

**BETWEEN THE GOSPEL AND THE NATION:
DUMITRU STĂNILOAE'S ETHNO-THEOLOGY¹**

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Cultural Wars in Great Romania

It was in 1918 when the great powers acknowledged for the first time, by the Treaty of Versailles, the legitimacy of the monarchist state of Great Romania. This international recognition put an end to the transitional period of struggle for union between Transylvania and the other two Romanian provinces (i.e., Walachia and Moldavia). At last, Romania felt part of the great family of European countries. Romanian towns and cities, and above all the capital, were called to a radical modernisation, by emulating one of the many Western models available. Perhaps, it was the time to do so.² At the dusk of the 19th century, to many English people, for example, Romania seemed more like a Chinese puzzle. Indeed, very few high-browed intellectuals had a first-hand knowledge of the Romanian realities.

“No further back than four years before the Russo-Turkish war [1877-1878], in which the Rumanian army took a distinguished part, we find the English consul in Bucharest complaining that letters sent to that city sometimes went to

¹ This study is the partial outcome of my research carried out at “New Europe College”, Bucharest during the academic year 2005/2006. Earlier drafts of this paper have benefited from the pertinent comments of my colleagues Eugen CIURTIN, Corina PETRESCU and Leo STAN, to whom I wish to express my gratitude.

² On the social conditions of Romania before WW II, see Kenneth JOWITT (ed.), *Social change in Romania, 1860-1940: A debate on Development in a European Nation* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1978).

India in search of Bokhara; and he even tells of a summons from London addressed, 'Bucharest, in the kingdom of Egypt.'"³

In the inter-war period, Romanian authorities did all they could to do away with this embarrassing stereotype which placed a South-European country on the intellectual map of Orientalism.

In the wake of the First World War, Romania became finally independent of any direct influence or pressure coming from Russia or the Ottoman Turkey. Its economic and social policies moved clearly towards the West. However, this shift was exempted from a wide range of cultural ambiguities. While satisfied with their integration into the European project, the Romanian intelligentsia saw itself subjected to roughly two different options.⁴ The first group of liberal intellectuals emerged in counter-reaction to the traditionalist movement which seemed both Romantic and conservative, backward looking, and happy to celebrate the religious dimension of every sober human enterprise.⁵ Among the advocates of Western secularism, one counts the cosmopolitan sociologist and historian of ideas Mihai RALEA (1896 – 1964), the literary critic Eugen LOVINESCU (1881-1943), and the social philosopher Ștefan ZELETIN (1882-1934). They all criticised Orthodoxy for its alleged contribution to civic fatalism and economic unprogressiveness into the ranks of rural

³ Marcu BEZA, "English Travellers in Romania," *The English Historical Review* 32 (1917), no. 126, p. 277. On this false but widespread etymology of Bucharest, see the hackneyed article of Mihaela TIMUȘ, "De unde ne vin uzbekii?," *Revista* 22, XIV (30 august-5 septembrie 2005).

⁴ Irina LIVEZEANU, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), and the reviews of C. CARMICHAEL in *Europe-Asia Studies* 48 (1996), no. 5, p. 861-2; Mary Ellen FISCHER in *The American Historical Review* 101 (1996), no. 4, p. 1244; and John W. COLE in *Contemporary Sociology* 25 (1996), no. 6, p. 740-741.

⁵ Even the former sceptic Titu MAIORESCU, in his later years, succumbed into explicit exhortations of religion. See the account of Raymund NETZHAMMER, *Episcop în România: într-o epocă a conflictelor naționale și religioase*, vol. I & II, edited by Nikolaus Netzhammer in cooperation with Krista Zach, Romanian translation by George Guțu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2005), p. 449. Maiorescu reportedly said: „În curând, ar trebui ca lumea să fie răzbătută de o mișcare religioasă, altfel s-ar prăpădi toată civilizația și ar veni alte popoare care cred!” For the German edition, see Archbishop Raymund NETZHAMMER, *Bischof in Rumänien. Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Staat und Vatikan*, edited by Nikolaus Netzhammer and Krista Zach, vol. 1 & 2 (Munich: SOKW-Verlag, 1995, 1996).

population, calling for a complete break with the Slavic sway on the national ethos.⁶

In response, another group of intellectuals, this time ethnocentric, claimed to have at a more fundamental level an increased legitimacy than the camp of “Westernisers.” It stemmed from a previous movement represented by the so-called “Sămănătoriștii,”⁷ who advocated the return to the pristine soil of the nation, its untainted roots, and sublime countryside. “*Sămănătorismul*” was the Romanian equivalent of the Russian *pochvennichestvo*. Moreover, the biblical metaphor of the seed (*sămânța*) and the sower (*semănătorul*) possessed a vast array of religious and poetic meanings. Among the members of this new elite, one should mention the monumental polygraph Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), the geographer Simion MEHEDIŢI, the poet and political activist Octavian GOGA (1881-1938), the philosopher Constantin RĂDULESCU-MOTRU (1868-1957), and the more original thinker Lucian BLAGA (1895-1961). None of these luminaries was inclined to shelter his nationalist discourse under the roof of the Orthodox theology, nor were they committed to leave Romania outside the political borders of Europe. Each one favoured in his way the preservation of local brands, pleading for a better management of the cultural values of traditional Romania in accord with the Western standards. “Synthesis” seemed to have been the watchword of their ideology.

Religious Nationalism: Three Authors and an Argument

A more dramatic form of metaphysical nationalism appears in the writings of Nichifor CRAINIC (1889-1972) and Dumitru STĂNILOAE (1903-1993). Crainic, in particular, churned out his ideas under the influence of Oswald Spengler (1880-1936).⁸ The latter’s epoch-making book entitled “The Decline of the West” (1918) encouraged him to

⁶ See also Adrian MARINO, “Luminile românești și descoperirea Europei,” *Pentru Europa* (Jassy: Polirom Publishers, 1995), p. 157-190.

⁷ Zigu ORNEA, *Sămănătorismul* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1998).

⁸ For an English biography of this leader of the traditionalist journal *Gândirea*, see Christine M. HALL, “*Jesus in my Country*”. *The Theology of Nichifor Crainic with Special Reference to the Cultural and Historical Background* (PhD thesis, King’s College London, 1986). In Romanian, see Nichifor Crainic, *Ortodoxie și Etnocrație* (Bucharest: Albatros Publishers, 1997), and the heavily biased study of Dumitru MICU, “*Gândirea*” și *gândirismul* (Bucharest: Minerva Publishers, 1975). The latter was harshly reviewed (and rightly so) by Virgil IERUNCA, *Dimpotrivă* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 1994), p. 60-72.

promote the idea of political authoritarianism. His readers went into rapture over the classical contrast between culture and civilisation, which had been derived from Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, coined for the first time in 1887. Crainic merged these terms with the notions of rural existence and urban life-style. His prose and poetry teemed with lyrical solemnities about the purity of the peasantry. At times, Crainic's journalism would indulge himself into offensive comments about the ethnic minorities of Romania. Thoroughly nostalgic and regressively utopian, he also believed in the future of an ethnocratic state.⁹ At his best, Crainic illustrated the messianic trope of the orthodoxist group, surrounding the "*Gândirea*" journal. In this sense, he is easily comparable with Russian Slavophiles, such as Aleksey Khomiakov (1804-1860) and Ivan Kyrëevsky (1806-1856).¹⁰ As we know, this specific group enjoyed drawing emphatic parallels between the Church vocation to redeem the human soul and the call of their particular nation (e.g., Russia) to illumine the world. Both lay Christians and ecclesiastical officials were inclined to produce self-centred tracts of defence in favour of Orthodoxy. According to the Slavophile manifesto, which clearly influenced Crainic, a faithful Christian had to be rather weary of secular institutions and reluctant vis-à-vis technological progress. The entire genealogy of Western values was univocally linked to the "heresies" of the Roman-Catholic and Protestant churches. Scholarship was distrusted as mere tool of intellectual scepticism. Anti-Semitism was not uncommon.¹¹ The attacks of cosmopolitanism necessitated the veneration of the national heroic past.

Against this background, many theologians felt free to endorse the exceptional character of the Romanian case. An easy appeal to theological arguments, such as the hope in the "resurrection of the

⁹ In 1938, Dumitru STĂNILOAE endorsed Crainic's views on ethnocracy, as it appears from his articles included in *Națiune și creștinism*, edited and prefaced by Constantin SCHIFIRNEȚ, (Bucharest: Elion Press, 2003), p. 62. STĂNILOAE also mounted a critique (op. cit., 33-35) of the "Sămănătorism Movement" (labelled as "cheaply Romantic"), paralleled by an appraisal of "*Gândirea* Movement."

¹⁰ The standard monograph on this subject remains that of Andrzej WALICKI, *The Slavophile Controversy. History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹¹ Andrei OIȘTEANU, *Imaginea Evreului în cultura română* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 2004²). I did not have access to William O. OLDSOON, *Providential Anti-Semitism: Nationalism and Polity in Nineteenth-Century Romania* (American Philosophical Society, 1991), reviewed by R. V. BURKS, *American Historical Review* 97 (1992), no. 2, p. 579, and discussed in detail by Denis DELETANT, "The Holocaust in Romania: Murderous or Providential Anti-Semitism," *East European Politics & Societies* 15 (2001), no. 1, p. 190.

nations”¹², helped the Church officials in their construal of the nation as a metaphysical entity. For Dumitru Stăniloae, for instance, ‘nation’ appeared to be that ‘spiritual reality’ working under the divine guidance of the Providence, capable offering everyone the *a priori* schemes to grasp the fallen nature of history and, above all, the meaning of divine revelation.¹³ Stăniloae regarded the ethnic determination of the individual as something literally *inalienable*. Against this background, it is not at all surprising that the interpretation of local traditions often took dualistic undertones. More specifically, it was guided by two antithetic categories: the local identity (“good”), and the foreign (usually Western) influence (“bad”). This agonistic economy of symbols and images characterised both the political debates and the historiographic reconstruction of the Romanian past. According to the national vulgate, which remains valid until today, the emancipation of Romanians from its crude oppressors was paralleled by the implacable Christianisation of the nation. National unity became, thus, the “basis for the Church unity.”¹⁴ Following such providential logic of history, the enemies of the Romanian people could be seen as the Church’s adversaries, and vice versa. Orthodoxy gradually turned into political commodity. It ceased to speak with equal power to the heterogeneous ethnic groups of Hungarians, Germans or Gypsies. The Gospel was divested from its original universality.

Less enthralled by the myths concerning the Romanian peasantry and more adapted to the flexible directions of the inter-war *Realpolitik* was Nae IONESCU (1890-1940).¹⁵ Educated in Germany at the dawn of the 20th century and heavily influenced by Carl Schmitt,¹⁶ Nae Ionescu

¹² There is always a hint to be found to the scriptural verse from the book of Revelation 21, 24. See D. STĂNILOAE, *Națiune și creștinism*, p. 119.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁴ See Metropolitan Nestor VORNICESCU, *Desăvârșirea unității noastre naționale – fundament al unității Bisericii străbune* (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei Press, 1988). In order to refute this parasitic view on national history, Lucian Boia authored the best-seller *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, ET by James Christian Brown (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001). Boia should be, however, read only in the light of the sound criticism provided by Sorin Antohi and Ioan-Aurel Pop, the latter being also critically reviewed by Ovidiu Pecican in “Imaginar și națiune”, *Tribuna* 6 (2002).

¹⁵ Nae Ionescu should not be confused with Eugen Ionescu (later Eugène Ionesco), whose particular inter-war position is analysed in Jeanine TEODORESCU, “Nu, Nu, and Nu. Ionesco’s ‘No!’ to Romanian politics and culture,” *Journal of European Studies* 34 (2004), no. 3, p. 267-287.

