light of the world, the light of Christ, the light of the uncreated energies, the light of the Resurrection are all employed and create an extremely powerful background. It will be extremely hard to develop a systematic approach to this writing which presents, more or less, a doxological, almost poetical style of presenting theological results. I would say that it is a poetic theology, full of piecemeal hymns that intertwine between themselves in a beautiful material. Stăniloae does not give an introduction to his book but begins

directly by positing a comparison between the created light of the world and the uncreated light.⁴⁶⁷ He places between them the light of the rationality of the human being, which leads to the discovery of the lights of the reasons of creation. Through the discovery of the 'lights' of creation, the human being progresses in spiritual knowledge, but he also needs the uncreated light of God. Without the uncreated light of God,

*The human being and the world and their relation are only illumined partially and, because the world and the human being are considered as representing the ultimate reality in them, they are surrounded by darkness. The world and the human being are fully illumined only through their Author who lies above them.*⁴⁶⁸

Without the uncreated light of God, the human being and the world lack illumination. The light of human reason and the light of the rationality of creation are nothing else but little stars surrounded by darkness without the shining of the divine light and this divine light is not something impersonal, but truly real and personal through Christ. "Christ is the full light of the human being, a light that not only shows him the purpose for which he was created, but also gives him the power to move forward towards it."⁴⁶⁹ However, Stăniloae stresses the idea that, if the human being fails to follow the light that comes from Christ, he will have the 'wrong' light with him and will fall out of the way of the righteousness. The spiritual progress is thus impeded

⁴⁶⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* [in Rom.], (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993), p. 5.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 13.

and the human being becomes prisoner of this universe and of natural laws. The progress in spiritual life raises us above the natural laws through the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷⁰

Stăniloae develops afterwards the idea that the world and the human being are nothing else but senseless existences without the union with God. Only the union with God gives the world and the human being a true meaning.⁴⁷¹ The fact that the human being and the world have to unite with God, does not mean however that they are meant to dissolve in Him.⁴⁷² Nonetheless, this union with God gives us also the possibility of being united among ourselves. The union with God is produced through a super-abundant love, a love that communicates itself as light. I remember here that Stăniloae considered at one point that the divine energies communicate to the human beings an uncreated love that receives their response and takes it further back to God. The quote runs like this: “Orthodoxy believes that love is an uncreated, divine and deifying energy communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, through which we really participate in the life of the Holy Trinity.”⁴⁷³ One can see immediately a similar image when Stăniloae begins to speak about the love that exists in the universe and that unites human beings and the created realm in general:

The entire existence, from the uncreated and Creator God down to the physical universe is an existence united through the love that exists between

⁴⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁷¹See the study of Marc Antoine Costa de Beauregard, ‘Le Cosmos et la Croix’, in: Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Oxford: The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2002), pp. 147-167. See also Stăniloae, Dumitru, ‘The Dynamics of Creation in the Church’ [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, Nr.3-4 (1977), pp. 281-291; Idem, ‘The Cross and the Renewal of Creation in the Orthodox Church’ [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Moldovei si Sucevei*, Nr.7-8 (1976), pp. 467-477.

⁴⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁷³Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church...*[in Rom.], p. 352.

*the persons and represents an existence that is joyful in all. This existence is a light that springs from God but communicates itself to the entire life.*⁴⁷⁴

This light of the existence which unites every created thing through love, cannot be anything else except an uncreated energy. I would say that it is the same with the uncreated love that Stăniloae spoke about earlier. However, this uncreated love, this uncreated light is never interchangeable with the created light of the universe.

*The entire universe is a light, but this light is dependent on a supreme light and, thus, represents a created light which has a relation with another existence, albeit the uncreated and creative light.*⁴⁷⁵

The light of the rationality of the human beings and of the universe stands in a direct relation with the uncreated light of God which is the source of their existence. However, these created lights are never confused with the uncreated light. This does not affect their union and the spiritual progress of the human being. The distinction does not imply a separation, but solely a clear delimitation between two aspects that can never be interchanged.

Stăniloae goes on and speaks about the relationship between the light (created or uncreated) with the word. He draws back to the beginning of the Gospel of John and tries to develop the ideas that appear there. However, at one point he leaves the pages of Scripture and goes further to Gregory Palamas in what seems to be a ‘Palamite’ description of the deification of the human being that takes place through the Son and Word of God. The Word is our Light (John 14: 6). What does that really mean in connection with the Orthodox doctrine of deification? “In the

⁴⁷⁴Idem, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 31.

⁴⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 32.

quality of Word of the Son of God and in the divine love (...) is also revealed the luminous character of God, which was affirmed and proved through all He did and taught.”⁴⁷⁶ The Word of God is the one that gives us the divine light, not exclusively in the form of a vision, but also through the meaningful interpretation and the super-abundant knowledge that He gives us through it. “The Word has this primary function: to show us the light, to reveal to us the meaning of the words and actions, but also to explain to us the true meaning of the existence of the human being, which cannot be known except within the communion in love with the human-loving God.”⁴⁷⁷ Thus, Stăniloae develops a particular aspect of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis. While in his monograph on Palamas he insisted solely on the vision of the divine light, without pointing out how this light manifests and what we receive through it, he kept developing and refining this idea further. In the second chapter I presented the fact that he already spoke about the super-abundant knowledge that appears through the vision of the divine light and the structures of love that keep constantly changing in order to permit the human being a continuous progress. In the third chapter I pointed out that this divine light comes to the human being while springing forth from the body of Christ and I also pointed out that the angels and the human beings share their knowledge of God and interpret one to another the meaning of the vision. The vision is unmediated. It is not the angels who give it to us, but it is Christ. The angels can only interpret it for us. However, here, Stăniloae goes even further and argues that Christ offers us not only the divine light which we see through the work of the Holy Spirit, but also the interpretation of the super-abundant knowledge that comes with it.

Stăniloae also develops later the idea of the difference between the essence of God and His attributes, and the way in which these attributes are communicated to us. Stăniloae speaks about

⁴⁷⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 38.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the goodness of Christ and the way in which this is communicated to the human being. However, these attributes of God spread out like a light towards other people as well. “If the love and the goodness radiates from the human being as light, they radiate much more from the incarnated Son and the Word of God, who became the communicating, revealing, illuminating and loving Word for the human beings.”⁴⁷⁸ However, Stăniloae dug deep and took these ideas further. He revealed the unity that existed between the attributes of God which bring themselves together to the human being.⁴⁷⁹

Stăniloae returns afterwards to the theme of the divine light communicated through Christ to the world. He argues that the human being cannot offer to the world the meaning that Christ offers. The human being is able only to receive it. Stăniloae affirms that:

*For the believer, Christ becomes the light of the world and of life, revealing the true value of the world and of the life within it, but only because Christ brings to the world and the life of the human being a value that neither the world, nor the human being have through themselves, but are only capable of receiving.*⁴⁸⁰

One can bring here into the discussion again the fact that the vision of the divine light represents something for which the human being is only ‘prepared’ to receive, but not prepared to reproduce through his own powers. The final purpose of the human being, deification, cannot be achieved through our natural powers. Our natural powers achieve their highest point in the

⁴⁷⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 44.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁸⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 49.

apophatic step of pure prayer. However, in order to see the divine light one must receive first the work of the Holy Spirit.

The access to the divine light is not given, however, solely through the fact that we receive the work of the Holy Spirit. In order for the divine light to be revealed to us, there was a need as well for the Incarnation of Christ. Of course, there were visions in which God revealed Himself to the human beings before the Incarnation of Christ, but I argue here that these visions were the ones in which this event was prefigured. What people saw was a prefiguring of the Incarnated Christ. This is something revealed also by Stăniloae, who states that: “The light or the meaning brought to the human being through Christ is the eternal life. However, this could not happen unless He was incarnated.”⁴⁸¹ Stăniloae speaks here as well about the fact that the vision of the divine light is somehow an eschatological revelation. We foretaste the eternal life. Stăniloae pushes forward his thoughts here and speaks the eschatological meaning of the vision of the divine light. However, in order to taste this divine light that gives us an eschatological aspect as well, we do not need only the work of the Holy Spirit, but also the work of Christ, because Christ is not only the Light, but also the Way.

*Christ is our way, helping us to make a more transparent environment of God from our human nature, as His human nature is, and a more perfected instrument for the work of God, without ever reaching the same quality that He possesses.*⁴⁸²

Thus, we progress in our spiritual life together with the eschatological Christ in order to become more capable of receiving the work of God. We transform our human nature in a ‘transparent

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁸² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 72.

environment' so that the divine light can shine forth from our body as well. However, this eternal progress in Christ never ends. The super-abundant knowledge of the divine energies never ceases to give us a new meaning, new chapters of spiritual experience. Stăniloae stresses here the fact that our spiritual progress is impossible if it is not done in Christ and together with Christ. We see here a great shift from the way in which he described deification in his *Ascetical and Mystical life of the Orthodox Church*. He does not speak here any longer about the super-abundant knowledge that we receive through the uncreated energies and the way in which we give it forward to other people in a more or less fragmented description that never catches its entire meaning. He argues here that the main purpose of our deification is our Christification.⁴⁸³ We receive not only the work of the Spirit, but also the work of Christ, who comes together with the Father and dwells in us in order to make our human nature become more and more like His, that is, full of divine energies and totally transparent to the divine actions.⁴⁸⁴ This actual inhabitation of Christ in us and our endless progress in Him do not happen however as something that we are totally unaware of or incapable of understanding.

Christ, by being a Person that remains at the same time divine and human is always in an action of communicating His infinity. He is always Light above any light and, furthermore, Mystery, always above the finite human [being]. Christ is an infinite Mystery in what he communicates to us and infinite Mystery in what remains un-communicated to us. The more he reveals us the [divine] Light, the more His Mystery remains untouched. Christ is Light and

⁴⁸³For more details consult Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Word of God: Creator, Saviour and Restaurateur for all Time' [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei*, Nr.1 (1991), pp. 7-19; Idem, 'The Christology of St. Maximus the Confessor' [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, Nr.3 (1988), pp. 67-72; Idem, 'The Son and the Word of God Incarnate and Risen as Man: The Unifier of Creation in Himself for all Eternity' [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei*, Nr.4 (1987), pp. 7-24.

⁴⁸⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...* [in Rom.], p. 75.

