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THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF DUMITRU
STĂNILOAE

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Abstract

This article presents the anthropological concept of Dumitru Stăniloae, priest, professor of theology and 20th century Romanian thinker, who delineated a new scientific direction on man and the world, by his iconic, patristic visions, starting from the Greek philosophy and having at its heart the status of the human being and nature. The anthropology of Professor Dumitru Stăniloae represents a rediscovery of the patristic theology but especially a pondering on the dialogue between religion and science cultivated in the academic area today. The core of Dumitru Stăniloae's thinking is man as image of the divinity, for this reason, his anthropology is full of spiritual meaning. The progress (evolution) in man's relation with nature is an authentic knowing rationality, the same with the progress in the knowledge of the sense of human existence, simultaneous to deification or transfiguration. The main anthropological ideas this study relies on show that man is a personal being opened to the communion with God, with the world and with his fellows, and the universe created by God represents a very artistic work of love and especially a reality of language, communication and knowledge.

Keywords: Christian; anthropology; Dumitru Stăniloae; man; world; knowledge;

INTRODUCTION

Professor Dumitru Stăniloae by his work has achieved a contemporary patristic synthesis, in which the teaching of faith lived on the liturgical-ecclesial level and the mystic experience intertwine and support each other, so his thinking is centred on the active level of the spiritual life. Stăniloae's approach of anthropology from the perspective of patristics by the works: *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului / Jesus Christ or Man's Restoration* (1943) and *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu / The Immortal Image of God* (1986), was correlated to the mystic experience rendered in the book *Ascetica și mistica ortodoxă / Orthodox Asceticism and Mysticism* (1993), but without giving up on the dogmatic dimension included

in the three volumes of *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă / Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (1978, 1981), all having a direct applicability in the cultic, liturgical area of Christianity, defined in the book *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia ortodoxă / Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Spirituality* (1986).

In the general sense, anthropology as a science about man includes the information related to the human essence, to the human phenomenon, to its relation with the whole Universe and with God. Man is seen from the perspective of the divine reflection, in which are active the forces of the transcendental reality. Anthropology, according to the Christian teaching, presents the person, the human specific and human nature.

2. CONTEMPORARY PATRISTICS - THE THINKING SPECIFIC OF STĂNILOAE'S ANTHROPOLOGY

The theology specific of Dumitru Stăniloae is amplified in point of sense and degree by the implications of the person in the inexhaustible love discovered in the framework of the community, in the grace-filled relation with God, with the fellows but also with the world. And if we refer this relation to the transcendental realities, from which any Christian thought must naturally start, then we understand that Stăniloae is the promoter of a gnoseological optimism involving transfiguration, man's deification and the sanctification of creation.

The discipline Christian Anthropology takes into consideration not just the revelation accomplished by Christ, but also the teaching on man's genesis, because man represents the microcosm comprising in itself all the components of the Universe, and the teaching on responsibility and ransom. As fundamental elements of the Orthodox anthropology's structure, one can highlight three concepts: the divine origin and ontological unity of humanity; the human person as unique subject, created in God's image to acquire full resemblance with God; the full restoration of the human nature and the recapitulation of the human specific in and by Jesus Christ. In the Orthodox theology, the anthropological problem has been in the permanent attention of the dogmatic supporters of great professional value. The methodology applied in anthropological research by the great Romanian thinker is initiated by the exegesis concerning the divine and human person passed through the filter of tradition and patristics correlated to modern philosophy (Augustine Casiday, 2005, 368).

In the Christian anthropological conception, man is a being created especially by God, who has the conscience of personal value and of time, and the time and the space limited by the materiality in which man lives open the full relations to which man is called in the eternity. Man lives in time, in the world, like a traveller, having the conscience of eternity and advancing to it, because the implications of the divine image that man carries (Genesis 1:26-27) are correlative with the likeness with God, which means pre-tasting and advancing through time into the state of eternity.