¹⁶ See the convoluted testimony of Mircea ELIADE, *Jurnalul portughez și alte scrieri*, vol. 1, preface and critical edition by Sorin Alexandrescu, introduction by

became in the early 1930s an intellectually sophisticated spokesman for the right-wing party, “Iron Guard.”¹⁷ He had numerous disciples in the academic circles and beyond. However, not all of them shared his fondness for Orthodoxy and political radicalism.¹⁸ Still, most of them deplored the limitations of philosophical positivism (as with Constantin Noica), while sympathising with the antidemocratic movements of the youth (Emil Cioran, for instance). To the exceptionally gifted polymath Mircea Vulcănescu (1904-1952), Orthodoxy constituted an intrinsic determination of Romanian-ness.¹⁹ Vulcănescu, whose beneficial contribution to Romanian philosophy deserves in itself a separate study, should be placed in the context of yet another intellectual movement, comprising young intellectuals of disparate ideological convictions, namely the “Criterion” group.²⁰ These figures spoke against the narrow tenets of the “Gândirea” movement and promoted a sober form of cultural

Sorin Alexandrescu, Florin Țurcanu and Mihai Zamfir (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 2006), p. 133.

¹⁷ On the Iron Guard, one of the best available monograph belongs to Armin HEINEN, *Die Legion ‘Erzengel Michael’ in Rumänien: soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation* (Munich, 1986).

¹⁸ The most relevant articles on this topic have been gathered in Nae IONESCU, *Teologia. Integrala publicisticii religioase* (Sibiu: Deisis Press, 2003); an alternative journal to Crainic’s populist magazine *Gândirea* was the short-lived *Predania* (editor-in-chief: Gh. Racoveanu), reprinted in 2001 with a preface by Ioan I. Ică Jr. (Sibiu: Deisis Press, 2001); the best biography of Nae Ionescu is available only in Romanian: Dora MEZDREA, *Nae Ionescu. Biografie*, vol. I-IV (Bucharest: Universal Dalsi Publishers, 2002-2005); for the nationalist proclivities of yet another influential disciple of Nae Ionescu, see Mac Linscott RICKETTS, *Mircea Eliade: the Romanian Roots 1907-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). For a recent study of yet another disciple of Nae Ionescu, see Alexandru POPESCU, *Petre Țuțea between Sacrifice and Suicide* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers, 2004).

¹⁹ See Mircea VULCĂNESCU’s influential essay, *Dimensiunea românească a existenței* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Română, 1943¹, 1991²).

²⁰ From a subjective perspective, see the accounts provided by Petru COMARNESCU, *Jurnal 1931-1937* (Jassy: Institutul European, 1994); Mircea VULCĂNESCU, “Revista ‘Criterion’ – oglindă a realității culturale și sociale,” *Opere*, vol. I., “Către ființa spiritualității românești,” edited, with notes and introduction by Marin DIACONU (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic & Editura Fundației Naționale pentru știință și Artă, 2005), p. 746-749. For an excellent presentation of all the intricacies of this cultural grouping, see Florin ȚURCANU, *Mircea Eliade, Le prisonnier de l’histoire*, preface by Jacques Julliard (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2003), chapter IX (in Romanian translation, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 2005, p. 223-263). See also Matei CĂLINESCU, “The 1927 Generation in Romania,” *East European Politics and Societies* 15 (2001), no. 3, p. 649-477.

ecumenism. Left-wing sympathisers met in this way with right-wing intellectuals in search for a real dialogue on issues of common interest. Some iconoclastic members condemned all attempts “to indigenise universals such as space, time, and being.”²¹ For example, with regard to Mircea Eliade’s authorship, one can notice a decided shift towards a more universalistic dimension of religion or spirituality. The exclusivist logic of “either/or” was never dominant among the “Criterion” circles.

Lined up on a different note, the writings of Nichifor Crainic, Dumitru Stăniloae, and Nae Ionescu, respectively, had a greater impact than the intellectual sophistication of the “Criterion” group, or the all too straightforward, pro-Western agenda of Lovinescu’s circle. Given their explicit Christian orientation, Crainic, Stăniloae, and Ionescu illustrated a dramatic paradox in the European history of modern ideas. A teacher of Christianity is expected, in principle, to stand up for a universalistic faith, to embrace and harmonise the multicultural texture of many traditional societies.²² Despite this fundamental vow to catholicity, some Orthodox theologians used a rhetoric which did legitimise not only a patriotism based on civic values, but also radical forms of nationalism. Oftentimes, this was in line with the official Church discourse at the expense of softening the universalistic criteria of the accepted Christian identity. Ethnic loyalty outstripped religious affiliation. Precisely this fact proves that, at least in the case of some Eastern-European countries, secular nationalism (especially, its 19th century version) did not easily replace religious discourse. It is necessary, therefore, that we raise a few pivotal questions regarding such a cultural dialectics.

What was the main driving force behind the theological arguments that usually justified the nationalist proclivities of the mainstream Romanian Orthodoxy? Which was the self-understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the beginning of the national states’ emergence? On the basis of which a particular “historio-logical” reading could such understanding occur? What was the context, that favoured an outward display of nationalism in protochronist garments? Which were the possible theological rationales behind the nationalist themes that persist to this day in the ecclesiastical discourse? Where was the borderline between blind nationalism and serene patriotism trespassed? The later works of Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) might provide the answers to quite a few of these questions. To the Western reader, this may

²¹ For an excellent genealogy of the Romanian ethnic ontologies, see Sorin ANTOHI, “Romania and the Balkans: From geocultural bovarism to ethnic ontology,” *Trânsit-Virtuelles Forum*, vol. 21 (2002).

²² On this topic, see Mihail NEAMȚU, “Re-Visiting Orthodoxy and Nationalism,” *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (2006), no. 2, p. 153-160.

sound paradoxical. Beyond the borders of his native country Stăniloae is known only for his universalistic message, a fact which impede some to deem him “the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20th century” (Olivier Clément).

Indeed, Stăniloae was one of the most prolific and inspired scholars of Eastern Orthodoxy during the 20th century. He penned a great number of books on Christian doctrine, liturgy and spirituality, together with translations and exegetical works on the early Church Fathers. Recently, these volumes started to receive a considerable attention among Western theologians.²³ It remains, nonetheless, important to understand

²³ Ioan ICA Jr. and Gheorghe F. ANGHELESCU have collected the best bibliography of Dumitru STĂNILOAE in the posthumous *Festschrift* entitled *Persoană și comuniune* (Sibiu: Diecezana Press, 1993), p. 16-67. The English reader could find the following volumes available in translation: *Theology and the Church*, foreword by John Meyendorff (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980); *The Experience of God*, vol. I, 1st part, foreword by Kallistos WARE (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994); *The World, Creation and Deification*, vol. I, 2nd part (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000); *Orthodox Spirituality* (St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002). The Community of Sisters of the Love of God (Fairacres, Oxford) published three pamphlets on *Eternity and Time*; *The Victory of the Cross* and on *Prayer and Holiness (The Icon of Man Renewed in God)*. For an excellent introductory study into Stăniloae’s dogmatic theology, see Andrew LOUTH, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae,” *Modern Theology* 13 (1997), no. 2, p. 253-267, with the hackneyed remark at page 259: “it was only with Calvin’s *Institutes* that the notion of Christ’s threefold office assumed the structural significance with which he invests it.” A detailed study of Stăniloae’s ecclesiology is available in Ronald C. ROBERTSON, *Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Ecclesiology. The Contribution of Dumitru Stăniloae and Younger Colleagues* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1988), along with Stefan Lupu, *La sinodalità e/o conciliarità espressione dell’unità della catholicità della Chiesa in Dumitru Staniloae (1903-1993)* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1999); and Lucian TURCESCU (ed.), *Dumitru Stăniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Jassy: Center for Romanian Studies, 2002). For Stăniloae’s theological metaphysics, see Daniel NEESER, “The World: Gift of God and Scene of Humanity’s Response: Aspects of the Thought of Father Dumitru Staniloae,” *The Ecclesiastical Review* 33 (1982), p. 272-282; Maciej BIELAWSKI (OSB), *The Philocalical Vision of the World in the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* (Bydgoszy, 1997, translated into Romanian by Ioan ICA Jr: *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae: o viziune filocalică despre lume*, Sibiu: Deisis Press, 1998); Emil BARTOS, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology. An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000); Silviu ROGOBETE, *O ontologie a iubirii. Subiect și realitate personală supremă în gândirea lui Dumitru Stăniloae* (Jassy: Polirom Publishers, 2000); Charles MILLER, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), amply reviewed by Dănuț

the particular contributions of Fr Dumitru Stăniloae to the elaboration of an “ethno-theology” and its *sui-generis* character. More than Crainic and Ionescu, Stăniloae’s understanding of the Church and nation relationship has been accepted as normative in the official circles of the lay theologians and hierarchs. It is therefore paramount that a research of Stăniloae’s contribution to the 20th century Orthodox “ethno-theology” should preface any general assessment of the Romanian, if not Eastern European setting. A biographical sketch can perhaps serve as the best introduction to a more detailed discussion of Stăniloae’s ideas.

An Unsettled Youth

Dumitru Stăniloae was born on 16th November 1903 in the Braşov county, the youngest child of simple and devout peasants.²⁴ He

MĂNĂSTIREANU in *International Journal for Systematic Theology* 3 (2001), no. 3, pp. 333-340; Jürgen HENKEL, *Eros und Ethos. Mensch, gottesdienliche Gemeinschaft und Nation als Adressaten theologischer Ethik bei Dumitru Stăniloae* (Münster-Hamburg-London: Lit Verlag, 2003). In French, see Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Dieu est amour* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1980); and the fine volume of conversations with Fr Costa de Beauregard, *Ose comprendre que je t'aime* (Paris: Cerf, 1983); and *Le génie de l'Orthodoxie* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1985); in Italian, one has the short volume D. STĂNILOAE, *La preghiera di Gesù e lo Spirito Santo. Meditazioni teologiche* (Rome: Editrice Citta Nuova, 1990). In German, see STĂNILOAE’s three-fold systematic work, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik*, transl. by H. Pitters, foreword by J. Moltmann (1984, 1990, 1995). I discussed and extrapolated Stăniloae’s views on tradition, Scripture, and the theological language of Orthodoxy in Mihail NEAMŢU, “Confesiunea apostolică,” *Gramatica Ortodoxiei* (Jassy: Polirom, 2006), ch. 2 (forthcoming).