*unending Mystery in his human nature as well, because His human nature is one through which the Divine Person communicates with us.*⁴⁸⁵

The divine light that reaches us through the deified body of Christ reveals a super-abundant knowledge, but also reveals that Christ is an infinite Mystery. Stăniloae depicts this powerful image by using two important terms: light and mystery. He is always trying to observe the connection between the two. However, sometimes he seems to show and interplay between them. The light is considered to be a mystery up to some point and the mystery as being super-abundant light. Christ, however, is both Light and Mystery, but at the same time, He is above both in His divine nature. His human nature, however, gives us the possibility of not only observing the Light and the Mystery, but also to appropriate them, although we will never have the same appropriation of both of them as He does. Christ gives us not only Mystery and Light, but also shares with us the Sonship of God.⁴⁸⁶ However, we do not become uncreated through this fact. This leads us to the knowledge of the Truth, because Christ is not only the Light and the Way (John 14:6), but also the Truth. And the truth is that “we have known Christ as Light, or as positive meaning of the world and of the humans. We have known that He is the Truth from which all things are and *to which all things are led.*”⁴⁸⁷ Christ is the Alpha and the Omega: the beginning and the purpose. Stăniloae goes further and argues that Christ is the purpose of the world. “He made Himself through the Incarnation the Light of the world, its meaning.”⁴⁸⁸

Stăniloae speaks afterwards about the meaning of the sacrifices that were asked in the Law of the Old Testament and he argues that Christ has replaced them through the Sacrifice of His own

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

⁴⁸⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 79.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

body and blood, that is the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Christ, however, does not give us here his body as it existed before His Crucifixion, but His resurrected body. In order to support his view, Stăniloae offers this quote from the writings of Gregory Palamas:

*The shining of this divine light over people was prefigured by God during the forty years [in which he led his people] in wilderness, by sending the manna from heaven and Christ fulfilled it, by giving the light of the Spirit and offering His luminous body as food to those who believe strongly in Him and prove their faith through good deeds.*⁴⁸⁹

Christ is replacing the lamb that needed to be sacrificed during the Paschal celebration with His own resurrected body, full of divine light. Stăniloae considers that the sacrifice of Christ made us capable of putting on us “the light of sons of Christ and, thus, the Light of the Father, whom Christ wears.”⁴⁹⁰ By becoming sons of Christ, we put on ourselves Christ as Light and we become light from light, just as He is Light from light with the Father. However, we never reach the end of this luminous road and we are not transformed in what he is. We do not become divine. Stăniloae stresses afterwards that all this is possible only through the Resurrection of Christ. Our deification and continuous progress is possible only because His human nature was deified.⁴⁹¹ What one can see from Stăniloae’s text is that he always prefers to speak about ‘the body’ of Christ instead of using for example the expression ‘the human nature’ of Christ. I believe that Stăniloae wants to stress here the fact that our deification is not only a matter that

⁴⁸⁹I was unable to identify the quote. Stăniloae argues that it is part of the *Triads* I, 3 and he offers even a footnote to his monograph on Gregory Palamas (p. 36), but the quote is not there.

⁴⁹⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 97.

⁴⁹¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 106.

concerns the soul or the inner part of it called mind, but also the human body. He did not insist on that too much in his previous works, but he tends to do that in his final writings.

Stăniloae extends this discourse on the ‘luminosity’ of the believer which is achieved through His progress together with Christ in Christ and speaks about the fact that this ‘luminosity’ will make the difference between the chosen and rejected during the Final Judgment.

*All [the chosen ones] will want to see Christ illuminating as image in all, because all are illumined by Christ, which is luminous through all, because of the deeds they have worked [during their lifetime]. However, they all turn aside from the ones in which Christ does not radiate, because they have not helped through their deeds the ones near them to fill themselves during their lifetime with the light of Christ.*⁴⁹²

Stăniloae considers that our deeds transform our being into a luminous one. This transformation is not only brought about by the vision of the divine light or the stage of pure prayer. Thus, the luminous character of our being which most of us will see only after our death, is enhanced by our own actions. The people who have refrained from performing good deeds will lack the luminosity of Christ, while others will shine and they will share the joy with other luminous people. The human being offers its light as well. What shines from us is the image of the Trinity. However, the light that one sees and which shines from one after one’s death is only a part of what we shall receive after the Final Judgment, when Christ will be all in all.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

⁴⁹³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 118.

Stăniloae develops this rich idea, which seems to be another huge shift from the description that he gave to the Final Judgment in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, for example. He considers that the divine light can be seen in this lifetime as he argued before in his previous writings as we have seen above and that this light shines forth in their soul and even “acts in the body as well”.⁴⁹⁴ However, the light that we shall see after the Final Judgment is the one that will spring forth from the Resurrected body of Christ. Stăniloae considers that this light will be much more powerful than the one we have experienced before during our lifetime and during the period between our death and the Final Judgment. It will represent a huge increase.⁴⁹⁵

Stăniloae goes on and discusses a few aspects concerning the fact that the divine light that we see is spiritual and not material.

*The light from the resurrected body of Christ and from our body that will be resurrected, as well as the one that shone forth from His body on Tabor and also the lesser one, that illuminates the face of the people that are purified and good – cannot be a physical light, although it is made known through the body as well. In order to understand this light we have to begin with the light that appears on the face of the good Christian, or with the halo that encircles the heads of the saints. The hesychasts see in their hearts Christ surrounded by this light. The light that surrounded Christ on Mount Tabor had this spiritual character which was visible only for the eyes of the three Apostles.*⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 122.

Thus, Stăniloae speaks here of the same divine uncreated light and not about three different lights. The light that will surround and spring forth from the resurrected body of Christ is the same as the one that will spring forth from our resurrected body and it is the same as the one seen by the Apostles on Mount Tabor when the Transfiguration of Christ took place. However, this light is never a physical one, not even when it shines forth from our created bodies. The light remains spiritual and uncreated. It represents our union with God which, although spiritual in nature, spiritualizes every aspect of matter. Our body becomes luminous as well, not only our soul. Stăniloae offers a couple of quotes from Gregory Palamas but does not indicate the treatises from which he took them. Mainly, these quotes describe the fact that the spiritual light cannot be considered as material, but only spiritual. Gregory Palamas offers the example of Moses whose face sprang forth divine light. Palamas considers that this light is the same as the one that the hesychasts see when the vision of it appears to them in their own heart. However, Palamas considers that the sinful people cannot see this light and this is something that Stăniloae stressed on many times in his works. Furthermore, Palamas accentuates the idea that the vision of the divine light that one might have in this lifetime is just a foretaste of the one that will be seen in the eternal life and it is much diminished in comparison with the latter.⁴⁹⁷ The vision of the divine light can be seen by the persons that are purified in heart, but they do not receive it as something that has a sensible or intelligible feature, but as a super-abundant knowledge. Furthermore, this super-abundant knowledge must not be confused with the simple intellectual operation which constitutes the backbone of negative theology.⁴⁹⁸

Another aspect pointed out by Gregory Palamas lies in the fact that the divine light will ‘overwhelm’ the bodies of the believers after the Resurrection of all. This does not mean that our

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴⁹⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 124.

body will disappear or that it will be ‘mixed’ with the divine light. It only means that our bodies will be covered by the divine light. The body will not seem to be constituted out of matter any longer, and yet it will still remain a created body.⁴⁹⁹

Stăniloae points out on the basis of the arguments brought forward by Gregory Palamas that even our bodies will participate to the divine light in some sort of way. However, he accentuates that this is a deep mystery that cannot be interpreted in detail and which will become evident when we reach that particular stage. “The power of God radiates directly through the resurrected body of Christ, leading all those who participate to it to Resurrection and leading as well the entire creation to incorruptibility and transparency.”⁵⁰⁰ The body of Christ gives us the possibility of having transfigured bodies, deified through the uncreated energies.

*Our body will not cease to exist, but will become transparent and we will see unmediated through it God in His glory, because our body will be beyond the splitting in subjective and objective, the laws of nature, the passionate fight for overcoming nature and the fight that we do in order to protect ourselves from the others.*⁵⁰¹

The body of the believers will suffer no more in the Kingdom of Heaven and will become fully transparent, without ceasing to be a material body. One might argue that Stăniloae builds here entire chains of pure speculation, but the main problem of his system does not reside in the fact that he lacks Patristic support. He has the Fathers at the core of his ‘synthesis’. However, in many points, he seems to repeat himself, in a way that annoys the reader, while in other instances

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

he uses a quite vigorous and penetrating way of arguing. Unfortunately, the style of his writing, no matter how doxological, prayerful and strong in content might seem at some points, still seems to cover just some repetitious ideas up to some point.

In the end of this analysis, there is only one more thing that Stăniloae offers as a result of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis and that follows a fruitful debate during the hesychast controversies, namely the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. This event has been considered one of the most important proofs of the fact that the divine light can be seen and that it does not represent simply a sensible or intellectual light. Stăniloae offers a good range of interpretations to this particular event that can be considered as a summary of the ‘research’ undertaken in this particular writing.

First, Stăniloae considers that the Transfiguration of Christ represented a prefigured image of His Resurrection. This means that:

*His human nature was going to become, through the sacrifice, the environment of the divine light. (...) This light has a spiritual quality although it springs forth from the material human figure, just as the light of goodness show itself on the face of the Christian and especially in the nimbus of saints.*⁵⁰²

Thus, the example of Christ becomes a model for the believers that have made the experience of the vision of divine light. Their shining face is something similar. However, the light that springs forth from their face keeps its uncreated characteristic. Second, Stăniloae considers that the appearance of Elijah and Moses prefigures the fact that the sacrifice of Christ is done not only

⁵⁰² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 205.

for the ones that have already died, but also for the ones that were not born yet.⁵⁰³ The third aspect lies in the idea that the Father identifies Christ as His own beloved Son and, through this, He also recognizes the disciples that follow Him as adoptive sons.⁵⁰⁴ The fourth aspect of Stăniloae's interpretation is represented by the argument that the 'dark' revelation of the Old Testament which was mediated by the prophets is now replaced by the 'luminous' and direct revelation given by the Son of God.⁵⁰⁵ "The Resurrected Christ fills everything with His light, because His light covers everything and is reflected into the ones that He loves and with whom He entered in a direct relation as Incarnated God."⁵⁰⁶ This means that God gives us a direct revelation and opens the door to a direct communion with Him. This also means that we have a communion in love with Christ. This loving communion will have no end:

*The light of the communion with Christ is unending as is the joy which it brings. It is an unending mysticism of light. Although this light can be seen, it is inexhaustible in its joy and eternal newness that it gives to the ones that see it. This unending progress in the light of the love of Christ is also lived by the person who, through the continuous prayer, begins to see Him shining in his heart, which is united with heaven. The mysticism of Orthodoxy is one of light or a mystery of light, not of darkness.*⁵⁰⁷

The last aspect of Stăniloae's meditation on the Transfiguration of Christ is constituted by the fact that the divine light which will spring forth from the body of Christ in the eternal life will not destroy our bodies, but will make them luminous. Furthermore, this light will make the space

⁵⁰³*Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

⁵⁰⁵*Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵⁰⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World...*[in Rom.], p. 207.

disappear. “The [divine] light overcomes space without destroying the persons that communicate through this light.”⁵⁰⁸ This is a very interesting and thoughtful insight which gives us the possibility of observing another aspect of Stăniloae’s Neo-Patristic Synthesis, namely the position adopted on the eternal life.

God’s Immortal Image

In this writing Stăniloae keeps the same style as in the one I have just presented above. This doxological/poetic style of presenting different aspects related to the human being and its relation with the world and God might seem extremely repetitive from many points of view. It is also extremely difficult to identify different Palamite themes in this dense Patristic synthesis in which many Church Fathers seem to appear here and there although they are rarely named directly. However, there are some aspects that can be still identified and I will try to present them in the same manner as I did in the previous section. Stăniloae tried to present in this writing the main aspects of the human being as image of God. I have selected only those passages in which Stăniloae discusses aspects clearly influenced by Gregory Palamas.

First of all, Stăniloae stresses even more the ‘luminous’ character of the human being. If in his previous writings he insisted mainly on Christ as the light of the world, he insists now up to some point on the human being as the light of the world. Let us not forget that one of the most important aspects of the Neo-Palamite Synthesis produced by Stăniloae is represented by the fact that the human being participates in the attributes of God.⁵⁰⁹ Stăniloae argues that:

⁵⁰⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹See especially chapter three of this thesis.