The image with its theological and anthropological implications is the foundation of the person as ontological given, reflecting the dignity, kingly condition and personal value of man, and his role, namely that of being apt for the special relation with God. Oliver Clement in his work *Questions sur l'homme / Questions on Man*, goes over the formal limits of those who approached this topic often, and advances towards the unavoidable psychological area in which man struggles to understand his ontological meanings and senses. The drama we are often struggling in, willy-nilly, is rendered by the French thinker as follows: "*The mankind we are observing and which we ourselves are part of, seems to be a broken mankind. Broken is, first of all, in each one of us, our «self», which is a theatre of shadows, of neurotic characters that we do not control but which rather control us. Our faculties are also broken and their hierarchy reversed...*" (Olivier Clement, 1972, 12).

In the modern anthropological conceptions, man is defined rather from a biological, psychological and sociological perspective, yet this is limitative and reductive to biological elements. The anthropology in the work of Professor Dumitru Stăniloae is much vaster, being centred around the concept of person and personality. The theological concept of person supposes liberty in relation to nature, alterity. The person is free from any determination. The human hypostasis cannot accomplish itself in perfection by its own will, in order to renounce itself and offer itself to other persons. The patristic theology affirms that each person is revealed by enhypostatizing and, for this reason, the hypostasis involves the person, which

it concretely relates to nature, but also to its properties, to relationality, to a certain state, showing how one is. Although identical from a Christian perspective, between person and hypostasis there is no perfect synonymy, yet one must mention that the person is the very hypostasis of the being. Stăniloae sees the pluri-hypostatic state of the human nature, which he defines wonderfully: *“The hypostasis can be understood neither emptied of nature, nor outside relation. Hypostases are nature in the concrete existence and in the form of the relations among them, nature in the dynamics of the internal relations realized under its pluri-hypostatic form. The hypostasis is an I referred to a you of the same nature. Only in this way can one experience endless relations of knowledge and of responsibility. And only in this way does nature really exist. Only under the form of hypostasis is the human nature also able to realize the endless relation with an absolute You. The human hypostasis, with the really subsistent human nature cannot truly develop without the relation with the personal absolute, without the responsibility to it.”*(Dumitru Stăniloae,1978,424). Stăniloae’s patristic thinking actually represents the theological synthesis anchored in the optimistic-realistic conception specific of the Orthodoxy, in which the transcendental, scholastic and abstract intellectualism specific of the western thinking is not an argumentative force because the basis is the living revelation expressed by the mystical and hesychastic experience realized in the liturgical-community domain of the ecclesial area.

So, the new conception of Stăniloae abundantly supported with patristic texts, puts into dialogue the traditionalist Orthodox position, with the modern western approaches based on the human forces (humanism, enlightenment), but in the centre of the approach is the deified human being, maximally represented by Christ, the Man-God. Starting from Christ and going through the ecclesial and mystical space, Stăniloae defines man and the world, with fineness and delicacy revealed in a concentric spiral of knowledge.

3. MAN AS A PERSON OPEN TO COMMUNION

Regarding the world genesis and the connections between man and his fellows and the surrounding nature in which man lives, Stăniloae highlights that the human person cannot be conceived outside the cosmic nature, that the cosmic nature is the same for all the human hypostases, although each person understands it in a certain vision, lives it in a personal manner and complementarily with the others. The productive activity, coordinated based on reason, represents a main quality that determines the existence of communion among men. The union among people, hypostases/persons is the natural result of their common nature, which is open to communion, without which *“the persons would remain closed in their own identity, which would turn into ipseity, and so they would find themselves isolated in their alterity”*(Jean Claude-Larchet, 2013, 356). The ontology of the human nature is not related to the concept of person, which does not depend on the biological nature but on the relation with the divinity. The holistic anthropological approach of Father Stăniloae allowed a conceptual delimitation of the person related to nature, but as interdependent and at the same time distinct reality, with no confounding. For this reason, the person is *“a way of being of nature”* (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1993,111).

