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## The Theological Anthropology of Dumitru Staniloae. A Contribution to the Contemporary Conversation

### Abstract

This article explicates and discusses the theological anthropology of Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae. It shows how his anthropology is connected to his theological system, and discusses specifically his contribution to three topics urgent today, namely: humanity's responsibility for the world, the dignity of the human being, and the distinction between person and individual. First, however, his anthropology is explicated from his understanding of four central themes: Creation as image of the Trinity, the mystery of love, apophaticism of the person, and deification through Christ. I argue that Staniloae has extracted a coherent



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logic of person and love from his understanding of the Trinity, that may contribute to a creative rethinking of contemporary anthropology. Moreover, I show that there are explicit resources in his thought that may contribute to our theological conversation on creation, the environmental crisis, and the human dignity. Lastly, I promote his understanding of person in contradistinction to the notions of Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas.

### Keywords

Dumitru Staniloae, theological anthropology, image of God, deification, apophaticism, responsibility for the world, human dignity, person vs individual

### Introduction

The aim of this article is to show how the theological anthropology of the renowned Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae (1903 – 1993) may contribute to the discussion of contemporary theological anthropology – Orthodox and beyond. The article will offer a short but comprehensive explication of Staniloae’s anthropology, and then discuss his potential contribution to three topics urgent today, namely: humanity’s responsibility for the world, the dignity of the human being, and the distinction between person and individual.

First, however, a few words on the importance of this endeavor. According to the late Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, anthropology seems to emerge as the central subject of Orthodox theological discussion in the twenty-first century (following ecclesiology,

which was central during the 1900s).<sup>1</sup> Ware mentions three reasons for this, roughly summarized here: (1) An increasingly experienced threat to ourselves as individual persons, as we face the contemporary world of urbanization, globalization, and advances in technology and genetic engineering; (2) the contemporary breakdown of marriage and sexual morality; and (3) the acute environmental crises.<sup>2</sup>

To this list, Paul Ladouceur adds the challenges posed by current debates on gender, transhumanism, and artificial ways of reproduction.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, I am afraid that we would have to add, also, a reawakened awareness of the destructive forces of warfare, due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the increasing tensions among heavily militarized countries around the world. No doubt, a theologically sound rethinking of what it means to be human seems to be urgent.

What, then, should an intellectually and spiritually satisfying theological anthropology today have to include? Apart from accentuating communion and love, and the reaffirmation of each human's uniqueness and infinite value, Kallistos Ware, again, mentions three points: (1) Apophatic theology should be complemented with an "apophatic anthropology", since we are a mystery even to ourselves; (2) the notion of humans as created in the image and likeness of God needs to be further explored; and (3) our characteristics as creative, self-transcending, and continuously surprising, must be accounted for.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kallistos Ware, "Orthodox Theology Today: Trends and Tasks", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 12:2 (2012): 105-121, 115-116.

<sup>2</sup> K. Ware, "Orthodox Theology Today", 117.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology: "Behold, I Make All Things New"* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 267.

<sup>4</sup> K. Ware, "Orthodox Theology Today", 117-118.

In addition to this, Alexis Torrance has pointed out that an Orthodox theological anthropology must never lose sight of Christology, lest it will lose the connection to its sources and end up as a sheer projection of worldly concepts on God and his people.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Stelios Ramfos has insisted that any personalism that emphasizes communion and love, must not be forgetful of the intrinsic dignity and value of the individual human being taken by itself.<sup>6</sup>

To my mind, the anthropology of Dumitru Staniloae meets all of these requirements (as this article will attempt to show, however briefly). Yet, this is not to say that he has solutions to all problems regarding contemporary anthropology. Obviously, he does not even address every current issue – many of which were not particularly pressing, or even present, during his lifetime (e.g. gender, sexual diversity, and genetic engineering).<sup>7</sup>

Even so, I think that the specific logic of person and love, which may be retrieved from his thinking (see further, below), may often prove helpful when discussing and reflecting on burning issues that go beyond the immediate scope of his theological vision. In this way Petre Maican, for instance, utilizes Staniloae's logic when discussing intellectual disability,<sup>8</sup> as we will see in the second part of this article.

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<sup>5</sup> Alexis Torrance, *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 8-10.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, 252-253 (references to Ramfos, *Yearning for the One*).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. K. Ware, "Orthodox Theology Today", 117; Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, 267; Thomas Arentzen, Ashley M. Purpura and Aristotle Papanikolaou, Eds., *Orthodox Tradition and Human Sexuality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Petre Maican, "Signposts for an Eastern Orthodox Inclusive Anthropological Ethics", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 75:1 (2022): 43-54, esp. 45-46.

To this day, Staniloae's contribution to theological anthropology has hardly been appreciated enough, which is rather surprising – given that it is generally recognized both that he is one of the greatest Orthodox twentieth-century theologians,<sup>9</sup> and that the concept of “person” is central to his theological thought.<sup>10</sup> In fact,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. e.g. Kallistos Ware, “Foreword”, in: Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 1, *Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, repr. 1998 [Romanian orig., 1978]), ix, and “Foreword”, in: Dumitru Staniloae, *Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 6, *The Fulfillment of Creation* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013 [Romanian orig., 1978]), vii; Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Staniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 2, and “Filled With the Trinity: The Contribution of Dumitru Staniloae's Ecclesiology to Ecumenism and Society”, *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 62:1-2 (2010): 55-85, 56 (incl. n.4); Nicholas Loudovikos, “Hell and Heaven, Nature and Person: Chr. Yannaras, D. Staniloae and Maximus the Confessor”, *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 5:1 (2014): 9-32, 26; Lucian Turcescu, “Staniloae, Dumitru”, in: Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby and Iain R. Torrance, Eds., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 487; Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster Press, 1999), 1. For Olivier Clément, Staniloae was “‘the greatest Orthodox theologian’ of our time” (quoted by Daniel Munteanu, “Dumitru Staniloae's Influence on Jürgen Moltmann's Trinitarian and Ecological Theology”, *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 6:4 [2015]: 24-52, 28).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. Calinic Berger, “The Immortal Image of God: The Theological Anthropology of Father Dumitru Staniloae”, *Synaxi* 146 (2018): 10-19, English original provided on the internet, pp. 1-8: [https://www.academia.edu/36891058/\\_The\\_Immortal\\_Image\\_of\\_God\\_The\\_Theological\\_Anthropology\\_of\\_Fr\\_Dumitru\\_St%C4%83niloae\\_Synaxi\\_vol\\_146\\_2018\\_pp\\_10\\_19\\_English\\_text\\_](https://www.academia.edu/36891058/_The_Immortal_Image_of_God_The_Theological_Anthropology_of_Fr_Dumitru_St%C4%83niloae_Synaxi_vol_146_2018_pp_10_19_English_text_) (last accessed, 2023-03-09), 2, and “An Integral Approach to Spirituality: The *Orthodox Spirituality* of Dumitru Staniloae” (review article), *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48:1 (2004): 125-148, 127, 133, and “Dumitru Staniloae”, in: Ståle Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise, Eds., *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016):