The human being is a light that enlightens first himself from himself, but realises, in the last stand, that he is not the source of this illumination in the end. The human being illuminates himself but only while being in connection with other persons and the world. We can also say that he illuminates himself and illuminates the world as well up to a certain extent, as a light that springs forth from a luminous darkness. (...) All are illumined and all remain mysteries. The Absolute on which depend all is the supreme light and, in the same time, the darkness or the supreme mystery. (...) The human being is a singular-dual existence, which, on the one hand, is revealed light, while on the other hand represents a spring of incomprehensible light.⁵¹⁰

Thus, the human being is also considered to consist of light. The object of this particular illumination which receives light and ‘produces’ light for others is our mind. However, what Stăniloae points out here is that all the meanings of the world contain in themselves some sort of divine light that needs to be revealed and understood up to some point. This light that comes from inside us and reveals to us progressively the meanings/logoi of all things in the world seems, at least during the steps of positive and negative theology, to come from inside us, as if it is entirely ours. However, when we pass on to the stage of pure prayer or to the stage of the vision of the divine light/uncreated energies, we realize that everything that we discovered was made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit which existed in us beforehand. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is active inside us when we are connected with the world and other human beings and not only when we enter the stage of pure prayer or the stage of the vision of the divine light. In the end, Stăniloae names the human being as ‘singular-dual existence’. This happens because,

⁵¹⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image* [in Rom.], vol. I, (Bucharest: Crystal, 1995), p. 62.

simultaneously, the human being has his own will and consciousness but, inside him, after the sacrament of baptism, Christ abides together with the Holy Spirit in a mysterious way. Thus, all the actions of the human being are made together with the help of God. What is really intriguing is that Stăniloae goes beyond this 'liturgical' feature of his thinking that he kept in his previous writings. He goes on and does not put Baptism as a condition any longer here. I cannot say for sure whether he considered that the human being can have access to the divine meanings of Creation (at least during the step of positive/cataphatic theology) only through the fact that he was made in the image of God. However, he spoke once about the *apophaticism of [pagan] philosophers*⁵¹¹, which means that he considered that, through the fact that the human being was created in the image of God, he can have access to at least some knowledge of God through different analogies or events that concern strictly this universe. However, in order for a person to have access to the vision of the divine light two conditions are always necessary: purification from sin and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In another place, Stăniloae speaks about the super-abundant knowledge that comes with our union with God.

The teachings that God gives us are, on the one hand, accommodated to our level of understanding while, on the other hand, they have an interior depth that surpasses any human understanding, calling us to an eternal progress in their understanding and in the feeling of the love of the divine Persons and of the strength of existence communicated by them. However, in the eternal life we shall receive them in a more abundant way and in a more intelligible manner, though they will have even then depths that are reserved for a more

⁵¹¹ See note 410.

*progressed understanding and feeling. A more profound level of receiving will also mean a more profound intimacy with the Person of the Incarnated Word, without confusing ourselves with Him. The depth of meanings that we have not understood yet is given to us through this communion and His Person different from ours, who communicates us their purpose and communicates it to us as to different persons.*⁵¹²

In this passage Stăniloae reiterates clearly the description of the vision of the divine light that gives us a super-abundant knowledge and which he has described extremely well in his writing *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*. There is a difference here, however, from the previous way of understanding this particular point. Stăniloae insists here on the role that the Word of God has in this particular direction. He is the one that gives us the super-abundant knowledge and he is the one who also gives us its meanings. This is something different not only for this particular aspect (the vision of the divine light and the meanings that come with it), but also in what concerns the Person who gives us the understanding of the new teachings. The angels are not present any longer in Stăniloae's system. Although in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* he used to speak about the role that the angels played in helping us to decipher different visions and new teachings that God offered to us, Stăniloae changes his view here and insists fundamentally on the direct vision of Christ and the interpretation that He Himself gives us in order to understand better the super-abundant knowledge that comes together with His visions.

Nonetheless, Stăniloae reiterated again the fact that eternal life will give us the possibility of receiving even 'more' super-abundant knowledge than we can receive here during our earthly

⁵¹²Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image...* [in Rom.], vol. I, p. 113.

life. Although he does not speak about the ways in which this knowledge will come to us, Stăniloae stresses the fact that it will be more ‘intelligible’, but also as mysterious as before. We cannot reach the end of it and we always maintain a continuous progress in its understanding. Christ is our helper and interpreter, a fact that Stăniloae began to accentuate in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* and other important works from the last part of his life. When receiving the divine light, one does not receive also the entire light of its meaning, but also the darkness of its mystery.

In the second volume of *God’s Immortal Image*, Stăniloae develops some more insights on different passages taken from Gregory Palamas’ writings. He seems to use here more the *Topics*⁵¹³ and I was able to identify here one of the rare instances in which he takes into consideration some Trinitarian statements of Palamas. For example, Palamas argues that:

The Goodness, then, that issues by way of generation from the Source of noetic goodness is Logos. But no intelligent person could conceive of a Logos or Intelligence-content that is lifeless and without spirit. Hence the Logos, God from God, possesses the Holy Spirit that issues together with Himself from the Father. (...) The Spirit of the supreme Logos is a kind of ineffable yet intense longing or eros experienced by the Begetter for the Logos born ineffably from Him, a longing experienced also by the beloved Logos and Son of the Father for His Begetter; but the Logos possesses this love by virtue of the fact that it comes from the Father in the very act through which He comes from the Father, and it resides co-naturally in Him. (...) From the Father

⁵¹³ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral and Ascetic Life: One Hundred and Fifty Texts*, in: ‘The Philokalia’, vol. IV, translated from Greek and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1998), pp. 346-418.

*comes not only the Logos – who is begotten from the Father – but also the Spirit who proceeds from the Father. Yet the Spirit belongs also to the Son, who receives Him from the Father as the Spirit of Truth, Wisdom and Logos. For Truth and Wisdom constitute a Logos that befits His Begetter, a Logos that rejoices with the Father as the Father rejoices in Him. (...) This pre-eternal rejoicing of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit who, as I said, is common to both, which explains why He is sent from both to those who are worthy. Yet the Spirit has His existence from the Father alone, and hence He proceeds as regards His existence only from the Father.*⁵¹⁴

I have offered this lengthy quote because it bears the seeds of all the ideas developed by Stăniloae on this particular theme (the intra-Trinitarian relations) in this particular writing. Usually, when speaking about the Holy Trinity and the intra-Trinitarian relations, Stăniloae did not use Palamas that much. He used to rely more on Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria or Gregory of Nazianzus. Palamas was not one of his main sources. However, in a study entitled *Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church*⁵¹⁵, Stăniloae discussed at length the importance that Gregory Palamas had for this particular theological area. I will analyze in depth this particular study in the last chapter of this thesis.

What one can observe from the quote given above is that Stăniloae was preoccupied with two particular issues, namely the way in which the Persons relate to each other in their communion of love and also, the way in which the Son was born from the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeded

⁵¹⁴ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science...*, 36, in: 'Philokalia', vol. IV, p. 362.

⁵¹⁵ Stăniloae, Dumitru, 'Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church', *Ortodoxia*, Vol. 16 (1964), pp. 503-525, reprinted in *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer (New York:St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 11-44

from the same Father. Stăniloae is also preoccupied (probably too much!) with the problem of *Filioque*. Nowadays, things have changed considerably and the *Filioque* does not represent such an important problem in the relation between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, as, for example, papal primacy.⁵¹⁶ For Stăniloae, however, the *Filioque* represented a massive doctrinal problem that highly affected the intra-Trinitarian relations transforming the Holy Spirit into a Person that lacked the same importance as the Father and the Son.

However, in this particular chapter, Stăniloae is preoccupied more or less with the relation of love that appears between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. He considers that the Holy Spirit is the ‘common’ joy that exists between the Father and the Son.⁵¹⁷ The Son rejoices in the proceeding of the Spirit.⁵¹⁸ Stăniloae stresses the fact that a joy shared between two persons and not between three is one enclosed in a dual egotism.⁵¹⁹ Two persons that love each other will tend to consider that the presence of a third person will make them unhappier because it will reduce the joy that they share with each other. Stăniloae considers also that “God is loving and good not only because He is Father and Son that love each other, but also because this joy of their love is also communicated to a third.”⁵²⁰ A leitmotiv of Stăniloae’s theology of the Trinity lies in the fact that he considers the Holy Trinity as the structure of a supreme love, as the basis and fulfilment of all communions. In order for a communion to exist, we need three persons, not just two.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁶ See for example the collective study entitled *The Filioque: A Church-Dividing Issue? An Agreed Statement of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation*, St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 48:1 (2004), p. 97.

⁵¹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *God’s Immortal Image*...[in Rom.], vol. II, p. 16.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁵¹⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *God’s Immortal Image*...[in Rom.], vol. II, p. 17.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵²¹ See also the connection that Stăniloae makes between the Holy Spirit and the Church. Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of the Church’ [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, Vol.19 (1967), pp.32-48, reprinted in *Theology*

Another leitmotiv employed by Stăniloae in his writing is the one of the Palamite distinction between the essence and the uncreated energies. Stăniloae employs this distinction in order to explain once again the relationship between the created world and the uncreated God. He considers that, although the world was created out of nothing, this is not a strong argument to prove that the world can exist on its own. God maintains the existence of the world through His uncreated energies. Furthermore, the existence of the uncreated energies as actions through which God maintains the life of the world and leads the world to the union with Him, does not mean that these are confused somehow with the created things or that the created things become uncreated. However, the employments of the uncreated energies which are different from the essence of God preserve God's Personhood as being free from creation and preserve the existence of creation without having to unite with it according to his essence.⁵²² God does not need to create anything. He does not fulfil a need when He creates the world. He simply manifests His will. However, if one denies that the uncreated energies and God's essence are distinct, then he "denies God as Person and the creation as being different from Him."⁵²³ Stăniloae gives here two quotes from the fifth *Antirrhetica* of Palamas against Akindynos⁵²⁴, in which Palamas argues that a being cannot exist without a will of its own. Furthermore, Palamas considered that the creation of the world would not be possible without the employment of the uncreated energies. If one thinks of God solely as an immovable essence, then God is

and the Church, translated by Robert Barringer (New York:St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 45-72 and Idem, 'The Holy Spirit in Revelation and in the Church' [in Rom.], *Orthodoxia*, Nr.2 (1974), pp. 216-249.

⁵²²Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image...*[in Rom.], vol. II, p. 24.

⁵²³Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image...*[in Rom.], vol. II, pp. 24-25.

