

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND PANDOGMATISM

Sandu FRUNZĂ

“Babeş-Bolyai” University
Department of Philosophy

Following the intrinsic tendency of every religion which strives for universality, Christian theology is driven by the tendency to construct an ontology of the human capable of developing the most exhaustive vision on man and life. Going beyond the regional nature of explanations offered by theology makes this a domain which has its own extensions and valences in perspective of a broader view on the issue of being. Eastern Christianity tries to sketch a pandogmatic ontology, based on the exigency of the whole humanity, starting from the data offered by Christian religious experience, extrapolating the globalising aspirations of the dogma from the level of human existence to that of existence as a whole.

Pandogmatism is a *par excellence* Christian option and it had settled as such along the history of the Christian ideas stored in the dogmatic options of diverse ecclesiastic traditions. Pandogmatism places the dogma at the basis of the explanatory process, makes it the organising principle of a field of existence considered to be the only reality. The dogmatic intentionality of the respective horizon bears fruits in this field.

The dogmatic horizon makes a shooting according to a certain organising centre which assures its functional consistence and ontological status. Therefore the dogmatic horizon appears as an organic governor of the whole field of reality. It is the order which is imposed on a world of the real in a more or less apparent way, an order in which the axiological possibilities multiply at the risk of taking aberrant shapes.

The existence of the Christian continually requires a modelling and leading reason which must be acquired and must become conscious. This reason is the dogmatic intentionality which animates the existential

field. It is this active principle which ensures the authenticity of human existence in Christianity. Assuming this dogmatic intentionality one can open towards a clearly outlined horizon which does not have rigid borders which would hinder free manifestation. In view of a dogmatic philosophy human existence is inevitably a dogmatic existence assumed in the forementioned ways. Leaving a certain dogmatic model already places you in a specific model of ordering reality, a certain type of existential interval.

We will present the Christian ordering of the world by a suggestive text by Denis the Areopagite who recurs to the the symbol of the centre: “all the rays of a circumference are concentrated in a single unity, the centre; this point contains all the straight lines gathered in it and unified in a starting point. They unite perfectly in the centre. As they draw away from it, they become different. The more they draw away from the centre, the more they become differentiated. In a word, the closer they are to the centre, the more united they are and the more they draw away from it, the more they differ from one another.”¹

The dogma is a circumference which opens towards the cosmic infinity of the real. We mention the dogmatic horizon to suggest that these divine-human nuclei try to endow human knowledge with the boundlessness of divine existence. They limit to the extent the horizon limits our possibility of seeing. However, they have an inner infinity. Dogmas derive from a certain circumference related to a certain centre.

The deepening of this centre by the individual's strive for knowledge and devotion transforms the dogma from a theoretical formula into a live dogma. Therefore dogmas are the symbol of great meetings and an opportunity to great openings. Thus the dogma ontologises and comes to the fore as a horizon of salvation. The gnoseological dimension of the dogma is also built on this ontological structure. According to tradition, “Christian dogmas are, on account of their form, points of the field of our deification, contained and accomplished in the supernatural Epiphany which had its summit in Christ. They are preserved, preached,

¹ Denis the Areopagite, *Despre numele divine. Teologia mistică*, Ed. Institutul European, Iași, 1993, p. 105.

applied and explained or defined by the Church. They represent the truths of our faith necessary for salvation.”²

This is where the role of theology interferes: it is a work of the Church which fixes the doctrines of faith. Theology is born on the level of the relation between the dogma and its explanation. According to Svetlov, dogmas are the seed whereas theology the tree which grows from this seed. He claims that Christian knowledge has two components: an objective one which is the divine truth in itself, independent of the consciousness of the believer and a subjective one which refers to the way in which this truth is reflected in Christian consciousness. The major problem is that of maintaining a theandric equilibrium of dogmatic formulas. Svetlov emphasizes two pathologic cases of dogmas and dogmatization: in Catholic theology he marks a tendency to subordinate and absorb the individual element in the godly element and a contrary tendency in Protestant theology to subordinate

² Dumitru Stãniloae, *Teologia dogmaticã ortodoxã*, vol.I, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1978, p.71. Our statements refer to Eastern Christianity in general, although the data examined by us are based especially on the analysis of the work of Father Dumitru Stãniloae. He is the most important Romanian theologian, a personality of universal stature. He has important contributions to Christology, Dogmatics, Patristics, the revaluation of the Hesychast tradition and the Romanian translation of the Holy Fathers and the Philokalia. His most important works are: *Viața și învățătura Sf. Grigorie Palama*, 1938, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, 1943, *Teologia dogmatica ortodoxã*, 3 volumes, 1978, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxã*, 1986, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, 1987, *Studii de teologie dogmaticã ortodoxã*, 1991, *Asceticã și misticã creștinã sau Teologia vieții spirituale*, 1993. He became famous for his translation of the 12 volumes of the *Philokalia*. Works written about Father Dumitru Stãniloae:

Persoanã și comuniune. Prinos de cinstire Pãrintelui Profesor Academician Dumitru Stãniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani, anthology edited by Ioan I. Ică, 1993

Sandu Frunzã, *O antropologie misticã. Introducere în gândirea Pãrintelui Stãniloae*, 1996

Ion Bria, *Spațiul nemuririi sau eternizarea umanului în Dumnezeu*, 1994

the godly element to the subjective one, a more and more pronounced independence from the teachings of the Church.³

We could also add here an item regarding the dynamics of the dogma: the way of understanding the open nature of the dogma. The views that deviate from the vision of the Synods' tradition are very nuanced according to the personal position of certain thinkers who confound theologumena and personal opinion with the dogmas of the Church. An extreme position is that of the Orthodox philosopher Nicolai Berdyayev.⁴

Let us return to the image of the opening circle, the dogmatic horizon which opens vertically (in the verticality which is concentrated as an archetype of being in the heart of every dogmatic horizon) rather than horizontally. We have seen that the Church is the depositary of these existential values. It is also the Church that can deem anti-value the moving away from the real content of dogmas. This is done by declaring the respective vision heretic, anathemasing the vision and its preacher. This is what happened with Trinity heresies, Christologic heresies and Ecclesiologic heresies during the history of Christianity.