Staniiloae is frequently forgotten in contemporary works on personalism and theological anthropology – his name is not even mentioned in otherwise brilliant overviews by, for instance, Aristotle Papanikolaou,<sup>11</sup> Paul Ladouceur,<sup>12</sup> and Alexis Torrance.<sup>13</sup> Hopefully, this article will inspire more investigations on Staniiloae’s anthropology, and contribute to increasing the scholarly interest in his resourceful theological thought.<sup>14</sup>

## I

The first part of this article will explicate four central aspects of Staniiloae’s anthropology: Creation as image of the Trinity; the mystery of love; apophaticism of the person; and deification

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393-402, 393, 395-396, 398); Andrew Louth, “Review Essay: The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniiloae”, *Modern Theology* 13:2 (1997): 253-267, 261, and *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (London: SPCK, 2015), 141-142; Ware, “Foreword”, in: Staniiloae, *Experience of God*, Vol. 1, xix; Turcescu, “Staniiloae, Dumitru”, 487; Bartos, *Deification*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Personhood and Its Exponents in Twentieth-Century Orthodox Theology”, in: Mary B. Cunningham and Elisabeth Theokritoff, Eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 232-245. Yet, Papanikolaou does give Staniiloae a page in his “From Sophia to Personhood: The Development of 20th Century Orthodox Trinitarian Theology”, *Phronema* 33:2 (2018): 1-20, 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ladouceur, “Divine-Humanity, Personhood and Human Rights”, in his: *Modern Orthodox Theology*, Ch. 10, 230-267.

<sup>13</sup> Alexis Torrance, “Human Perfection in Orthodox Theological Anthropology: Retrieving the Christological Imperative”, in his: *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology*, Ch. 1, 1-39. In this “summary” of “contemporary Orthodox personalist theology” (12), Torrance emphasizes the importance even of Sophrony Sakharov and Justin Popovic – none of which are generally so highly regarded as Staniiloae. This makes his absence even more surprising.

<sup>14</sup> According to Calinic Berger, Staniiloae “has yet to be even partially appropriated by theologians” (“The Immortal Image of God”, 1).

through Christ. Throughout, it will also elucidate how Staniloae's anthropology is coherently connected to his Trinitarian and Christological theology, which form the foundation and logic of his thought.

## Creation as Image of the Trinity

To begin with, Staniloae considers the Trinity as the logical starting point of theology – and indeed of everything;<sup>15</sup> as he writes: The Trinity “explains everything, and nothing can be explained without it.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The centrality of the Trinity in Staniloae's thought is already suggested by e.g. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae”, 265; and Patriarch Teoctist of Romania, “Foreword”, in: Dumitru Staniloae, *The Holy Trinity: In the Beginning There Was Love* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012 [Romanian orig., 1993]), vii. Coman speaks of a “Trinitarian turn in Staniloae's theology” around 1964, after which the Trinity became a dominant factor of his theology (Viorel Coman, “Revisiting the Agenda of the Orthodox Neo-Patristic Movement”, *The Downside Review* 136:2 [2018]: 99-117, 105-106 [quote 106]). The Trinity's governing role for Staniloae's ecclesiology has been emphasized by Bordeianu, *Dumitru Staniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, and “Filled with the Trinity”; Danut Manastireanu, “A Perichoretic Model of the Church: The Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Dumitru Staniloae”, Doctoral dissertation, Brunel University (2005), available on the internet: [https://www.academia.edu/7204283/Danut\\_Manastireanu\\_A\\_Perichoretic\\_Model\\_of\\_the\\_Church\\_PhD\\_Thesis\\_final](https://www.academia.edu/7204283/Danut_Manastireanu_A_Perichoretic_Model_of_the_Church_PhD_Thesis_final) (last accessed, 2023-03-09); and Viorel Coman, *Dumitru Staniloae's Trinitarian Ecclesiology: Orthodoxy and the Filioque* (London: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, 2019), and “Dumitru Staniloae on the *Filioque*: The Trinitarian Relationship Between the Son and the Spirit and Its Relevance for the Ecclesiological Synthesis Between Christology and Pneumatology”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 49:4 (2014): 553-576.

<sup>16</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, xi (cf. *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 151 [“it explains everything”] and 203 [“Nothing is understood apart from the holy Trinity”]).

To him, the Trinity is the condition for the possibility of any existence, including its own.<sup>17</sup> As perfect loving communion of three absolute persons,<sup>18</sup> the Trinity contains within itself the necessary conditions for creating a rational<sup>19</sup> and finite<sup>20</sup> world of plurality,<sup>21</sup> time<sup>22</sup> and space,<sup>23</sup> with personal beings capable of love and communion.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, all creation is created in the image of the Trinity – yet, it is especially modelled on the divine Logos.<sup>25</sup> Creation is, accordingly, the uncreated *logoi* molded into material form;<sup>26</sup> and as “materialized rationality”, it has been guided by the Logos to the state of the emergence of the human consciousness that is suited for the conscious human soul.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 150-152.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 28, 68, 151, 153, 171, 185, 186-187, 229-231, 247; Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, repr. 2003 [Romanian orig., 1981]), 38, 320, 323.

<sup>19</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 11.

<sup>20</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 141-142.

<sup>21</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 144-145.

<sup>22</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 163-164.

<sup>23</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 171-173.

<sup>24</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 187, 267.

<sup>25</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 2, *The World: Creation and Deification* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000 [Romanian orig., 1978]), 27-35.

<sup>26</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 32, 68 (cf. 6, 29, 52, 56, 67). He writes that creation is “the molded material and sensible forms of [... God’s] own reasons” (32; my emphasis). Yet, in Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 3, *The Person of Jesus Christ as God and Savior* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011 [Romanian orig., 1978]), he writes: “Created things are the created images of the divine reasons given material form” (1; cf. 2-4; my emphasis).

<sup>27</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 68-69. Consequently, Staniloae presupposes a divinely driven evolution (68-72, 163-166). That Staniloae endorses the modern evolution theory is further emphasized



However, whereas our bodies are derived from matter, each soul – or spirit – is created “out of nothing”.<sup>28</sup> Yet, Staniloae emphasizes, body and soul are created simultaneously as a whole human being<sup>29</sup> – the body being permeated by the soul from its very beginning and participating in the soul’s conscious and free rationality.<sup>30</sup>

Oddly, Nicholas Loudovikos asserts that Staniloae “puts the image of God exclusively on the soul”.<sup>31</sup> This assertion is simply false, which is obvious not only from the logic of Staniloae’s theology, but also from a few explicit affirmations.<sup>32</sup> For even though Staniloae affirms that the soul in a special way is created in the image of God’s “spiritual Subject”,<sup>33</sup> he emphasizes that neither body nor soul exclusively is the image of God. On the contrary, the whole human person (both body and soul) is created in God’s image.<sup>34</sup>

For Staniloae, we are especially created in the image of the divine Logos, and called into a dialogue of love with him and each other

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by Doru Costache, “A Theology of the World: Dumitru Staniloae, the Traditional Worldview, and Contemporary Cosmology”, in: Vasilios Makrides and Gayle Woloschak, Eds. *Orthodox Christianity and Modern Science: Tensions, Ambiguities, Potential* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2019): 205-222, 206, 209, 211-212, 219-220.