⁵²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 25.

constrained to create the world and the pantheistic strand of the act cannot be avoided.⁵²⁵

Stăniloae argues that:

*The actions through which God creates, sustains and perfects the world, leading it to Him are all forms of the uncreated goodness. (...) Through this it is proved that the goodness of God is not enclosed only in His interior, in the relations between the three Persons, but can also focus towards an existence that exists outside Him.*⁵²⁶

It is very interesting to see how Stăniloae considers that the uncreated energies not only create the world and sustain it, but also lead it towards God and perfect it more and more. The fact that God created the world did not mean even for a single second that He was in need of something. He made it out of love and in order to share love. However, as Stăniloae observes, this created realm was enriched with a capacity of receiving and communicating through the uncreated energies, otherwise a union between the world and God would not have been possible.⁵²⁷ What is interesting is that Stăniloae considers that the human being is helped to develop and unite with God through *different* actions/energies of God than the ones related to the created realm in general. He argues that:

The human person, although also created out of nothing through the divine action, is nonetheless brought to existence, sustained in it and helped in its own progress by other divine actions/energies than the ones that refer to the created things. Even in the work of creating the human being, God used more

⁵²⁵*Ibid.*

⁵²⁶*Ibid.*

⁵²⁷*Ibid.*

*actions/energies. The work of creating the body through the 'hands' of God is distinct from the one of 'inbreathing' the soul in him, though a solidarity does exist between them. (...) It is true that all the created things participate in God, but there is a great difference between their participation and the one of conscious persons and between the one of conscious persons and the one of the saints. The sensible things and the insensible ones do not receive the power to live in a deified manner. Only the persons do.*⁵²⁸

Stăniloae develops here some interesting ideas relating to the difference between the participation that the created realm in general has in God and the participation of the human persons. He stresses the idea that even during the creation of the human beings other divine actions/energies were employed, different from the ones used to create the cosmos and all its living animals and plants. This is a striking idea, because Stăniloae does not illustrate a difference here on the basis of the fact that the human being was created in the 'image of God'. He simply states that the human being was created by God with other divine energies and there is a plural here, because a distinct energy was used for the creation of the body and another for the creation of the soul. Another important distinction between the human being and the created realm lies in the fact that only the human being can become deified. Only the human being is truly a person, made in the image of God and only the human person can receive deification, while the created realm cannot receive it. One might ask what the place of angels is here. I am afraid that this is the weak point of Stăniloae: he does not mention angels at all and their role in the hierarchy God – human being – world. Angels are completely absent. We do not know if for their creation a special divine energy was employed. We do not know whether they may receive

⁵²⁸Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image...* [in Rom.], vol. II, p. 33.

deification as humans do and what is their importance for the created realm in general. Unfortunately, Stăniloae simply did not tell us something in this direction.

Another important contribution that Stăniloae brings forward lies in the discussion of the relationship between the unchanged essence of God and the changeable feature of the divine energies. Stăniloae is convinced that this is a bogus issue that can be explained extremely easy:

*The extensive discussion of the distinction between the being and the energies of God made by Gregory Palamas, helps us to understand the even changing active presence of God in the temporal development of creation without considering this activity as a change of His unchangeable essence. If God uses these works through His own will, He can change them in relation with the temporal world, which is changeable in essence, although He remains unchanged in His essence. (...) God reveals Himself to be similar to the human being in this freedom of using His personal works. He uses different works accommodated with every situation and need of the entire world or of singular persons, but His essence remains in the same position of absolute love and power in the relationship with the world and the conscious and free persons that live in it. (...) In God we have all the possibilities of manifestation and communication of good, but He chooses them in conformity with the changing situations of the creatures.*⁵²⁹

Stăniloae accentuates here the Providence of God. Although the actions/energies of God are different in conformity with the needs of the world and the human being, this does not mean that

⁵²⁹Dumitru Stăniloae, *God's Immortal Image...* [in Rom.], vol. II, p. 44.

His essence suffers any change during this process. The intra-Trinitarian life of God is beyond any relationship with creation. Creation cannot influence it in any way. However, Stăniloae does not forget to accentuate here as well the manifold difference between the actions/energies of God that come in contact with the world. These energies are accustomed to the needs that the world has and present, thus, the maximum of efficiency.

Conclusion

I have analysed in this chapter two of the last writings of Stăniloae, namely *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* and *God's Immortal Image*. Both of them present significant details concerning the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae.

The first significant aspect of Stăniloae's Neo-Patristic Synthesis that can be observed in the first piece of writing lies in the fact that Christ is seen as the source of the vision of the divine light and also as the interpreter of the super-abundant knowledge that comes with it. The angels are left aside in these last writings of Stăniloae. They do not appear anymore as interpreters of the vision of the divine light. We have here employed the Christological aspect of the vision of the divine light, something that Stăniloae started timidly only in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, but which is scarcely discussed in his monograph on Gregory Palamas or in *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*. The body of Christ is seen as the source of divine light and Christ Himself becomes the one who initiates us in the super-abundant knowledge that comes together with the union with Him. However, Stăniloae considers that the previous knowledge of God gained during the steps of natural knowledge – knowledge through faith and negative theology together with the further step of pure prayer - all possess an increasing

abundance of 'light'. The vision of divine light is not something that seems totally separated from the other steps of the knowledge of God. It is true that, in order to attain it one must purify from passions and also be ravished in ecstasy by the Holy Spirit, but a foretaste of it is taken as well beforehand. The believer discovers the meanings of the world, goes further and considers that God is above all and enters in the stage of pure prayer. All of these steps are full of the light of knowledge shared progressively by the unseen Christ, who illuminates our mind and gives us answers, even though still in a highly mysterious fashion. Stăniloae is one of the few scholars that accentuates so deeply this Christological aspect not only for vision of the divine light, but also for the steps that precede it.

Another significant aspect of the Neo-Palamite Synthesis employed by Stăniloae stands in the difference between the visions of the divine light which take place here while we are still on earth, and the ones given in the eternal life. Basically, Stăniloae considers that our bodies will become light in the afterlife. Although they will still keep their material composition, they will be wholly transparent and, significantly, will participate more and more in the light of God. Stăniloae considers that this event will follow the pattern given by the resurrected and wholly deified body of Christ. This is the purpose of the believers that begins here and will never end in the eternal life: to attain the deification that the human nature of Christ possesses in fullness.

In *God's Immortal Image*, Stăniloae speaks about the internal union between the human being and the divine uncreated light. He considers the human being as a "singular-dual" being. We are a single person, yet, inside us, we possess the divine light. This is why during the vision of the divine light the person sees that the divine light seems to spring forth even from the inside. Before we attain the vision of the divine light, we can be tempted to consider that all the knowledge gathered is a product of our own intelligence. However, in that particular moment we

realise that only Christ was the one who gave us not only the teachings, but also their interpretation.

I consider that the most significant aspect of the Neo-Palamite Synthesis employed here by Stăniloae lies in the fact that he speaks more about the human being as the image of God. He discovers the connection between the human being and God more realistically and deeply than he has ever done before. The only place where he discussed this previously in such a depth might be the beginning of the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. However, here Stăniloae brings to surface new meanings and interpretation of his previous position. He considers, for example, that the divine energies/actions employed in order to create the human being were different from the ones employed by God in order to create the universe. Furthermore, based on different arguments of Palamas, he argues that only the human being, from the entire created realm (and, of course, we can include here angels as well) was created in order to attain deification. However, only *persons* can attain deification and not the created realm in general, although Creation itself also participates in God. Nonetheless, the fact that the divine energies are always changeable does not mean that the essence of God ever changes. Stăniloae considers that God employs his divine actions/energies in conformity with the needs of the world, but this does not employ any modification in His essence which is above everything created and cannot be influenced by Creation. The fact that God created the world from His will and out of nothing through His divine energies preserves the fact that the essence of God cannot be affected in any way by the created realm.

The final aspect of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis lies in the discussion of the intra-Trinitarian relations and their importance. Stăniloae argues that the *Filioque* is one of the major mistakes of Western Europe, although today things have changed and he unfortunately does not

seem aware of that. This last aspect will be discussed at length in the next chapter which gives us the possibility of analysing the most important studies developed by Stăniloae in order to explain different aspects of Gregory's Palamas theological contribution.

CHAPTER V: STUDIES ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF GREGORY PALAMAS' THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

Surprisingly or not, Stăniloae did not dedicate many studies to different areas of Palamas' works. However, what we can find right from the beginning is that Stăniloae used Palamas very much in some of his studies and we endeavour to discover these piecemeal examples that could bring light to many of his particular approaches in one direction or another. We shall concentrate on three examples of studies where Palamas is quoted extensively and his ideas are presented and developed further. I have chosen four particular studies, because they bring into light different areas of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis that cannot be easily discovered in his major works.

The Mariology of Gregory Palamas

The first study is dedicated to role of the Mother of God as intercessor.⁵³⁰ Although Palamas is one of the main sources used by Stăniloae in order to present the Mariology of the Orthodox Church, he is not the only one. Stăniloae makes good use of other important Byzantine authors such as Theophanes of Nicaea, Euthymios of Constantinople, John of Damascus and Andrew of

⁵³⁰Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Mother of God as Intercessor' [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, 1952, nr. 1, pp. 79-129.

Crete. He bases his research on subsequent works of these particular Fathers. However, Stăniloae clearly considers that the most interesting source on the Mother of God is Theophanes of Nicaea, whom he quotes copiously, but, nonetheless, he acknowledges the fact that Theophanes was tributary mainly to the homilies⁵³¹ of Gregory Palamas delivered on different celebrations of Mary. This study has an interesting story, given the fact that it provoked a huge debate at the Theological Institute of Sibiu, where the former colleagues of Fr. Stăniloae disagreed with the sources he used and with the conclusions of the study. They criticized him for using too many Byzantine (sic!) authors instead of Church Fathers. In the end, the debate was closed, but Stăniloae clearly suffered a shock and, when he discussed the importance of the Mother of God in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* he offered to it just a few pages and almost no quote from the Fathers named above. Although Stăniloae considered that Evdokimov made a huge theological contribution through his writing on the Mother of God and he truly took into account the creation of a similar project, he left it aside in the end, due to this unhappy event of his life.

In his study, Stăniloae points out again his initial idea that the hesychastic controversies were nothing more but a clash between the Orthodox East and the Scholastic Roman Catholic West. Thus, he affirms that:

“Theophanes [of Nicaea] made part of the school of Gregory Palamas and represented together with this school, the first and the most important position of the Eastern theology taken against the newly instituted Western

⁵³¹ The homilies of Gregory Palamas have been translated in English as well. See Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Saving Work of Christ. Sermons*, edited by Christopher Veniamin (Waymart: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2008); Idem, *On the Saints. Sermons*, edited by Christopher Veniamin (Waymart: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2008).

Scholasticism [in the East] represented by another party of Byzantine theologians who were influenced by Scholasticism.”⁵³²

It is highly difficult to discover the names of the Byzantine theologians who fought so hard against Palamas and were, at the same time, influenced by Scholasticism. Nicephorus Gregoras and Akyndinos were certainly anti-Catholics and Barlaam of Calabria was an anti-Catholic as well in the first part of his controversy with Palamas. It is true that some Byzantine theologians, such as the Kydones brothers were highly influenced by Thomas Aquinas, but Palamas never had anything to do with them. Thus, Stăniloae reads back in history events that were not quite as he imagined them to be. Stăniloae concentrates in this study on another polemical feature between Orthodoxy and Catholicism: the role of the Mother of God as intercessor. He considers that Theophanes of Nicaea was interpreted wrongly by Catholic theologians such as M. Jugie who have tried to defend different Catholic ‘innovations’ such as the doctrine of the Assumption of the Mother of God or the fact that she is Co-Redemptrix together with Jesus Christ. In order to prove that Theophanes of Nicaea had a very different point of view from the one attributed to him by the Roman Catholic theologians, Stăniloae goes back to the texts of Gregory Palamas.⁵³³ He quotes them directly although he does not insist too much on them. However, this proves that he considered Gregory Palamas as one of the most important Church Fathers that had an influence on Orthodox Mariology. Palamas was one of the most influential figures used further on by Theophanes on Nicaea in his treatises on the importance of the Mother of God. Probably, Stăniloae draws so much on the influence of Palamas on Theophanes from a polemical point of

⁵³² Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Mother of God as Intercessor...’ [in Rom.], pp. 79-80.