We can state that anti-value can be born on the ontological level as well as the gnoseological level. On the ontological level dogma itself can become anti-value in its subjective dimension (never in its objective dimension), that is, in its dimension of being assumed by man.

The dogma "implies a live religious experience... The dogma is therefore a lived knowledge."⁵ Thus the dogma has an integral application as it is the transfiguring factor of the whole sphere of reality. If it does not fertilise human existence it will be transformed from a principle of the accomplishment of the real freedom of the individual into an empty, coercive formula. The activation of dogmatic intentionality by intensifying "intentionality towards communion" is the

³ Svetlov, P, *Învățătură de credință în expunere apologetică*, Tiparul Moldovenesc, Chișinău, 1935, p.266

⁴ Nicolai Berdyayev, *Sensul creației*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1992; *Adevăr și revelație*, Ed. de vest, Timișoara, 1993

⁵ Nicolae Chițescu, *Dogma și viața creștină*, in: *Studii teologice*, nr.1-2/1954, p.51

condition of the subjective valorisation of dogma. For lack of this valorisation dogma, which is considered the royal way of freedom in Christianity is emptied by its positive content and is transformed into an ossified, rationalised and dysfunctional truth which throws the individual into the world of mundane anti-values.

On a gnoseological level the problem refers mainly to the understanding of the open nature of dogma. The controversy between confessions has in view the “implicit progress” and the “explicit progress”.⁶ We do not deal with this debate. We are interested only in the apophantic aspect of the dogma which makes it an inexhaustible source of knowledge. Any attempt to reduce the dogma to rational contents is a violation of its innermost being. Nevertheless O. Clement says: “ We must state that there is a mathematic or metamathematic rigour in the dogma which we do not have the right to loosen or modify when the consensus of the Church confirmed it a code of transcendence”.⁷ Evdokimov who has an even better understanding of the dogma insists on the fact that dogma has to preserve an equilibrium because “dogmas are apophantic and, on the other hand, rational; this is a rationality in the apophantic, supra-rational field; dogmas are ‘reason beyond reason’”.⁸

If the dogma is the nucleus of the dogmatic horizon, it is also the circumference of it, because every opening towards the horizon of knowing God is an opening, a way through the heart of dogma. Of course, the opening is the opening of an inner infinity which continually filters the circumference by the point of equilibrium which bears its circularity.

What is this rigorousness of preserving the accuracy of dogmatic truths? It derives from the threefold nature of the dogma.⁹ In Christian tradition a) the dogma is a revealed, immutable truth with absolute

⁶ Svetlov sums up this controversy in *op. cit.* p. 285-296

⁷ Quotation in Dumitru Stãniloae, *Noțiunea dogmei, Studii teologice*, nr.9-10 / 1964, p.557

⁸ *Op.cit.*, loc.cit.

⁹ Ion Bria, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1981, the article *Dogma*

authority given man by divine initiative, by natural and supernatural revelation; it is the objective core of the teaching of faith; b) dogma is a cognitive truth formulated by the Church in formulas of faith in the process of gradual dogmatisation of the ecumenical Synods; c) dogma is an instance of soteriology; the worry for living within the dogmatic horizon is the worry of the Church for its members. This is about the subjective accomplishment of the dialogism which is the dogma. The subjective and objective dimension are harmonised in this structure of the dogma which is considered revelation, ecclesiastic assuming and soteriologic dynamism.

In Christian religion creation itself is conceived as an actualisation of dogmatic rationality. Therefore God thinks the world from eternity so that the act of creation from nothing is explained by a plasticisation of divine reasons. This “thinking which thinks itself” and thinks the world at the same time, must not be conceived in a pantheist manner as in the case of Neoplatonism, nor in the term of Gnostic trends. This is not a gradual thickening of the spiritual into its material state but these “plasticised reasons”¹⁰ refer to virtual and contingent structures which carry in their hearts the dynamics of a meaning which commits itself in the flux of broader meanings until finding them in the unity of meaning of the divine Logos.

Consequently, to be rational is synonymous with being a virtuality grounded in transcendence and striving for transcendence. To be rational presupposes to be relational at the same time. All these virtual structures of the world and of the human become real units used in the field of existential experience to the extent they are harmonised in a continually open dialogistic structure.

Therefore the relational nature presupposes the existence of a subject which endows nature with the features of rationality and a subject which leads the human being on the way of natural rationalisation. These two subjects are man, who rationalises the world and God, who gives man its subjective nature projecting him in the opening of the horizon of the multiple meanings of the world and naming him as

¹⁰ Father Stăniloae explains the act of creation as a “plasticisation of divine reason” in *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol.I, p.356

keeper of the cosmic harmony given by the act of the Creator who invites his creature to continually find himself by stabilising his relations with God, his fellow creatures and the world.

Therefore the Christian vision presents the world as a rational work of God, made to measure human reason and its ability to sense the relations of significance of nature and to lead them towards the sketching of certain signifying structures which lend nature a teleologic movement by which humanity can be itself again, valorising nature from the perspective of its immanent reason intensified by a transcendent dynamics.