<sup>28</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 12. Souls are, therefore, “of another order” than our bodies (56).

<sup>29</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 80 (cf. 69-72).

<sup>30</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 66 (cf. 52-55). Interestingly, Staniloae writes that “[t]he human body is not matter only, [... but] matter that has been given the character of being subject, and as subject it participates in the spirit” (53).

<sup>31</sup> Loudovikos, “Hell and Heaven, Nature and Person”, 27.

<sup>32</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 87-88, 112 (affirming quotes by Gregory Palamas, Paul Evdokimov, and Maximos the Confessor).

<sup>33</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 67-71 (quote 70).

<sup>34</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 87-88. On the unity of body and soul in the human person, see 52-55, 71-74.

through the *logoi* of creation.<sup>35</sup> Since the incarnation, this dialogue includes the possibility of transformation by participating in Christ's deified human nature.<sup>36</sup> Through the incarnation, the Logos himself has perfected the divine image in creation.<sup>37</sup> Jesus Christ, therefore, is the goal of creation as well as the way toward that goal; and he helps us on our way of becoming what he is – namely, united to the divine “community of Persons” through perfect love.<sup>38</sup> As all things are created in the Logos, it will be gathered again in Christ,<sup>39</sup> and lifted up to deification.<sup>40</sup> Thus, to Staniloae, Christ is the center and source of Christian spirituality and knowledge,<sup>41</sup> even though the Trinity remains the ultimate reason, source and goal of any possible existence.

### **The Mystery of Love**

From his understanding of the Trinity, Staniloae has extracted a logic of person and love, which explains the oneness and threeness of God, as well as creation's existence and union with him.

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<sup>35</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 70, 101-102; Vol. 3, 2-4.

<sup>36</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 36.

<sup>37</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 101; Vol. 3, 9, 18. “The humanity of human beings was not yet complete before the Incarnation of the Son of God” (Vol. 3, 36).

<sup>38</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 20.

<sup>39</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 22 (cf. Col. 1:16-20; John 1:3-5, 14).

<sup>40</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 6, 151-152.

<sup>41</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 11-12; *Orthodox Spirituality*, 62.

In the Trinity, the persons communicate themselves in their totality toward each other through “absolute love”.<sup>42</sup> They are perfectly interior and transparent to one another,<sup>43</sup> and thus possess the whole divine nature in common.<sup>44</sup> For Staniloae, human persons are called to a similar communion,<sup>45</sup> in which we share ourselves completely so that the one is in the other.<sup>46</sup>

In his reflection on the mystery of love, Staniloae incorporates, among other influences, certain aspects of the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger (1881 – 1966).<sup>47</sup> In Binswanger’s non-religious “ontology of love”, pure love has the capacity to transform two lovers in conformity with who they truly are and may become.<sup>48</sup> Staniloae creatively receives this insight into his Trinitarian and Christological scheme of thought.

Through love, he asserts, the depth and richness of the other is revealed. This revealed beauty forms, together with the lover’s own ideals, a bright image in the lover; and through the lover’s belief in this image, the beloved is drawn toward its actualization. Love, then, becomes “a power” which brings forth and increases the beauty and goodness of the beloved.<sup>49</sup> Persons in love thus continuously transform by increasingly actualizing the “idealized image” that the other has made of them. Eventually,

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<sup>42</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 17 (quote); *Orthodox Spirituality*, 53, 310; *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 257.

<sup>43</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 153, 256, 258, 260.

<sup>44</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 254-255.

<sup>45</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 322-326; *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 101.

<sup>46</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 311.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 310-326.

<sup>48</sup> Joeri Schrijvers, “The Transcendence of Love: Ludwig Binswanger and Contemporary Philosophy”, *Bogoslovni vestnik* 77:3-4 (2017): 489-501, 496-500 (quote 496).

<sup>49</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 316-317.

their idealized images will fuse into one, and form a “synthesis” in which none has preference before the other.<sup>50</sup>

Through their loving union the lovers also discover “the divine infinite”, as the source of the richness of themselves, the other, and their idealized image. This discloses that their idealized image is ultimately fashioned on the divine Logos, who has created them according to his image. Consequently, the image revealed through real love – and according to which lovers transform – is, ultimately, Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup>

Staniloae’s point is, therefore, certainly not that “[w]e imprint our impressions on each other, for good or bad”, as Calinic Berger has suggested,<sup>52</sup> but rather that we, insofar as we are involved in an experience of true love, give and receive the power to transform into the ones that we truly are – and as each of us truly is an image of Christ, this transformation evokes our innate likeness to him.

### **Apophaticism of the Person**

That the depth of the other is revealed only through love, points to what Staniloae calls an “anthropological apophaticism”.<sup>53</sup> To him, the person is characterized by being apophatic, since it

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<sup>50</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 317.

<sup>51</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 320 (cf. 318; *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 101). Thus, in the loving union with our neighbor, “in an indirect way, the union between us and God is also realized” (323). For Staniloae, we are called to actualize such a relationship with anyone (316).

<sup>52</sup> C. Berger, “An Integral Approach to Spirituality”, 139.

<sup>53</sup> A concept he has received from Boris Vyscheslavzev, an exiled Russian philosopher affiliated with St. Sergius Institute, Paris (D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 94).

transcends that which can be directly perceived (and this is even more true of the “supreme Person”, i.e. God).<sup>54</sup>

Because of this apophaticism of the person, others are known in a personal way only insofar as they reveal themselves on their own initiative. They cannot be known only on one’s own initiative, or by force, but tend to reveal themselves in proportion to the lack of one’s aggression to know them.<sup>55</sup> The more they are loved, the more they venture to reveal themselves, actively and freely, to the lover.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, love is realized only when persons meet without reducing the other as object, but mutually affirming each other as subject, and revealing and giving themselves to one another in complete freedom.<sup>57</sup>

Without love, Staniloae claims, we see the other only as object, as a number of attributes; but through love the other is revealed as subject, as *someone* who is impossible to define. So even though love greatly increases our knowledge of the other, this knowledge is an “unknowing knowledge” which cannot be captured in concepts. The other becomes definable only when love ceases – as we direct our attention to the attributes.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, for Staniloae, one cannot really love a person because of any characteristics (i.e. looks, skills, social status, power, health condition, etc.), but only because of “who” he or she is; and as the beloved only ventures to reveal her- or himself to the one who

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<sup>54</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 127.

<sup>55</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 38 (cf. 316).

<sup>56</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 316 (cf. 38).

<sup>57</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 315.

<sup>58</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 316, 343-344 (quote 344). “In love I experience you beyond any attribute whatsoever defined in concepts. When love ceases, I am left with your attributes, your characteristics; [...] I see your traits when I start to judge them” (344).

truly loves her or him, the other is only really known apophatically, through a mutual experience of love.<sup>59</sup>

As Staniloae frequently draws parallels between our human personal existence and God,<sup>60</sup> always with the latter understood as the condition for the possibility of the former, the anthropological apophaticism is in accordance with the apophaticism of the person within God himself.