²⁴ For the biography of the Romanian theologian, I rely on Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Dictionarul teologilor români* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2002), 455 ff. The English reader can consult the article written by Ioan ICA JR, “Stăniloae, Dumitru (1903-1993),” in Trevor A. HART (ed.), *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Pater Noster Press – William B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 527-531. For a more subjective account, see Lidia STĂNILOAE, „*Lumina faptei din lumina cuvântului*”: împreună cu tatăl meu, *Dumitru Stăniloae* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 2000). For the late Stăniloae, see also Sorin DUMITRESCU, *Şapte dimineţi cu Părintele Stăniloae* (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishers, 1992¹, 2003²). Insightful but short portraits are available in the following books: Petre PANDREA, *Amintirile mandarinului valah* (Bucharest: Albatros Publishers, 2001), *passim*; Alexandru PALEOLOGU, *Despre lucrurile cu adevărat importante* (Jassy: Polirom Publishers, 1998²), p. 102 ff. Monica LOVINESCU, *Jurnal 1981-1984* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 2003), p. 23

had a basic education in Braşov based on strict German principles. The young Dumitru started his theological studies in 1922 at the University of Cernăuți (the cultural centre of the former Romanian province, Bucovina, now part of Ukraine). Disappointed by the Scholastic methods of teaching theology, Stăniloae enrolled in the department of Classics and Literature, Bucharest University. At the recommendation of Nicolae Bălan, the Metropolitan of Transylvania at the time, Stăniloae completed his theological studies, despite the rather dull and compromising environment of this academic subject. In 1927, he graduated with a somewhat short dissertation on “Infant Baptism in the Early Church tradition.” Shortly afterwards, Stăniloae received a series of scholarships for post-graduate research in Athens (1927), Munich (1928, where he attended the lectures of the renowned scholar in Byzantine studies, August Heisenberg), Berlin and Paris (1929) and, lastly, Istanbul (1930). These trips were often interrupted by short visits to Romania, where his contribution to the improvement of theological education became more and more obvious. That being so, in 1928, Stăniloae received his doctorate with a thesis on “The Life and the Works of Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem.”²⁵

During the postdoctoral stages of his studies in Europe, Stăniloae significantly improved his knowledge of German and Byzantine Greek, perusing the growing literature on patristics, Church history and systematic theology. It was during this Western period that Stăniloae read extensively Protestant authors such as Karl Barth (1886-1968) or Emil Brunner (1889-1966).²⁶ In Paris and Istanbul, he did his initial research on the works of the late Byzantine theologian, St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). While deeply moved by anti-Catholic sentiments, the young Stăniloae presented the life and work of Gregory Palamas in an influential monograph published in 1938. Together with Nichifor Crainic, Stăniloae was among the first Romanian professors of theology to substantially redirect the interest of his students towards the rich sources of Christian Orthodox mysticism. Throughout his approach, while emphasizing the richness of *Oriental* Christianity, Stăniloae remained, nonetheless, fond of the opposition “East *versus* West,”²⁷ to which he added a distinctive

(the entry: 10 octombrie 1981); Sanda STOLOJAN, *Nori peste balcoane* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 1996), p. 41 ff, and p. 111.

²⁵ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Viața și activitatea patriarhului Dositei al Ierusalimului și legăturile lui cu țările românești,” *Candela*, vol. 40 (1929), p. 208-276.

²⁶ See the interesting comments of the Romanian historian Daniel BARBU, “Istoria, peștera, Balcanii,” *Cuvântul* VII, no. 349, July 2006, p. *.

²⁷ With his sensational genius and serendipitous sense for historical details, H. Chadwick has described the theological ironies comprised by this historically cemented opposition. See Henry CHADWICK, *East and West: The Making of a Rift*

„antirömischen Affekt“ (to use here the famous phrase coined by Hans Urs von Balthasar).²⁸ In an article published in 1930 he wrote:

“The Roman-Catholic tradition is rationalist and empirical, while Eastern Orthodoxy is mystical and transcendent.”

and,

“For the Roman-Catholics, the Church is a social body opposed to, and fighting against, other social bodies in search for supremacy within the same life experience, and not the divine-and-human body which penetrates the other social bodies from above.”²⁹

Notwithstanding these polemical exaggerations, Dumitru Stăniloae displayed much more than an abrasive non-ecumenical temperament, as one recent commentator has suggested.³⁰ His theological position was rooted in the radical eschatological insights professed by great thinkers and mystics of the Byzantine tradition. In his harsh criticism of the Western leaning towards juridical discipline and rational clarity, Stăniloae echoed time and again St Gregory Palamas' stance. The latter had rejected the claim of Barlaam of Calabria that “profane knowledge” (such as mathematics or natural philosophy) necessarily converged with the “spiritual knowledge” inspired directly, as it were, by God. The exercise of dialectics, for example, is not indispensable to attain salvation, whereas the understanding offered by the divine Scriptures remains fundamental and has salvific effects for every single Christian soul. The Western tradition, Stăniloae suggests, has forgotten this crucial truth of patristic tradition, which was reappraised later by the Byzantine monastics of the fourteenth century. The limits of scholarship and discursive thought are frustrating, since they cannot pay off the lack of personal communion with the Holy Spirit.

in the Church. From Apostolic Times until the Council of Florence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁸ For a philosophical defence of *this* Roman (and Catholic) identity, see Rémi BRAGUE, *Eccentric Culture: a Theory of Western Civilisation*, ET by Samuel Lester (South Bend Indiana: St Augustine's Press, 2002).

²⁹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Ortodoxie și catolicism,” *Națiune și creștinism* (ed. C. Schifirneț), p. 19, and p. 20.

³⁰ Cristian BADILITA, “Dumitru Stăniloae, ses affinités et ses idiosyncrasies patristiques,” in Cristian BADILITA & Charles KANNENGIESSER, *Les Pères de l'Eglise dans le Monde d'aujourd'hui* (Paris-Bucharest: Beauchesne-Curtea Veche Publishers, 2006), p. 281-310.

There is first the “human wisdom” pertaining to the created realm of being; this is followed by the “wisdom from above,” which represents the effect of God’s revelation in man’s heart.³¹ In other words, one should never wrong the uncreated grace of God (which illiterate people, among them some apostles, are perfectly capable to receive) with the natural gifts of human intelligence, which could easily go hand in hand with a perverted heart. Discursive thought, moreover, is divisive, while spiritual knowledge unites the human self in the light of God’s united being. That is why, in accordance with the Christian tradition, the apostles were greater than the brightest philosophers of the Hellenistic age. On the other hand, this does not mean that, before the advent of Christ, traces of truth could not have been found in those instances where the pursuit of goodness was selfless and genuine.³² It is, nonetheless, vital that Christians from all walks of life do not ignore the right epistemological order and the adequate hierarchy of gifts. Assigning more value to scholarly endeavour than prayer and meditation might have harmful effects to one’s personal salvation and the congregational life in general. By stating this theological truth, Stăniloae remained indebted to the stark positions adopted by St Mark of Ephesus (+1444) during the “unionist” council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-45). More exactly, Stăniloae claimed that the Byzantine tradition was the true heir of the Patristic wisdom, as expressed in its splendid mystical and liturgical theology. Unlike the Western theologians who lapsed into unnecessary speculations on the nature of God, the Orthodox Church focused on the transfiguration of the person through prayerful contemplation of the divine light. It was this theological difference - often perceived in the specific terms of the monastic spirituality - that set the limits to the dialogue between East and West.

“Political” versus “Mystical” Theology

After marrying Maria in 1930, Dumitru Stăniloae was ordained priest one year later in Sibiu. Before and during the World War II, Stăniloae exerted his influence for more than a decade on the field of theological and historical studies, despite the lack of a mentor. Gradually, he became a public intellectual, very keen on making the voice of Orthodoxy be heard among the more secular members of the political elite. This exercise was rather novel among the Romanian advocates of

³¹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Viața și învățăturile Sfântului Grigorie Palama* (Bucharest: Scripta Publishers, 1993), p. 27 sq.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 30.

the Orthodox Church, who had been silent for centuries, adorned as they were in liturgical garments.³³ During the 19th century, in sharp contrast to Russia, for instance, Walachia and Moldova benefited from much fewer theological debates regarding the relation between tradition and modernity, or about the transfer of theological concepts from the private to the public sphere. Within this impoverished context, Stăniloae's theoretical indecisions strike the reader as normal. At times, he seemed in favour of Crainic's apology of an ethnocratic state, while in other cases he rejected any manifestation of political fascism, xenophobia or cultural exclusiveness.

Stăniloae's pen had been confronted with the weightiest challenges of the century. In 1934, he could brand communism as anti-Christian, while ten years later he identified in the Gospel the roots of social equality. He fell over many sweeping generalities about the history of the nation, and the role that Christianity had played in the invisible formation of Romanian ethos. He dismissed most of the social and economic elements which, in terms of rational explanation, could have illuminated the past of his own country. This inadequate training in political theory determined Stăniloae to make risky statements about the future of the world, his discourse being often fraught with utopian elements. Some of his theological inquiries were, indeed, groundbreaking, given the rudimentary level of religious instruction of his contemporaneity. He was a person that could read with genuine interest not only the writings of the Church Fathers, but also the books of Sherlock Holmes³⁴, or the essays of a nihilist figure, such as Emil (E.M.) Cioran.³⁵ His literary input was, in short, extraordinary.

³³ Steve RUNCIMAN, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

³⁴ M. CONSTANTINESCU, *Doctori la oameni de seamă. Amintiri, evocări, comemorări* (Bucharest: Anastasia, 2000), p. 14. For references to Cioran, see Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei, 1988), *passim*.

³⁵ E. M. CIORAN (1911-1995) was born the son of a priest and went to elementary school in Sibiu. Then, as a young student in philosophy, he became infatuated with the personality of Nae Ionescu and supported publicly the political ideas of the extreme right-wing movement. Exiled to France after WWII, he became one of the most important essayists of the 20th century. Following is a list of his works translated into English: *The Temptation to Exist*, ET by Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968); *The New Gods*, ET by Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1974); *The Fall into Time*, ET by Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1974); *The Trouble With Being Born*, ET by Richard Howard (New York: Viking Press, 1976); *A Short History of Decay*, ET by Richard Howard (New York: Viking Press, 1976); *Drawn and Quartered*, ET

Stăniloae published hundreds of articles, some of which tried to prove the compatibility between ethnocentric nationalism and the distinctive theological tenets of the universal Church. He thought God liked the specific way of being Romanian, which could not have been imparted to other nations. Stăniloae overlapped the modern category of “nation” with the more ancient concept of “ethnicity” (“civic nationalism” being deemed “insufficient”).³⁶ The Greek word *ethnos* is widely used in the classical and biblical literature, being commonly translated either as “people” (Romanian: *neam*), “tribe” (Romanian: *seminție*) or, somewhat misleadingly, with its modern equivalent, “nation” (Romanian: *națiune*).³⁷ Particularly in the New Testament corpus, the meaning of *ethnos* (often taken as identical with *laos*) covers a historical reality that can hardly match the modern configuration of the European national identities, in the wake of World War I. For example, in St Paul’s speech, as recorded by Luke (Acts 13, 16-41), there is a reference to the “seven nations (*ethne hepta*)” from Canaan, which perished at the will of God so that the Israelites finally seize the Promised Land. The nations considered here could not have possibly represented the socio-political units which flourished during the modern period in Europe and elsewhere. The Israelites and their foes alike (with the exception of the Egyptians, perhaps) could only be described in contemporary terminology as “tribes” in search for geographic expansion and economic sovereignty. Stăniloae did not appreciate the historical transformation of the notion of “nation” and “nationality”, which had acquired a strong political significance instead of its previously ethnic connotation (“the blood”).

It should be added that Stăniloae’s ethnic sensitivities had no totalitarian connotations.³⁸ Albeit rejecting pacifism as such, and while critiquing the weaknesses of modern democracy, Stăniloae called for the implementation of the virtue of moderation in all political endeavours. Under this warrant, he condemned the acts of violence perpetrated by the

by Richard Howard (New York: Seaver Books, 1983); *Anathemas and Admirations*, ET by Richard Howard (New York: Arcade Publishers, 1991); *On the Heights of Despair*, ET by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); *Tears and Saints*, ET by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); *History and Utopia*, ET by Richard Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³⁶ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Națiune și creștinism*, p. 68.

³⁷ For this history of this notion in the Romanian literature, see Dionisie PETCU, *Conceptul de etnic* (Bucharest: Editura științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980); and Adolf ARMBRUSTER, *Romanitatea românilor. Istoria unei idei* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1993), with caution.

³⁸ This is also the argument of Costion NICOLESCU, *Teologul în cetate: Părintele Stăniloae și aria politicii* (Bucharest: Editura Christiana, 2003).

members of the “Legionary Movement” while in power. Critical of communist internationalism, and sceptical about papal universalism, Stăniloae tried to explain how the Orthodox Church is the only Christian body capable of welcoming and blending the character of every nation. This was to be done by achieving a particular synthesis resembling the Platonic paradigm of the “One-among-many.” Stăniloae thought this was the true vocation of a vigorous participatory theology that sees in the event of the Incarnation the very paradigm for the union between the human and the divine.