Man is invited to make use of the “repeatedly overlapping rationality of the world”.¹¹ He is the good shepherd of fundamental meanings which he pastures on the combinatorial slopes of the inexhaustibility of the meanings of the world. Following the example of the Holy Fathers we must draw a distinction between the meaning of things (noema) and their strict logic (logos) followed by the distinction between understanding the meaning (noesis), the strictly personal logics and the objective logics of things in order to step on the fertile soil of distinctivity, stating the difference between the logic of things and the knowledge of things through human reason, between their meaning and the intuition of this meaning.¹²

However, these differences do not introduce a dichotomy between the rational structures of the world and the capacity of man to sense and influence the gradual development of these structures. Through “strictly personal logic”¹³ man searches and understands natural mechanisms both by analytic reason which divides up the world into its components in order to reveal it in its partial units, and by the totalising effort of intuition which tries to fix the unitary position of all sequential units on the background of a metaphysical principle which would globally model existential meanings. In the act of knowing the reality which surrounds him, man is continually led by a tendency to globalise the expressiveness of the world.

¹¹ Dumitru Stãniloae, *Teologia dogmaticã ortodoxã*, vol. L, p.346

¹² *Op. cit.* p.347

¹³ *Op. cit.* p.15

The world projects its meanings higher and higher in the intimacy of the inner language of the unfolding of the world, man observes that “the world lightens in its ontological relation to God who is the utmost meaning”. Concluding that “the meaning of the world is implied by the meaning of God”, Father Dumitru Stăniloae joins the signifying surface of the world with the horizon of primordial meanings “shed” by the divine Logos in the act of creation.¹⁴

Grasping the metaphysical meaning of the world places man under the badge of originality. We can speak therefore about a natural religious experience. The perpetual actualisation of what is primordial and formative in the condition and conditioning of man is tantamount to a ritual act which transfigures man’s life as a being in the field of religious meanings. If we relate man’s life to God’s life we must accept that experimenting the world in its deep structure places man in the centre of a continuous religious experience. In the vision presented by us religious experience is nothing else than the experience of the rationality of the world. This experience is possible due to an ontological adequation which allows human reason as an “organ of knowledge” to perceive the reason of the world and model it adapting to its requirements by combinatory methods based on the continuity of meaning of existential rationality.

These methods are continually intensified by the humanisation brought about within the rationalisable components of the world by the practice of the freedom of man. Father Stăniloae postulates that human reason and the reason of things are adequated: “everything is rational in things and in their component energies, just like between them.”¹⁵ This does not mean, however, a shift to a rationalist philosophy which renders immanent the rational principle of the world and opens the way to its explanation based on the correspondence between human reason and the par excellence rational description of the world. Everything is rational here only to the extent in which the mechanisms of this rationality are permeated by the shiver of a spiritual becoming in which

¹⁴ *Op. cit.* p.20

¹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1986, p.280

the whole world is engaged by the ontological basis. Only when we understand that these mechanisms are part of another mechanism which sets into motion the dialogistic essence of a religious experience will we understand that the rationality of the world opens the way towards the experience of God.

Let us stop for a while at the relation between natural Revelation and supernatural Revelation. Although as an Orthodox thinker Father Stãniloae does not speak about natural Revelation and supernatural Revelation as two different forms by which God reveals himself to man, he maintains this distinction. Before the ontological break natural Revelation could in itself assure the dialogical coexistence of the Creator and its creatures, whereas after this event the transparence of the work of Divinity was no longer evident. Similarly, the susceptibility of man to the transfinite meanings of existence is reduced by his progressive anthropologic (anthropocentric) concentration. This shift of stress claims the necessity of supernatural Revelation as a way of returning natural Revelation to its former state.

Which is the content of natural Revelation? We learn from the dogmatic theology of Father Stãniloae that this content is revealed to us a) in the act of creation when the universe and man endowed with reason, consciousness and freedom are brought into existence b) in the double process of preservation, which comes from Divine Providence on the one hand, the effort of man and the intrinsic tendency of self-preservation of the universe, on the other c) in the rationality of the universe which proves that the reason for bringing it into existence is "to be known by a being for whom it was created and to set up a dialogue between itself and that rational being in order to convey that rationality".¹⁶

Therefore natural Revelation concentrates around man all the effort and possibility of ordering the real and the reason of things. Human consciousness develops as the keeper of the actualisations of all virtual reasons of things. By actualising these virtualities in human reason, the world becomes the fruit of divine reason. The world humanised by the

¹⁶ Dumitru Stãniloae, *Teologia dogmaticã ortodoxã*, vol. I, p.9

enlightenment of its rationality by man is asked to become “pan-human” in order to be integrated in the order of certain conscious aims which make possible for it to be integrated by the aspirations of human nature. Theological meditations show us that human nature bears the mark of the wish to find itself a meaning in eternity. It is in a continuous search for novelty and renewal. It is like an agonising aspiration towards the absolute. This search is a consequence of the personal character of man who feels that he is “an aim in itself for eternity.”

Therefore, the anthropologic site reserved for man is that of a theandric principle between God and the world. If man leads the world towards a spiritual sense, he is at the same time endowed with meaning by a transcendental being who comes to meet him. The vision of God meeting man precludes dogmatic reflections from any kind of pantheism suggested by the way it describes man’s meeting the world.

Father Stăniloae speaks about natural revelation which is the basis of a natural faith, moreover, he theorizes upon natural dogmas which are parts of the faith which originate in natural revelation and reveal the fact that the whole world culminates in man. This can lead us to the conclusion that Father Stăniloae leaves space for the anthropologic discourse in the detriment of the theologic one. Actually the thinker pushes man towards the edge of the abyss of pantheism and then he generously offers God’s help who turns man’s face towards the light of supernatural revelation. Natural revelation is a medium of religious experience which is transformed into the medium of the experience of the nothing as soon as it becomes the object of an “interrupted consciousness” which does not sense any more the supernatural link with absolute and eternal consciousness. It turns into an abyss of irrational forces as soon as it is ascertained as ultimate truth. Therefore the author states as a conclusion: “everything that is rational object is only the middle of an interpersonal dialogue”.¹⁷ As soon as man senses that the rationality of the world is not in itself the ultimate reason of the world, he observes that God is waiting for him at the edge of the abyss with open arms and paternal smile on the face of the universe; he saves

¹⁷ *Op. cit*, loc.cit.

man from an interrupted consciousness and reveals him the supernatural meaning of natural rationality.