Accordingly, to Staniloae, God is a “Trinity of pure subjects”, who see nothing as object in the others, nor in themselves. In perfect love, they are fully open and perfectly interior to one another.<sup>61</sup> They give themselves completely, but are never exhausted. Rather, in their reciprocal and stable unmoving movement,<sup>62</sup> they remain “inexhaustible” and “always new” in their manifestations toward each other.<sup>63</sup>

This intra-divine apophaticism of the person is, for Staniloae, even a necessary condition for the possibility of God’s eternal existence. For if God was only one single person – or even if the persons of the Trinity would be exhausted through their reciprocal manifestations – then eternal life would be unbearable in its boredom; and so, eternal existence would be utterly self-destructive and, hence, impossible.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 38, 315-316, 343-344.

<sup>60</sup> This is also pointed out by Calinic Berger (“An Integral Approach to Spirituality”, 133-134).

<sup>61</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 258 (“perfect love”), 260 (quote).

<sup>62</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 240-241 (cf. 151).

<sup>63</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 151, 184 (cf. 127). Even though “[e]ach experiences the modes in which the others live the divine being,” (261) they do this from their “own position” (262). No-one knows the other as himself, but rather, as the eternally other (261-264).

<sup>64</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 152 (cf. 151, 266). Moreover, while quoting Karl Barth, that “the pure *immobile* is – death”, Staniloae adds that “whatever is found to move in an identical and automatic way is also dead” (151).

## **Deification through Christ**

As the persons of the Trinity direct their perfect love toward created persons, deification is a real possibility.<sup>65</sup> However, our reception of the divine love has become deifying only since the incarnation, death and resurrection of the divine Son. Before Jesus Christ, Staniloae claims, union with God was only possible on the level of operation or energy; but in Christ, human nature was transformed through communion with the divine nature. Our union with God is, therefore, fully achieved only by partaking in the deified human nature of Christ, through loving union with him.<sup>66</sup>

In our deification we are called to bring the entire world, since we are the spiritual beings – or persons – of all cosmic nature. For the common created cosmic reality is, in a way, an “extension” of our human nature, and is equally called to participate in our personal communion with God.<sup>67</sup> Since we are spiritual creatures, we are free to enter into a loving relationship with God; yet, since we are material creatures too, God’s loving and transforming presence in us may spread throughout creation as a whole. In this way we are mediators of God to the world and priests of the entire cosmos.<sup>68</sup>

The goal of human existence is already accomplished in Christ, and he wants to gather and deify all of creation through our union with him.<sup>69</sup> However, “the form” in which Christ gathers creation in himself is the Church, Staniloae affirms. The Church,

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<sup>65</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 52 (cf. *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 65).

<sup>66</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 33-36, 40-41.

<sup>67</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 2, 103 (quote), 112.

<sup>68</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 78-80, 81-82.

<sup>69</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 101-102; Vol. 3, 20-22.

then, is creation both as restored and on its way of becoming restored; and at the end, “the Church will be the mode in which God is ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28).” As her head, Christ constitutes and sustains the Church, while continuously imprinting his own life upon her and her members.<sup>70</sup>

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ draws us into his filial relationship with the Father, so that we may participate in the perfect communion of the holy Trinity.<sup>71</sup> As we are deified, the divine persons share their interior love with us.<sup>72</sup> Our relation becomes so close that we are stamped with God’s attributes and powers.<sup>73</sup> Practically and functionally we go beyond our limits;<sup>74</sup> we see and know qualitatively as God does.<sup>75</sup> For God gives us all that he has, except that we cannot become uncreated and sources of existence.<sup>76</sup>

At the end of time, the eternal rest is not static or monotonous, Staniloae asserts. Rather, we are continuously rising through eternity,<sup>77</sup> in a rest that is always new and surprising, though ever the same, since we rest in the boundless and inexhaustible love of the tri-personal God.<sup>78</sup> (Here, we may note a clear connection to Staniloae’s notion of the apophaticism of the person in the intra-trinitarian life; cf. above.)

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<sup>70</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 5, *The Sanctifying Mysteries* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012 [Romanian orig., 1978]), 6-7 (first quote 6; second quote 7). Unsurprisingly, the Church’s sacraments or mysteries are crucial means in this activity (12-13, 22-24; cf. *Orthodox Spirituality*, 135).

<sup>71</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 248-249; Vol. 3, 20-21.

<sup>72</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 68, 248, 252-253.

<sup>73</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 65.

<sup>74</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 371.

<sup>75</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 342.

<sup>76</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 216.

<sup>77</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 6, 200.

<sup>78</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 6, 202 (cf. Vol. 2, 194-195); Vol. 1, 152 (“inexhaustible love”).



## II

After this short explication, I will briefly discuss Staniloae's view on three topics that are urgent for theological anthropology of today. These topics are: humanity's responsibility for the world; the dignity of the human being; and the distinction between person and individual.

### **Humanity's Responsibility for the World**

According to Staniloae, God created the world limited for a purpose. Through the world's limited resources, we are impelled to care for the environment, share the resources fraternally, and enable for others the possibility of development. During Staniloae's lifetime, the limitation of the world became increasingly evident. Therefore, he suggested that God calls us to a "new asceticism" that is obligatory for all, and requires that we restrain our selfishness, abstain from polluting nature, use the natural resources sparingly, are ready to work, and ready for sacrifice. Thus, it will cause us to grow both in solidarity and spiritually, while protecting us from the passions and from looking to the world for any infinite satisfaction.<sup>79</sup>

The importance of this new asceticism is even more evident today, I think, as the consequences of pollution, littering, social injustice, and exploitation of the natural resources become more and more severe, effecting – among other things – climate change, loss of biodiversity, and humanitarian catastrophes. However, for Staniloae, our responsibility for the world goes even further. As ontologically united with it, our salvation and deification are mutually dependent on the world's salvation and

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<sup>79</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 6-7 (quote 6).

deification. The corruption of any part of it, even one's own human nature, affects cosmic nature as a whole.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, our abuse and poisoning of nature also damage us spiritually, whereas we grow spiritually by maintaining and cultivating nature in conformity with itself.<sup>81</sup>

So, Staniloae apparently affirms our duty to transform and cultivate nature.<sup>82</sup> Yet, this does not mean that he has an exaggerated "confidence in human 'work' and 'mastery'", nor that he is "alarmingly close [...] to ideas of progress and development", as Elizabeth Theokritoff has argued.<sup>83</sup> Theokritoff praises, instead, Alexei Nesteruk for explaining that in our "quality as 'hypostasis of the cosmos'" we are called to bring the entire creation – even that "beyond humans' reach" – "into a conscious relationship with God";<sup>84</sup> but she fails to see that Staniloae has made precisely the same point.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 1-2; Vol. 3, 146 (on our "ontological" connection with nature). "Thus, each person is responsible for the development of the whole of the physical and spiritual universe. Our smallest gesture makes the world vibrate and changes its state." (*Orthodox Spirituality*, 41).

<sup>81</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 3 (cf. 6-7).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. e.g. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 4-5, 43-52; *Orthodox Spirituality*, 44-45.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, "Creator and Creation", in: Cunningham and Theokritoff, Eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, 71 (first quote), 72 (second quote).