Stăniloae’s interest in the “prophetic”, that is to say in the public dimension of the Church life, had its pair in the purely theological concerns that he developed from an early age. He penned in this sense several apologetic books, amongst which the most notable is his first essay in Christology.³⁹ A close knowledge of Patristic authors (St Maximus the Confessor, in particular), and the fruitful dialogue with the modern Russian tradition (Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky and Serghei Bulgakov, in particular), along with the interaction with some major Western philosophers (Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blondel, Louis Laval, Ludwig Binswanger), placed the early Stăniloae in the frontline of Orthodox thinking. In his book on “Jesus Christ and the Restoration of Man,” Stăniloae declared himself ready to defend the doctrine of deification (*theosis*) in the footsteps of the Church Fathers. His growing interest in the monastic spirituality of Eastern Christianity determined Stăniloae to start his monumental translation of *The Philokalia*.⁴⁰ The first

³⁹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos și restaurarea omului* (Sibiu: Diecezana Press, 1943). In 1993, a second edition of this books was reprinted at Craiova (Omniscop Publishers). Unfortunately, this volume is littered with spelling mistakes in Greek and German.

⁴⁰ Summing up more than five thousand pages, STĂNILOAE’s edition of *The Philokalia* includes many more patristic writings than the first Greek edition. Here are the *supplementa* coined by Stăniloae. Vol. I (1946¹): Evagrius, *On prayer*; Mark the Ascetic, *On Baptism*; Vol. II (1947): Maximus the Confessor, *On the ascetic life*; the *scolia* to *Chapters on love*; *Quaestiones et dubia*; Vol. III (1948): *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium*, instead of *Various chapters*; Vol. IV-V are identical with the Greek version; Vol. VI (1977): *Ethical discourses* 1 and 5 by St Symeon the New Theologian; plus *On paradise* by St Nikitas Stithatos; Vol. VII (1977): Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* II. 2-3; *On the godly and deifying participation*; Vol. VIII (1979): A study by D. Stăniloae on the history of Romanian hesychasm, and some texts on prayer written by various Romanian saints (Vasile from Poiana Mărului, Calinic from Cernica, and Iosif from Văratec, from the 19th century); Vol. IX (1980): *The Ladder* of St John Climacus, Abba Dorotheos, *Instructions* i-xiv; *Letters* 1-2; Vol. X (1981): St Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetic Writings* (Greek version); Vol. XI (1990): The writings of Abba Barsanuphius and John; Vol. XII (1991): *The Writings of Abba Isaiah the Solitary*. In a letter dating from 22 June

volume appeared in 1946, and the last one in 1991. This famous compilation of texts on prayer and contemplation, comprising the wisdom of the Church Fathers from the fourth up to the fourteenth century, was issued in Romanian in not less than twelve volumes. In contrast, the English edition, following the initial design of St Nikodemos the Athonite and St Makarios of Corinth, has only five volumes (the last to be published soon). Regarded by Stăniloae himself as the best achievement of his theological career, the Romanian edition of *The Philokalia* had and perhaps still has a significant impact on the development of monastic life in Romania, shortly after the Soviet occupation⁴¹, and following the political revolution of 1989. To this day, *The Philokalia* is a best seller on the religious book market.

The Imprisonment

Starting with the summer of 1940, the “The Burning Bush Conferences” were held at the most important ecclesiastical centre of Bucharest, namely the Antim Monastery.⁴² However, Stăniloae’s involvement in this movement was short-lived and not comparable with the strong commitment of even more influential figures, such as the hieromonk Ioan Kulighin, Rev. Benedict Ghiuș or Rev. Sofian Boghiu, the poet Sandu Tudor (the future Fr Daniil) and Dr. Vasile Voiculescu. Stăniloae’s arrest and imprisonment eighteen years later was not so much a result of his connection with the “Burning Bush Movement” from Antim. Indeed, under pressure during the abusive investigations, he

1985, Emil Cioran commented on Stăniloae’s greatest achievements: „V-am spus la Paris, însă țin să repet că *Filocalia* este un monument capital în istoria limbii noastre. În același timp, ce lecție de profunzime pentru un neam nefericit și ușurelnic! Din toate punctele de vedere, o astfel de operă este chemată să joace un rol considerabil. Sunt nespuse de mândru că vă cunosc de mai mult de o jumătate de veac.” See Emil CIORAN, *România Liberă* 49 (25-26 May, 1991), no. 406, p. 5.

⁴¹ See André SCRIMA, “L’avènement philocalique dans l’orthodoxie roumaine,” *Istina* V (1958), p. 295-328; p. 443-374.

⁴² For some insights into the yet not fully documented, but tragic episode of the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church, see André SCRIMA, *Timpul Rugului Aprins. Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană*, foreword by Andrei Pleșu (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 1996), in Italian translation: André SCRIMA, *Padre spirituale* (Bose: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2001); Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Rugul Aprins* (Sibiu: Editura Mitropoliei Ardealului, 2002); Mihai RĂDULESCU, *Rugul Aprins. Arestare. Condamnare. Achitare* (Bucharest: Agapis Publishers, 2003), with caution.

claimed that his link with the monastic and literary circle of Antim was casual. The explanation, then, must be found elsewhere.

It would seem that it was his public defence of the “hidden treasure” kept by the great theological tradition of Orthodoxy, that led to the arrest of *doctor philocalicus*.⁴³ Between 1947 and 1955, Stăniloae was severely marginalised and his courses at the Faculty of Theology in Sibiu were totally suppressed. In 1947, he had to move to Bucharest. It was more than ten years later, in 1958, that Stăniloae was allowed to author a book (in cooperation with other colleagues from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest) on Church dogmatics.⁴⁴

From 1955 to 1958, Stăniloae attended some private seminars, organized by his former friends of the “Burning Bush” movement. They read and commented on books on early Christian spirituality. Being under the constant surveillance of the secret police, the members of the “Burning Bush” were arrested again on the night of 13/14 June 1958.⁴⁵ Stăniloae was arrested on 3rd September 1958, when his friends had already been sent to prison. On 8th November 1958, he was sentenced to five years in prison as an “obscurantist propagandist” belonging to the *ancien régime*.⁴⁶ On 15th January 1963, he was released and allowed to enrol as a teacher at the Institute for Orthodox Theology in Bucharest. In 1964, all the political and religious prisoners of Communist Romania had to be liberated, given the increasing pressures exerted by international bodies. Stăniloae spent most of his time in the dreadful prison of Aiud.⁴⁷ Later on, he used to say that this harsh period of deprivation and

⁴³ Cf. Maciej BIELAWSKI, “Dumitru Stăniloae and his *Philokalia*,” in Lucian TURCESCU (ed.), *Tradition and modernity*, p. 52. A moving testimony about the outstanding behaviour of Fr Dumitru Stăniloae during his prison years can be found among the exquisite literary portraits drawn by Petre PANDREA, *Reeducarea de la Aiud* (Bucharest: Vremea Publishers, 2004), p. 140-146.

⁴⁴ N. CHIȚESCU, I. TODORAN, I. PETREUȚA, D. STĂNILOAE (eds.), *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică*, 2 vol. (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic, 1958).

⁴⁵ I follow here the data provided by George ENACHE, “Arestarea și condamnarea lui Dumitru Stăniloae,” *Rost. Manifest românesc* (2003), no. 9.

⁴⁶ A thorough exposition of the cultural and historical shock brought about by the early communist occupation is provided by Dennis DELETANT, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State (1948-1965)* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999). I did not have access to A. JOHANSENS, *Theological Study in the Rumanian Orthodox Church under Communist Rule* (London, 1961).

⁴⁷ For an insight into penitentiary life in Aiud (Romania) during the hard times of the Soviet occupation, and following, see Alexandru POPESCU, *Petre Țuțea. Between Suicide and Sacrifice* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing House, 2004), p. 61-90.

humiliations helped him to practise the unceasing prayer of the heart (“Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me”). Over the centuries, this prayer has been much cherished by the hesychast monks of Eastern Christendom, being regarded as the corner stone of the Christian path to deification.

After Liberation

As we said, in 1963, Stăniloae was released from prison, and, in return, he was asked to write a few appreciative articles on Communist regime. However, the maltreatment continued until 1969, when the communist Department for Religion intended to offer a better image of Romania in the West.⁴⁸ Thus, Stăniloae and other theologians were allowed to travel abroad. In 1970, our theologian went to Oxford, where he was hosted by the Convent of the Incarnation (“Sisters of the Love of God”). There, he met his life-long friend, Canon A. M. Allchin, and other Anglican companions. He also received innumerable international awards, among which “The Cross of St Augustine of Canterbury” offered by the Bishopric of London. In 1976, the second series of *Philokalia* (from volume five onwards) started to appear in Romanian, though in a very small number of copies and deficiently circulated. In the same year, the State University of Thessalonica offered Dumitru Stăniloae the title of *doctor honoris causa*.

In was in the same period that, in a quite embarrassing manner, Stăniloae endorsed his former views on the Uniate Church. Seeing the Orthodox Church as a constitutive element of the Romanian national identity, Stăniloae approved in 1948 of the artificial “union” between the Uniates and Orthodox congregations.⁴⁹ Like most of the other Orthodox

⁴⁸ On this interesting shift, see Katherine VERDERY, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). A clear depiction of the Ceaușescu's tyrannical regime is offered by Denis DELETANT, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania 1965-1989* (Portland, Or.: Book News, Inc., 1994), along with Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), who emphasises to what extent Ceaușescu's era cannot be understood unless we take into consideration the Stalinist imprint of the first version of Romanian Communism. See also the review of Robert LEVY, *East European Politics and Societies* 18 (2004), no. 4, p. 697-701.

⁴⁹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Întoarcerea fraților,” *Glasul Bisericii* VII (1948), no. 10, p. 64-68; “Restaurarea unității Bisericii străbune,” *Glasul Bisericii* VIII (1949), no. 5-6, p. 15-26; “Reîntregirea Bisericii strămoșești,” *Glasul Bisericii* IX (1950),

leaders in that period, Stăniloae overlooked the coerced character of this “union” which was accomplished under the diktat of the Communist government. Stăniloae’s take pleased the Communist officials, who aimed at the total suppression of the last remnants of the Greek-Catholic Church (also known as “the underground Church”). Unlike their Orthodox peers, the Greek-Catholic theologians and historians had no rights to worship⁵⁰, to gather publicly, let alone to defend themselves in journals or newspapers.⁵¹ Quite surprisingly, the polemical perspective embraced by the young Stăniloae survived his personal experience in the Communist prisons, where he must have met and befriended with many people of various Christian backgrounds. In 1973, Stăniloae published a collection of essays under the provocative title: “The Uniate Church in Transylvania: An Attempt to Dismantle the Romanian Nation.”⁵² Here, Stăniloae reinforced his views on the Uniate Church which was seen as a mere expression of the Roman-Catholic proselytising action within the

no. 6, p. 27-33. After he left the prison, STĂNILOAE wrote the highly polemical tract on “Uniatismul: opera unei întreite silnicii,” *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 87 (1969), p. 355-390. It should be noted here the insistent reference to “the Church of our ancestors,” which fits the quasi-shintoist version of Communism implemented in Romania of that time. Like in the Soviet Russia or Communist China, “the popular Church” was a phrase coined by the party officials, who could dictate the rules of speech for the Christian Orthodox hierarchs. Until today there is still a confusion between the Church, the Army and the State, all seen as legitimate means to rule the nation. See the study of Ana Daniela BUDICĂ, “Imaginea despre sine a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române și revista Biserica Ortodoxă Română,” in Mirela L. MURGESCU and Simeon CĂLȚIA (eds.), *Exerciții întru cunoaștere. Societate și mentalități în noi abordări istoriografice* (Jassy: Do Minor Publishers, 2003), p. 231-264. For an official example of ethno-theological discourse, see the sermons of Patriarch Teoctist: “Cuvântări rostite de PFPF Teoctist marcând evenimente importante din viața noastră bisericească,” *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 1-6 (1997), p. 70. For an excellent overview of contemporary Church discourse, see Iuliana CONOVICI, “L’Orthodoxie roumaine et la modernité. Le discours officiel de l’Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine après 1989,” *Studia politica* IV (2004), no. 2, p. 389-420.

