

A Mystical Anthropology: Introduction into the thought of Father Dumitru Stăniloae

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Sandu Frunză, *O Antropologie mistică. Introducere în gândirea părintelui Stăniloae* [A Mystical Anthropology. Introduction into the thought of Father Dumitru Stăniloae], 2nd edition. Bucureşti: Editura Eikon, 2016.

Keywords: mystique, Orthodox Theology, Ascetical Theology, Philocalic writings, Saint Maxim the Confessor, Philosophy of Religion

Known and appreciated both in the Theological and Philosophical space for his research, Professor Sandu Frunză from the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences from “Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, has become a specialist in the thinking thought of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, one of the most important Orthodox Theologians from the entire world (through works like: *Experiența religioasă în gândirea lui Dumitru Stăniloae. O etică relațională* [The religious experience in the thinking thought of Dumitru Stăniloae. A relational ethics], Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Press, 2001; “Profilul dinamic al comunicării în ontologia creștină a Părintelui Stăniloae [“The dynamic profile of communication in the Christian ontology of Father Stăniloae”], in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Trăirea lui Dumnezeu în Ortodoxie* [The experience of God in Orthodoxy], Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1993: 11-30; “Pentru o antologie a iubirii” [“For an anthology of love”], in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iubirea creștină* [Christian love], Galați: Porto Franco Press, 1993, 159-174; “Realitate și simbol” [“Reality and symbol”], in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ascetica și Mistica Ortodoxă* (The Orthodox Ascetical Theology and

Mystique), Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 1993: 348-357, and *O antropologie mistică. Introducere în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae* [*A Mystical Anthropology. Introduction into the thinking thought of Father Dumitru Stăniloae*], Craiova: Omniscope Press, 1996). The last of these writings was reprinted, in a new and improved edition, by Eikon Publishing House from Bucharest, in 2016. Its re-publication is the subject of the present review.

Written in an attractive way, the book creates a bridge for the dialogue between Christian spirituality and philosophical investigation. Equipped with the competence of the latter, but also well-documented with respect to the former, the author brings into attention not only the biography and the personality of the Theologian Dumitru Stăniloae or his works through the specific investigation of a certain Theological issue, which is common among other researchers. Instead, he tries to highlight and analyse subjects that have things in common with philosophy.

Segmented in five chapters, the book is accompanied by a foreword belonging to the author (pp. 7-12), a few words written by Professor Aurel Codoban for the 1st edition (pp. 13-16) and an index of terms and names (pp. 171-176). The introductory and motivational part contains, besides the evocation of the Great Theologian, a few words about the author's contribution to the valorisation of his works and some thoughts about his demarche and its importance. Sandu Frunză shows that by studying Stăniloae's works, he became interested in relational ethics (p. 11), and classifies his teachings as a "permanent authentic challenge to find yourself in the world" (p. 11).

Subsequently, professor Codoban appreciates the author's contribution to the understanding of Father Stăniloae's ideas in a hermeneutic way, meaning that the "lecture is seen as an interpretation" (p. 14), and underlines the personal accent that Sandu Frunză brings to the investigation of the Theologian's works.

Structured, as we have already said, in five thematic unites, the book looks into the issue of communion (pp. 23-52), seen by the Romanian priest as a fundamental component of

Orthodox Theology, the issue of persons and their Theological and Ontological implications (pp. 53-66), and that of communication between people, based on the virtue of love (pp. 67-94). The author also investigates in depth the anthropological aspects highlighted by Dumitru Stăniloae in his researches (pp. 95-114), after which he concludes by inter-correlating all the mentioned subjects, in an interesting essay about the way of understanding value from a Christian perspective (pp. 115-160).

Useful both for specialised and unspecialised readers, the research contains, in the first chapter, a unit with dogmatic explanations (pp. 23-31). There, the author emphasises the meaning of terms like *person*, *love*, *communication* and s. o. as seen by Dumitru Stăniloae and insists on the link that exists between these “keywords” of Eastern Theology. Speaking about the link between love and communication in the Holy Trinity, he shows that:

“The highest expression of communication is considered love, which, paradoxically, enables the union of the selves, without leading to their identification. The work of each person of the Trinity in the World is understood as a call to love between people and God. Love is not perceived only as simple gift and as a way of implementing mutual acceptance, but as a deeper ontological act. The triadic formula proposed by Orthodoxy is the matrix that we try to build on, within the mystery of interpersonal love” (p. 27).

The discussion is resumed and deepened in the chapter dedicated to the triadic structure of the person (pp. 54-59): starting from the idea that man was created in the image of God, Sandu Frunză resumes the main aspects of anthropology seen in the thinking thought of Father Stăniloae, as a call to reflect the Trinitarian relationship in man’s life. This creates the context for him to speak about the Ontological break caused by sin (pp. 59-60), but also about the need for inner purification, attained in Christ and in the Resurrection (pp. 61-65). Linking “the word” as an instrument of communication and the instrumentalization of language, through the original sin and the work of Christ, he shows, starting from the ideas of Father Stăniloae, that:

“Jesus Christ comes to re-establish the unifying function of communication, both at the level of interpersonal relationships and at the level of the profound meaning of the world. According to the Romanian Theologian, before His incarnation, Jesus Christ, as the source of human words, communicates them in a non-sonorous way, through prophetic voices, while after His incarnation He uses sonorous words. In each of these cases, He mysteriously lives in these words, as the ultimate unifying power” (p. 64).

Likewise, the author presents the important aspects emphasised by Father Stăniloae in his writings about the link between love and creation, the restoration of love, Christ as the archetype of perfect love (pp. 79-80), the liturgical dimension of love (pp. 83-86), its mystical dimension (pp. 87-94), anthropology and s. o.

Through his work, Sandu Frunză is not only bringing in front of the reader a new and personal interpretation of the Theological and Philosophical thinking thought of the Romanian writer Dumitru Stăniloae, but he is also making an interesting contribution to the understanding of the Theologian’s manner of thinking, in a way that brings together philosophical hermeneutics and theological instruments of research. This is the reason why the re-publication of his work is an important editorial event that must not only be emphasised and welcomed, but also understood to its full extent.

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