Therefore the anthropology of religious experience represented in the discourse on revelation is a theologic anthropology. Anthropocentrism is correlated in this vision with theocentrism. Christian anthropology is an anthropology which always signifies in a theologic way. Natural medium which is the medium of human experience cannot stabilise the authenticity of religious experience because of the temptation of analytical human rationality which, structuring the world according to formal rules gets lost in its natural phenomenality, in its always identical principles. As dogmatic theology says, "the light of meanings... glimmers in the darkness" and asks for the initiative of the absolute Being who communicates it to the human being. Again, we must take into account that, after the Fall, although on an objective level revelation portrays God in the deep structure of nature and human consciousness, on a subjective level man refuses the evidence of revelation shifting from a consciousness of global intuitions towards an interrupted consciousness.

Interrupted consciousness is the fragmentation of human consciousness which fills with the contents imposed by the acceptance of finitude and the mundaneness of the world. Taking into account this dimension of the subjective-objective dichotomy of natural revelation, supernatural revelation must restore the fundamental consciousness of man, the consciousness that man is a being who unnaturally passes into death and becomes assimilated to the world. The unhappy fate of the interrupted conscience is answered by supernatural revelation, by the actualisation of the fundamental consciousness of man which renders sensitive the subjective perception of man to distinguish the superluminous face which watches him from the mysterious depths of existence. Thus the dogma is the integral synthesis in Christian vision because it fulfills the totalising meaning of the deepest significances of the world. Dogmatic intentionality presupposes certain parametres emphasised in the description of the dogma: the Divine Being as archetype of the human icon, man placed in the world as a comprehending being, love as a restoring reality, the recognition of the

liturgic centrality in the program of restoring the human, the integration of individual life in the community of the Church, etc.

When we try to sketch a dogmatic ontology, we must mention first of all ecclesial ontology among the symbolic openings of the dogma and dogmatisation. Ecclesial ontology is revealed by the symbolism of the centre, the centrality of the church as a liturgic medium, man and the world as liturgic manifestations.¹⁸ The liturgic place represents a centre of sacrality where the religious man has a privileged experience of God. The liturgic place allows this experience on a horizontal level, by the element of continuity with history as well as on a vertical level, as the domain of the concentrated action and the effective presence of absolute value.

Therefore the break must not be considered a hiatus but a qualitative difference determined by a privileged value-structure. Mircea Eliade speaks about the dialogistic role of the threshold of the church: it is the sign of the distinction from and the continuity with the world.¹⁹

The threshold of the church is the guardian of the integral meaning of the world. In temporal symbolism it is equivalent with the interval of opening towards the eschaton. The threshold of the church speaks us about the tendency of the centre to merge with the circumference and about the aspiration of the circumference towards the centre.²⁰ It maintains an equilibrium between aspirations on a vertical level and the experience of the horizontality of the world.

This mediatory structure must be interiorised so that we shall not fall into the abyss of anti-value. Only such an opening makes accessible the experience of the continual overflowing of verticality in horizontality. Horizontality which is not permanently refreshed by transcendental contents, becomes dull, uniform, incapable of reflecting the hierarchic structures of existence.

¹⁸ St. Maximos the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, in: *Revista teologică*, nr. 3-4 and 6-8/1944

¹⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Sacral și profanul*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucuresti, 1992, p.25

²⁰ On the symbolism of the centre see Georges Poulet, *Metamorfozele cercului*, Ed. Univers, Bucuresti, 1987

The refusal of the horizontalisation of the experience of man is due to the human tendency to multiply endlessly the privileged places of religious experience. The search for the centre is man's search for himself. In every consecration of a church the parochial community finds again its community self whereas the individual finds again himself as a being who participates in the being of the absolute value by the Holy Secrets placed at his disposal by the Church.

Some philosophers of religions who discuss the problem of secularisation as well as the dialectics of the sacred and the profane tried to prove that the endless multiplication of the centre leads to the large-scale multiplication of mediation so that the centre substitutes transcendence, restraining man's access to reality guaranteed and mediated by the Church. According to these philosophers the Church turns into a censure which does not allow man's access to God any more, diverts God's intervention from man's life and makes himself responsible for the administration of grace in canonic portions.

Therefore the Christian vision according to which the world has been created and conceived as a reality brought into existence by a Being who manifests itself everywhere as an active principle and can be observed in any place where there is an opening towards dialogue, is ignored. All these symbols of the centre are keepers of the absolute value, because the Absolute Being is their centre.

Moreover, in Christian religion every individual can become a sacred place. Every individual can achieve his inner liturgy. In Christian theology there is a principle called "universal priesthood".²¹ According to this principle every individual can (or should) become a temple of the sacrifice of love, become an image of the Archetypal Bishop, Jesus Christ. Christians can participate in the human nature of their Saviour who is the Sacrificer and the eternal Sacrifice. However, there is restriction in the teaching of the Church which stirred up controversies among theologians of different confessions: every individual must rely on the liturgic acts of sacramental priesthood in order to accomplish his

²¹ Dumitru Stãniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxã*, Ed. Omniscop, Craiova, 1993

inner liturgy. Therefore universal priesthood is conditioned by sacramental priesthood.