⁵³³ He quotes especially the *Homily on the Death of the Mother of God*, from P.G. vol. 151.

view as well, because Palamas was, from some points of view, the most contested Eastern Church Father by Western Catholic theologians.

Stăniloae considers that Palamas pointed out the fact that the Mother of God represents, after the Incarnate Christ, the most deified human person. Thus, she is not only full of divine grace and mercy, but also, from a certain point of view, she mediates this divine grace towards the believers through her prayers. However, she does not do that in an ontological way, but only through the mercy of God. She does not generate uncreated energies and she does not possess an uncreated nature. She simply intercedes through her prayers and offers through this help to the believers in order for them to progress further in their spiritual life. From the texts of Gregory Palamas quoted by Stăniloae, I can say that these opinions are highly influenced by the hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite, a fact that Stăniloae acknowledges as well.⁵³⁴ All the sainthood comes to the angels and saints through the Mother of God.⁵³⁵ Does that mean, however, that all the grace that comes to us and all our visions are mediated through the Mother of God? No. Stăniloae resolves this matter as he did later on, using again Gregory Palamas, by pointing out the role of angels as interpreters and mediators of divine visions. We can have direct visions of God, because the Mother of God, the angels and the saints are only interpreters. However, through their prayers, they intercede for us in order to discover more and more the divine grace. They do not offer us the grace or the visions, only God does, but they can offer us sometimes their interpretation. It all depends on our own level of understanding and the way in which we have made ourselves capable of receiving more and more the super-abundant knowledge given by God through His visions.

⁵³⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Mother of God as Intercessor...' [in Rom.], pp. 87-88.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88

The Mother of God who is the most advanced human being in the knowledge of God is already at the top level of everything. Thus, she possesses already a super-abundant knowledge and its meaning which she is willing to share with whoever God may consider worthy. This is the Orthodox meaning of the Mother of God as intercessor in Stăniloae's opinion, a view which was highly influenced not only by Theophanes of Nicaea, but also by Gregory Palamas. Unfortunately, Stăniloae was unable to build more on these important ideas.

Nature and grace in Byzantine theology

The second most important study written by Stăniloae that has many important aspects taken from the works of Gregory Palamas, speaks about the relationship between nature and grace in the works of different Byzantine theologians.⁵³⁶ He interprets here some important Church Fathers. The names used are, in order: Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas and Nicholas Cabasilas.

In the section dedicated to Gregory Palamas, Stăniloae deals with two important aspects of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis, namely the human being as image of God and the role of the mind and the heart in the purification from sins. When speaking about the main theme of his study, Stăniloae recognizes that Palamas was not deeply interested by the relationship between nature and grace, but, nevertheless, the fact that he gave a strong importance to the principle that no nature can exist without having a corresponding energy of its own, led towards his significant contribution on the development of the principle that every nature has a *dynamism and an*

⁵³⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology' [in Rom], *Orthodoxia*, (1974), 3, pp. 392-439.

*inalterable character.*⁵³⁷ After stating this, Stăniloae goes on and argues that this dynamic quality of human nature lies in the fact that the human being was created in the image of God. In order to attain the likeness, our nature has to have dynamism and a thirst for spiritual progress. However, the attaining of the likeness with God never means that we exceed the limits of our nature. Nonetheless, although he does not use that in an explicit manner here, Stăniloae considers that human nature can only pass on to the state of the likeness of God, or to a state contrary to nature which is the result of sin.⁵³⁸ Stăniloae gives the following quote from the writings of Gregory Palamas:

Since the noetic and intelligent nature of the human soul alone possesses intellect, thought-form and life-generating spirit, it alone, more so than the bodiless angels – is created by God in His image. This image the soul possesses inalienably, even if it does not recognize its own dignity, or think and live in a manner worthy of the Creator's image within it. After our forefather's transgression in paradise through the tree, we suffered the death of our soul – which is the separation of the soul from God – prior to our bodily death; yet although we cast away our divine likeness, we did not lose our divine image. Thus when the soul renounces its attachment to inferior things and cleaves through love to God and submits itself to Him through acts and modes of virtue, it is illuminated and made beautiful by God and is raised to a higher level, obeying His counsels and exhortations; and by these means it regains the truly eternal life. Through this life it makes the body conjoined to it immortal, so that in due time the body attains the promised

⁵³⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology'... [in Rom], p. 420.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

*resurrection and participates in eternal glory. But if the soul does not repudiate its attachment and submission to inferior things whereby it shamefully dishonours God's image, it alienates itself from God and is estranged from the truly and blessed life of God; for as it has first abandoned God, it is justly abandoned by Him.*⁵³⁹

This is a very rich text that contains the main ideas developed further by Father Stăniloae in what concerns the discussion of the human being as the image of God. Stăniloae begins by stating that the image of God was not destroyed by sin and that the human nature still kept the possibility of attaining the likeness with God. However, the image of God was covered by the darkness of sin. This meant that the soul could not attain the likeness with God unless it renounced the passions.⁵⁴⁰ Furthermore, the choice of sin over virtue led to the death of the soul and put nature in a state contrary to it. Human nature can begin its spiritual progress only in connection with the Holy Spirit. Stăniloae makes a striking argument by considering, on the basis of a text taken again from Gregory Palamas⁵⁴¹ that the human soul has a tripartite feature represented by the mind, reason and the life-giving spirit. The mind and its reason are considered to be icons of the Father and the Son, while the life-giving spirit is an icon of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴² This life-giving spirit is, in Stăniloae's opinion, both created and uncreated. This is a strange argument, because Stăniloae does not point out further on which are the main aspects of this life-giving spirit which is part of the human soul.⁵⁴³ This ambiguity gives place to the idea that the human soul also has an uncreated part, which is highly difficult to base on the Fathers. This life-giving spirit seems to

⁵³⁹ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science...*, 39, in: 'The Philokalia', vol. IV, p. 163.

⁵⁴⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology'... [in Rom], p. 422.

⁵⁴¹ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science...*, 38, in: 'The Philokalia', vol. IV, p. 162.

⁵⁴² Dumitru Stăniloae, 'Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology'... [in Rom], p. 423.

⁵⁴³ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology'... [in Rom.], p. 423.

represent the cohesion between the uncreated energies of God and our deepest part of the soul, without a confusion between them and it is the “carrier of love.”⁵⁴⁴ Basing himself again on a quote taken from Gregory Palamas⁵⁴⁵, Stăniloae states that the love is the most important virtue and the one that facilitates the union between the human soul and God.⁵⁴⁶ In order to explain how this love progresses, Stăniloae makes recourse to the vision of the divine light by the purified soul of the believer. He considers this vision as an act of love⁵⁴⁷, but also that this act of love was preceded by a progress in the knowledge of God (natural knowledge – knowledge through faith – negative theology) which has simultaneously increased our love.⁵⁴⁸ Stăniloae made all these arguments as well in order to prove that the human soul participates entirely in the knowledge of God and not only the mind taken apart from it.⁵⁴⁹ Stăniloae argues that:

It is not the mind, separated from the complete human being, that can see God, although it has the leading role in the taking of the human being to this vision. God is sensed by the complete, concrete, yet purified human; purified not in the sense that he is emptied from the content of his senses, but in the meaning that his senses were purified. (...) Nobody can obtain the feeling of the mind (τὴν νοεράν αἰσθησιν) through which he can observe again the presence of God, otherwise than as a gift of his strivings for virtue in the relations he had with the persons and in his contacts with the created things. That spiritual feeling is the fruit of the efforts for obtaining the virtues, of the

⁵⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 424.

⁵⁴⁵ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science...*, 39-40, in: ‘The Philokalia’, vol. IV, pp. 163-164.

⁵⁴⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology’... [in Rom], p. 425.

⁵⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 425-426.

⁵⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 426.

⁵⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 427.

*purification efforts of cleansing the soul, which cannot take place outside the relations we just named.*⁵⁵⁰

The purification from sin is obtained through our loving contact with the world and the other human beings. Through this we open our mind towards the feeling of the presence of God. However, the vision of the divine light and spiritual perfection in general is not something reserved exclusively to our mind, but also to our cleansed and purified senses. The body also partakes of the divine grace, which is not meant to act exclusively upon our soul or just on a part of the soul, namely the mind. Stăniloae considers that the human being has to unite first his mind and body and, afterwards, his mind and heart and these actions cannot be fulfilled unless we strive towards obtaining the virtues. The heart is considered as being the centre of all the “powers and thoughts of the soul and all the feelings of the body”⁵⁵¹, an idea which Stăniloae traces again back to Palamas and also to Pseudo-Macarius.

Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church⁵⁵²

The third study in which Gregory Palamas plays an extremely important role was published by Stăniloae in 1964 and concerns the intra-trinitarian relations.⁵⁵³ Stăniloae is preoccupied in this

⁵⁵⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology’... [in Rom], p. 428.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

⁵⁵² For a discussion on the Trinitarian contribution of Gregory Palamas see M. Edmund Hussey, ‘The Palamite Trinitarian Models’, *SVTQ*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1972), pp. 83-89. For Stăniloae’s further insights on this theme see: Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Holy Trinity and the Creation of the World from Nothing in Time’ (II) [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei*, Nr.3 (1987), pp. 28-47; Idem, ‘The Holy Trinity and the Creation of the World from Nothing in Time’ (I) [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei*, Nr.2 (1987), pp. 41-69; Idem, ‘The Holy Trinity: The Creator, Saviour and Eternal Goal of all Believers’ [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, Nr.2 (1986), pp. 14-42; Idem, ‘The Holy Trinity, Structure of Supreme Love’ [in Rom.], *Studii Teologice*, Vol.22 (1970), pp. 333-355, reprinted in *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 73-108.

study to identify the proper meaning of the expression “through the Son” concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father. Stăniloae is convinced that this expression indicates a highly different view from the implications that the *Filioque* had on Western theology.⁵⁵⁴ He also observed that this particular expression was not something that belonged expressly to Gregory Palamas, but was developed in the Patristic period beforehand and interpreted significantly by two other Byzantine theologians. The first Byzantine theologians, who led this expression to its culmination, were Patriarch Gregory II of Cyprus⁵⁵⁵, who was Patriarch of Constantinople between 1283 and 1289 and Joseph Bryennios who was active mainly in the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁵⁵⁶ Stăniloae was aware of the fact that Vladimir Rodzianko, a priest of the Serbian parish in London held a series of lectures on this particular expression that appears in the writings of Palamas and Gregory II of Cyprus.⁵⁵⁷ However, Stăniloae claims that no other Orthodox theologians gave much attention to the thought of Joseph Bryennios.⁵⁵⁸

I will insist on the particular aspects concerning the theological contribution brought in this direction by Gregory II of Cyprus and Joseph Bryennios only inasmuch as these are related to the ones that appear from the analysis of Palamite texts. I would like to remark however, that, although Stăniloae was not able to identify the strong connection between Palamas and Gregory II of Cyprus at the time when he wrote the monograph on Palamas (1938), he was still able to

⁵⁵³ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church’, *Ortodoxia*, Vol.16 (1964), pp. 503-525, reprinted in *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer (New York:St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 11-44. I will use the English translation of the study in order to provide the quotes.

⁵⁵⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church’, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁵⁵ See the interesting study of Andrew J. Sopko, “Palamism before Palamas” and the Theology of Gregory of Cyprus’, *SVTQ*, Vol. 23, No. 3-4 (1979), pp. 139-147.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁵⁷ Published in the volume *Russie and Chrétienté*, 2 (1950), 3-4, pp. 123-244.

