



Arhim. Asist. Phd. Hrisostom Ciuciu

Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Dumitru Stăniloae" – Iași

FATHER DUMITRU STĂNILOAE OR THE THEOLOGY OF NATURALNESS¹



ABSTRACT: *This study argues that understanding Father Dumitru Stăniloae's theology requires first exploring God's work in his daily life. The central theme of this work revolves around "naturalness", suggesting that Stăniloae's theology is deeply embedded in the immediate, everyday human experience. His theology narrates the story of God's entry into the "normal" aspects of human existence – a love story between man and God, unfolding simply, orderly, and naturally. This path of embracing the "naturalness" of God's work becomes, as Stăniloae emphasizes, the way to elevate human life from its natural limitations to the boundlessness of God. The study follows the Apostle Paul's counsel to "remember our leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrew 13, 7), using Father Stăniloae's life as a lens to approach his theology. The work is structured into four parts: 1. Dumitru Stăniloae as a person; 2. Theology brought closer to people; 3. Knowing God through life's concrete circumstances and 4. From person and communion to attention as closeness and the celebration of love. Through numerous quotations – both testimonies from those who*

¹ This study was first published in French, in: Ciprian Costin APINTILIESEI (ed.), *Saint Dumitru Staniloae, Père Confesseur de l'Eglise moderne*, Éd. Cerf, Paris, 2025.

knew him and excerpts from his theological writings – the study seeks to highlight the authenticity of his thought and invites readers to reinterpret his theology through the lens of the “naturalness” he proposed as the foundation of truth.

KEYWORDS: *Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Theology, naturalness, God’s work, communion, authenticity, christian anthropology*

Dumitru Stăniloae – The Man



A great philosopher, whose name has faded into the shadows of history, once said that no place speaks more of humanity than where God is spoken of. This truth has been quoted, adapted and reiterated countless times, yet it remains unchanged. It is encapsulated in the assertion of the Church Fathers: “God became man so that man might become god”². Thus, theology cannot be confined to *speaking about God* and this is even more evident when considering theologians. To speak of God is to speak of His love for humanity. A theologian, to paraphrase Evagrius Ponticus, is not so much someone who speaks *about* God, but someone who speaks *with* God. Yet one must remember that God cannot be separated from humanity and when this humanity is embodied in a true theologian, this interconnectedness becomes even more obvious.

Volumes could be written about *the man* Dumitru Stăniloae, not because his life was extraordinarily complex or varied – although he endured many trials –, but because he left such a profound impression on those who knew him. His presence filled their lives so deeply that words alone seem powerless to capture it. Nevertheless, we will attempt to approach Father Stăniloae and his life through a few descriptions from those who felt God’s blessing through him.

² This classic formula belongs to St. Athanasios the Great (*De Incarnatione Verbi Dei – On the Incarnation of Christ*, 45, in PG 25, 192), expressed in different words by other Saints of the Church as well, such as St. Gregory of Nyssa (*Catechetical Discourse*, XXV, in PG 45, col. 65).

Testimonies about Father Dumitru Stăniloae

The first testimony comes from Academician Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga – at that time Vice President of the Romanian Academy –, who later embraced monastic life under the name Mother Benedicta. Her account is particularly valuable because it captures her *first impression* – a moment that often encapsulates authenticity:

“With natural emotion, I entered the small house in the courtyard of «Saint George» the Old Church. I was well aware of Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s european reputation [...]. Everything I knew about him bore the great mark of grace, sealing an intellect and spirit powerfully dedicated to vocation and mission. I expected to encounter an imposing figure, a philosopher and professor in surroundings befitting such an intellectual of high stature. But the simplicity of his home stunned me. The interior was modest, rural, furnished with old, worn furniture, faded blankets, beautiful icons, also old, and a vast library. We were greeted warmly by the priest’s wife, Maria (whom he affectionately called «sister Maria»³), dressed simply and modestly. Father Dumitru was at his desk, surrounded by stacks of books. He raised his leonine head, his hair and beard white as snow, and his face illuminated by a gentle smile, full of kindness. His piercing eyes regarded us with love and openness. He began to speak directly, without hesitation, with pleasure, as if delighted to have guests, even though we had interrupted his work [...]. We sat enthralled for about two hours, captivated by this great thinker and teacher, enjoying the light of his mind and the grace of his words. When we left, overwhelmed with admiration, the modesty of his home faded into insignificance. Only later did I fully grasp the profound meaning of his life and work. His actions, steeped in a nobility of behavior and priestly dignity, reminded me of ancient ascetics.