<sup>84</sup> E. Theokritoff, "Creator and Creation", 72 (Theokritoff's emphasis).

<sup>85</sup> Intriguingly, Staniloae made this point some twenty-five years earlier than the works by Nesteruk that Theokritoff refers to, in the very book that she uses for her critique, namely, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2. He writes, e.g., "that the entire cosmos – through each human subject – may come to have a share in the quality of being subject [...] The goal of the body is that the human spirit should be at work through it to transfigure and render spiritual the whole cosmos" (*The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 55).

Repeatedly, Staniloae emphasizes that the entire world shall be elevated and spiritualized together with us.<sup>86</sup> To him, each of us is, in a way, “a hypostasis of the entire cosmic nature,” and so, cosmic nature is “common to all human hypostases.”<sup>87</sup> Through us, it may even share in our “quality of being subject.”<sup>88</sup> As we are the only creatures of both spirit and matter, the material creation may rise above its automatic repetition or monotonous cycles and become spiritualized only through us,<sup>89</sup> and through our cooperation and loving communion with God.<sup>90</sup>

In contrast to Theokritoff, who seems to introduce a dichotomy between development of the world within our reach and deification of the world in its entirety,<sup>91</sup> Staniloae sees everything as connected. To him, everything we do matters for all of cosmos.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, loving and creative engagement with our work and neighbors is certainly not an alternative opposed to the cosmic perspective, but rather, one among a variety of ways to contribute to the entire creation’s deification.<sup>93</sup>

For Staniloae, our responsibilities for each other, ourselves, and the cosmos, are likewise connected; and since even our smallest gestures change the state of the world, our responsibilities are

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<sup>86</sup> E.g. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 2-3, 5-6, 51, 55, 78, 101-102.

<sup>87</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 2 (cf. 50-52). Thus, the human person may experience “the entire cosmos in its reasons and sensibility” (55; cf. 54).

<sup>88</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 55 (cf. 53, 74).

<sup>89</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 50-51, 56-57.

<sup>90</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 59, 78-80, 101-102 (cf. 7-9, 17-18, 58-63, 67-69).

<sup>91</sup> E. Theokritoff, “Creator and Creation”, 72-73.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 1-2; *Orthodox Spirituality*, 41.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 48-61; *Orthodox Spirituality*, 44-45.

also acute.<sup>94</sup> To him, we certainly need the world and each other in order to reach salvation and deification. Yet, the world's salvation and deification are completely dependent on our free cooperation and union with God. Therefore, our responsibility before the creator for how we treat his creation – his free gift – is even “total”.<sup>95</sup>

As everything we do matters, Staniloae manages to take our responsibility for the world seriously on any imaginable level. He also succeeds in connecting the environmental crisis not only to social issues, but also to salvation history and the deification of the world. However, the persuasiveness of his position lies primarily, I think, in the way his theology on the topic is deeply and coherently intertwined with the rest of his creative thought. If his notions of the Trinity, Christ, and creation are true (cf. Part I), then our total responsibility for the world certainly seems to follow.

### **The Dignity of the Human Being**

For Staniloae, the human being is the only creature that is both body and soul – both matter and incarnate spirit; and it is because of the soul that the human being is a personal being – a “someone” with consciousness, rationality, and freedom.<sup>96</sup>

However, the body, too, contributes to our existence as persons.<sup>97</sup> In order to unite material creation with spirit (in a human being), God developed it and made it suited for being a body of a

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<sup>94</sup> D. Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 41; *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 2.

<sup>95</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 2-5 (quote 4); cf. *Orthodox Spirituality*, 40-45.

<sup>96</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 65 (quote), 79; Vol. 3, 27-28. On the soul as “incarnate spirit”, see 71-74 (quote 72 and 74).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 52-55, 65-67, 71-75.

soul.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the human body is unique among material creatures, and represents the highest form of complexity of the materialized rationality.<sup>99</sup> In it, Staniloae claims, matter has even received “the character of being subject” – and as such, it participates in the soul.<sup>100</sup>

As noted above, body and soul come into being at exactly the same moment.<sup>101</sup> Together, they constitute a human being, subject or person. In the union of a person, the body participates in the soul, and the soul permeates the body; and insofar as the soul exerts its spiritual freedom (rather than being enslaved by bodily impulses), the body will increasingly be transfigured and spiritualized – and through the body, all of cosmos may likewise be transformed.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, for Staniloae, the calling and dignity of humans are different from that of the rest of creation, for it is only through humans that the world can be spiritualized.<sup>103</sup> Only humans can relate through love to God and neighbor and acquire the spiritual and material transformation obtained in Christ’s human nature. Therefore, the human being is of “inestimable value”.<sup>104</sup> Without humans, Staniloae affirms, creation would even be meaningless.<sup>105</sup>

As images of the spiritual and personal God, human beings are subjects or persons capable of a dialogue of love.<sup>106</sup> Each human

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<sup>98</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 68-69.

<sup>99</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 65-66.

<sup>100</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 53.

<sup>101</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 71 (cf. 69-72); cf. above.

<sup>102</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 52-55, 66 (on the body being “permeated by soul”).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 46-47; cf. also above.

<sup>104</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 65-67 (quote 65); Vol. 3, 33-36.

<sup>105</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 12-13.

<sup>106</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 68.

is uniquely created and willed by God, as he breathes forth the soul “out of nothing” and establishes a relationship with it. From the very first moment, Staniloae asserts, the human being is a subject or person in dialogue with God.<sup>107</sup>

As Petre Maican observes, the consequence of Staniloae’s reasoning is that our existence as person, and our relationship with God, begin immediately at the conception. Regardless of age, sex, social status, health condition, etc., each human – no exception – is a person loved by God and called into union with him, its neighbors and the world. No particular bodily faculty is required for a spiritual dialogue with God in freedom and love (a dialogue that will spiritualize one’s body, and by extension the whole cosmos). By using such insights from Staniloae, Maican establishes a solid theological foundation for protecting the human dignity and rights of persons with intellectual disabilities.<sup>108</sup>

The example of Maican shows that there are resources in Staniloae that may further our contemporary theological reflection regarding the dignity of the human being – even on issues that Staniloae himself does not treat. Accordingly, I would argue, there are many topics that could be fertilized by the attempt to draw conclusions from his anthropology (e.g. euthanasia, abortion, alternative ways of human reproduction, physical and intellectual disability, sexual ethics, gender identities, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, etc.).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 12-13 (quote 12).

<sup>108</sup> Petre Maican, “Signposts for an Eastern Orthodox Inclusive Anthropological Ethics”, esp. 45-47.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. e.g. K. Ware, “Orthodox Theology Today”, 117; P. Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, 246-247, 267; Arentzen, Purpura and Papanikolaou, Eds., *Orthodox Tradition and Human Sexuality*. Even though it is far from obvious how Staniloae’s theology would influence one’s reflection on, for instance, gender identities or artificial intelligence, his contribution may be worth considering because of his coherent logic of person and

By drawing the logical conclusion of Staniloae's thought and applying it to a topic urgent today, Maican thus provides a model for future reception. For his thought is resourceful, not only since it is vast and well-informed,<sup>110</sup> but primarily – I think – because of its coherent logic of person and love, which is founded on his creative reception of the Christian theological heritage, and most radically explicated in his notion of the Trinity. I would even suggest that it would be fruitful to reflect on virtually any urgent topic that may lend itself to theological reflection, by drawing on the carefully developed logic of his thinking.

