

Featured Review

Dumitru Staniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology¹

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The author, Radu Bordeianu, is a theologian of the Romanian Orthodox, currently teaching as Assistant Professor of Systematics at the Duquesne University, Pittsburgh. It is originally written as a doctoral dissertation by the author at the Marquette University, USA, and published as volume 13 of a series called, "Ecclesiological Investigations" with Gerard Mannion as editor.

The author makes a serious and detailed research into the writings of Dumitru Staniloae (1903–1993), who is an important theologian of the Romanian Orthodox Church and reconstructs his Trinitarian ecclesiology and proposes it as an ecumenical ecclesiology acceptable to the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions. The works of Staniloae are not well known as he lived in Romania behind the iron curtain and the regime censured his publications and incarcerated him for five years. Many of his publications were in the Romanian language and therefore not accessible to the English speaking world. According to Lucian Turcescu and Kallistos Ware, Staniloae occupies "a position in the present day Orthodoxy comparable to that of Karl Barth in Protestantism and Karl Rahner in Roman Catholicism" (p. 3).

In the medieval period until the 19th century the Eastern Orthodox theologians in general followed the "Manual Theology" of the Western

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Churches, which was scholastic or neo-scholastic, as a result of their contact with the western catholic missionaries and theologians. The Orthodox theologians call this period as the “Western Captivity of the East”. But slowly the Eastern Orthodox Churches, when they got political and ecclesiastical autonomy and autocephaly, made a departure from Manual Theology. Many Orthodox theologians called for and tried to make a “neo-patristic synthesis” by taking into consideration the modern problems and trends of thought instead of simply repeating the early patristic thought. Alexei Khomiakov, Nicholas Afanassieff, Paul Evdokimov, Alexander Schmemmann, Vladimir Lossky, Georges Florovsky, John Meyendorff, Dumitru Staniloae, Nikos Nissiotis, and John Zizioulas are some of the champions of this new trend of “neo-patristic synthesis”. According to the author, among these theologians Dumitru Staniloae has a unique place and role as he is very ecumenical by calling for “open sobornicity” which means a readiness and capacity to learn from all sources and traditions, whether Catholic, Protestant or other religions, Biblical, Patristic or contemporary theological and philosophical systems.

In **part one** the author presents the “Ecumenical Ecclesiology” of Staniloae, which has two chapters. *Chapter one* deals with “open sobornicity” or Staniloae’s interaction with the West. Here the author argues that Staniloae made a “neo-patristic synthesis” by a creative development in Orthodox theology by engaging in dialogue with the modern ecumenical thought and contemporary social issues. His participation at the International Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue in Munich in 1982 influenced to moderate his view on the Catholic Church and he stated that Orthodoxy and Catholicism are not divided by essential differences, even on the question of Papacy (p. 21). It is interesting to note here that Staniloae spoke about a new method of theology which recognized three sources of theology, namely, Revelation (Scripture and Tradition), Liturgy and contemporary thought. He was also of opinion that the works of the Fathers of the Church needed to be taken a step further due to their limited cultural and even theological character. He was also convinced that the different views of the Churches are not irreconcilable, but they may be held together with the principle of ‘unity in diversity’, a symphonic unity without uniformity. As Orthodoxy and Catholicism do not have “Eucharistic intercommunion” today, he suggested that it should be complemented by “spiritual intercommunion” consisting of common study, prayer, and common action in the world (p. 30). Applying ‘open sobornicity’, he relied on Western philosophers and theologians as well as Western Biblical and Patristic scholarship. According to Staniloae the Orthodoxy received the theology of three offices of Christ as priest, prophet and king and the number of sacraments as seven from Western theology. According to the author, “Staniloae presented a neo-patristic theology characterized by a balance between cataphatism and apophatism, personal encounter with God, rootedness in the biblical, patristic, and liturgical

Tradition of the Church, and engagement with contemporary thought" (p. 40).

Chapter two is on the Relationship between the Trinity and the Church. Based on Staniloae, the author presents four models for the relationship between the Trinity and the Church: (1) Church as the Reflection of the Trinity - Trinitarian theology is automatically and analogically reflected in the life of the Church (2) Church as the Icon of the Trinity – Love among the human persons and in the Church is the type of love in the Trinity. (3) Church as the Sacrament of the Trinity – Christ is the sacrament of the Trinity and the Church is the sacrament as the extension of the mystery of Christ. (4) Church as the Ecclesiological Consequence of *Theosis*, which means God's perfect and full penetration of humanity. Staniloae shows that the Church shares in the communion that exists within the Trinity. In other words, the life of the Trinity is interwoven in the life of the Church (p. 64).