⁵⁰ In 1948, the official number of Greek-Catholic Christians in Romania was around 1, 560 000 souls.

⁵¹ The circulation of Orthodox ecclesiastical newspapers in Communist Romania reached the astonishing total of 60,000 copies. cf. G.A. MALONEY, *A History of Orthodox Theology since 1453* (Belmond Mass.: Nordland, 1976), p. 288.

⁵² Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Uniatismul din Transilvania: încercare de dezmembrare a poporului român* (Bucharest : Editura Institutului Biblic, 1973). Some of the articles mentioned above were included in this book. Delia Despina DUMITRICA, “Uniate vs. Orthodox: What Lies behind the Conflict? A Conflict Analysis,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 3 (Winter 2002), p. 99-114.

traditional boundaries of Orthodoxy. The immediate consequence of this theological decision had a political character: namely, that of separating Romanians from Transylvania, from their brothers and sisters living the Orthodox faith beyond the Carpathians. Stăniloae's reading of history was inevitably biased, since it ignored the voluntary commitment of a great number of Uniate intellectuals to the national cause, in a time when the Romanian Orthodox Transylvanians were still under the jurisdiction of the Serbian ecclesiastical see from Karlowitz (*Sremski Karlovci*). With the meagre exception of Inochentie Micu,⁵³ whose patriotic deeds Stăniloae did praise, the activity of most other Uniate characters who were responsible for the political emancipation of the Romanians in Transylvania seemed useless. Stăniloae evokes instead the exceptional, but almost solitary personality of the Orthodox Metropolitan Andrei șașuna (1809-1873), who indeed had fought - as quite a few others - for the setting free of the Romanian Orthodox Christians from Transylvania.⁵⁴

It is noteworthy that Stăniloae constantly balanced his polemical postures in the theological and intellectual debates with a prominent dedication for the common spiritual roots of the Christian Church: namely, the patristic tradition. In the late 1970s, though aged and fragile, Stăniloae had the impressive stamina and inspiration to write his monumental work of systematic theology, issued in three volumes. His commentaries on the works of the spiritual masters of the East (from St John Climacus to St Isaac the Syrian and St Symeon the New Theologian) drew the attention of many Romanian intellectuals and monastics.⁵⁵ Among them, one should mention Fr Ilie Cleopa⁵⁶ (1912-1998) from Sihăstria and Fr Paisie Olaru (1897-1990) from Sihla, both of whom had words of praise for the work of Reverend Stăniloae.⁵⁷ Moldavians by

⁵³ On this important figure of the 18th century Romanian intelligentsia, Dumitru STĂNILOAE wrote with respect and resignation in his study "Lupta și drama lui Inochentie Micu Clain," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 86 (1968), p. 1137-1185.

⁵⁴ The best monograph on șașuna remains Keith HITCHINS, *Orthodoxy and Nationalism: Andrei șașuna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1856-1873* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).

⁵⁵ Nicolas STEBBING, *Bearers of the Spirit: Spiritual Fatherhood in Romanian Orthodoxy* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 2003).

⁵⁶ Elder CLEOPA of Romania, *The Truth of Our Faith: A Discourse from Holy Scripture on the Teachings of True Christianity* (Greece: Uncut Mountain Press, 2000); for a hagiographical piece on Fr Cleopa, see Ioanichie BĂLAN, *Shepherd of Souls, Elder Cleopa the New Hesychast of Romania* (Platina, Alaska: St Herman Brotherhood Press, 2000).

⁵⁷ For an impressionistic description of Fr Paisie's personality, see H.-R. PATAPIEVICI, *Flying against the Arrow: an Intellectual in Ceausescu's Romania*, ET by M. Adăscăliței (Budapest: Central European University, 2003), p. 106-118.

birth, these towering figures of Romanian monasticism are presently remembered as two unmistakable candidates to canonisation along with other Romanian hermits and confessors who died during the 20th century. Stăniloae's publication of *The Philokalia* was a direct appraisal of this radical Christian culture which prioritized obedience, poverty and chastity.

Struggle and Triumph

Gradually, the depths of Stăniloae's thought and his well-balanced ecumenism received the just appreciation among Western theologians. Jürgen Moltmann⁵⁸ and John Meyendorff remarked the freshness of Stăniloae's approach to historical theology. The way he dealt with the sources was rejuvenating and inspiring for those young theologians who were less acquainted with the patristic tradition. According to his daughter Lidia, in the early 1980s, Stăniloae travelled to Chicago, where he met the celebrated Romanian historian of religions, Mircea Eliade. Allegedly, Stăniloae had a prayerful conversation with Eliade in private.⁵⁹ Upon his return home, Stăniloae plunged into his studies with an indefatigable energy, writing even more theological books with a particular focus on the meaning of Christian worship.⁶⁰ This theological orientation is of no surprise, since the Communist authorities insisted that the Orthodox Church, like any other Christian communities, should not manifest herself outside the liturgical borders. Religious education, charitable works, outward mission and public service were strictly forbidden. Limited by this hostile environment, Stăniloae continued to translate the theological works of Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria or Maximus the Confessor. Not all of his translations have been published during Stăniloae's lifetime, given the restrictive regulations pertaining the publishing houses in communist Romania.⁶¹

A clear indication of Stăniloae's recognition within the monastic circles is also offered in the writings of Archimandrite Ioanichie BĂLAN, *Convorbiri duhovnicești*, vol. 2 (Roman: Editura Episcopiei Romanului, 1988).

⁵⁸ J. MOLTSMANN, "Gleitwort," in D. STĂNILOAE, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik* (Zurich, Einsiedeln, Köln: Benzinger Verlag; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1985), p. 10: "Der Verfasser ist im Westen noch within unbekannt, er ist aber der einflussreichste und kreativste orthodoxe Theologe der Gegenwart."

⁵⁹ Lidia STĂNILOAE, *op. cit.*, passim.

⁶⁰ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă* (Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei, 1986).

⁶¹ See the interviews carried out by Lidia VIANU, *Censorship in Romania* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998).

By the end of the 1980s, Romania was probably the country most badly damaged by Communism in Eastern Europe.⁶² Many intellectuals learnt how to forget their captivity into the social misery of Communism by taking refuge into a mild sort of Platonism. Utopias of all sorts, from the mystical journey into that self which is “interior intimo meo”⁶³, to the most whimsical forms of artistic, literary and philosophical escapism, proved to be somewhat short of personal redemption.⁶⁴ In those days, theology lost its prophetic dimension, while philosophy was embarrassed to face the naked truth of historical reality. For those worrying about mental sanity, the world of culture seemed to be the last refuge. In the words of Andrei Pleșu, “the only reason to concern oneself with culture, to do culture within a totalitarian system, is that it must be done, regardless of audience, circumstances, outcome.”⁶⁵ In one or another way, this attitude required a certain belief either in the secular judgement of history or in the theological aftermath of eschatology. After years of deprivation and harassment, Dumitru Stăniloae was prepared to regard history – and here he resembles the famous philosopher Constantin Noica – as if it were a matter of sheer meteorology.⁶⁶ In the late 1970s and

⁶² There are some important books, which, on a personal note, reflect the religious persecution perpetrated by the Communist authorities in Romania. See, for example, Nicolae STEINHARDT, *Journal de la félicité*, French translation by Marily Le Nir, preface by Olivier Clement (Paris: Arcanthers, 1999); for the Italian version, see Nicolae STEINHARDT, *Diario della felicità*, Italian translation by Gabriella Bertini Carageani (Bologna: EDB, 1996). Of great importance remains also the witness of Richard WURMBRAND, *In God's Underground* (Living Sacrifice Book Co.: 1993); *Tortured for Christ* (Living Sacrifice Book Co.: 1998); *Alone With God: God and Suffering: New Sermons from Solitary Confinement* (Living Sacrifice Book Co.: 1999). For the Church (in particular, Catholic) resistance in Eastern Europe, see George WEIGEL, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also the vibrant recollections of the archimandrite Roman BRAGA, *Trepte duhovnicești* (Alba-Iulia: Editura Arhiepiscopiei, 1998).

⁶³ St. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* 3.6.11 (“more inward than my most inward”).

⁶⁴ This history of the intellectual life in Romania during the 1980s still needs to be written. Glimpses of it can be found in the large number of diaries, interviews, essays or chronicles, which emerged in the wake of the “Revolution” (December 1989). Notwithstanding, these personal testimonies deserve a systematic exposition and subsequent interpretation.

⁶⁵ Andrei PLEȘU, “Intellectual Life under Dictatorship,” *Representations*, vol. 49 (Winter 1995), p. 61-71, here p. 69.

⁶⁶ Cf. Sorin ANTOHI, “Commuting to Castalia: Noica’s ‘School’, Culture and Power in Communist Romania,” in G. LIICEANU, *The Paltinis Diary: A Paideic Model in Humanist Culture*, ET by James Christian Brown, (Budapest: Central European University, 2002), p. xix.

early 1980s, the time for a confrontational approach had long passed. Noica and Stăniloae, who both supported in their youth the idea of political action, were favouring now, each one in his own way, a solitary form of asceticism put in the service of a great tradition (whether philosophical or theological in nature).

This relatively open collaboration between the State authorities and the Church, plus the incapacity of most of the Orthodox theologians to resist to the ideological pressures exerted by the dictatorial regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918-1989), damaged the image of Romanian Orthodoxy.⁶⁷ The “national Church” seemed to have failed the test of real patriotism which would have meant a more active resistance against the horrific acts of social engineering perpetrated by the Communists. The recovery from this slump of unpopularity among the local intelligentsia was slow. After 1989, Romania was trapped in political and economic corruption. Rampant poverty, especially among the elderly people, and the loss of hope for the youth, formed the ruthless plague of the post-communist transition. In this rather gloomy atmosphere, dominated by venality on all social levels, the Orthodox Church was rather silent than vocal. Only rarely could one hear the traditionally Christian plea for truth, justice and reconciliation in a society haunted by the traumas of the past.⁶⁸

The Later Years

Encouraged by the freedom gained after December 1989, Stăniloae voiced his criticism, calling the Church to act with greater responsibility in the social sphere. He deplored the lack of sobriety and prophetic spirit within the ecclesial milieu, while defending the promotion of Christian values in the public realm.⁶⁹ Not unlike other Orthodox

⁶⁷ Paul CARAVIA, *Biserica întemnițată: România, 1944-1989* (Bucharest: Institutul National pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 1998).

⁶⁸ Some of these issues have been touched upon in M. NEAMȚU, *Bușnița din dărmături* (Bucharest: Anastasia Press, 2006).