³ Father Stăniloae, in a private conversation, said that he had known only one saint in his life: his wife, Maria!

Father Stăniloae embodied not only the married priest who loved his family with indescribable tenderness, nor merely the professor devoted to his students, nor even just the scholar of immense erudition. His entire life unfolded with physical, moral, and spiritual rigor [...]"⁴.

Only someone as complex and intellectually and spiritually profound as Mother Benedicta – Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga – could identify the greatness of simplicity – a simplicity that concealed a richness of depth, commanding reverence. This *naturalness* carried within it the *supernatural*!

“Even silence with Father Stăniloae was meaningful”, as noted by one of his closest disciples, the painter Horia Paștina, himself a model of humility and spiritual living. Here, in short, is the description made of the Father:



“A model of gentleness and kindness, sensitive and mild; near the Father, you felt at ease, safe, calm, and protected. You felt strengthened. You didn’t want to leave, and you desired to be like him [...]. His eyes were bright and gentle. He had an extraordinary serenity and a transparent gaze, radiating natural light and joy. His eyes reflected a beautiful purity”⁵.

Through these testimonies, we see a portrait of a man who embodied profound spiritual wealth and natural simplicity, lifting those in his presence beyond the limitations of this world.

For a swift transition to the next subsection, it is fitting to include the

⁴ Zoe DUMITRESCU-BUȘULENGA, *Contemporanii mei: portrete*, Ed. Niculescu, București, 2008, pp. 108-109.

⁵ ***, „Și tăcerile erau bogate...”, interviu cu Horia Paștina, în Ștefania COȘULEANU, *Întâlnirea dintre persoană și persoană este lumină: mărturii despre Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae la 30 de ani de la trecerea la Domnul*, Ed. Basilica, București, 2023, pp. 287, 299.

testimony of one of Romania's foremost contemporary intellectuals, mister Costion Nicolescu, a theologian and ethnologist and someone who might be described as “enamored” with Father Stăniloae. These qualities contribute to a unique *portrait* of the Father:

“Father Stăniloae’s theology is an ongoing friendly dialogue with God; ultimately, it is an act of service, a liturgical act. His theology is a way of living in closeness to God. When you meet him, you first encounter the spiritual father, the deeply loving guide, and only then the great theologian – though the two are, of course, inseparable. Like the Church Fathers, he addressed the problems of his time, always grounding himself in the tradition of the Fathers and the Gospel of Christ. Yet he added his own fresh experience, the testimony of his spiritual journey, inviting others to share in it. His contribution to tradition is dynamic, not repetitive. Through Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Romanian theology presents itself to the world and to God in its highest and most authentic form. I spent some of the happiest moments of my life in his «cell» on Cernica Street”⁶.



Theology brought close to people

If our journey of understanding begins with Father Stăniloae’s life, seeking to understand him first as a person in relation to others, we must also listen to what he himself said about his beginnings in theology:

“I sought God in the people of my village, then in books, ideas, and symbols. But this gave me neither peace nor love. One day, I discovered in the writings of the Holy Fathers that it is possible to encounter God directly through prayer. And then I heard Him saying to me: dare to understand that I love you! From that moment, I patiently

⁶ Costion NICOLESCU, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae sau viața ca teologie*, Ed. Meteor, București, 2015, pp. 5-6.

set to work. Gradually, I came to understand that God is near, that He loves me, and that, being filled with His love, my heart opens to others. I understood that love is communion with God and with others. Without this communion, the world is only sorrow, ruin, destruction and massacre. If only the world would choose to live in this love, it would know eternal life [...]”⁷.