Part two, consisting of three chapters, is an elaboration of the relationship between Trinity and the Church; *chapter three* on the relationship of the Father and the Church, *chapter four* on the relationship of the Son and the Church, and *chapter five* on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church. All human persons are the adoptive children of the Father in the Son who assumed the human nature. The Son is begotten from the Father by nature, whereas we are adopted children by grace (p. 69). Our adoption is not only due to the Son, but also due to the mission of the Spirit who rests in the Son. Hence this adoption is fully Trinitarian. Our adoption and *theosis* will be fully realized only at the *eschaton*. The Church is related to the Son as His Body. By assuming human nature, the Son has become closer to all humans, closer to each one more than any other person. The Church is thus filled with the Trinity and it becomes thus a communion according to the structure of the Trinity. This communion is continuously renewed and strengthened in the liturgy and sacraments. By explaining the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church, Staniloae and the other Orthodox theologians try to correct the exclusively Christocentric and Christomonistic understanding of the Church. The Spirit represents the bond of love between the Father and the Son, and the Spirit cannot be separated neither from the Father, as the Father's love, nor from the Son, as the resting place and response to paternal love (p. 113). God manifests his love outside the intratrinitarian communion through the Spirit. In short, the Son and the Spirit are closely interrelated both in the immanent Trinity and in the economic Trinity. Hence the work of Christ and the Spirit in the Church are inseparable; the Church as institution and charisms in the Church are interrelated. "No Christology without Pneumatology and no Pneumatology without Christology" (Congar). "The charismatic element is not parallel to the institution, since both are means of grace in which the Word and the Spirit act together" (p. 121).

Part three of the book is titled “Communion Ecclesiology”, and it consists of three chapters, *chapter six* (Priesthood toward Creation), *chapter seven* (The Priesthood of the Church) and *chapter eight* (Locality and Universality: Eucharistic Ecclesiology), which are in fact applications of the Trinitarian and Communion ecclesiology. God’s acts (priestly work) are mediated through creation which may be said to be natural priesthood and in a special way through the priesthood of the Church. When we exploit and destroy nature, we are challenging God’s presence in creation and sacramentality of nature. On the contrary we have to sanctify and reestablish the God-ward movement of creation by regarding it as God’s presence, gift and sacrament (p. 145). All human persons have to exercise their natural priesthood by offering the world back to God. Of course, God’s presence in the world will be fully revealed only at the *eschaton*, when God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15: 28).

Staniloae’s view of interdependence of natural (belongs to all humans), universal (belongs to all Christians) and ordained priesthood in the Church is ecumenically very significant, and it can overcome the classical polemics on ministry between Protestants and Catholics. All ministries are a participation in the ministry of Christ. In general Protestants do not attend to natural priesthood and the sacramentality of the cosmos and they traditionally emphasize priesthood of all Christians and do not give sufficient importance to ordained ministry in the Church (p. 157). Staniloae’s view of natural priesthood is also ecologically very relevant and it promotes ecumenical and interreligious dialogues (p. 158). Staniloae rightly emphasizes the relationship between universal priesthood and ordained priesthood in Church. The ordained ministers exercise their ministry only within the ministry of the universal priesthood of all Christians. This point has been sufficiently emphasized both by Vatican II and recent ecumenical documents on ministry.