⁶⁹ On the intrinsic theological ambiguities that pertain to this issue, as it is made clear in Aristotle PAPANIKOLAOU, “Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and Democracy,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71 (March 2003), no. 1, pp. 75-98, where the opposed positions of Vigen Guroian and Stanley Harakas are discussed. See also Stanley HARAKAS, “Orthodox Church-State Theory and American Democracy,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 21 (1976), p. 399-421; and Vigen GUROIAN, *Ethics after Christendom: Toward and Ecclesial Christian Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994). A more substantial historical dossier is to be found in Pedro RAMET (ed.), *Eastern Christianity in Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

theologians, such as Metropolitan John Zizioulas, Fr. Stăniloae joined some leading figures of the civil society in his criticism of the non-ecological policies of the state. As a citizen of the world, he was anxious for the future of humankind, sharing with Heidegger an ongoing concern for the global spread of destructive technology (expressed by the German philosopher through the concept: *das Gestell*).⁷⁰ On the other hand, Stăniloae did not trouble himself with the political immaturity and economic backwardness, which were responsible for so many social disorders and educational shortcomings in the rural area. Until late in his life, Stăniloae did not show much confidence in the historical agents of modernisation: free market, political institutions, and a civil society guided by critical reasoning. He remained a pessimist, prone to hold onto unilateral solutions.

On the other hand, Fr Stăniloae stayed in touch with many personalities of the Romanian Diaspora, among whom one counts Eugène Ionesco, former member of the French Academy. In 1991, he was welcomed in the Romanian Academy, being also awarded the *doctor honoris causa* of the Universities of Athens (1991), and Bucharest (1992). Only in these last years did Stăniloae publish his more serene *Reflections on the Spirituality of the Romanian People*, in which he envisaged, not without some utopian undertones, a societal model for the new Europe emerging from behind the Iron Guard. Stăniloae pleaded for the rediscovery of the Christian principle of personhood after so many years of Communist dictatorship, and against the nihilistic drive of Western individualism.⁷¹ In this sense, Stăniloae's ideas were in accord with the reflection of other contemporary theologians, such as John Zizioulas or Christos Yannaras. They all held that only the retrieval of the dialogical, Eucharistic and self-giving attributes of Christ could provide new ways of experiencing communion among people.

Stăniloae was known and remembered as a cheerful, and yet conservative character, an affectionate father and gentle professor, immune to depression, always compassionate, and jovial. A man of prayer and a genuine pastor, Stăniloae showed much consideration for the people who formed the body of the Church, trusting their "spiritual instincts."⁷² On the 4 October 1993, Reverend Dumitru Stăniloae passed away, leaving behind an impressive theological legacy.

⁷⁰ Martin HEIDEGGER, *The Question concerning Technology and other essays*, ET by W. Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

⁷¹ cf. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român* [1992¹] (Bucharest: Editura Elion, 2001), p. 31-32.

⁷² Cf. Sorin DUMITRESCU, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

Bucolic Nostalgia

After such a substantial biographical exposition, one needs to look at the subtle rationales of Stăniloae's attachment to the ideals of post-Romantic "ethno-theology." However, before scrutinising the institutional aspects of Stăniloae's problematic attachment to religious nationalism, one should grasp his idiosyncratic positions, as filtered through various articles, essays, interviews and testimonials left in the religious press of his time. It would be probably recommendable to take into consideration the literary style used by Stăniloae in order to celebrate the marriage between the Gospel and the nation. A certain romantic rhetoric betrays the inebriation with the idea that the peasants are the only true heirs of Christian spirituality. Despite that, Stăniloae was one of the many Romanian hierarchs and theologians who claimed during the interwar period that rural life constituted the matrix of a pristine religiosity, the only source of the nation's spiritual renewal. He shared the values of the Slavophile intelligentsia, being himself born into a family of peasants who lived their Christian faith in strict accordance with the traditional norms of Eastern Orthodoxy. For many personal reasons, and perhaps less from a scientific perspective, Stăniloae saw the rustic life before the industrial revolution as "filled with many blessings."⁷³

This puritan dream for the Romanian village never completely lost its adherents. It remained particularly attractive to those members of the urban intelligentsia who have been brought up and educated in emphatically secular centres of Europe. This phenomenon marks a specific transformation of the modern world, which encourages a somewhat essentialist bovarism of a poetic kind. More often than not, an almost complete ignorance about social and economic history contributes to the idealisation of the "perennial village." Nevertheless, it is against the odds of modern history that the "archaic ontology" of the Romanian

⁷³ For time in the archaic ontology of the Romanian peasant, see Mircea ELIADE, *Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God: Comparative Studies in the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); on how these stable rhythms of life have been disturbed by the aberrant economical policies of communism, see P. RONNAS, "Turning the Romanian Peasant into a New Socialist Man: An Assessment of the Rural Development Policy in Romania," *Soviet Studies*, vol. 41 (1989), no. 4, p. 543-559. Horia BERNEA (1938-2001), painter and curator, has offered in the galleries of of the famous "Museum of the Romanian Peasant" from Bucharest (www.mtr.ro). This is an impressive reconstruction of the symbolic world of the traditional Romanians taken directly from the countryside, as the collection of the Romanian journal *Martor* shows abundently.

peasant unfolded its pre-modern (though not necessarily anti-modern) story.

It is true that the church, in the Romanian territories and elsewhere, lied at the heart of the traditional Christian village.⁷⁴ Like an *axis mundi*, the temple structured the symbolic geography of ordinary people. Time and space were shaped by an innate sense of awe towards the sacred. The Psalter was widely known among the more committed believers. Crucifixes and shrines would mark the crossroads and the entries into every village. Pilgrimages to monasteries were a common practice during the great festivals of the Church. Often, a turreted belfry would inform the peasants living at a distance about the time for daily prayer or mourning for those departed. Normally, Orthodox Christians had their work and food sanctified in prayer by the sign of the cross.⁷⁵ The presence of God was felt in the most ordinary circumstances of life.

In the light of these considerations, one sees why Stăniloae's attachment to bucolic nostalgia had a profoundly sentimental touch. In the 1980s, in his conversations with Costa de Beauregard, Stăniloae reminded the cardinal virtues of the peasant family life: modesty, discreetness, and kind-heartedness. These qualities were the essential ingredient of "the joys," as opposed (in Augustinian fashion) to the mundane "pleasures" of life.⁷⁶ Ideally, Stăniloae thought, the community life of peasant Christians would be shaped by the oblatory ethos of Orthodoxy. Ascetic endurance and humility were the virtues that fed their natural admiration for the diversity and order of creation. In fact, throughout his life, Dumitru Stăniloae embraced an austere conduct. Even when 90 years old, he would still wake up at three or four o'clock in the morning, saying his prayers and writing unabatedly, while in the afternoon and during the evenings he received visitors. The young Stăniloae, on the other hand, strongly believed that the Gospel had nourished the substance of the Romanian folk traditions. Different rites of passages used patterns of the "cosmic liturgy." He would have subscribed to the words of Mircea

⁷⁴ B. ȘTEFĂNESCU, "Dimensiunea rituală a structurării comunitare în lumea rurală transilvăneană la începutul epocii moderne," in Nicolae BOCȘAN, Ovidiu GHITTA, Doru RADOSAV (eds.), *Tentația istoriei. În memoria profesorului Pompiliu Teodor* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003), p. 83-118.

⁷⁵ This practice would go back to the practices of the early monks of the Egyptian desert, who used the sign of the Cross in order to chase out the evil spirits. See Athanasius the Great, *Vita Antonii* 74-75; and in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (collectio alphabetica), see Abba Ammonas 8, Abba Poemen 8, etc.

⁷⁶ Stăniloae's description of the life of the Christian peasant in an Orthodox country could be paralleled with a similar testimony given by St Silouan the Athonite (+1938). See, Archimandrite SOPHRONY, *Saint Silouan* (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, 1991), p. 12.

Eliade, in whose eyes “the Romanians have preserved, deepened and valued the Christian vision on cosmos, as it was expressed in the first centuries of Christianity. Thus, the conservatism and archaic character of Romanian folklore protected a heritage that belonged to Christianity, and which various historical processes wished to destroy.”⁷⁷

Looking at the ancient culture of the Romanian peasants, Stăniloae did not adopt the critical posture of the cultural anthropologist. He never took the trouble to identify the pagan reminiscences in the fables, stories, and legends that perhaps have captured the imagination of the last Romanian peasants. In his youth, he went so far that he conceded a certain theological orthodoxy to the uncanny experiences of “illumination” and “prophecy” ascribed to the Wallachian peasant Petrache Lupu, nicknamed “Moșul” (“The Elder”).⁷⁸ This elder from Maglavit (the Dolj County) claimed that God bestowed upon him the miraculous gifts of healing, clairvoyance and prophesying. Albeit not a monk and without belonging to any specific churchmanship, Petrache Lupu was revered by thousands of people in the 1930s. Some other Orthodox theologians, such as the layman Mihai Urzică, resisted the claims made by Petrache Lupu and his adepts, placing them under serious doubt.⁷⁹ On the other hand, the learned Stăniloae felt the need to give a patristic explanation of that phenomenon by comparing the hesychastic tradition of the Byzantine mystics with this dogma-free manifestation of folk religiosity. He never ever expressed any regret with regard to this episode, which suggests that his personal beliefs (never officially validated by the Church) did not change.

⁷⁷ Mircea ELIADE, “Destinul culturii românești” (1953), *Împotriva deznădejzii* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 1992), p. 173. A former monk, the Romanian poet Tudor ARGHEZI was of a wholly different opinion, when he claimed that “not a single fairy tale or a chant has ever had contacts with the Orthodox ethos,” *Kalende*, vol. I (2 December 1928), no. 2, p. 27-28 (*apud.* Zigu ORNEA, *Anii treizeci*, p. 105).

⁷⁸ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Ortodoxie și Româniism* (Sibiu: Diecezana Publishers, 1938), p. 179-235.

⁷⁹ In his startling essay *Minuni și false minuni* [1940] (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishers, 1993²), p. 177-229, Mihai Urzică provided a sharp theological critique of the “Petrache Lupu Movement.” Along the lines of this early critique, one should read the cautious remarks of Archimandrite Ilie CLEOPA, *Despre vise și vedenii* [1962¹] (Bacău: Bunavestire Publishers, 1994²). See also the historical account of F. Müller, “Maglavit – proiecții social-politice,” in Nicolae BOCȘAN, Ovidiu GHITTA, Doru RADOSAV (eds.), *Tentația istoriei. În memoria profesorului Pompiliu Tudor* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003), p. 287-304.

Trauma of Secularisation

Stăniloae's strong attachment to the rural values of Christianity was not exceptional in the interwar period.⁸⁰ On behalf of Stăniloae himself and other Church officials, this attitude betrays only the hesitant acceptance of the inevitable changes that the modernisation of Romania brought about. For those acquainted with the history of early Christianity, this seems to be a real paradox. Within the confines of the New Testament, rural culture hardly enjoys a privileged status.⁸¹ On the contrary, nearly all the Pauline letters were sent to major cities from the Roman Empire, and the later success of the Byzantine project cannot be explained without reference to the urban network, which mediated the communication between religiosity and politics.

Despite this initially urban ethos of early Christianity, the modern shift from the rural to the urban setting had unsettling effects for the religious individual and community alike, particularly in the case of those whose historical knowledge was missing.⁸² For a better understanding of the roots of this modern, ongoing perception, one has to look at the phenomenon of secularisation connected (though not exclusively) to the Westernisation of various religious customs and practices. In Europe, particularly, secularisation was seen as an integrative, if not dissolving, factor which allowed the emergence of intercultural dialogue. Among all the other Romanian principalities, Transylvania was the first to have experienced an abundance of different secularising strategies, regarded as necessary steps in the process of modernisation. Transylvania was the space where the Roman-Catholic Christians encountered the Evangelicals, and the Uniate Christians came across the Eastern Orthodox. They all agreed and had disputes on many points, only to notice later that the new Christian confessions (such as the Baptist or the Adventist churches) surfaced and prospered among their former coreligionists. Different churches had dissimilar attitudes towards food-rites and their symbolism, allowing a greater or smaller degree of flexibility in terms of cuisine innovation. The neo-Protestant churches, in particular, seemed prone to forget the deep symbolism of the religious meal ceremonies, which represented the backbone of traditional

⁸⁰ See also Ion AGÂRBICEANU, *Preotul și familia preotească. Rostul lor etnic în satul românesc* (Sibiu: Ed. Subsecției Eugenice și Biopolitice a Astei și a Institutului de Igienă și Biopolitică al Universității Cluj-Sibiu, 1942).