Even if we do not go into details of architectural symbolism and do not deepen the beauty of liturgic symbolism, we can apply the analogy of the threshold to man who is a border creature. Just as the threshold, even more, man is a theandric opening which comes to put into motion the fundamental axes of the world.

Speaking about the “ecclesiological aspect of cosmology” Evdokimov takes again the teaching of St Maximos the Confessor who sees the world as a cosmic temple in which man, participating at the bishopry of Christ, must reveal himself as a being destined to permanent consecration. Evdokimov reveals his cosmic fate which is to transform the world into the place where God descends to meet man and to transform the world, which is personalised by his individual effort, into the gift given him by the living God.²²

We understand now why Hans Urs von Balthazar tells us that “existence as a liturgic act, worship, celebration and thrilling sacred dance is the cornerstone of the spiritual image of the world”²³ as it appears in the generous tradition of capitalising the world which comes from St Maximos the Confessor. The third meaning of the Church is revealed here. Due to the presence of the Church as “eucharistic place” and the action of man as an ecclesial being, all the transcendental premises which allow the sanctification of the whole creation become timely.²⁴

²² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, ed. cit, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. II, ed. cit, *Trăirea lui Dumnezeu în ortodoxie*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj, 1993. Cf. Paul Evdokimov, *Teologia icoanei*, Ed. Meridiane, 1993.

²³ After Constantin Voicu, *Hristologia cosmică după Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul*, in the memorable anthology *Persoană și comuniune*, ed.cit, p.24.

²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, ed.cit, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol.II, ed. cit, Alexander Schmemmann, *Euharistia; Taina împărăției*, Ed. Anastasia, București, p.88, Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, Ed. Anastasia

It becomes clear that the whole creation exists under the badge of the absolute value to the extent that it proves to be a doxologic reality. We have seen that in Christian ontology the assertion of Transcendence as a coagulant factor of all situational expressions is the decisive condition of a global, harmonious understanding of existence. The aspiration towards an integral existence compels man to bring up to date the preservation of the cosmos, the ultimate rational force which makes the world a unitary rational reality. The loss of the original consciousness (or at least that part of it which is preserved by the nostalgia of paradisiac consciousness) which identified the reason of existence of man with the Reason of the Personal Logos leads to the ontological disfigurement of man and the world he lives in.

There is in fact a cracking in the concomitance of the horizontalisation of verticality and the verticalisation of horizontality. There is an interruption of the intermittance of those two levels which are assumed by the symbolism of the cross. The aspiration of the centre towards the periphery and the aspiration of the circumference to measure itself to the centre is weakened.

All these apparently speculative findings decypher in fact a specifically human and quotidian existential state, that of the de-ontologisation of creation before our eyes, due to the burden of human deeds and the meanings with which existence sets into motion the intimate dimension of the world. It can endow it with the thrilling vitality of transcendence or can leave it to slide to a quick dissolution in a hasty and accentuated immanentisation of the world.

This phenomenon - the loss of the transcendental skeleton which maintains the harmony of the world, the incarceration of the human being in the self-sufficiency of immanence - helps us to understand de-ontologisation as the profanisation of the world.

From a dogmatic perspective we can state that the person is the metaphysical substance of Christian reality. It is part of the metaphysical paradigm of the relation between image and archetype. We will insist on the meaning of the person on the level of the human. However, we must state that neither on the level of the human, nor on the level of the divine does it refer to anthropomorphic structures, even

if God is humanised to the point of anthropomorphisation. On both levels the person refers to a communication structure with specific dimensions.

The order of the divine explained by St Gregory of Nyssa as “a unique and indistinct light in three suns, in a reciprocal interiority” is nothing else than the divine person or the divine nature in three hypostasis, that is, the divine *of-one-being-ness*. The chapter in *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă* which establishes the model of the trinity as “Holy Trinity - the structure of supreme love”²⁵ is relevant for our subject. Most interesting is the unity of being which reconciles in itself differentiation and communication, establishing itself as an archetype of personal communication.

Human nature called the “human of-one-being-ness” by Father Stăniloae is grafted on this archetype. The person is only the “mode of the real sustenance of nature”. The difference between human of-one-being-ness and divine of-one-being-ness is that the former exists only as a hypostatized nature whereas the latter appears as a unique being expressed by the three Persons.

In order to present more clearly the meaning of the person we recall the amazing analogy of Father Stăniloae. He imagines human nature as a thread which links diverse knots, i.e. hypostases. Thus there are threads starting from each person towards all the other persons; these can be activated or not in direct relations. Each person is the centre of endless rays, they are like stars, that is, the persons are linked by their rays as in a huge net. They give and receive through their rays. Their rays are common, however, each person is a different centre of the rays that start from him and come towards him. Each person is the centre of as many virtual threads as can be in relation with him. Every person can take a central place related to the other. This net of loops is continually developing by itself, some parts disappear, others appear, just like in a sphere with more and more loops.” This allows the famous theologian

²⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol.I, ed.cit, p.282; see also *Sfînta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1993.

to show that “human God-being” does not only mean the identical nature of detached persons but the same being of all the hypostases.”²⁶

The Christian dogmatic vision is not a biological one; neither is it a type of pantheism. It merely wishes to note the existential unity of diverse hypostases. This principle has repercussions on interpersonal communication which validates relationally the placement in existence of the other. Therefore the extension of the communicational sphere of the individual is nothing else than permanently positing the principle of relation as an ontological factor.

Consequently, Christianity develops as a religion of communication in which the ontological foundation of creation is viewed from the perspective of certain realities which are in a dialogic relation. As *Teologia dogmaticã ortodoxã* says, “the divine face is the ontological structure of man who strives for communion with the supreme communion, that of the divine persons who are the source of any communion, and communion with human persons; the similarity with the divine consists in the activation of this structure.”²⁷ Therefore in understanding the divine face we do not have to do with the copy of a prototype, a mimetic perspective. The analogy bears an ontological reduction, it is established on an “infinitely reduced” scale; there is an unsurpassable ontological difference.