This personal testimony is paradoxical and antinomic, as is much of orthodox thought. It situates us simultaneously in the familiar realities of earthly life and in a dimension accessible only to saints. The true beauty of this testimony lies in its pure simplicity, its enchanting ability to convince even those who feel unworthy that God can be near to them too. It breathes a naturalness that dispels discouragement and despair, encouraging everyone to draw closer to God. Through Father Stăniloae’s words, one hears of a God who comes near, who speaks directly and personally, as He spoke to the Father.



Father Stăniloae often returned to this theme when speaking with those close to him. He reminded them to be convinced that God loves them and that, rooted in this certainty, they could achieve anything. He spoke of God’s love with overwhelming confidence. Despite his vast erudition – praised even by Martin Heidegger, who regarded him as the greatest theologian of the 20th century – his speech about God was marked by extraordinary familiarity. This familiarity, born of his intimate relationship with God, encouraged those who listened to seek a similar closeness. Father Stăniloae’s humility created an atmosphere where even the most complex theological topics, such as the Holy Trinity or the Incarnation, became accessible and natural. His theology was both elevated and practical, rooted in relationships – both with God and with others. The

⁷ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, Pr. Marc-Antoine COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită: dialoguri la Cernica*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2007, p. 227.

intimate relationship each person is called to build with God must translate into concrete relationships with others.

Father Stăniloae undoubtedly lived in God, yet his presence never emphasized the vast distance that, in truth, existed between him and others. On the contrary, he exuded a natural humility – calm and authentic – that everyone could sense as their own. He often spoke, as close acquaintances recall, about the Holy Trinity, about the Savior Jesus Christ and about the Mother of God. Always, always, with an ease as natural as breathing. And suddenly, these theologically complex and delicate topics became simple, accessible and familiar. His words conveyed a life-long experience, which he was able to share so effortlessly.

Theology presupposes a personal relationship with God, but also ascetic purification, a relentless search and an unquenchable thirst for prayer as manifestations of longing for God. It is, at its core, a gift – a gift received from God, but one that is meant to be passed on to others. Father Stăniloae had the charisma of igniting in others the flame of prayer that had also burned within him. Other great Fathers also possess this ability, but he had a unique approach: so natural that, within the shelter of his humility, anyone could warm themselves by that flame, anyone could dare to desire it for themselves. No one felt too small or insignificant to receive this gift, because Father Stăniloae made it his priority to convince those he spoke to of one fundamental truth: that God loves them. Sometimes, to emphasize this, he could even be stern. To his daughter Lidia, he once said:



“Do you believe in God? If yes, then make your faith concrete through patience and the conviction that He helps you. If not, then you need to reconsider your way of living. You cannot find yourself

without first clarifying what this way of life entails. That requires effort. Nothing is possible without effort and hope”⁸.

Although Father Stăniloae brought Christ closer to everyone, he never succumbed to the temptation of superficial pietism or a hollow piety stripped of the substance that only personal ascetic effort can provide and safeguard. His discourse about God, though simple and human-centered, always directed people to their ultimate goal: deification, union with God. He did not conceive theology without Christ, without unwavering attention to His Person. Through His boundless love and His descent to us, this attention also extended to the self and to others:



“The deepest definition of Orthodox Theology is this: Theology is the reflection on Christ experienced as present in us, through His uncreated energies, united with our self and uniting us, in a special way, through the Holy Spirit. Its main purpose is to unite people in the most loving unity, in the mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church”⁹.

His theology was both lofty and practical, as it was rooted in human relationships. The intimate relationship each person must cultivate with God was meant to be expressed in relationships with others. The Son of God brought the Father’s love close to us and communicated this love to us. But this love demands to be imitated by each of us, by offering it to others. Christ, however, does not impose this

⁸ Lidia STĂNILOAE, „Tatăl meu, Dumitru Stăniloae”, în vol. *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae în conștiința contemporanilor: mărturii, evocări, amintiri*, Ed. Trinitas, Iași, 2003, p. 71.