Chapter eight in part three is in fact a fitting conclusion on “Eucharistic Ecclesiology”. Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiologies have arrived at a convergence today with the understanding of “Church as Communion”. According to the author, in contemporary Orthodox ecclesiology it is John Zizioulas who contributed to such an approach with his criticism on Afanassieff’s ‘Eucharistic ecclesiology’. Staniloae’s ecclesiology seems to complement and correct the Eucharistic ecclesiologies of both Afanassieff and Zizioulas and the author proposes it as an ecumenical ecclesiology. Afanassieff held that the Eucharistic assembly of the local church contains the fullness of the church, and the local churches are autonomous and independent, while Zizioulas emphasized both the local and universal church, for the universal church is ontologically prior to local church. For Afanassieff participation in the Eucharistic assembly makes the church and wherever Christians celebrate authentic Eucharist, they are united, as the

Eucharist is one and the same. According to Zizioulas, churches cannot have intercommunion without sharing the same faith and without communion among the bishops. Episcopal communion is a necessary condition for Christian unity. Staniloae is closer to Zizioulas in emphasizing the importance of right faith for the validity of Eucharist. Sharing the same faith is a condition for intercommunion. Moreover, a local church possesses ecclesial plenitude only in so far as it is in communion with the other local churches or in the framework of the universal church. Hence both Zizioulas and Staniloae replace 'Eucharistic ecclesiology' with 'Communion ecclesiology' emphasizing four elements: doctrinal unity, Episcopal communion, love and Eucharistic communion. The author of the book, Radu Bordeianu, proposes to bring together elements both from Eucharistic and Communion ecclesiologies balancing the local and universal aspects of the Church. He combines the two existing models, or the two opposing views of Eucharistic intercommunion as a 'sign of unity' or 'means of unity', and advocates that it should be both a sign and means of unity (pp. 209 – 214).

I would like to congratulate Radu Bordeianu for his study on Staniloae and for proposing it as an ecumenical ecclesiology, as it can be a bridge between Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiologies. The central theme of Vatican II was 'Communion ecclesiology' and it rejected the medieval pyramidal, papal monarchical and institution-centred ecclesiology. It emphasized the mystery aspect of the Church, its Trinitarian origin, Church as People of God with emphasis on the priestly, prophetic and pastoral role of all the members of the Church, its rediscovery of the synodal and collegial character of the Church. It addressed the ancient eastern Orthodox Churches as 'Sister Churches' and other Churches as 'Ecclesial Communities' though at different levels. It emphasized the presence and action of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the midst of the world to transform everything including the whole cosmos into the Kingdom of God. I fully agree with the author that the different elements of Communion ecclesiology, such as, doctrinal unity, communion among bishops and churches, fellowship or love and Eucharistic communion and liturgy have to be deeply and critically studied in an ecumenical spirit. Staniloae's idea of 'open sobornicity' is in fact the method followed in the contemporary ecumenical movement.

The present reviewer has some reservations on the method of "neo-Patristic synthesis" as proposed by the author and Staniloae. In my opinion, the Orthodoxy's strength and weakness are their strong adherence to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, and their inability to break from the patristic framework. For the early Fathers theology was just the commentary on the Scriptures, and for the later Greek and Latin Fathers theology was the exposition of Christian faith in terms of Greek philosophical categories. For the Orthodox Churches and theologians theology is basically Patristics, or neo-Patristics as put by the author. In my opinion theology today has to

break this exclusively Patristic framework and attend to the problems, mental categories and thought patterns of the society today. The Orthodox theology in general is a theology "from above" with a deductive approach, drawing exclusively from Bible and the Fathers. The classical Trinitarian theology is typically a theology from above. There is a lot of discussion today on theological methods. A "theology from below" related to the life and concrete experience of the people today is the need of the hour. The experience of people of all religions and cultures has to be taken seriously and a socio-cultural analysis of the reality seems to be a better starting point of theology. I am not advocating to reject the deductive approach of classical theology, but to combine it with an inductive approach of the analysis of human experience today. Trinitarian theology is the heart of this book, running through all the chapters. In our understanding of and approach to Trinity could we adopt a method 'from below'? Everything in cosmos is related to everything else. We have a unitary experience of reality. In analyzing it we will discover that Reality and our experience of it has a Trinitarian structure, a 'cosmotheandric structure or vision' of reality. I am not proposing here a Trinitarian theology 'from below' in detail. What I want to say is that any theology that does not take into consideration the actual human experience today or unrelated to it is unacceptable. This is the reason why many Christian theologians today in Asia, Africa and South America are seriously engaged in 'contextual theologies'.

The purpose of this review is to present this book in an objective way and in some details. I think I have done it though not in all its details and nuances. A more critical review is beyond the scope of the present reviewer. Once again I congratulate the author for this great contribution clearly written in a concise form, and hope that the readers will enormously profit by this book in understanding Eastern Orthodox theology and ecclesiology.