⁵⁵⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church’, p. 15.

identify it later on, although no one can say for sure that he observed it on its own or that it was suggested to him by the monograph written by J. Meyendorff.

The first text employed by Stăniloae from the writings of Gregory Palamas runs like this:

Therefore we must ask ourselves: when the Spirit goes forth from the Father in a movement we neither observe nor understand, can we say that, according to the evidence of Scripture, he has someone in whom he can rest in a manner which befits God? If we search the Scriptures we discover that the Father of the Only Begotten God has seen fit to disclose this very thing to John the Precursor and Baptizer of the Lord who said: "I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on who you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit' (John 1, 33). (...) And that no one may think that these things were spoken and accomplished by the Father with reference to the incarnation of the Son (...) let us listen to the divine Damascene who writes in the eighth of the Dogmatic Chapters: 'We believe also in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son.'⁵⁵⁹

The main idea that springs forth from this text is that, after His procession from the Father, the Holy Spirit 'rests' in the Son. Gregory Palamas appeals here to two important texts. The first one is taken from the Gospel of John (1:33) and the other one from St. John of Damascus. This appeal to the Tradition of the Church reveals the fact that the 'shining forth of the Holy Spirit through the Son' is not a concept formulated first by Gregory II of Cyprus or Gregory Palamas,

⁵⁵⁹ Gregory Palamas, *Two Apodictic Treatises Proving that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son but only from the Father*, P.G., 150, 833.

but already existed before them. Stăniloae considers that this ‘resting’ of the Holy Spirit in the Son means two important things. First, it cannot be argued any longer that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well. Second, the fact that the Holy Spirit has as its first ‘goal’ this resting in the Son means that it is impossible to have other Persons appearing from the Father. This second aspect seems a bit exaggerated. Even if the Holy Spirit had not rested in the Son, nothing could have prevented or compelled the Father to give birth or to send forth an endless number of additional Persons.

Stăniloae also observes that this ‘rest’ of the Holy Spirit upon the Son is proven by their union “in the temporal order”.⁵⁶⁰ The Son and the Holy Spirit work closely together in the created realm. “The presence of Christ is always marked by the Spirit resting upon Him, and the presence of the Spirit means the presence of Christ upon whom He rests.”⁵⁶¹ Furthermore, we never have the chance of seeing the Spirit in Himself, but we see Christ when we “are in Spirit”.⁵⁶² “Therefore, although there is no knowledge or experience of Christ as God apart from the Spirit, neither is there any experience of the Spirit by Himself in isolation for He is only the means for supernatural perception.”⁵⁶³

Stăniloae passes on to a detailed description of Palamas’ contribution in this direction. On the basis of a text from Palamas which presents important features in the direction of his contribution⁵⁶⁴, Stăniloae considers that this ‘resting’ of the Spirit on the Son does not mean just a static movement, but also a dynamic one. Thus, the procession of the Holy Spirit represents the love that the Father has for the Son, while His ‘rest’ in the Son implies the dynamism of the

⁵⁶⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church...’, p. 24.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

⁵⁶³ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church...’, p. 25.

⁵⁶⁴ Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science...*, 36, in: ‘Philokalia’, vol. IV, p. 362. See note 492 for the corresponding text.

returning love of the Son for the Father. Stăniloae considers that Palamas went beyond Gregory II of Cyprus who did not develop sufficiently the concept of the Holy Spirit's shining through the Son in connection with the relation both these Persons have with the Father.

*When we put the ideas of St. Gregory Palamas together with those of Gregory of Cyprus we may rightly consider that the former threw fresh light on the thought of the Cypriot. The radiation of the Spirit from the Son is nothing other than the response of the Son's love to the loving initiative of the Father who causes the Spirit to proceed.*⁵⁶⁵

There are two ways in which this shining of the Spirit from the Son takes place. The first one is a response of the love of the Son for the Father which the Holy Spirit 'carries', but the other way round is towards temporal creation. Stăniloae speaks about the second aspect of this 'shining' considering that, as he already done before that, while uniting with Christ we also unite with the Spirit and the other way round as well. No one can see Christ except in the Spirit. No one can participate to the uncreated energies of the Spirit, unless he knows Christ. "All are beloved of the Father in the Son and all respond to the Father in the Son with the Son's own love."⁵⁶⁶ However, this cannot be done without the help of the Holy Spirit: "for inasmuch as all are found in the Son, the Spirit of the Father hovers over all and shines forth from all upon the Father."⁵⁶⁷ In the created realm, the Spirit shines *from us* towards the Father, because we are made in the image of Christ through His help. Thus, Stăniloae concludes: "This is the climactic moment of the

⁵⁶⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church...', p. 31.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

condition of salvation: the union of all with Christ in the Spirit, and through the Spirit, in the consciousness of the Father's love for them and of their own love for the Father.”⁵⁶⁸

Thus, the study of Stăniloae gives useful insights on different aspects concerning the expression attributed to Gregory of Cyprus who spoke of the “shining of the Holy Spirit through the Son”. Stăniloae observed here that Gregory of Cyprus did not develop enough the implications of this expression and pursued an enriching analysis of two other important theologians: Gregory Palamas and Joseph Bryennios. The most prolific results appeared from the Palamite texts. Stăniloae was able to speak about the fact that this ‘shining’ has two directions. First, it ‘carries’ the love of the Son for the Father to the Father and, second, it abides as well in the temporal creation and develops into something similar with the Christians that follow Christ. The uncreated energies of the Spirit shine forth from the persons that are united with Christ.

The Significance of the Divine Light in the Spirituality and the Cult of the Orthodox Church

The last study that I am going to analyse in this chapter refers to the liturgical significance of the divine light in the Orthodox Church.⁵⁶⁹ In this particular study, Stăniloae returns to some of his favourite Palamite themes such as apophatic theology and especially its final stage: the vision of the divine light. Stăniloae begins his study with a critical note towards the book *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*⁵⁷⁰ which was written by cardinal Jean Daniélou. Stăniloae considers that Daniélou was wrong when he considered that Eastern theology fell into some kind of inferior

⁵⁶⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church...’, p. 32.

⁵⁶⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Significance of the Divine Light in the Spirituality and the Cult of the Orthodox Church’ [in Rom.], *Orthodoxia*, (1976), 3-4, pp. 433-446.

⁵⁷⁰ The book was published in 1944.

Platonism when its theologians affirmed that the vision of the divine light is possible.⁵⁷¹ He insists that the vision of divine light is the highest step of apophatic theology and not the negative theology proposed by Western theologians.⁵⁷² Of course, Stăniloae recourse for proof to the writings of Gregory Palamas and he uses especially *The Triads*. He rejects the opinion of Jean Daniélou again afterwards arguing against the Platonist quality that some Eastern theological ideas might have:

*From the accent put by Eastern spirituality on the work of the Holy Spirit that takes place during this 'vision', it can be noticed that the vision is far away from the Platonic contemplation, which was accomplished through the natural powers. The Christian Fathers borrowed here, as well as in many other cases, some terms from Ancient philosophy, but the content of these terms has become different through the supernatural [quality] of the Christian faith and through the fact that all the knowledge [of God] is not based upon the Revelation given from above, by and through the Incarnated hypostatic Word.*⁵⁷³

Thus, Stăniloae makes some steps away from the initial position that he had almost forty years before, when he considered that Palamas especially had not accepted any philosophical influence in his works.⁵⁷⁴ He seems to recognize here at least that, up to some extent, some of the Fathers

⁵⁷¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Significance of the Divine Light...' [in Rom.], p. 433.

⁵⁷² Ibid., p. 434. A similar way of discussing studies of Roman-Catholic theologians on Palamas can be found in Georges Barrois, 'Palamism Revisited', SVTQ, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1975), pp. 211-231.

⁵⁷³ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Significance of the Divine Light...' [in Rom.], p. 435.

⁵⁷⁴ See the first chapter of this thesis.

‘used’⁵⁷⁵ a few philosophical terms to which they gave new meaning and, thus, ‘Christianized’ them.

However, what is even more striking is that Stăniloae seems clearly open to admit even the fact that Daniélou gets close to the Eastern position at least in some points expressed in the latter’s book. Although Stăniloae still considers that the opinion of Barlaam of Calabria was nothing more than the opinion of Western Scholasticism which, therefore, did not take into consideration any other spiritual development except negative theology, he carefully acknowledges the fact that Daniélou is far from this.⁵⁷⁶ Daniélou, influenced by Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite spoke about a mystical union with God and a vision of the luminous darkness.⁵⁷⁷ Thus, Stăniloae concludes that he is not far from the Eastern point of view and that all that exists right now between his option and the Eastern one is just a misapprehension of terminology.⁵⁷⁸

Stăniloae leaves Daniélou behind after this quick conclusion and moves forward to an article of M. J. Le Guillou⁵⁷⁹ in which he considers again that he has encountered a position that moves close to the Eastern point of view. Le Guillou affirmed at one point that, although the vision of the divine light as understood in Eastern Europe might have a Neo-Platonic background, it does not seem to be so in the case of Gregory Palamas.⁵⁸⁰ This divine light is more or less born from the loving meeting between two persons.⁵⁸¹ Nonetheless, Le Guillou brings forward some other texts from the writings of John Klimakos and Symeon the New Theologian and proves that his

⁵⁷⁵He clearly avoids the term of ‘influence’, because he believes that if he recognizes this aspect, the teaching of the Fathers might become just another development of some philosophical opinions.

⁵⁷⁶Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Significance of the Divine Light...’ [in Rom.], pp. 435-436.

⁵⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 436.

⁵⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹Entitled ‘Lumière et charité dans la doctrine Palamite de la divinisation’, *Istina*, (1974), 3, pp. 329-338.

⁵⁸⁰M. J. Le Guillou, ‘Lumière et charité dans la doctrine Palamite de la divinization...’, p. 332.

⁵⁸¹*Ibid.*

hypothesis has some background as well.⁵⁸² However, Stăniloae is not entirely satisfied with this view because Le Guillou takes one step behind and still argues that the grace received by the believer has a created nature and not an uncreated one.⁵⁸³ Stăniloae gives a positive end to this particular analysis stating that:

*Once Le Guillou recognizes the fact that the divine light that we receive is due to the manifestation of the love of the personal God towards us, it is not hard for us to demonstrate to him that the work and the light and, therefore, the grace are not only created by God in us, but are, first and foremost, the shining of the personal God in us. The works help us to produce the efforts that take us to obtain the good habits or the virtues.*⁵⁸⁴

One can recognize here the mediating approach that Stăniloae takes in order to discover what is useful and not in the studies of different Western theologians concerning the vision of the divine light, a Palamite theme par excellence. His way of seeing things is highly different from the aggressive and polemical tone that one could see in the monograph that he wrote on Palamas. He tries now to see the positive approaches of Western theologians and to be as less polemical as possible when he really has something to reproach.

After analysing the results of these two important works of Western theologians, Stăniloae gives a brief conclusion and considers that the main problem of the Palamite controversy that exists nowadays between East and West remains the fact that the concept of person has not been developed enough in theological discussions. The fact that Palamas makes a distinction between

⁵⁸²M. J. Le Guillou, 'Lumière et charité dans la doctrine Palamite de la divinization...', p. 331.

⁵⁸³Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Significance of the Divine Light...' [in Rom.], pp. 435-436.