In an ontological sense, with no person or hypostasis there is no being or nature and viceversa, with the mention that the person or hypostasis is the reason of existence of the being. Mankind is not since always (since eternity), because if it were so it would not evolve towards an absolute. Overcoming the monologue and moving on to a dialogue *“man holds a superior position in relation to the world by the conscience by which he discovers its senses and by his freedom to organize it in different ways, often alternative. The world has man as his goal, but not by itself, but by a subject that treats man as a subject, using it, above it”*(Dumitru Stăniloae, 1943, 29). The world was created for man, so that he may use it in relation to God, in order to bring to perfection his relations with the divinity. For man, the world is an environment of love, but the soul is satisfied to the full only by the communion with the personal God. Stăniloae shows that the structure of the physical nature and that of the human nature offers a space always open for exerting human freedom. The human person understands again and again new alternatives of the things not just by reason, by new combinations and uses of them, but also by the thoughts and sensations that are always new, realized in his time by the contact with them and by the

permanent and modified connections. The communication and expression are highlighted as concretized by a continually enriched language, to which man is called.

Concretely, the holistic conception developed by Stăniloae, which defines man as a person is opposed to the individualist philosophies seeing man as an autonomous, self-sufficient individual, limited by everything that surrounds him, the self-sufficiency specific of postmodernism. Man as a person is intention to another, the self always has in view a you, the natural impulse of communion and the intentionality to the other is part of the human nature and is personalized by the hypostasis of each one in turn. The person appears, therefore, as tension towards communion, its reason has an ALTER EGO character, from which necessarily spring: 1. the relation that I have with a you and with a he, and 2. the relation I with I, as potential dual nature, duality that appears as complete and incomplete, and also the relation with an inner YOU – namely GOD. All these are generated by the quality of God's image in man. Thus, ontology is founded on the divine image, an iconic, not biological, one, because man has been created out of nothing, by God's breath of life, according to the divine model and called to attain the likeness of his Prototype. The feature of man's immortality remains until he becomes willing to know, and even more, until he lives in his conscience the divine presence, because he has something new to know and research: *"until he has reached a conscience of the connection with the infinite God, not in the monotony of an essence submitted to the same laws, but in connection with the One Who makes Himself known in ever newer depths."*(Dumitru Stăniloae,1987,10). The superiority of man to the nature of the things surrounding him is highlighted by Father Stăniloae by the consideration that man is in a continual dialogue with the divinity that created this nature of things. The relation of man with God continually determines different alternatives of the relation between man and the world. Man understands and succeeds by developing his conscience to apply responsibility making true the best connections with the world for the spiritual growth of his own self and of his fellows. In relation to nature, man brings solutions corresponding to the given moment, sometimes even unpredictable, getting to introduce a certain liberty available to him in nature.

4. THE WORLD, AN ACT OF LOVE - REALITY OF COMMUNION & KNOWLEDGE

God's creation is not just a simple world, that the Creator has brought into being, but represents the expression of an overflowing love, in Stăniloae's work. The world is created by God to mirror in it God's brilliance. It is a work of the divine love because "God is love" (1 John 4:8). God shows himself in the world as intentional manifestation, in full agreement with His liberty. His existence is free of any external or internal need, because *"He is the One Who Is", being perfect communion and love, overflowing outside His Being by the creation of the world and of the rational beings. The world as God's act is an environment of communion and knowledge, is a language communicating and expressing God's will and love. "Truly wonderful and sublime is the world with everything that is included in it. It is true, God did not create it to make Himself perfect, to make His internal life perfect, which otherwise would not have been perfect without the world; the creation was not a natural necessity for His Divine Being... The world is not an accident... This whole world is, according to its content, eternal"* (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1992, 27). The created world is a very artistic product, it reflects the entire divine wisdom, harmony and love in which all the things created support one another and all of them are supported in God, in all of them burning the reason of the Trinitarian love, manifested in communion, in coexistence. For this reason, matter is shapable energy, a concretization of God's will, it is the result of God's personal work, and remains at work as reason - logos - by which the divine work is shown. Matter cannot be understood without the Spirit that organized it and mysteriously pervades it, namely the Logos. Any created thing has its "logos" springing from the divine Logos, which gives the created world not just its order, but also its ontological reality. In essence, the world, the whole creation represents the means by which the Creator communicates with man, who is its material and spiritual axis.