⁸¹ Christopher R. SEITZ, *Word Without End* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁸² Fred DAVIS, *Yearning for Yesterday: a Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979).

Orthodoxy. The idea that “bread” was intrinsically sacred was inconceivable for those who deafened themselves to the voice of the tradition for the benefit of biblical literalism. Regardless of these tensions, all Christian bodies intersected with the secularisation vector, especially during the second half of the 19th century, and the early 20th century (when a mass migration of workers boosted the hybridisation phenomenon). Between 1848 (a time of political and cultural revolution) and 1948 (when the cross-fertilisation culture disappeared under the “red horizons”), Transylvania staged ambivalent actions pertaining to different interpretations. Dumitru Stăniloae preferred to view secularisation as the by-product of Western theology, and thus as having exclusively negative effects.

Upon entering into the complex space of modernity, the sense of belonging to a “cosmic Christianity” faded away. The implementation of the functionalist approach to food, the invention of new medical notions of hygiene, the oblique attachment to scepticism among the intellectuals and the new bourgeoisie, the loss of the authority of traditional, Christian piety (exemplified by the opposition established by Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna between on the one hand, schools - seen as necessary - and monasteries which are deemed futile⁸³), the industrialisation process, the constant changes of the urban calendar and time perception, the erosion of the Byzantine memory within Eastern Orthodoxy, along with the appearance of informal ecumenical practices at the grassroots level (triggered, in part, by mixed marriages) – all these changes contributed to the gradual loosening of all rites of passages.⁸⁴

It is because of all these losses that the young Stăniloae did not repress his preference for the “humble character” of the Romanian ethos. Stăniloae sided with those religious leaders, rural conservatives and supporters of old folk traditions who expressed a strong resistance to secular homogenisation. On the other side, there were the partisans of social rejuvenation, defending the need to adapt the traditional *rites de passages* to the new conditions of life, marked by economic exchanges across different symbolic borders.

⁸³ Andrei ȘAGUNA, *Corespondență*, vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2005).

⁸⁴ José CASANOVA, *Public Religion in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), with an analysis of the North-American transformation of secularism and public religion; Friedrich W. GRAF, *Die Wiederkehr der Götter. Religion in der modernen Kultur* (Munich, 2004).

The National Ideal and the Orthodox Ecclesiology

Along this partly legitimised nostalgia for the mythological realities of the peasant life, Stăniloae defended the dignity of the concept of “nation-State” as somebody who experienced as a child the political union of Great Romania. At the age of 15, Dumitru Stăniloae witnessed this thrilling event, which was publicly celebrated in Alba-Iulia on 1st December 1918 in the presence of a great number of Church officials, as well.

Stăniloae was an offspring of an ordinary Transylvanian family, religiously engaged and remarkable only for its unmistakable sober ethos. Pundits in psychohistory may help with some arguments, which could explain the difference between the Transylvanians and their Romanian fellows living in the already constituted Kingdom (proclaimed by 1881, under the rule of King Carol I). Modest and honest, so the story went, Romanians from Transylvania knew better than anyone else how to earn their survival under foreign occupation.⁸⁵ Continually toiling with a long-term plan in their mind, ordinary Transylvanians quickly adopted the administrative and economic skills developed by Austrians, Germans, and Hungarians.⁸⁶ This could better explain the response to modernisation to be found in Transylvania after 1918.

The Wallachians, however, managed to appropriate the more stagnant ethos of the Balkans, which could not make a substantial contribution to economic progress, or political freedom. Seen as less talkative than Wallachians and perhaps less creative than Moldavians, the ideal Transylvanian citizen understood better the historical mission surrounding the “national ideal.” Resentment and frustration must have fuelled almost inevitably the rhetoric of young Transylvanians, such as Dumitru Stăniloae at the sight of the “compromising deals” struck between the government from Bucharest and the Vatican administration. The Orthodox Transylvanians defended their patriotic rights against “the foreign” and “heretic” influence in counter-reaction to the Vatican’s attempts from 1927 to establish a concordat with the Romanian state.⁸⁷ More than anybody else, the Orthodox from Transylvania remembered the acts of injustice perpetrated during the Austro-Hungarian occupation

⁸⁵ For an anthropological study of the Transylvanian ethos in the 19th century, see Sorin MITU, *National Identity of Romanians from Transylvania* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001).

⁸⁶ For a better understanding of this point, see the well-balanced considerations of the same Romanian historian Sorin MITU, *Transilvania mea* (Jassy: Polirom Publishers, 2006).

⁸⁷ Ștefan LEMNY, *Originea și cristalizarea ideii de patrie în cultura română* (Bucharest: Minerva Publishers, 1986).

(1867–1918) and, before this date, under the rule of the Habsburgs (1526–1867).⁸⁸ The role of this recent memory, unhealed by historical distance and participatory hermeneutics, was thus crucial for the subsequent developments of Stăniloae's polemical stance.⁸⁹

To these considerations one should add Stăniloae's strong convictions about Orthodox ecclesiology in contradistinction to the Roman-Catholic dogma of universal jurisdiction. Instead of papal authority, Stăniloae saw the bishop as the one who

“[o]versees the preservation of faith in his diocese, having the charge to keep it the same as other dioceses of the whole Church. That is why he is ordained by two or three different bishops, as they ask him to confess his faith as precondition, and that it be the same as that of the bishops who ordain him. Thus, the bishop makes also the link between his diocese and the other dioceses and with the universal Church in matters of faith. That's the reason why he must be in uninterrupted communion with other bishops.”⁹⁰

Stăniloae was suspicious of the potentially totalitarian tendencies hidden by the office of St Peter's vicar, under the appearance of a missionary umbrella.

“Both the principle of communion and the transcendent origin of the Church's sanctifying action are concentrated in Episcopal synodality. Synodality shows that sanctification and perfection do not exist outside communion. But sanctification as the power to raise to a higher communion is distinct from general communion, for it comes from above. Since nothing higher than Episcopal synodality exists, the sanctification of the transcendent origin within the Episcopal order can only come through the highest sanctifying organ, which is the Episcopal communion or synodality itself.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ The actions carried out against the contemplative monasteries (both Orthodox and Roman-Catholic) by General Bukow are an almost constant reference in Stăniloae's polemical prose (which forgets to mention the sufferings to which the Roman-Catholic faithful had been subjected during the long periods of tyranny).

⁸⁹ The voice of another Transylvanian was particularly acute in the 1930s. See Emil CIORAN, *Schimbarea la față a României* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 1990), *passim*.

⁹⁰ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Autoritatea Bisericii,” p. 207, quoted by Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 26. I use here Robertson's translation.

⁹¹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Temeiurile teologice ale ierarhiei,” p. 171, *apud* Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Not only does the Roman-Catholic Church give to the pope more power than to his collegial bishops; she also tends to water down the natural differences between the nations of the globe. True ethnic plurality and cultural diversity, Stăniloae thought, were celebrated in Orthodoxy as a divine gift.⁹² He opposed what he took to be the canonical Roman-Catholic view (which has radically changed since Vatican II) with an organicist understanding of the “nation” and a conciliary vision about the Church. One nation, Stăniloae opined, cannot be reduced to a simple gathering of people sharing the same language, history, and culture. Despite the transitory character of any ethnical entity, Stăniloae could not regard nations as being “like chaff driven by the desert wind,” or put “on fire” (Isaiah 47, 14).

In other words, the Orthodox ecclesiology does not consider the notion of Christian identity as free-floating. Rather, it is defined by some exact forms of territorial fellowship.⁹³ Ideally, the bishop is master not over an abstract flock, but over the close friendship of those gathered together to worship in one given place which makes the body of the local church. It was this theological sense of being able to justify the local and the particular in the light of the traditional Christian teaching that allowed Stăniloae to utter harsh statements about the allegedly power-driven structures of Roman-Catholic universalism. On the ideal map of Orthodox ecclesiology, the call of each nation to develop and flourish fit well together. While making these somewhat idealistic claims, Stăniloae overlooked the complex interaction, if not conflicts, between modern nationalist rhetoric and the pastoral mission of the Orthodox churches in their diasporas. More than once, the Christian communities living outside the traditionally Orthodox borders perceived with great pain the lack of unity in the actions pursued by different ecclesiastical centres (from Moscow and Constantinople, to Bucharest and Belgrade). Differently put, Stăniloae did not challenge the shortcomings of Orthodox ecclesiology revealed by the very dynamics of modern life, when the traditional notion of territorial identity and the imperial authorisation of ecumenical debates did not have the same weight.

Narcissism in Historiography

Along with the bucolic nostalgia intensified by the trauma of secularisation, with his Transylvanian sensitivity, and his deep theological

⁹² Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Ortodoxie și Româanism*, p. 13.

⁹³ Grégoire PPATHOMAS, “La relation d’opposition entre Église établie localement et diaspora ecclésiale,” *Contacts* 57 (2005), no. 2, p. 96-132.

convictions about the truth of Orthodox ecclesiology, Dumitru Stăniloae embraced a nationalist agenda for reasons related to historical scholarship. While attacking the Uniates, Stăniloae attempted to legitimise the Orthodox contribution to the formation of Romania as a nation. One of his articles bore the eloquent title: "The Contribution of Orthodoxy to the Formation and the Maintenance of Romanian People and National Unity,"⁹⁴ where he directly implemented the common vulgate of nationalist historiography. According to Stăniloae, Orthodoxy was the original form of Christianity which landed on the proto-Romanian territories. Following the conquest of Dacia by the Romans (II-III century), a Romanian nation was born, *tout court*, Christian. The natural conclusion of such logic, which loses sight of all the historical discontinuities recorded by the archaeologists, suggests that the birth of the Romanian people emerges as a providential miracle in history.⁹⁵ A betrayal of the Orthodox faith is, thus, nothing short of an act of treason directed against the Romanian identity.

It mattered very little for Dumitru Stăniloae that the factual history of early Christianity in the territories of *Romania antiqua* was rather poorly documented, lending itself only to mere conjectures. What to a foreign historian looked like an unconvincing picture, to a Romanian traditionalist was absolutely obvious: "the Romanians were born Christians."⁹⁶ That the birth of the nation coincided with the advent of Christianity on Romanian soil was an undisputed matter amongst the Orthodox hierarchs, this claim being also reflected in the 1923

⁹⁴ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Rolul Ortodoxiei în formarea și păstrarea ființei poporului român și a unității naționale," *Ortodoxia* XXX (1978), no. 4, p. 584-603.

⁹⁵ In this, Stăniloae follows the rhetoric legitimised by professional historians, such as G. I. BRĂTIANU, *O enigmă și un miracol: poporul român* [1942¹] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1988). The phrase in the title belongs to Ferdinand Lot ('une énigme et un miracle historique'). Andrei Brezianu once noticed that the Romanian historiography lacks a contribution similar to F. Braudel's monograph on *L'identité de la France*. See Andrei BREZIANU, "Ieri și azi. Schiță de tablou moral pentru o societate în tranziție," *Ideii în dialog* 10 (iulie 2005), p. 13.

⁹⁶ This blunt statement belongs to Fr Ioan Iovan from the "Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God" (Recea, Târgu Mureș), interviewed by Victoria CLARK, *Why the Angels Fall. A Portrait of Orthodox Europe from Byzantium to Kosovo?* (Oxford: MacMillan, 2000), p. 211: "we are Christians grown, like grass which has never been cut." This was the view shared by the members of *Gândirea* movement, and it is currently still endorsed by the Church historian Mircea Păcurariu in his first volume of the *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic, 1980-1981), 3 vols.