⁹ ***, „Ultima convorbire a Părintelui Ioanichie Bălan cu Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae”, în Arhim. Ioanichie BĂLAN (ed.), *Omagiu memoriei Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Ed. Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași, 1994, p. 11.

on us against our will. Instead, by making us partakers of this love, He allows us to taste it. Along with this communion, He grants us the power to offer ourselves to those around us. Thus, the love of God, which descends to us, becomes within us both the source and the strength for us to ascent together toward likeness to God. Father Stăniloae's theology, as encapsulated by bishop Kallistos Ware, is: "Above all, a theology of love and personal communion. The only way to speak about God and humanity is through the language of love. As a God of love, our Christian God is involved and vulnerable, a God who suffers because of our inability to love"¹⁰.

This theology reveals a tension between the sorrow of a world trapped in darkness and the love of God, which draws near to liberate humanity. Truly, we cannot help, but notice the shadow of sadness that settles over a world unable to break free from the dominion of darkness, which prevents it from receiving God as light and as a Brother (*cf. John 1, 5, 10-11*). Nevertheless, Father Stăniloae emphasizes that it is still God's love that draws near to us to dispel this human inability of ours:



"The immutability of God is not rigid or abstract, but dynamic, a steadfastness of love that manifests as a willingness to suffer when needed, to lift human hearts from their hardness and to limit Himself to enter the conditions of His creation. In God, there is a paradoxical union of impassibility and suffering"¹¹.

Father Stăniloae brought Christ closer to everyone, but without falling into the trap of superficial piety. His simple way of speaking about God

¹⁰ † KALLISTOS WARE, Episcop de Diokleia, „Experiența lui Dumnezeu în «Teologia Dogmatică» a Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae”, în vol. *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae în conștiința contemporanilor...*, p. 52.

¹¹ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, Pr. M.A COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită...*, p. 60.

always pointed to the ultimate goal of the union with God, the deification. His theology emphasized the relational nature of love – a love that originates in God, is communicated through Christ and empowers humanity to love others. Thus, God’s descending love becomes the source and power of humanity’s ascent to likeness with God.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s theology is not an arid system frozen in the lofty heights unreachable by the average mind. Instead, he manages to reconcile the tension between two verses from the Johannine Prologue that, while successive, seem to be at odds: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (*John 1, 4-5*).

While his theology may initially seem difficult to *overcome*¹², it does not remain suspended in those heights. Instead, it descends quickly to the level of every individual, as it is a theology of simplicity and naturalness. It is not difficult to speak to a heart created from love and for love, about love. Father Stăniloae’s theology unfolds simply and directly, like life – a life that is the light of men. One only needs to receive it. Father Stăniloae himself did just that: he received it and because he *dared* to do so, he was able to pass it on to others.



Avoiding the *glaciers* of Western scholasticism – which he himself admitted were difficult to escape during his academic formation – Father Stăniloae anchors himself in the naturalness of God’s work. His is a theology of naturalness: a God brought close to every heart, to each person individually. A God who comes near, so near that He becomes a participant in the daily life of every human being – so naturally and delicately that one may find it difficult to notice Him. But once the obstacle of routine and inattentiveness is removed, the Incarnation of the Son of God becomes clear – so clear that those who delve into this theology discover unexpected subtleties, which they now perceive in the most natural way.

¹² Here (*John 1, 5*), the verb is *κατέλαβεν*, verb indicativ aorist active 3rd singular, from *καταλαμβάνω*, which means „to overcome”, but also „to comprehend”.

Through his theology, which reveals God as present in the naturalness of every human being, giving them the courage to feel loved and embraced by a personal God, Father Stăniloae uncovers the eternal youth of Orthodox Theology.