### **The Distinction between Person and Individual**

For Staniloae, a *hypostasis* or person is an individual being of a certain *ousia* or nature. As he writes, there is “no distinction of content between person and nature. Person is only nature in its real existence.”<sup>111</sup> (Yet, as we have seen, he tends to restrict person to an existent nature with spirit or soul.)<sup>112</sup>

However, his agemate Vladimir Lossky thinks that such a position leads to a Nestorian Christology; for if “person” is identical to an “individual nature”, then the human nature of Christ would be a different person than the divine Logos, Lossky presumes.

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love which is meant to account for the source, way, and goal of all creation.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. e.g. C. Berger, “Dumitru Staniloae”, 393; Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers*, 132-133.

<sup>111</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 99 (cf. Vol. 1, 256; Vol. 6, 27). Cf. P. Maican, “Signposts for an Eastern Orthodox Inclusive Anthropological Ethics”, 49.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. above. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 65 (cf. 51, 56-59, 67-69, 79; Vol. 3, 27-28).

Yet, this conclusion is hardly correct, since Christ's human nature – as Lossky himself writes – “only began to exist [...] at the moment of the incarnation, i.e. in the unity of the Person or Hypostasis of the Son of God become Man.”<sup>113</sup>

For Staniloae, this means that the individual human nature of Christ has no subsistence of its own, but subsists only within the divine Logos – as “a drop of water in the ocean of divine myrrh”.<sup>114</sup> It was “assumed and included in” the Logos,<sup>115</sup> who was already an existent self.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, it never developed an autonomous identity as subject, and hence, neither a free will of its own (though it had its own natural will).<sup>117</sup> Rather, its modality of subject was only realized in the Logos, so that the divine

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<sup>113</sup> Vladimir Lossky, “The Theological Notion of the Human Person”, in his: *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974): 111-123, 117-118 (quotes 117). Contrary to Staniloae, Lossky speaks of an “irreducibility of person to nature,” which means that the person is distinguished from the individual substance (118). The person is “someone who is *distinct from his own nature*, [...] someone who goes *beyond* his nature while still containing it, who makes it exist as human nature by this overstepping and yet does not exist in himself beyond the nature which he ‘enhypostasizes’ and which he constantly exceeds” (120; my emphasis). Moreover, Lossky writes that “‘*individual*’ and ‘*person*’ have opposite meanings, for ‘*individual*’ expresses some *mixture* of the person with elements belonging to common nature, while ‘*person*’ denotes what is *distinguished from nature*” (*Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* [New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978], 125; my emphasis). Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., repr. 2005 [French orig. 1944]), 121-124.

<sup>114</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 58. Following Leontios of Byzantium and the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Staniloae emphasizes that the unconfused natures of Christ are so perfectly united that they are only “theoretically” distinct (37-38; quote 37).

<sup>115</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 26 (see further 27-29).

<sup>116</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 27-28, 30.

<sup>117</sup> Referring to St. Maximos the Confessor, the foremost adversary against Monothelitism, Staniloae claims that the human will of Christ was restricted to his human nature's natural will (*The Experience of God*, Vol.



subject became the subject of his human nature, too.<sup>118</sup> Thus, Christ's individual human nature may never be thought of as an existence apart from the Logos, and consequently, Nestorianism is no threat.

As a result, Staniloae has no need to distinguish, like Lossky, between the content of person and individual,<sup>119</sup> or to speculate about the person as being "beyond", "distinct from", or "irreducible to" nature.<sup>120</sup>

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3, 74; cf. 27-31). Moreover, Christ's human nature "was weakened after the original sin", and therefore, his human natural will "had to fight against these innocent passions [e.g. "hunger, thirst, fear of death"] in order to remain in conformity with the divine will." (74; yet, cf. 70-71.)

<sup>118</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 3, 26, 29.

<sup>119</sup> (On Lossky, see notes above and below.) However, this does not stop Staniloae from borrowing Lossky's language of "the individual" to designate human beings whose spiritual freedom is weakened by our fallen nature, and who wish to keep their own particular nature "separated off from human nature as a whole", rather than "bestowing and receiving it reciprocally among themselves" (D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 2, 99). He even speaks of "the sin of individualism", both in: Vol. 1, 264, and in: D. Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980 [essays, orig. publ. in Romanian and English, 1964-1972]), 89.

<sup>120</sup> Vl. Lossky, "The Theological Notion of the Human Person", 113 ("irreducible to"), 120 ("beyond", "distinct from"). Lossky does distinguish between the *content* of person and individual, I contend. Yet, in order to grasp Lossky's position, I think that it is necessary to refer to his anti-nomic thinking, which he inherited from Pavel Florenskij and Sergii Bulgakov (Brandon Gallaher, "The 'Sophiological' Origins of Vladimir Lossky's Apophaticism", in: *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66:3 [2013]: 278-298, 290-292; Paul Gavrilyuk, "Vladimir Lossky's Reception of Georges Florovsky's Neo-Patristic Theology", in: Justin Mihoc and Leonard Aldea, Eds., *A Celebration of Living Theology: A Festschrift in Honour of Andrew Louth* [London: T&T Clark, 2014]: 191-202, 197; Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Eastern Orthodox Theology", in: Chad Meister and James Beilby, Eds., *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought* [London: Routledge, 2013]: 538-548, 544; Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 65-66). For Lossky, every Christian doctrine is posed as an antinomy, that is, two statements which are both true yet contradicting each other,

For Staniloae's anthropology, this means that person and nature designate the same reality of an entire human being, yet from different angles – that is, the angles of “who” and “what”.<sup>121</sup> Our personhood is not due to some kind of person beyond nature, but to our existence as spiritual beings. Precisely because of our spiritual existence we are utterly apophatic and can transcend ourselves through love.

Another criticism marshalled against equating person with an individual nature comes from the late Metropolitan John Zizioulas, who explicitly criticizes Staniloae for ascribing consciousness and subjectivity to person. To Zizioulas, nature and person

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and which can only be reconciled through contemplation. Thus, for instance, God's energies are outside of his essence yet virtually identical to it (for several references, see Jonas Eklund, “Palamism in the Twentieth Century: An Examination of the Essence/Energies Distinction in Vladimir Lossky, Kallistos Ware and Dumitru Staniloae” [MA thesis, 2017], 24-36 [esp. 24-28, 34-35], <https://mfopen.mf.no/mf-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2487119/AVH5010-1002-Eklund.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [last accessed 2023-03-11]). Applied to Lossky's notion of person, this would mean that the person is really distinct from the individual nature yet virtually identical to it. Such an antinomic interpretation would make perfect sense of his reasoning, which otherwise appears as rather confused. However, in order to make justice to Lossky's own formulations, the emphasis of his person/individual distinction – as with his essence/energies distinction – must be on the distinction rather than the identity. Clearly, his words show that he hardly intends to suggest a distinction in thought alone (see note above for some of these formulations). Rather, the distinction must in some sense concern *content*, for otherwise person and individual would really be identical – a notion Lossky cannot accept since he thinks it leads to a Nestorian Christology (cf. above; “The Theological Notion of the Human Person”, 117-118).