The world appears for man as a means of spiritual growth realized by the relation of communion and love, the world does not represent for man an asset in itself to which he needs to stop, but "the environment" in which God is present, for man to be able to contemplate Him immediately. The divine

reason overflows outside His Being, creating the world out of love, because the perfect reason, if it stays in itself, cannot manifest its love, and if it cannot do this, that means it is not perfect. Love is a quality having to do with the person, and a person is turned to good value in relation to another conscious and free person, to whom he shares his whole being living in symphony without them being melted into one. Dumitru Stăniloae presents, in the description of the world as God's work, the factors actualizing the multiple and alternative virtualities as follows: (1) the union between body and soul; (2) the body is inner to the spirit (non-objectiveness of the body); (3) modellability of the images of the divine reasons, as realization of the world, or as their being brought into existence; (4) the world as work of the divine freedom. According to the Christian doctrine, with no soul, man would be limited to the automatic repetition of some monotonous cycles, narrower or larger, being considered that only the soul is able, by its liberty, to go beyond repetition and implicitly beyond nature, and that work, as feature of the human being (rational being), has an overwhelming influence in the transformation of nature. In man's body, reason gets to retain a well-delineated complexity, a situation determined by the power and richness of the soul that is in him. Simultaneously, the reason of the soul is actualized in the work on the body, in a great subtlety and fineness. The act of modelling of the divine images corresponds with the creation of the world ex nihilo, which is why this action permanently preserves in its essence this dependence on the supreme creating subject. Moreover, it is mentioned that *"man puts on the world the seal of the spiritual level of each step of his ascent, or the world is lifted in man to his spiritual level"* (Dumitru Stăniloae, 1978, 370).

The world has a contingent structure, and this assures the presence of human freedom in its framework and it can be coordinated towards increasingly uplifting states, a situation outlining the work of a free creator. Since the moment of his creation by God, man is the being characterized by reason, will and liberty, by responsibility for his acts; he is a person that, by his activity and communion with God, with his fellows and with the world, acquires personality. The total personality in Christianity is Jesus Christ, and, according to His model, all the saints. If in the human person is concretized the ontology of nature, of the species man is part of, in the personality of the saints is comprised man's activity in time, seen as state of communion and love that gives it the dimension of eternity. Man's eternity is always involved in his contrasting, omnilateral unity, in the infinite mobilization to performance and perfection. The human being is, according to the opinion of Father Stăniloae, a unity that *"that can become a unity of contraries, out of which some fight to dominate or even to exclude the others... man is realized integrally by continually going beyond his former achievements horizontally towards the world and his fellows and vertically towards the personal Absolute, for which he thirsts"*(Dumitru Stăniloae, 1978, 37). True knowledge starts with self knowledge and attains the likeness of God by virtue and good deeds, because man will be like his Creator not by wearing gold-embroidered clothes, but doing good deeds, collaborating with Grace freely, never losing any opportunity, due to the rational power planted intrinsically in the soul, in the image, which makes deification possible, as a state in which the image of the true man is shown - the gnostic - the Saint.

Man is a personal and unique subject, created in God's image to achieve God's likeness (Genesis 1: 26). The quality of image is man's personal centre, his natural given by which the relation of man with God is realized. In man's relation with God, aware and voluntary, is impressed the image of the divinity in the humanity. Man's likeness with God makes it tend to the absolute. The certainty of this relation is presented by Dumitru Stăniloae in a visionary framework, as follows: *"deification is man's perfection by God, given that there is no other way for him to reach perfection. Sin has belittled and enchained, as in a bad magic, the powers of the human nature. We do not know exactly in all their magnitude the powers our nature is capable of. Envy, worries, hate paralyze its impetus. The love we have for someone or that someone has for us, the trust that we are given or that we give whenever we get out of our sinful selfishness, unchain in us powers that we intuit, just as the kiss of Prince Charming awakens Sleeping Beauty from the paralysis of an unnatural sleep"*(Dumitru Stăniloae, 1993, 337). Communion can develop the image into likeness, can reveal the person but especially the personality. Authentic communion is developed and made perfect by means of an attention focused on the other fellows (people) and on the world as realization of the divinity. Man's tendency to encompass perfection is truly

accomplished *“only when desired as ontological answer to his demand, therefore admitting his need to give himself and to demand from another in answer his devotion”*(Dumitru Stăniloae, 1987, 106).