Similarly, Father Stăniloae shapes the image of the Church as a body of which we are now a part – not merely something we hope to join someday. If we understand and embrace this, it becomes our responsibility to share this understanding with the other members of the body. The Church is here and now; it is the means through which God pours His love into our hearts. It is both a privilege and a duty to respond to a God who is always present in and among us:

“The Church is a divine-human environment, which is why Orthodoxy is always relevant. We must help people find unity with others under the outpouring of God’s energies, in the shared sense of His presence among them. [...] God is transcendent within us; He is other than us, but He is among us. He loves us, gives Himself to us and works within us, if we allow it. The entire Liturgy is full of blessings and grace; at every moment, the faithful receive blessings and grace, which they carry into their lives. These blessings help them live with the awareness that God is with them – a God who is love, Trinity, who pours out this love upon humanity. The presence of God, the intimate presence of God, the continuous outpouring of God, His power and the love of personal encounter are all characteristics of Christian life”¹³.



What is even more remarkable is how Father Stăniloae makes the concept of deification – still stumbling many so-called *theologians* – accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or level of understanding. For him, union with God is real and possible for

¹³ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, Pr. M.A COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită...*, pp. 47-48.

humanity. He repeats this leitmotif throughout his works: deification begins within us. Father Stăniloae seems to say simply: deification is about making space for God within and among us. It is an ascent toward perfection, but not an isolated, individual perfection. It is a perfection determined by relationships:

“Deification is not something physical, but rather a greater purity of the human person in its relationship with God and others. Deification means becoming godlike through participation, being full of goodness, humility, and a willingness to give oneself to others, assuming the responsibility that God took upon Himself for us in Christ. It is a very concrete deification, entirely corresponding to human needs. It does not separate man, so that one might say: ‘He is a saint and has nothing to do with us’. Instead, it allows man to share a readiness to give himself to others, a delicacy toward others, an understanding, and a capacity to help others. It leads to a daily increasing humanization and an inability to tolerate situations where people are treated with less dignity or respect than others”¹⁴.



Knowing God from the concrete circumstances of life

For Father Stăniloae, his first and most important teacher was the Romanian people. The good upbringing he received laid the foundation for his personality. It is no surprise that, as a child, when he deeply pondered the search for and knowledge of God, his gaze first turned toward the people of his village. “I first sought God in the people of my village”, he would later confess.

His gratitude to those who helped shape him as a person became the primary reason for his love for the Romanian people. Few have

¹⁴ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, Pr. M.A COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită...*, pp. 48-49.

managed to love and understand this people as profoundly and as elevated and noble as he did:

“The Romanian people live human existence elevated to the higher plane of genuine spiritualization, thirsting for eternity, and marked by a delicate sensitivity in relationships with others. It is a spirituality of great refinement – a true spirituality, never fully articulated, but deeply lived. It cannot be separated from the inexhaustible experience of the mystery of one’s own person and that of others, united in the supreme and eternal mystery that unites them and from which they derive their existence. This mystery keeps them in a continuous humility and thirst for more, a longing that cannot be explained solely by their relationships with one another, given their simultaneous experience of the inability to fully satisfy this thirst for plenitude”¹⁵.

From this spirituality of his people, Father Stăniloae developed his conception of “knowing God from the concrete circumstances of life”, which became his unique contribution to Orthodox Dogmatic Theology. This knowledge of God reminds us of the psalmist’s words: “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (*Psalms* 46, 10). It is a knowledge that emerges from the naturalness around us, from the everyday:



“Knowing God through the concrete circumstances of life is knowledge that guides each person on their own path to perfection. It is a vibrant, pressing, painful, and joyful knowledge that awakens responsibility within us and warms our prayer, drawing it closer to God. Through it, our being experiences God’s goodness, power, justice, wisdom, and attentive care for us, as well as His special plan

¹⁵ Arhim. Ioanichie BĂLAN, *Ne vorbește Părintele Stăniloae*, Ed. Mănăstirii Sihăstria, Vânători-Neamț, 1993, p. 188.

for us. In this relationship, the human person lives in an intimate relationship with God as the supreme Person. In this knowledge, I no longer see God solely as the Creator and Sustainer of all or as the Mystery revealed to all, filling them with shared joys, but I know Him in His special care for me, in His intimate relationship with me, in the history of His dealings with me, in His plan to lead me personally to the common goal, through the pains, demands, and specific directions He addresses to me in life. [...] In all things, God descends to us and makes Himself known. This very descent reveals His love, surpassing all earthly love. All the circumstances and people through whom God speaks to us are living, transparent reflections of Him. The simple God descends to us in a multitude of forms and situations – in fact, in all the situations and forms of our lives”¹⁶.