<sup>121</sup> Cf. C. Berger, “The Immortal Image of God”, 3. Lossky also endorses the distinction of “who” and “what” (“The Theological Notion of the Human Person”, 118-119), but has a rather different idea of what these concepts contain (see notes above).

must be sharply distinct, and subjectivity and consciousness clearly belong to the concept of nature, and not person.<sup>122</sup>

Zizioulas asserts that anything that is common – that could be affirmed of all persons of God or humans – belongs solely to the nature, whereas that which is unique, unrepeatable, and absolute, signifies the particular person.<sup>123</sup> Since there is nothing unique for neither God nor humans to have subjectivity and consciousness, these belong to their natures. However, since the human nature is divided into individuals, the common characteristics belong to each individual nature independently, whereas in God they belong to his single undivided nature.<sup>124</sup>

For Zizioulas, to ascribe characteristics to the divine persons, other than that of origins (unbegotten, begotten, and proceeding), would be tantamount to *defining them vis-à-vis each other* by these characteristics (which would be absurd).<sup>125</sup> Curiously, he never considers the possibility to distinguish the divine persons only by their origins while, at the same time, ascribing the

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<sup>122</sup> John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London and New York: T&T Clark, repr. 2009 [essays and articles, orig. publ. in Greek and English, 1975-2006]), 134-135 n.63 (cf. 173). It remains unclear to me whether Zizioulas, like Lossky (see notes above), also would affirm a distinction of *content* between person and nature. Most often he seems not to, because he affirms that personhood simply is the *how of being* (129-130), and even the *how of a nature* (“human nature” [165]; but also “God’s nature is hypostatic or personal” [28, cf. 168]); but then he repeats Lossky’s threat of Nestorianism (cf. notes above), which would seem to imply a very real distinction between the content of person and nature (277). This is a tension in Zizioulas’ thought, that I have been unable to resolve, so far.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 101, 166-168, 213.

<sup>124</sup> J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 159.

<sup>125</sup> J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 173. Absurd, because if the divine persons would be definable by their characteristics, that would imply that they had different characteristics, and this inevitably leads to tritheism.

divine characteristics to each of them particularly. Thus, to him, God does not in any sense have three subjects or consciousnesses, but only one.<sup>126</sup> Consequently, the divine persons are consciously aware of their union and distinction only through their one common consciousness.

To me, it remains rather puzzling how the divine persons can be free to love and give themselves to each other, if they lack any personal consciousness and subjectivity whatsoever – if they are consciously aware of their distinction as Father, Son and holy Spirit *only* by their common nature.<sup>127</sup>

Staniloae, on the other hand, certainly distinguishes the divine persons only by their origins, but he *also* ascribes the divine characteristics *both* to each of them particularly *and* to their common nature.<sup>128</sup> Zizioulas' dichotomist notion of either/or is completely foreign to him.

The only way God can exist, Staniloae contends, is as a trinity of persons sharing themselves totally (i.e. including the characteristics) with each other through "absolute love".<sup>129</sup> In the Trinity,

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 134-135 n.63.

<sup>127</sup> The only sentence I have found so far, in which Zizioulas touches on any *personal* knowledge that the divine persons may have of each other, leaves us with many further questions. He writes: "The knowledge that God the Father has of himself *is the Son and the Spirit*: the Son is the *aletheia* of God, the mirror in which he sees himself" (*Communion and Otherness*, 306; Zizioulas' emphasis). What precisely does this mean? What kind of knowledge is that? How do the divine persons even *know that they know anything as particular persons*, if they only share one single consciousness and subject? Moreover, does the Son and the Spirit acquire knowledge of themselves in the same way as the Father does? If so, what consequences would follow for the *taxis* of the divine persons and the monarchy of the father? If not, how do they acquire knowledge about themselves and the others?

<sup>128</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 11, 130-132, 143, 151-153, 186-187, 240, 258; Vol. 2, 68.

<sup>129</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 150-152, 266-270; *The Holy Trinity*, 17-18 (quote 17).

each person has consciousness, subjectivity, rationality, eternity, goodness, etc., but they have these characteristics only because they give themselves completely to each other in “perfect love”;<sup>130</sup> and because of this total communion the nature is identical in the three.<sup>131</sup> Thus, as Calinic Berger acknowledges, for Staniloae “each divine Hypostasis has the whole divine essence *both individually and in perfect communion* with the Others”.<sup>132</sup> As a consequence, that which is puzzling in Zizioulas, is perfectly reasonable in Staniloae.<sup>133</sup> For in Staniloae, the divine persons are free to love and give themselves to each other *because they are conscious subjects*. As subjects, they know themselves and the

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 11 (rationality), 130-132, 143, 151-153 (eternity), 160-161, 186-187 (goodness), 203, 240, 258 (quote), 260-263 (subjectivity); Vol. 2, 68 (consciousness). To him, the divine characteristics would make no sense if the absolute existence was apersonal or even monopersonal (150-152; cf. 266-270).

<sup>131</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 187, 247, 258; *The Holy Trinity*, 29-30.

<sup>132</sup> C. Berger, “The Immortal Image of God”, 5 n.47 (my emphasis).

<sup>133</sup> The root of Zizioulas’ criticism of Staniloae is, arguably, his axiomatic radical apophaticism regarding the divine nature and his refusal of any theological analogy of God based on creation. He writes: “Indeed, *about the substance of God nothing can be said at all*: no property or quality is applicable, except that which is one, undivided and absolutely simple and uncompounded, descriptions pointing to *total unknowability* rather than knowledge of the divine substance” (*Communion and Otherness*, 160; my emphasis). He continues: “Speculation about divine substance *per se* is not only absent but impermissible in Greek patristic thought” (183 n.12; cf. 26, 195 n.44). On his view of analogy, see 20 n.19, 122, 169, 172-173, 176, and John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: DLT, repr. 2015 [essays and articles, orig. publ. in Greek, French, German, Italian, and English, 1969-1981]), 108. Anxious to guard God’s total uniqueness, he shuns any notion that he perceives to be anthropomorphic – and this includes ascribing subjectivity and consciousness to person (cf. *Communion and Otherness*, 134-135 n.63, 171).

others through their loving intercommunion, or “complete intersubjectivity”.<sup>134</sup> Staniloae explains:

[As] the Father [...] experiences himself as Father, [he] experiences simultaneously – as Father – all the filial subjectivity of the Son. [... Likewise,] the Son experience[s] the paternal subjectivity of the Father in his own filial subjectivity, that is, as Son. In the Holy Trinity, all is common and perichoretic, and yet [...] there is no confusion of the distinct modes in which this subjectivity is experienced together.<sup>135</sup>

That Staniloae includes the natural characteristics – such as, subjectivity – in his conception of person, is therefore no problem for his trinitarian theology, but rather, its precondition.