⁵⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 438.

the essence and the energies of God is not the only main feature of his theological approach. Palamas keeps as well the idea that all the divine works/actions/energies are *personal*.⁵⁸⁵ The Persons of the Holy Trinity send to us the divine uncreated works/energies. Stăniloae considers that Catholicism has insisted too much on the aspect of the essence of God forgetting about the Persons of the Trinity, while Protestantism left aside the essence of God and concentrated exclusively on the Persons.⁵⁸⁶ He argues that:

*The perspective of the development of the view of God as a Person will help in the future the entire Christian theology to understand the theme of His manifestation as uncreated light, the theme of the complexity of His free works and the theme of a real meeting with God; a God who comes before us in a real manner through grace and through any uncreated divine action, accustomed to our measure and for the use of our capacity to receive Him with love, in the measure in which we have a spiritual growth.*⁵⁸⁷

Stăniloae considers that the main problem between the Catholic and the Orthodox position on Gregory Palamas stands not in the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God, but, more or less, in the fact that God is not considered fully in terms of Personhood, but only in terms of essence. In the remainder of his study, Stăniloae concentrated as much as he could on the significance of the divine light in Orthodoxy. He argued that the love between two persons manifests itself as true light.⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, all the acts that we make out of love have a

⁵⁸⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Significance of the Divine Light...' [in Rom.], p. 438.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 438-439.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 440-441.

luminous character.⁵⁸⁹ Stăniloae begins again to employ his poetical/doxological style of speaking, but he does not give much information about the cultic use of images of light in Orthodoxy. He insists on the luminous character of the meanings of things, of the rationality of creation and, of course, on God as Light, using texts from the Scriptures and a few quotes from the *Topics* of Gregory Palamas.⁵⁹⁰ He also speaks about the eschatological vision of the divine light and the fact that, after the Final Judgment it will be much richer than the one that we might receive in our lifetime. In fact, what we have here is a scheme that Stăniloae will use later on in his book *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being*.⁵⁹¹ Unfortunately, Stăniloae dedicates only a page and a half of his entire study to the analysis of the use of ‘images’ of divine light in the cult of the Orthodox Church.⁵⁹² He considers that the Paschal celebration and also the celebration of Pentecost represent the moments in which all the believers feel the presence of the divine light.⁵⁹³ However, he is highly general in his arguments and only gives a couple of quotes from the hymnology of the celebrations themselves. I consider that he has not accomplished satisfactorily the second task of his study, which should have consisted in an analysis of the significance that the divine light receives in the Orthodox worship.

Conclusion

Stăniloae offers interesting insights on different aspects of Palamas’ theological contribution in these four studies. Here we possess a good analysis of themes that Stăniloae does not employ in

⁵⁸⁹Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Significance of the Divine Light...’ [in Rom.], p. 441.

⁵⁹⁰Especially chapter 112.

⁵⁹¹More information can be traced back in chapter four where this book was analyzed.

⁵⁹² Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Significance of the Divine Light...’ [in Rom.], pp. 445-446.

⁵⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 446.

other places, such as the Mariology of Palamas⁵⁹⁴ and its significance for Orthodoxy or the Palamite interpretation of the expression “the shining of the Holy Spirit *through* the Son”.⁵⁹⁵ Nonetheless, one can also observe some changes in Stăniloae’s opinion in what concerns the general Western theological contribution on Palamas.⁵⁹⁶ Furthermore, he offers some useful insights about the relationship between nature and grace in Palamite theology.⁵⁹⁷

I argue that Stăniloae had a fruitful period of meditation in which he changed the polemical tone of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis. Although one might still find it in the study on the Mariology of Palamas and Theophanes of Nicaea⁵⁹⁸, it is almost impossible to detect it 24 years later when Stăniloae speaks so peacefully about Western theologians such as Daniélou and Le Guillou and their opinion in what concerns Palamas and his theological contribution.⁵⁹⁹

One more aspect that can be observed here is that Stăniloae, in his Neo-Palamite Synthesis, took great care to observe even themes that are not easily grasped by the majority of researchers on the latter’s work, namely his Trinitarian contribution and perspective on Mariology. Furthermore, he developed in this period of time as well a ‘scheme’ of the way in which the divine light shines more and more through the meanings that we get from the contemplation of things, deepen through our apophatic step of pure prayer and reach in the end through the final

⁵⁹⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Mother of God as Intercessor’ [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, (1952), 1, pp. 79-129.

⁵⁹⁵ Idem, ‘Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church’, *Ortodoxia*, Vol.16 (1964), pp. 503-525, reprinted in *Theology and the Church*, translated by Robert Barringer (New York:St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 11-44.

⁵⁹⁶ Idem, ‘The Significance of the Divine Light in the Spirituality and the Cult of the Orthodox Church’ [in Rom.], *Orthodoxia*, (1976), 3-4, pp. 433-446.

⁵⁹⁷ Idem, ‘Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology’ [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, (1974), 3, pp. 392-439.

⁵⁹⁸ Idem, ‘The Mother of God as Intercessor’ [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia*, (1952), 1, pp. 79-129.

⁵⁹⁹ Idem, ‘The Significance of the Divine Light in the Spirituality and the Cult of the Orthodox Church’ [in Rom.], *Orthodoxia*, (1976), 3-4, pp. 433-446.

vision of the uncreated energies. He used this scheme later on in some of his important books written in the last few years of his life.⁶⁰⁰

⁶⁰⁰ Especially in *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* and, up to some point in *God's Immortal Image*.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

I have reached the end of my research from some points of view, although I am clearly aware of the fact that there are many other ideas and thoughts that can be developed further. The first one lies in the fact that all that I have presented here is the influence that just *one* Church Father had on Stăniloae. My first initiative was to analyse all the Patristic influences in his work. I became aware soon after I started to work that 75,000 words are not enough to encompass all the Patristic richness and all the developments that Stăniloae made more or less on different ideas of the Fathers. Thus, I restricted my research to Gregory Palamas. I chose Palamas because he was less celebrated in the relevant literature. Basically every scholar knows that Stăniloae was influenced mostly by the works of Maximus the Confessor. I knew that, if I really wanted to have a groundbreaking subject I should focus on another Church Father that had a tremendous influence on Stăniloae. The second choice was of course Palamas. I thought at one point to include Cyril of Alexandria as well, but this would have meant to spread my analysis in two directions, which although had their similarities would have affected the cohesion of my thesis.

I will split the conclusions in two principal parts. I consider that a Neo-Patristic Synthesis needs to be considered from two points of view: the style employed by the author in his analysis, especially in cases such as the one of Stăniloae, where, in time, the style of analysis went through many transformations and, nonetheless, the main themes that were discussed and their importance for the theology today.

First, I want to give a few words about the style used by Stăniloae in order to produce his Neo-Palamite Synthesis. I have remarked in the first chapter of this thesis, that Stăniloae uses a

polemical tone, quite aggressive from some points of view, in order to describe the conflicts between Palamas and some of his adversaries. Stăniloae uses this polemical tone because he was influenced massively by Roman Catholic historians and theologians (such as M. Jugie) who were hunting more after blood than offering an accurate presentation of the Palamite doctrine. If for Jugie, the worst adversary is Palamism, for Stăniloae it is Scholasticism. This aggressive tone is one that Stăniloae did not employ elsewhere during his entire lifetime. He tends to get milder especially after the 1970s when he was invited to several conferences in Western Europe and he had the chance to meet important theologians that were not only Orthodox, but also Catholic or Protestant. He changed his view and this can be seen from different articles and studies⁶⁰¹ in which he reconsiders his view towards the ‘scholastic’ West. However, one must not get too excited about it, because Stăniloae always considered that Western theologians cannot give too much to Eastern theologians with the exception of the methodological tools. I will get back to this idea in the second part of the conclusion.

This aggressive and polemical tone changes when Stăniloae begins to translate the works of the Church Fathers and to comment on them.⁶⁰² He becomes more temperate and tries to observe the good ideas that exist in different philosophical and theological works written in the West. One can see the breadth of Western theological and philosophical literature that appears in *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* (1947) or in *Jesus Christ or the Restoration of Man* (1941). One can see, furthermore, that, in the monograph on Palamas, Stăniloae had more or less a *historical* perspective. He was concerned by two things: the clear observation of the historical facts and an accurate presentation of the main themes of conflict between Palamas and

⁶⁰¹ See for example Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘The Significance of the Divine Light in the Spirituality and the Cult of the Orthodox Church’ [in Rom.], *Orthodoxia*, (1976), 3-4, pp. 433-446.

⁶⁰² As it happened in the *Romanian Philokalia* and his subsequent translations of Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa etc.

his adversaries. In *Jesus Christ or the Restoration of Man* where (pay attention!) the quotes from Western philosophers⁶⁰³ compete with the ones from Church Fathers⁶⁰⁴, Stăniloae gives the most massive philosophical synthesis. He is far from a Neo-Patristic strand. However, in just six years, a time in which he translated the first four volumes of the *Romanian Philokalia*, two of which comprise some of the writings of Maximus the Confessor, Stăniloae reverses the strand. In *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*, he quotes more from the Church Fathers than from Western sources.⁶⁰⁵ He also improves his style. He does not possess a historical view any longer. He has a more Patristic spirit. His phrases breathe fresh air and the polemical tone is only employed in the introductory part of the work. What is astonishing here is that, although Stăniloae focused more on Maximus the Confessor in his last years, he gives the lion's share to Gregory Palamas, especially for the most important part of the book: namely the description and the analysis of the stage of deification.

However, the polemical tone with the Western theologians was still kept up to some point in Stăniloae's studies. He is still aggressive in his studies on specific doctrinal points, but, in his books, he takes a different approach. He forgets about it. He concentrates more and more on what the Fathers have to say. In his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1973), Stăniloae still keeps an academic style for the footnotes, but, what is incredible is the fact that he begins to leave aside secondary literature. His style begins to resemble more and more with the one of Church Fathers such as Maximus the Confessor. He becomes dense, sometimes extremely hard to comprehend. He quotes almost entirely only from the writings of the Fathers. No philosophical works, no theological works. It is just him and the Fathers.

⁶⁰³Such as N. Hartmann, L. Lavelle, M. Buber or W. Schmidt.

⁶⁰⁴We have mainly quotations from Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. The latter was just being discovered by Stăniloae.

⁶⁰⁵Although one might find here a fine selection from the writings of M. Heidegger, M. Blondel and L. Binswanger.

In the last part of his life, when Stăniloae offered some extremely interesting writings such as *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* (1993) and *God's Immortal Image* (1987), his style bears another modification. Stăniloae begins to leave aside even the many quotes from the Fathers that he used to employ for example in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. He is not giving any longer the quotes from the Fathers, he has already incorporated their style in his own style. He writes like Maximus or Palamas would have written, if they had lived in our times. This is the most intriguing and special feature of Stăniloae's style. It keeps improving. I would say that the monograph on Palamas corresponds to natural knowledge, the second stage in which he wrote *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* and *Jesus Christ: the Restoration of Man* are like knowledge through faith, the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* is like the stage of pure prayer, while the last books of his life are like the vision of the divine light. Stăniloae is not any longer a simple follower of the Fathers. He goes further, developing their concepts in an original manner. His style is poetical and doxological, almost breathing prayer in every page.

Thus, one can see the huge impact that the Fathers had on Stăniloae's theological contribution even when one takes into consideration the style employed in order to present their ideas and the usefulness that these have in the modern period of time.