God is Person, and by drawing near to the human person, He accords humanity great dignity. In Father Stăniloae’s theology, everything related to humanity, its life, and its concrete circumstances takes on capital importance. God desires that humans adopt the same attitude toward others and the most effective and accessible way to achieve this is through prayer. For Father Stăniloae, prayer assumes an integrative role – perhaps due to his vision of God as actively present in our lives – combining both, word and action, echoing the words of St. John the Evangelist: “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but indeed and in truth” (1 John 3, 18):

“The Christian who prays and helps others knows God more deeply and intimately than the speculative theologian, for God becomes transparent to the conscience through prayer and through the neighbor, in the help we offer them. Thus, the true theologian must also be a person of prayer and loving action. The loving, active presence

¹⁶ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, în coll. *Opere Complete*, 10, Ed. Basilica, București, 2018, pp. 144, 148.

of God in all the circumstances and relationships of human life reveals not only God as a living mystery but also humanity and the world as profound mysteries. This active presence of God in humanity and the world illuminates their inexpressible value and unfathomable depth. Humanity must realize itself in relationship with God, becoming ever more like God and delving ever more deeply and mysteriously into Him”¹⁷.

From person and communion to attention as proximity and the celebration of love

Father Stăniloae summarized this vision in a remarkable confession:

“If I were to highlight what I have considered most important in my concerns, it would be the value God places on each human person and their eternal happiness in the bond of love with Christ, His Son, and between one another. God is not concerned with His own honor in relation to humanity, nor with subjugating them to Himself, but with the happiness they can achieve by being convinced of His love, which sent His Son to become human and to accept death in order to overcome it; with their desire to gain true and eternal joy, which comes from imitating His love, even to the point of sacrificing themselves for one another. Person and communion are the two terms in which I have sought to develop what I consider to be, in its depth, Orthodox Theology”¹⁸.



Despite the difficulty and mystery surrounding the Holy Trinity, Father Stăniloae managed to make its essence accessible to everyone.

¹⁷ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, Pr. M.A COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită...*, p. 54.

¹⁸ ***, „Ultima convorbire a Părintelui Ioanichie Bălan cu Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae”, p. 12.

By avoiding the rationalism of scholastic theology – which, relying solely on logical reasoning, often failed to reveal the Persons of the Holy Trinity – he presented God in His relational nature. Drawing from the theology of the Name inherited from St. Gregory the Theologian, Father Stăniloae skillfully evaded the traps of scholasticism while illuminating the relational aspect of God. His famous expression – “The Holy Trinity is the structure of supreme love” – served as a bridge for the mind to grasp this profound understanding:



“I sought to bring Dogmatics out of the narrow and rigid framework of brief scholastic definitions, which still predominate in orthodox dogmatic manuals, and instead proposed a rich, living content modeled after the Fathers. I aimed to emphasize the spiritual depth and meaning inherent in Dogmatics. I sought to show that no spiritual fruit can be gained in defining the doctrine of the Holy Trinity unless we understand that it is the structure of supreme love; nor in defining the two natures in the Person of Christ unless we highlight the love the Holy Trinity reveals in this way and the filial love for the Father to which the Son raises us by assuming our humanity. My goal in Dogmatics was to present the living God – who comes to us and works in us – not closed rational definitions”¹⁹.

A truly remarkable aspect of Father Stăniloae’s theology is that, starting from this understanding of the Holy Trinity, he reveals humanity itself as a structure of God’s love within the Trinity. The work of the Holy Trinity is, and can only be, to reunite humanity with Himself through this reciprocally shared love. This is the work (and at the same time the gift) of God toward humanity: “You do not know what you are doing. But do as you will. In any case, I am

¹⁹ F. STRAZZARI, L. PREZZI, „Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae: o teologie filocalică. Interviu cu Părintele D. Stăniloae”, în: *Mitropolia Ardealului*, XXXV (1990), p. 35.

there, waiting for you because I, your Creator and Lord, love you. I will wait for you until the end of time. When you are ready, I will offer Myself to you forever”²⁰.