In comparison to Zizioulas, Staniloae’s theology on the Trinity seems to be more thoroughly consistent, I think, since it manages to explain in a cogent and coherent manner that which remains unclear in Zizioulas. Moreover, the connection between trinitarian theology and anthropology is much clearer and more elaborate in Staniloae than in Zizioulas.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, with Staniloae’s conception of person it is far more obvious how love and deification may concern the entire human being – and, by extension, the entire cosmos. (In Zizioulas, this connection is certainly

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<sup>134</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 261.

<sup>135</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 263. Thus, “each divine person knows the other in himself, but in his quality as another person” (203; cf. 202). “Each experiences the modes in which the others live the divine being, yet not as his own but as theirs” (261).

<sup>136</sup> Whereas Zizioulas is rather exclusive in the way he draws parallels from God’s way of being person (cf. e.g. *Communion and Otherness*, 66-67, 70, 95, 108, 140-144, 165-169, 173, 249), Staniloae recognizes significant parallels between God and humans on many levels – parallels which cohere neatly with each other and with his overall theological system (cf. above “Part I”; Berger, “An Integral Approach to Spirituality”, 133-134).

present, too, but it tends to be obscured by his somewhat exclusive emphasis on personhood.)<sup>137</sup>

Thus, for good reasons, Staniloae overcomes the distinction between “individual” and “person” that has become prominent in much contemporary Orthodox theology.<sup>138</sup> He shows that it is perfectly possible to affirm a personalism of freedom, relation, and love, without this distinction – a personalism that arguably fits more neatly with the fathers of the Orthodox tradition, than does the personalism of fellow theologians such as Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. e.g. *Communion and Otherness*, 27-32 (incl. n.51), 42, 66-68, 165-168. For Zizioulas, freedom and love primarily concern personhood – which is sharply distinguished from nature (cf. e.g. 9-10, 119-120, 252, 278, 282-283). Even though he does allow for the transformation of matter and, indeed, of the entire cosmos (242 n.48, 297-298), he is far more interested in our transformation into *relational* beings, than in our acquisition of the divine attributes or our participation in the divine energies (cf. e.g. 6, 30-31 n.51, 84-85, 89, 93, 243; cf. *Being as Communion*, 112-114). However, it remains unclear to me, exactly how our communion, freedom, and love, are connected to our acquisition of the divine attributes and the deification of the world.

<sup>138</sup> On the prominence of this distinction, cf. e.g. Lossky and Zizioulas (above); Kallistos Ware, “‘In the Image and Likeness’: The Uniqueness of the Human Person”, in: Christophe Chalamet, Konstantinos Delikostantis, Job Getcha and Elisabeth Parmentier, Eds., *Theological Anthropology, 500 Years after Martin Luther: Orthodox and Protestant Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 53. Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 22-23; Torrance, *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology*, 12-15; Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, 243-245, 252-253. That Staniloae has overcome this distinction is also noted by Maican, “Signposts for an Eastern Orthodox Inclusive Anthropological Ethics”, 49 (cf. C. Berger, “The Immortal Image of God”, 5-6).

<sup>139</sup> For a comprehensive overview on the anthropology of the fathers, cf. e.g. Jean-Claude Larchet, “Anthropological Background: The Human Composite”, in his: *Mental Disorders and Spiritual Healing: Teachings from the Early Christian East* (San Rafael, California: Angelico Press / Sophia perennis, 2011 [French orig. 1992]): 16-33 (Ch. 1), esp. 26-33.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to highlight a few points that should have emerged from this article.

Staniloae has developed an anthropology that is systematically consistent with his overall theological vision, based on the trinitarian logic of person and love. As images of the Trinity, we are called to a mutual relationship of love, in which we see and evoke each other's depth, richness, and beauty, and reveal ourselves freely and actively. In this way, real love always contributes to transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who has perfected the divine image in himself. Through our loving union with God and neighbor, and our participation in Christ's deified human nature (particularly through the Church and her sacraments), we will be drawn into the inter-trinitarian communion of perfect love and acquire the divine attributes.

For Staniloae, the world is directly dependent on us humans and how we manage to answer God's call to a loving and creative life. As ontologically connected to us, it rises and falls when we do. Therefore, we are totally responsible for the salvation and deification of the entire cosmos, and bound to answer before God for how we treat his creation – his free gift to his creatures. As spiritual – or personal – beings in matter, we thus have a unique role in creation; and as unique persons, each of us is willed, loved, and related to God, from the very first instant of our existence. Therefore, the dignity of the human being is unique among creatures. To Staniloae, a person is primarily an individual nature that has spirit or soul. It is apophatic and can, in a sense, go beyond its nature in a union of love. Even so, the person is not itself beyond its nature (against Lossky). Rather, it is a person precisely because it exists as a spiritual nature. Surely, this conception does not contradict the Christology of the Ecumenical councils. For in Christ, the individual human nature – while remaining human



nature (against Monophysitism) – was included and assumed in the divine and eternal Son from its very beginning. The modality of subject of Christ’s human nature was, therefore, only realized in the Son (against Nestorianism). Thus, without replacing the subjectivity of his human nature, the Son became the subject of the human nature, too (against Apollinarianism).

Neither is Staniloae’s notion of person any obstacle for the trinitarian propositions of the Ecumenical councils. For even though the divine nature belongs to each divine person particularly, it belongs, at the same time, to them in common as one single nature. Precisely because each has the divine characteristics personally, they have the being, freedom and knowledge it takes to give and receive themselves to each other in absolute love. If the divine characteristics were only common and not particular in any way, then their capacity for personal love would seem to be difficult to explain (against Zizioulas).

In his neo-patristic synthesis, Staniloae has clearly evolved his understanding of person beyond the elaborations of the Church fathers. In fact, he even affirms that their notions of person and interpersonal communion were not very well developed.<sup>140</sup> Yet, I would argue that his understanding of person harmonizes bet-

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<sup>140</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Vol. 1, 72-73. Lossky contends, rather, that patristic theology did develop a “very precise teaching on divine persons or hypostases”, although they never elaborated any doctrine of the human person (“The Theological Notion of the Human Person”, 111-112 [quote 112]). Zizioulas, for his part, seems to affirm that his personalism is the direct consequence of the Cappadocian theology (cf. e.g. “The Trinity and Personhood: Appreciating the Cappadocian Contribution”, in: *Communion and Otherness*, Ch. 4, 155-170).

ter with the gist of their teachings, or with what Georges Florovsky has called the “mind of the Fathers”,<sup>141</sup> than the conception of many other Orthodox personalists (e.g. Lossky and Zizioulas).

This article has argued that the anthropology of Staniloae is a relevant resource for contemporary discussions. I have attempted to show that his contribution has resources to move these discussions forward – still, thirty years after his death. I have also encouraged a creative reception of his logic of person and love, in order to see how it may play out in contemporary issues that goes beyond the scope of his vision. In any event, I think that his rich and creative anthropology deserves much more attention than it has received until now.

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. e.g. Paul Gavriluk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91-92.