Viewed as the impetus of the human being towards the divine archetype or the aspiration of the human spirit towards the infinite being or the tendency of the human eros to the divine eros, this is in fact the most characteristic tendency of man which leads him to the ontological communion with the most noble communion, that of the Holy Trinity.²⁸ This is a tendency of man as a whole. It does not belong to a certain part of his being, even if the Holy Fathers speak about the divine face as man’s innermost part. We can identify it with “mind” or “heart” in their language.

²⁶ Dumitru Stãniloae, *Teologia dogmaticã ortodoxã*, vol.I, ed.cit, p.293.

²⁷ *Op. cit.* p.410.

²⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *Prezența Duhului Sfânt în Tradiția Ortodoxă*, Ed. Anastasia, 1995; Dumitru Stãniloae, *Rugãciunea lui Iisus și experiența Duhului Sfânt*, Ed. Deisis, 1995.

Fr Stăniloae calls our attention in *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă*²⁹ that these terms do not refer to biological aspects but to that part of consciousness which is called the “zone of the transconscious”³⁰ in the philosophy of religion and is able to offer the individual the opening towards the “infinite light enlightening him.” There is no danger of any kind of psychologism here, because the divine face is discussed on two levels: on the individual level and the level of the community. The synthesis of these two aspects results in what the theologians call the divine face. There is a series of factors which make the individual communicate with the transworld archetype of communication.

Without establishing an identity between the human person and the divine person we must underline that the accomplishment of the human person is only possible if those two structures of communication interfere and this is concretised in the dialogistic relation between persons. If this relation is permanent, the divine face is restored in man, that is, the personal character of the human being is continually activated.

Man is a relational being. All his questions can finally be reduced to those referring to his relation to the universe (the mundane), his fellow creatures and God. On account of this interrogation man acquires the consciousness of his site. Therefore the possibility of accomplishing his personality is given to the individual in any moment, although it means a way that must be covered, because every fellow creature opens a way to God. Of course, the dialogic alterity must not be viewed as a means, but as a circumscription in the horizon of a community personalism.

Similarity takes into account the dynamic view of Orthodox thought on the person. Dumitru Stăniloae also underlines the fact that man had been created in God’s likeness and the similarity between them was implanted as a virtuality which should have been activated by man through the perpetuation of dialogue with the supreme Person.

²⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă*, in: *Teologia morală ortodoxă*, vol. III, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1981.

³⁰ Aurel Codoban, *Sacru și ontofanie*, under way of publishing, Ed. Dacia, Cluj

Therefore man as a finite being has a tendency to expand towards infinity. In the perspective of future life similarity is viewed as an infinite advance in the dialogistic relation with God. We must underline that this advance is infinite. Communion does not wipe off the ontological difference between Creator and creature.

The issue of the divine face was subject to different interpretations within different systems of thinking in Christianity. From the total denial of the divine face in man after the Fall which had as a consequence the complete corruption of human nature, to the consideration that human nature had not been impaired by sin as the so-called divine face is an additional grace withdrawn by God in the act of Fall.³¹

Orthodoxy, the doctrine of equilibrium par excellence, tries to convince us that although human nature is corrupted by the original sin, man remains a divine face even if in a veiled, "dark", "unactivated" form. What remains for man to do is to strain every nerve to restore his nature by the continuous lighting of his innermost face. This can be achieved by the continuous search for an authentic existence which man can only reach by finding again the original centre of his being.

The image of the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden is extremely suggestive; we can take it again after St Gregory of Nyssa.³² It refers to the ambivalence of the world and the possibility given to man to place himself in the order of his nature or to break with the natural way of his being and posit himself as the cosmic centre of the real.

Creation which is a function of this free choice of man, an existence open towards divine values or a closing in the mundane objective-ness, also becomes victim of a division: it becomes world and surrounding world. Therefore the world understood as "light", an existence open towards God, is opposed to the cryptic world which limits man to his superficial relations which do not allow him any more to sense the

³¹ Dumitru Stãniloae, *Ortodoxie și romãnism*, Second edition, Mãnãstirea Putna, 1992, p.11.

³² St Gregory of Nyssa, *Scrieri. Partea întâi*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1982, p.273.

ultimate reality which sets up human reality.³³ Only the existence which signifies in relation with the transcendent is real. The mundane becoming independent and man closing in himself shows the face of pseudo-reality. Man plays the game of reality or pseudo-reality depending on his harmonious or disharmonious position in the world.

Primordial insubordination is in fact a refusal of revelation. Man as an understanding being is open (by creation) to transcendental meanings: he turns them towards his being and limits them to it. Human nature concentrated in hypostases atomises itself by losing the intentionality towards communion. The relation is weakened on the level of self-contemplation of man and his elementary placement in the totality of nature as well as on the level of being situated face to face with that absolute, ultimate You in whose alterity he must fix himself teleologically.

Consequently, the individual bears in himself the seed of individualism. Father Stăniloae thinks that the quality of subject is destroyed in this case. His accusations brought against individualism and the Western world built on it (he says that they reduce man to an object) are not taken over from the highly popular discussions of contemporary thinkers. His motivations are profound and refer to the death of the individual who loses his meaning and therefore himself as well. Cancelling the organic individuality of the subject transforms the individual into an object. The break on this level brings about the de-subjectivisation of the hypostasis and makes impossible the accomplishment of the person as a universe open towards communication.