Following the Church Fathers, Father Stăniloae constantly emphasizes the characteristic of love that is *freedom*. This freedom, gifted to humanity, elevates it above time and transforms the everyday into something transcendent. It is a freedom that does not coerce, yet it avoids laxity. It is a freedom born from God’s love, a reflection of the divine image in which humanity was created. This freedom unites, in a warm yet responsible manner, God’s calling and humanity’s response. In Father Stăniloae’s theology, the human response to God’s call transforms into a reciprocal calling through prayer. Humanity responds to God’s call with its own call. God and humanity begin to call to one another in prayer. Until then, He waits. This image becomes even more powerful when placed alongside Christ’s words in *The Book of Revelation*: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (*Revelation 3, 20*).



Instead of conclusions: attention and love in the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae

At one point, I reflected on a single word that, without claiming to encapsulate Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s theology entirely, might hint at its profound meanings – a sort of hermeneutic key. I settled on two inseparable words: *love* and *attention*. Attention is an essential aspect that both stems from and sustains love, an indispensable element for any form of love, beginning with God’s love: “A God without love, without eternal attention toward someone, is not

²⁰ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, Pr. M.A COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită...*, p. 81.

God!”²¹. Thus, attention comes first – an attention that must not only be focused, but also ready to respond, a willingness cultivated in this “School of Life”, which is, in essence, a “School of Love”. God’s love becomes our love – a love that responds to Him and calls out to others. In this way, the daily circumstances we encounter, which we receive as gestures of God’s love for us, transform us. Through this, He, loving *in* us and becoming the soul of our soul, helps us love *as* He does. This is the transformation that, according to Father Stăniloae, takes place within us.

Knowing God through the concrete circumstances of life is the path by which, opening our hearts to Him through attention, we allow ourselves to be loved by Him. This helps us better understand the Apostle Paul’s words: “If anyone thinks he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him” (*1 Corinthians* 8, 2-3).



Thus, Father Stăniloae speaks of how knowledge of God arises not from theoretical speculation, but from living experience. It is the way we allow ourselves to be transformed by our relationship with God, who loves us and has given us this love so that we might pass it on to others. It becomes abundantly clear that Father Stăniloae’s theology flows from his attention to God’s work, to a God he came to believe loves him with a love that defies analysis or measurement and does not fit into the merit/justice framework. This is a love that must simply be received and embraced – not a love to be earned, but one to begin with. It is the foundation of all our effort, not its goal.

Through his theology, Father Stăniloae invites us all to meet one another. This invitation, as simple and humble as it is serious, calls each of us to adopt a beautiful and gentle attitude toward God, toward others, and toward ourselves. We are invited to an attentive love, and because it is about love, we must feel the duty to

²¹ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, Pr. M.A COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită...*, p. 70.

respond authentically and personally. Although this invitation might not initially seem urgent, the call of Father Stăniloae's theology is one marked by urgency – an urgency reflective of the divine image imprinted within us, an urgency arising from our identity as *logos* in the image of the Logos:

“Every circumstance is a call from God, an invitation that demands a response. Every person we meet is a word of God. Others speak to us. They are icons of the Word of God, in the image of the Hypostatic Word of God. They are icons that speak, that speak to us as the Word of God Himself speaks, as Christ speaks. Christ has given us others; they call us, and we must respond to them. We are beings who must respond to God through others. We are in constant dialogue with God. God is in dialogue with us, through nature, through others, through Jesus Christ and through ourselves. We must respond. And this binds us together: I cannot live without responding to the other, without calling out to the other; and the other cannot live without calling out to me, without responding to me. We are connected through the word. The word is not merely an idea that moves from me to the other. We are all bound together by the necessity of speaking together. Here, a profound and mysterious connection is established through words”²².