I will pass on now to the main Palamite themes which Stăniloae analysed and developed in his books and studies. I will stop first at his monograph on Gregory Palamas.⁶⁰⁶ Stăniloae was the first person who discussed at length the hesychastic disputes that took place in the first half of the fourteenth century in Byzantium. However, his Neo-Palamite Synthesis is more or less

⁶⁰⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Life and Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas* [in Rom.] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2006). It was published first at Sibiu in 1938.

nonexistent in this particular book. Unfortunately, Stăniloae took on a polemical approach and was never capable on going beyond this darkened view in order to keep his objectivity. He considered that the dispute that Palamas had with his main adversaries were really clashes between the Eastern doctrine and the Western ‘Scholasticism’, a sad option that had nothing to do with the real events. Stăniloae made another mistake when he simply quoted from the works of Palamas without bothering to give his own comments and views. Although this monograph was the first important study of its kind, twenty years before Meyendorff wrote his own, it is clearly weaker than the latter. It lacks vision, understanding and, above all, objectivity. The only positive thing that one finds in this writing remains the fact that Palamas gets, probably for the first time, the chance to speak in his defence. Stăniloae researched the manuscripts of his works⁶⁰⁷ and tried to give some good and accurate translations of many important passages. Furthermore, although Stăniloae presented the conflict as one between East and West from the doctrinal point of view, which is erroneously, he offered a pretty good presentation of the main chronological events using a breadth of secondary literature of good quality and being able up to some point to keep an objective view at least in this direction. However, he completely missed the point in his opinions about Western ‘scholasticism’ and its relationship with Palamas in the hesychastic disputes.

The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church was a far better approach to Western doctrine and also a better presentation of the Palamite doctrine including some personal comments as well. Stăniloae moderated a bit his polemical tone and was able to present and interpret a good range of Palamite themes such as the relationship between cataphatic and

⁶⁰⁷There was no critical edition of the works of Palamas at that time.

apophatic theology, the steps of apophaticism (negative theology – pure prayer – the vision of the divine light) and, also, the theme of the deification of the human being.

Stăniloae was equally interested in what other important theologians such as Vladimir Lossky had to say in what concerns the apophatic doctrine of the Orthodox Church. He was quite the only scholar that has criticized the approach given to apophaticism by Lossky. Lossky was influenced in his opinions more by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. However, he seemed to be unaware of the contribution given in this direction by the writings of Palamas where the contribution of Pseudo-Dionysius on this particular aspect is enlarged. Lossky considered that apophatism consisted solely of the negative theology and the vision of the divine light. On the basis of the Palamite writings, Stăniloae was able to demonstrate not only that there is another step, namely the one of pure prayer, which stands between the negative theology and the vision of the divine light, but also that the vision of the divine light is not a mere contemplation, but consists in receiving a super-abundant knowledge and it also includes an unending progress. Lossky failed to include in his writings anything about the step of pure prayer and did not expand his analysis on the subject of the vision of the divine light enough in order to reach a similar result. Although Stăniloae kept Lossky in a very high regard, he did not refrain from having a critical approach on his writings.

Furthermore, Stăniloae was able to present a coherent analysis of the rapport between cataphatic and apophatic theology. This aspect represents a very important part of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis. The cataphatic theology is not considered as a limited feature, as a theology of mere language. Cataphatic theology does not represent solely a positive discourse about God, but also the way in which the super-abundant knowledge received during the vision of the divine light

can be transmitted to other people. However, cataphatic theology and negative theology cannot be thought as being separated. They act together, united with each other.

Stăniloae was also able to analyse very well the steps of apophaticism. He gave very deep descriptions of all three steps, namely negative theology, pure prayer and vision of the divine light. He also made very clear, on the basis of the Palamite writings, that each step is not totally separated from the next one. Negative theology moves us towards pure prayer and pure prayer makes us ready for the ecstasy achieved through the help of the Holy Spirit in which we are able to see the divine light.

Another aspect of the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Stăniloae stands in the fact that he speaks about the super-abundant knowledge that the vision of the divine light brings upon the believer and how this super-abundant knowledge can be described up to some point through concepts after the vision has ended. We may speak here of a spiritual circle. The believer starts with cataphatic theology, moves to negative theology, advances to pure prayer, receives the work of the Spirit and, through it, the vision of the divine light with its super-abundant knowledge and, after this has ended, returns to the Church and tries to describe as much as it is possible what he has seen and heard through the help of positive (cataphatic) and negative terms.

The fourth aspect of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis lies in his approach to deification. He describes deification in two distinct manners. First, he considers that deification takes place solely in the last apophatic stage, namely the vision of the divine light. Second, he changes his view and adopts a more balanced approach considering that the process of deification begins with the receiving of Baptism. Although there are three stages of the spiritual life: purification, illumination and deification, somehow deification embraces the first two steps as well, because

in all the stages the believer unites more and more with Christ and this union represents the core essence of deification itself.

Generally speaking, his approach in this work is much improved in relation to the one that he employed in the monograph on Palamas. He gives extensive interpretations on these particular themes, he is always out there for new interpretations, for new insights, but now he terribly lacks the secondary literature on Palamas. He is out there on his own and, sometimes, he is really showing the limits of his style. He keeps repeating the words of Palamas or just seems to lack totally a critical style. His analysis is sometimes not much more than mere repetition.

The *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* represents truly a magnificent work of Neo-Patristic Synthesis. Although Palamas was employed quite rarely here in comparison with the previous writing, we still find some important themes on which Stăniloae embroils different insights. For example, the apophatic scheme that we quoted just above (negative theology – pure prayer – the vision of the divine light) is highly modified. Stăniloae gives more attention to the positive (cataphatic) theology and formulates, on the basis of the writings of Palamas a wider scheme (natural knowledge – knowledge through faith – apophatic knowledge (corresponds to the level of pure prayer) – vision of the divine light). What is different here from the views expressed in *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church* in what concerns the apophatic scheme is the fact that the first steps are modified. Instead of negative theology, we have knowledge through faith. Stăniloae also replaces cataphatic theologic with the concept of natural knowledge. I consider this a very significant difference. Natural knowledge is something given to every human being, no matter to which confession or religion he might belong. By observing the natural laws of the universe and their reasons, we can also grasp something about God. However, we can also go beyond this positive description and believe sincerely that God is above all laws

and concepts. Stăniloae even speaks here about a *pagan apophaticism*. Nonetheless, the second step, the one of the *knowledge through faith* is given only to those who have known God inside a certain tradition. Stăniloae considers that this step began with the choosing of Israel as the nation blessed by God. God is known through faith and a more personal approach is given to His relation with the human being. However, the last two steps only appear with the Incarnation of Christ. This is the place from where Stăniloae will begin to speak about Christ as the source of the divine light and as the Person whom the believer sees as well when experiencing this final vision.

Furthermore, Stăniloae develops his ideas concerning the human being as made in the image of God, the relationship between human beings and angels and the way in which they receive the knowledge of God still on the basis of Palamite texts. However, due to the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Stăniloae considers that angels are still the ones that interpret for us the visions received from God, although this view will be changed in his final writings. Nonetheless, angels are not considered as being superior to the human being as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite argued. Stăniloae draws more from the writings of Palamas and argues that the angels are superior to the human being in what concerns the knowledge of the reasons of creation, but inferior in what concerns the knowledge of the Incarnation of Christ. Furthermore, angels are meant to serve, but humans are also meant to rule, at least in what concerns the universe.

Stăniloae did not employ the writings of Gregory Palamas that much in his most important writing, probably because he wanted to give more space to other Church Fathers such as Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor and Pseudo-Dionysius

the Areopagite. However, he reversed the tide in the last few years of his life, when he not only used more Gregory Palamas, but also started to write in a very Palamite style.

In *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* and *God's Immortal Image* represent two of the last writings completed by Stăniloae with just some time before his death. Here, Stăniloae offers his great insights and takes his Neo-Palamite Synthesis to its final stage. He does not rely too much on quoting Palamite texts in order to support his views. He simply lets his mind wander freely in order to create and to develop all the magnificent subjects that he already employed before. I will begin with the writing entitled *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being*. The scheme of cataphatic and apophatic theology is melded into beautiful descriptions of how the human being becomes luminous in relation to the luminous interpretations of things that his luminous mind discovers. There is a lot of 'light' in this book. The vision of the divine light represents the last stage of union between the human being and Christ.

Christ appears as the divine Person who gives us the vision of the light. In his previous writings one could not note the 'Christological' feature of the vision of divine light. Here, however, Stăniloae considers Christ as the summation of the meaning and purpose of the human being. The deified body of Christ, full of divine light and made transparent through the uncreated energies, is the model of our own deification. Christ is the Logos of Creation who has given the luminous meanings of things. We gather these meanings (natural knowledge), but we realise that, in the end, none is appropriate for its source (negative theology). We begin to participate more in more in Christ while we purify our sins and we reach total silence (pure prayer) and, in the end, we partake of the divine energies. However, Stăniloae brings here another aspect never underlined before: the fact that eternal life, after the Final Judgment, will represent a continuous

progress in our deification. The vision of divine light will increase and our bodies will become fully transparent and luminous just like the one of Christ, but they will not transform into something uncreated. They will remain material, but made transparent through the work of the divine Spirit who unites us more and more with Christ.

In *God's Immortal Image*, Stăniloae develops some of his previous ideas taken from the works of Palamas on the human being as an image of God. However, Stăniloae interprets all those features in a new cosmological view. The human being was created by God using other energies than the ones used for the creation of the cosmos. This is why the human being can be considered as the master of the universe. One more idea that catches one's eye here is that Stăniloae uses several Trinitarian statements of Palamas in order to describe the relations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

There are also four important studies that interpret different ideas of Palamas. Stăniloae was interested in certain areas of the theology of Palamas which had not received enough attention even until recently, like Mariology, Trinitarian statements, or the relationship between nature and grace. The contribution of Gregory Palamas in what concerns Mariology is described by Stăniloae in relation with the contribution given by another significant Byzantine theologian, namely Theophanes of Nicaea. Stăniloae considers that Palamas was the first theologian who described the Mother of God as one that 'mediates' the grace of God to the believers. However, Stăniloae is keen on observing here that this mediation does not mean that the believer does not have a direct relationship with God. The Mother of God solely helps him receive more super-abundant knowledge through her prayers and also offers him sometimes the interpretation of certain visions. The Trinitarian contribution of Gregory Palamas is analyzed in comparison with the ones given by Gregory of Cyprus and Joseph Bryennios and is concentrated exclusively on

the shinning of the Holy Spirit through the Son, a very important doctrinal point of the Orthodox Church. In all his studies, Stăniloae seems to offer a good range of interpretation, although, as I have noted before, his Neo-Palamite Synthesis lacks secondary literature.

In conclusion, I can argue that Stăniloae offered an extremely interesting Neo-Palamite Synthesis, in what concerns the chosen subjects and the range of attention he gave them. However, his lack of criticism and the sometimes excessive use of a doxological style which did not also include a good bibliographic range, had a serious impact on the results. One can feel Palamas almost writing through Stăniloae, but, at the same time, one does not know when Palamas ends and Stăniloae begins. For an ‘Orthodox’ synthesis this is the maximum that one can ask for up to this moment, and yet for an ‘objective’ analysis, this is poor work from many points of view. Only time will decide which direction - if any – shall prevail in the mind of Stăniloae’s future researchers.

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