The split on the level of relation culminates in the break on the level of significance. We speak here about two levels for the sake of explanation. Actually there is a single phenomenon which has repercussions on man's situation in the world. When man ceases to be a person, the divine face stagnates in virtuality.

The continuous activation of this virtuality proves to be of major importance because in this dogmatic vision the process does not consist

³³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, ed.cit; Iisus Hristos lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului, Ed. Anastasia, 1993

of the restauration of the communion alone but its continuous renewal and extension on transfigured nature as well. "Man is called to grow by the spiritual mastering of the world, its transfiguring, his ability to see and transform it into a transparent medium of the spiritual order which irradiates from the person of the Word."³⁴

The break on the level of significance can be perceived as a degradation of the iconic nature of the world. The world does not refer to its ultimate basis any more, it loses its governing reason. The possibility of any communion is annulled. Moreover, there is a division and a de-ontologising of one of its parts. Consequently, the break on this level leads to the perception of the world as a mere object, the appearance of a division within the created reality, which breaks the unity of significance of the world.

The elementary ontology of Father Stãniloae avoids the antagonism of this division by crediting understanding as man's mode of being in the world. (We speak of an elementary ontology because man is viewed as an element with specific function in a system which assures the continuous re-dimensioning of the human in view of the concentration in the individual of the whole human nature by a continuously extended and renewed communion.) In the act of understanding man proves his state of free being by choosing the way of communion or he annuls his liberty by his own liberty, taking the road of solitude.

The harmonisation of the two ways becomes possible by Jesus Christ, as it was to be expected in a Christian view. The issue is extremely complex and must be treated separately. We just stress here the new manner of ontological engagement of human significance. The world regains its unity and consistence because communication does not take place between two exterior entities but it is interiorised, it becomes a dialogue with the transcendent depths of the person.

Hence the need for a permanent inner purification: Christianity invokes it as the vital force of communion. Exterior contacts between people are purely mechanical and isolate them in the narrow circle of their solitude whereas the interiorisation of fellow creatures in the

³⁴ Dumitru Stãniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, ed. cit, p.318.

relation with God leads to a “plus of existence”, that is, gives authenticity to all beings on this level of being.

There are various ways of restoring the person. We can represent synthetically such a program of setting back human being to its natural course in three dimensions: 1) the teleologic dimension 2) the theologic dimension 3) the symbolic dimension.

As we have already stated, man can give meaning and significance to the whole existence, but cannot valorise his own existence by himself because of his ontological structure with its transcendent resorts.

Therefore it is always repeated and suggested the fact that man must reach a state of self-enlightenment whereby he can gain the vigilance of self-consciousness by discovering others’ meaning and their correlation with a transcendent Self which is also the ultimate source of the plus of existence which appears in such a relation. Dumitru Stăniloae explains this plus of existence by the “mutual appreciation” of individuals. Therefore he agrees with the Patriarch Callistus of Constantinople (14th century) who says: “I love, therefore I am.” This means that “everybody lives life more intensively by communication through love than by lonely thinking upon himself or others. The plus of existence comes from a mutual communication of existence through love.”³⁵

Christians find again the meaning of human being in such a love. It gives nobleness to the existence of man who finds in Christian teachings a value which he cannot find in any other doctrine. This value comes from the paternal and brotherly relation established between the divinity and the creature.

We can spotlight the formulation of an anthropological apophantism in the study *Omul și Dumnezeu* which presents man as an inexhaustible secret which must always find the meaning of its being in transcendence. He must always “deepen” in God in order to live the secret of God and his own secret which is based on the former one. The surrounding nature was given man to help him in his growth. The world is ontologically inferior to man and as such it cannot become the very source of human existence.

³⁵ Dumitre Stăniloae, *Omul și Dumnezeu*, in: *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1992, p.326.

We call this explanatory step “teleological” because we have to do with a perspective which wishes to underline two features of the human person: “self-consciousness” and “the thirst for all meanings”. Therefore man can reach authentic self-consciousness only by the continually renewed relation with the other, pushed to transcendent alterity, whereas the meaning of his existence can only be defined in relation with the world. The philosophies which tried to do this reached the conclusion that existence is absurd. Some of them even tried to justify the absurdity of the nonsense of existence.

In the ontology of the dogma the meaning of existence can only be decyphered by the union “with the personal Word, the infinite source of all meanings, the lover of all persons in whom the meanings are incorporated” and which is always communicated as a plus of existence which leads to the restoring of the person and intersubjective communication.

This option is not aleatory because it can throw light on the second dimension, called “theological”. It is not an accident that John’s Gospel begins with identifying the word with God the Word. The word is a kenosis, God’s descent to his creation. It is not a mere instrument by which God creates the world but it is the manifestation itself of his godly power in the act of creation. The overflowing love of God pours out in the act called by dogmatic theology the “plasticisation of divine reason”.³⁶ This is in fact the activity of the creating Word. It appears as the essence of communication. If overflowing love is the symbol of communication within the Holy Trinity as the structure of love, the word calls attention to the communication of the divine with the creation, man especially. Therefore we can say that in the Orthodox consciousness the word is not an instrument created in order to facilitate the materialisation of divine reason: it is the creative power of God.