The development of the human nature (its perfection) depends on the variety and diversity of the hypostases by which man is substantiated. The endless (infinite) evolution of man is amplified by knowledge and responsibility, in his relations with an infinitely varied definition has maintained and multiplied the hypostases of human nature. Liberty is paradoxical for the human being, it helps man look for and find perfection, and, by this, God, or inversely, it can also drive man away from his Creator. *“The human person is the highest creation, only because God puts in it the possibility of love and of refusing it”*(Dumitru Stăniloae, 1978, 414). Father Stăniloae concludes in his vast anthropological characterization that the human being represents the hypostasis of the whole Cosmos, man participating to its knowledge, development and perfection. The Earth finds its hypostatic personality in man and by man. All the world follows the human being, because it is meant for man (the Anthroposphere).

Man has the possibility to check himself as a master of the Universe in reality, each person can be in all the space and all the time after himself, possessing all the Universe as a body of his. *“Maybe in this power given to man, namely of being present in a certain degree in the entire space, is anticipated a spiritual presence of man in the entire universe, in the future life”*(Dumitru Stăniloae, 1987,1).The deification that man tends to by the nature of reason and of the spirit that he possesses brings him from the created things to the uncreated ones, on the level of the divine energies.

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of holistic anthropology promoted by Dumitru Stăniloae is a mainly personalistic one, yet elucidated by means of Christ, God’s Son, Who by the embodiment has a person made up of the divine nature and of the human nature. Seen from this perspective, man as a person is one that has to take into account the rationality of his own nature but also of the world, has to maintain his own will and liberty in the Creator’s (God’s) good will, Who attracts and maintains him in love and communion, all these being in fact implications of the divine image in the human nature.

The icon of the anthropological concept specific of Stăniloae’s thinking, which fully defines the notion of person of man with the mission to become personality (state of holiness), is summed up in the following theological, logical and philosophical arguments:

- man is a personal-rational being meant for deification;
- man is a personal being open to the communion with God, the world and his fellows;
- man is generally a unitary yet also extremely complex being;
- man is like one that cannot be comprehended;
- man can increase in the knowledge that his self is an inexhaustible mystery, determined by an absolute mystery;
- man has the quality of hypostasis, of person made up of spirit and body, and is able to know the world and God;
- man has an existence uniting in it two contrasts: mystery and sense;
- man gives birth in himself to uniqueness as a person, but also to community of nature with others;
- man, giving himself to another, has the power to remain unmistakable in himself;
- man has as eternal importance in his person the uniqueness, but also the specific communication imposed by his conscience;
- man has the mark of a transitory and a personality of the moments lived and acts achieved;
- man represents the unity between creature and transitory (passive and dynamic);
- man represents the guarantee of the union between liberty and responsibility;
- the fundamental paradox of the human person is its inexhaustible, yet finite character;
- the human person thirsts for an endless ascent to perfection;
- the human person lives as connected to the present moment, yet comprising the past and tending to a limitless future;
- the human person has a certain unity and complexity defining it;

- the human person has something definite and something indefinite;
- the human person is not an emanation of a blind essence and submitted to implacable laws;
- the human person is referred to time but also to the eternity;
- the human person has a temporal and eternal character;
- the human person has an excellent structural unity and a great power of comprising reality, a situation that cannot be explained without the absolute One in Whom all things are contained and Who created and supports all things in unity;
- the human persons have as destination the desire of conscious and progressive union - with no confounding -, realized by the union with Christ.

All this scientific approach on Dumitru Stăniloae's anthropology, and the arguments brought in favour of this significant theme, which the philosophical thinking cultivated with predilection during the modern period, fully shows that his work is a new milestone regarding the concepts of person and personality, yet not depriving them of their ontological character.

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