Today, perhaps more than ever, we are called to discover God in His unique way of presenting Himself – in the form of a servant, a form that draws us close rather than instilling fear. In His work toward each of us, we have the power to recognize His presence in our lives.

If we read Father Stăniloae's theology as we ought, we will understand that God loves us and that we can now see this love coming near to us. We also understand the urgency of responding to such

²² Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, Pr. M.A COSTA DE BEAUREGARD, *Mica dogmatică vorbită...*, p. 38.

love – a response that begins by situating ourselves in the naturalness of God’s work. Father Stăniloae teaches that God’s love is not distant or inaccessible, but close and transformative. This love invites us into dialogue, into a reciprocal exchange that starts with God calling us and us daring to respond in love and attention. Through this response, we step into the natural flow of God’s transformative work in us and in the world.

The theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is a profound yet accessible synthesis of love, attention and communion, rooted in the naturalness of God’s presence in human life. Through his reflections, Father Stăniloae reveals a God who draws near to humanity, inviting us into a transformative relationship characterized by freedom, love, and mutual dialogue. His theology emphasizes that knowing God is not a theoretical endeavor, but a lived experience, born out of prayer, service and attentiveness to the divine in the everyday. By situating the Holy Trinity as the structure of supreme love, he bridges the infinite and the personal, encouraging everyone to embrace God’s love as a starting point for personal growth and communal responsibility. His invitation to live attentively, lovingly, and authentically in response to God’s call resonates as both, a spiritual challenge and a promise of eternal communion.



Rezumat: *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae sau despre teologia firescului*

Am socotit că pe Părintele Stăniloae nu-l poți cunoaște fără să cauți mai întâi lucrarea lui Dumnezeu în viața sa, motiv pentru care lucrarea de față se vrea a fi o pledoarie pentru recitirea teologiei părintelui Stăniloae prin filtrul umanului, vieții lui cotidiene; ajungi mai repede și mai firesc la teologia părintelui prin viața lui. De fapt, în jurul acestui termen – firesc – se construiește întregă această lucrare. Teologia lui este, de fapt, „povestea” intrării lui Dumnezeu în firescul omului, în viața sa cotidiană, o poveste de iubire dintre om și Dumnezeu lui; o poveste care se desfășoară obișnuit, așezat și normal și pe care fiecare om și-o zidește împreună cu Dumnezeu, în modul cel mai firesc cu putință. A te așeza în „firescul” lucrării lui Dumnezeu – iată calea prin care părintele Stăniloae ne spune că ne putem ridica viața noastră din limitele ei „firești” în nelimitarea lui

Dumnezeu. Iar dacă vrei să găsești un teolog, caută mai întâi să vezi cum îți duce viața, după cum spune și Sf. Apostol Pavel: „Aduceți-vă aminte de mai-marii voștri, care v-au grăit vouă cuvântul lui Dumnezeu; priviți cu luare aminte cum și-au încheiat viața și urmați-le credința” (*Evrei 13, 7*). De aceea, înainte de a încerca să intrăm în teologia părintelui Stăniloae, vom schița un portret al părintelui, așa cum l-au cunoscut câțiva dintre cei apropiați ai săi. Astfel, lucrarea va fi împărțită în patru părți, după cum urmează: 1. Omul Dumitru Stăniloae; 2. Teologia adusă aproape de oameni; 3. Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu din împrejurările concrete ale vieții și 4. De la persoană și comuniune, la atenție ca apropiere și celebrare a iubirii. Am socotit iarăși de cuviință să presar lucrarea cu multe citate, multe dintre ele fiind mărturii ale celor care l-au cunoscut pe părintele Stăniloae, iar celelalte fiind fragmente din teologia sa. Am făcut aceasta din două motive. Primul ar fi acela că doar astfel putem pune în evidență autenticitatea, iar cel de-al doilea este dat de îndemnul nostru (prin lucrarea de față) de a încerca o „citire” puțin diferită a teologiei părintelui Stăniloae, din perspectiva „firescului”, pe care aceasta ni-l propune ca stâlp și temelie a adevărului.