Man, who is considered the “most complex system of plasticised rationality” becomes the “unique speaking word” in a dogmatic philosophy. Tradition which follows Anthony the Great in identifying the Word (Logos) with reason, identifies the rational (speaking) nature

³⁶ Dumitru Stãniloae, *Teologia dogmaticã ortodoxã*, vol. I, ed. cit, p.356.

of man with his feature of being created in the likeness of God. Therefore the word is linked to the person.³⁷ We can find similarities between the word and the morphology of the person. There is a unity of hypostatised words in which a certain intentionality, the intentionality of the person towards communion germinates. Therefore, Father Stăniloae considers that every word is not only a manifestation of meaning but also a manifestation of the person who utters it. The word does not exist by itself. It is linked to the person and ensures personal unity and distinctiveness. The person has in himself all the words of his language in a virtual form. The “unity of the words in a common language shows the unity of people and their unity with the cosmos as well as man’s unity with himself. They are all united in the cosmos, but in a changing unity decyphered and modelled in various ways by each person and everybody.”³⁸

The creative word breaks in man. Even if the creative power of the word is lost, the transforming power of human word remains. Hence the great responsibility of man towards his own words. We are warned that the word we utter can ruin or kill as well as construct and accomplish. It is given man to use it in his constructive relations with others. To be the unique speaking word means to be a person for the other. The taking on of this quality makes people “hypostatic words of a being”.³⁹

In Father Stăniloae’s view the dialogistic reality created by the word emphasises that “man is hypostasis-speaker, because he is hypostasis-communication”⁴⁰. This is due to the fact that God is the prototype of man who owes the words by which he expresses himself and all those by which he comes into contact. Man and the world are viewed as existences of meaning because they bear the mark of the Word (the “plasticisation of the divine reason”).

The few things we know about the paradisiacal state refers to a creation which flourishes under the cratophanic impulse of the word. It

³⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, ed. cit, p.9.

³⁸ *Op. cit.* p.254.

³⁹ *Op. cit.* p.329.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.* p.103.

is no wonder that Adam invented the names so easily, as though he would have had them before his eyes.

The vision meant to explain the Fall as the fall from the original order of the Word⁴¹ is worthy of the high level of the metaphysical treatment of Father Stãniloae's work. The universal order of love is replaced by a disharmonious rationality which reduces the original signifying power of the word by the disorder installed by it.

The word placed human meanings in the very intimacy of the being of things. However, words gradually integrate in the ebbing which takes place on all levels: the shift from the unique primary significances to the separation into individualities, specific meanings and finally into elements of everyday expressions.

The instrumentalisation of the language furthers the idea that the word creates a gap between individuals, between man and things. It separates rather than unifies the realities expressed by it. In the Christian perspective words fill these gaps because they have their origin in the "hypostatic Word" which is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ restores the "unifying communicational function" of words, both on the level of interpersonal relations and that of the deep meaning of the world. According to Father Stãniloae, Jesus Christ is the source of human words. He communicates them without sounds before the embodiment and by prophetic voices and words after the embodiment. In all these cases he himself exists mysteriously in them as the "supreme uniting power".

The restoring of the signifying dimension is required on the level of the meanings of the world. The issue of the restoring of the dialogistic relation is raised on the human level. As the dialogistic relation is an "essential and inalienable feature of the individual", words are transfigured in the harmonious relation between people; they are filled with more precious meanings than natural meanings, hence their modelling power when they mediate relations of love between people. Father Stãniloae considers that the words of preaching and the words of God help in restoring the divine face in man; they are links of a

⁴¹ Especially in the notes of *Grigorie de Nyssa, op. cit.*

possible personal reconstruction. Man answers these words by prayer. Father Stăniloae thinks that words and prayers are forms of the penetration of the Christological mystery in interpersonal relations.

Consequently, there is no border between the word and prayer. If there is, it must be a fluid one. There is an inner relation between them which can be expressed by the words of Dumitru Stăniloae: "God appears in the word as he who solicits and claims our love. Therefore the love by which we answer God in our prayers is not only felt as our deed but also as the fruit of God's love."⁴² The prayer itself has the feature of a word: its mission is to annul distances. The word is the imminent nature of the establishment of communion.

The importance of the word is also revealed in the attempt to transform the regional ontology which is the dogmatic ontology, into an ontology of the human in general. This effort could be seen in all the previous pages. The ecumenical model is essential in the extension of the dogmatic thought from the level of the human to the level of the social. Ecumenism helps us to understand what "ecumenical man" is. This enforces the paradigm called the "paradigm of communitary personalism" in the spirit of a personalist pandogmatic thought.

This paradigm aims to harmonise man with the community. Harmony comes from the dogmatic content recognised by the respective community as its own. The dogma watches the assertion of man as a person in his relation with others and with transcendence. The dissolution of the individual in the community and the individualist reduction (pandogmatic ontology tries to shrink man from it) is avoided this way.

Extended on the social level, dogmatic thought tends to become a pandogmatic ontology, that is, an ontology which integrates all spheres of reality. Therefore, dogmatic thought centred on the dialogistic individual proposes the relational model represented by the ecumenical man as a model of community personalism, a prototype which proves to be extremely fruitful even when the relations between diverse confessions, nations or groups of nations are expressed. Pandogmatism

⁴² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, ed. cit, p.95.

claims its efficiency on the level of national ideologies and on the ecclesial level.

The dogma tends to transcend its strictly ecclesiastic dimension, to stress permanently the ontological power it owes by virtue of concentrating in itself the Trinitarian energies.

The expansion of the dogma on all spheres of reality is due to the expansion of dogmatic intentionality on all levels of existence. We have seen that the dogma tries to fertilise the horizon of the world, on the level of the person (restoring relational order is the most important activity of dogmatic thought) and on the level of the community, on the level of the human world as well as the level of the cosmos.

Dogmatic thought starts from the ideal of being “pan-human” and tends to become “pan-dogmatic”. We can say that Christian thought is “pan-dogmatic” because it is “pan-human”.

However, it does not stop at an anthropologic discourse. It attempts to scrutinise the innermost layers of existence in order to bring to the fore the consequences of a relational existence (stimulated by the Hypostatic Word), moreover, it tries to set up a relational ontology fertilised by a dogmatic horizon. This horizon tends to establish itself as the only form of the real and the reality by virtue of the intentionality to communion by which it is driven.