Constitution (which called the Orthodox Church the “national Church”). The triumphal emancipation of the Romanian nation from the crude oppressors, according to the Church official vulgate, is paralleled by the equally brave story of Christianisation – in Orthodox terms, only – of this young nation. There exists an epitomising myth that troubles the ethno-theological discourse of the Church official – embraced, at least in part, by Stăniloae too: the story of St Andrew, apostle Peter’s brother. This first-called among the apostles is regarded as the seal of the Orthodox tradition, which was planted from the very beginning in the earth of the Romanian nation. All other missionary actions performed on the territories of *Romania antique* are to be seen in the glowing shadow of St Andrew, whose feast in the Orthodox calendar (30 November) just happens to announce the National Day of Romania (1 December).

But what do the historians say about this narcissistic narrative regarding divine election, continuity and triumph? To begin with, in his *Church History* (iii. 1) Eusebius of Caesarea describes Andrew as the “apostle of Scythia.” This geographic appellation used to denote in the past a region lying north of the Caspian and the Black Sea. This explains why Russians claimed later to have St Andrew as their patron saint. The majority of scholars are inclined to think that Eusebius refers to Scythia Minor (today Dobruja, which extends from the western banks of the lower Danube to the eastern shores of Black Sea). In 46 AD, Scythia Minor was incorporated by the Roman Empire as part of the Moesia Inferior region to become later a Byzantine province. Hereby, the Greek emissaries who were sent from Constantinople gradually Christianised Dobruja. Most of the historical records, which demonstrate a Christian presence in Scythia Minor, date from the fourth century. Around 300 AD, the persecution of the Church initiated by Diocletian reached the territories of Dobruja, and countless of Christians saw their death in places such as Niviodunum (today Isaccea) Axiopolis (today Cernavodă), or Tomis (today Constanța). Starting with the fourth century, the ecclesiastical structure of Dobruja began to be fortified. Mark, a bishop of Tomis, attended the gatherings of the first ecumenical council from Nicaea 325. The same Dobruja can boast with the famous monk, John the Cassian⁹⁷, with bishop Teotim I (a defender of Origen, and a friend of St John Chryostom), and with Dionysius Exiguus (“the Small One”) who calculated first the date of Christ’s birth. On the map, Dobruja represents, however, only a small fraction of contemporary Romania.

The successful conversion of this Pontic region to orthodox Christianity, passing from the influence of the Roman colonists and to the

⁹⁷ Henri-Irénée MARROU, “La patrie de Jean Cassien,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* XIII (1947), pp. 588–96.

direct supervision of Constantinople, cannot account for the Church history in Transylvania, Moldavia and Walachia.⁹⁸ These provinces, which shape the present structure of the country, eschewed the Byzantine influence. Significant archaeological evidence (consisting of religious objects, inscriptions on stones, and remnants of churches) testifies to the existence of early Christian communities which go back to the early fourth century. For a long time, the proto-Romanians must have experienced a semi-nomadic life in the hilly regions of the Carpathians, where they could be out of sight for the invaders (e.g., Goths, Huns, Slavs). They lacked the opportunities available to all those Christian communities living in the proximity of the urban centres of the Mediterranean. This inevitably resulted in a lack of literary culture, which today makes almost impossible the identification of the very source of Christianisation in Walachia, Moldova and Transylvania. In Walachia and Moldova, which for two centuries formed “the free Dacia” (a buffering zone between the Roman Empire and the *terra incognita* of the barbarians), the rather slow and discontinuous process of religious conversion took place from the second century AD (following the invasion of Dacia by Emperor Trajan, between 101-106) up to the early fourteenth century. As Nicolae Iorga repeatedly remarked, the sense of religious kinship with the Byzantine commonwealth is well testified among the Romanian princes. Transylvania represents a special case. It is probably safe to say that, to the extent it embraced Christianity, the Latin-speaking population of Transylvania maintained its allegiance to the creed and liturgical languages (Greek and Slavonic) of the Eastern Orthodox Church until very late, i.e. towards the dawn of the 18th century.⁹⁹

Historians find it very difficult to prove the necessary connection between the appearance of Christianity in ancient Romanian territories and the birth of the Romanian nation in the first millennium. The early Christian communities of *Romania antiqua* were extremely diverse: they included Orthodox believers and Arians, as well as Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking churches. Before the sixth century, it is very likely that

⁹⁸ This is a huge topic, but I refer the reader to Alexandru MADGEARU, *Rolul creștinismului în formarea poporului român* (Bucharest: All Publishers, 2001); for an English equivalent, see Alexandru Madgearu, “The Spreading of the Christianity in the Rural Areas of Post-Roman Dacia (4th-7th centuries),” *Archaeus* VIII (2004), no. 1-4, pp. 41-59. On Christianity as ‘folk religion,’ see the challenging studies of Nelu ZUGRAVU, *Geneza creștinismului popular al românilor* (Bucharest: 1997).

⁹⁹ P.P. PANAITESCU, “‘Perioada slavonă’ la români și ruperea de cultura apusului [1944],” *Interpretări românești. Studii de istorie economică și socială*, 2nd edition by Ștefan S. Gorovei and Maria Magdalena Székely (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1994).

religious syncretism was peculiar to the inland territories of ancient Romania (Dobruja being probably the sole exception). As many pieces of Romanian folklore show, the Christianisation process of the rural population continued until very late. Magic, superstition, and pagan rites were never completely uprooted from the cultural soil of the Romanian peasantry, despite the tremendous efforts paid by the Church.¹⁰⁰ The official historiography, however, found it very difficult to come to terms with this aching truth.

Conclusions

“Theology and nationalism” remains a topic of paramount importance for the intellectual history of modern Romania, and that of the Balkans in general.¹⁰¹ Many historians have done very well in studying

¹⁰⁰ For one famous example of Shamanic practices discovered by Christian missionaries in the Carpathian Mountains during the 17th century, see V. A. URECHE, *Codex Bandinus: Memoriu asupra scrierii lui Bandinus dela 1646* (Bucharest: Analele Academiei Române, 1895), p. 154, commented by Mircea ELIADE, *Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God*, ET by W. R. Trask (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 191-194, and Moshe IDEL, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism. Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2005), p. 148-150.

¹⁰¹ On this wide-ranging issues, see the studies of Emanuel TURCZYNSKI, *Konfession und Nation: zur Frühgeschichte der serbischen und rumänischen Nationsbildung* (Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1976); Krista ZACH, *Orthodoxe Kirche und rumänisches Volksbewusstsein im 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1977); Janice BROUN, *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1988); Paschalis KITROMILIDES, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989) no. 2, p. 149-192; Vassilios MAKRIDES, “Aspects of Greek Orthodox Fundamentalism,” *Orthodoxes Forum* (1991), vol. 5, p. 49-72; T. LIPOWATZ, “Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism: Two Aspects of Modern Greek Political Culture,” *Greek Political Science Review* (1993), vol. 2, p. 31-47; Paschalis KITROMILIDES, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-Eastern Europe* (Aldershot, 1994); Peter F. SUGAR, *East European Nationalism. Politics of Religion* (Ashgate Variorum, 1994); V. GEORGIADOU, “Greek Orthodoxy and the Politics of Nationalism,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 9 (1995), no. 2, p. 295-316; John S. MCGIEL (ed.), *State and Nation Building in East Central Europe: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Institute on East Central Europe, Columbia University, 1996); Ina MERDJANOVA, *The Postcommunist Palimpsest: Religion, Nationalism, and Civil Society in Eastern Europe* (Edwin Mellen Press,

the cultural and political trajectory of the “national idea” up until 1918. Very few scholars failed to underline the instrumental role played by Eastern Orthodoxy during the agonising birth of Romanian self-consciousness, especially during the 19th century.¹⁰²

The political rapport between the Orthodox Church and the national state of Romania is rather well documented, while the “dangerous liaisons” between the secular nationalism and the Christian theological discourse still need pioneering research. This study aims to be an introduction to Dumitru Stăniloae’s ethno-theology. A systematic examination of the nationalistic themes present in the writings of this eminent thinker has not as yet been carried out, although his views still capture the imagination of many leaders of Romanian Orthodoxy. The great influence exercised by his reflections on the nation and the Church explains why an inquiry into the roots of Stăniloae’s ethno-theology cannot be postponed for too long.

The present study aimed at presenting, merely as an introduction, the theological tensions at work in the writings of Dumitru Stăniloae. We discovered his passionate involvement in history, seen as the domain of the “many” paralleled by the ineffable “One,” which is to be contemplated beyond the realm of any fragmentation. One could call the first type of discourse the “prophetic” trope, while the latter, and the most important one, would be “the sapiential.” I have identified four major causes which hold Stăniloae responsible for his defence of a *sui-generis* ethno-theology: a) the genuine bucolic nostalgia, accounted in his personal memoirs; b) the severe trauma inculcated by the experience of secularisation intensely perceived in Transylvania; c) the sincere belief in

2001); and Vjekoslav PERICA, *Balkan Idols. Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), especially p. 2-16.

¹⁰² Among the titles available in English, see especially the following works by Keith HITCHINS, *The Rumanian National Movement in Transylvania 1780-1849* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); *Studies on Romanian National Consciousness* (Pelham N.Y., etc.: Nagard Publishers, 1983); *A Nation Affirmed. The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania 1860-1914* (Bucharest: Enciclopedica Publishers, 1999); *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); *The Romanians, 1774-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). For the earlier period, see Ovidiu PECICAN, “Ethnicity and Faith in the Romanian-Slavic Literature of the 14th to the 15th Centuries,” in Maria CRĂCIUN and Ovidiu GHITTA (eds.), *Church and Society* (Cluj-Napoca: EFES, 1998). For an excellent synthesis for the period between the 17th and the 19th century, see Katherine VERDERY, “Moments in the Rise of the Discourse on National Identity. I. Seventeenth through Nineteenth Centuries,” in I. AGRIGOROAIEI, Gh. BUZATU, and V. CRISTIAN (eds.), *Românii în istoria universală*, vol. III (Jassy: Universitatea “Al. I. Cuza” Press, 1988), p. 25-92.

the rightfulness of the Orthodox ecclesiology, based on the notion of dogmatic and administrative authority exercised by the bishop, on the theological and spiritual sovereignty of the “holy man,” and on the territorial identity protected by the living community of Christians from a given place (parish). This view went against the Roman-Catholic claims to universal jurisdiction made by the papal office; d) finally, Stăniloae gave gullibly into the narcissist tropes of the neo-Romantic historiography quickly adopted by Orthodox Church officials at the end of the 19th, and also during the whole 20th century.

It is also true that in the pan-Orthodox circles, the lasting memory of Stăniloae’s life-long activities stems not from his nationalistic agenda, but from a truly inspired and creative reading of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. For more than fifty years and under the most austere circumstances, the Romanian theologian indefatigably worked for the construction of a “neo-Patristic synthesis.” In his case, the attempt to refresh the theological thinking of the Orthodox Church, caught up in a long cultural and religious captivity under Ottoman Rule, and the unilateral impact of the Western *Aufklärung*, was rather successful. Stăniloae, together with other Orthodox theologians, such as Vladimir Lossky or Fr Justin Popovitch, tried to react to the challenges of modern culture, surpassing hereby the barren “theology of repetition,” wherein even the greater minds of the post-Byzantine tradition were hopelessly stuck. This return to the biblical and patristic sources of Christian theology, in which he saw the only possible bedrock for an ecumenical dialogue among the Christian communities, was paralleled by a genuine interest in the continental philosophy of the 20th century. In the battle between the Gospel and his early nationalist temptations, the universality of Stăniloae’s theological commitments ultimately prevailed.