

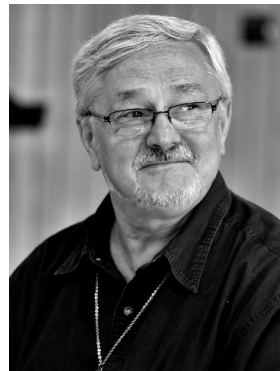


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The Place of Trinitarian Perichoresis in the Dogmatic Theology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae¹

Abstract

The twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of interest in the concept of *perichoresis*. The present paper deals with the way in which Fr Dumitru Staniloae handled the various meanings of this patristic concept in his Dogmatic theology. We argue that *perichoresis*, especially in its Trinitarian sense, did not play a prominent role in Staniloae's Dogmatics. Yet, although the term itself is quite rarely used, the Trinitarian concept was expressed through a varied terminol-



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ogy and permeated, explicitly or implicitly large sections of this book, particularly in the first volume, while the other volumes concentrated more on the implications of this *theologumenon* in the process of deification. On the other side, the Christological meaning of *perichoresis* is the least one present in Staniloae's development of Orthodox dogmatics.

Keywords

perichoresis, Staniloae, Orthodox theology, Trinity, Christology

1 Introduction

The concept of *perichoresis*, which played an important role in Trinitarian debates during the Patristic era, and to a certain extent also in the Medieval period, was neglected for a long period in Modernity. The twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of interest in this concept, which is understandable, given the revival of Trinitarian thinking in the last hundred years or so in the theological world. It is not our intention to discuss extensively in this paper the various meanings of *perichoresis*, nor to elaborate on the complex history of the use of the concept of Trinitarian perichoresis during the Patristic, Medieval and the contemporary periods. We have done this already in our article 'Perichoresis and the Early Christian Doctrine of God'², published in 2008, even if the last decade has added a lot of significant material to this debate.

² *Archaeus*, XI-XII, 2007-2008, pp. 61-93. The article is part of the central argument in our doctoral work, defended in 2004, which was published under the title *A Perichoretic Model of the Church: The Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Saarbrücken: Lambert, 2012).

In order to set the stage for this discussion, we believe it is enough to state here that perichoresis has three basic meanings:

- a. Historically, Christological *perichoresis* (or *perichoreo*) was the first meaning of this term (used first, it seems, by Macarius of Egypt and Gregory of Nazianzus, d. 390AD), and it relates to the dynamic relationship between the two natures of Christ. As we have argued elsewhere, 'Christological *perichoresis* has not elicited a large degree of agreement among theologians'³, mostly because of the grave risk of leading to Docetism, given the inherently unequal relationship between the divine and the human nature in Christ, among other reasons.
- b. Trinitarian *perichoresis* is clearly the most important and generally accepted meaning of this term. Although the term is first used with this meaning by Pseudo-Cyril in the 7th century, the concept is present implicitly in the Gospel of St John (10:30, 38: 14:10-11) and more explicitly in Athanasius, Hillary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nyssa and Cyril of Alexandria.
- c. Deification *perichoresis* is the minor meaning of this term. It refers, according to Verna Harrison, to the interpenetration 'between God and deified human persons in the transfigured creation'⁴. The author thinks she finds arguments for this meaning on some passages from Maximus the Confessor. Yet, we believe this meaning of the term runs even greater risks than Christological *perichoresis*. As Professor Colin Gunton argued in a

³ For an elaborate discussion of the reasons for these disagreements see D. Manastireanu, 'Perichoresis', pp. 64-79.

⁴ V. Harrison, 'Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 35 (1991), no. 1, p. 55.

private conversation dated July 1st, 1997, '[Christological, and, we may add, deification] *perichoresis* increases the danger that the divinity will not simply remove fallenness, but overwhelm humanity. I am in general, for this reason, suspicious of all conceptions of divinisation, which is dubious biblically, despite the one text [2 Pet. 1:4]’.

Given the limited scope of this paper, we will concentrate here on the way Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, the most important Romanian theologian, handled the concept of Trinitarian *perichoresis* in his Dogmatic Theology⁵.

2 Terminology

Let us begin with some basic statistics and general considerations related to the perichoretic terminology used in Staniloae’s *magnum opus*. The term *perichoresis* appears only six times on Staniloae’s Dogmatics (five times – pp 145, 203 – twice, 256, 264 and 272 – in the first volume; and one time – p 145 – in the second volume), while its cognate, ‘perichoretic’, is mentioned once, at p 145 in the first volume. In all these instances, *perichoresis* is used in its Trinitarian meaning, even in the case of the occurrence at p 256, where Staniloae mentions the use of *perichoresis* by St. John of Damascus⁶. This does not mean, however,

⁵ D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vols 1-6, Brookline, Ma: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994-2013.

⁶ As is well known, even if the Trinitarian meaning of *perichoresis* is dominant in his theology, the Damascene leaves some space, admittedly, with lots of qualifications, for Christological perichoresis. According to Prestige, this amounts to ‘an unnecessary technicality which adds no fresh idea to christological thought, but is extremely liable to be misleading’ (L Prestige, ‘*Perichoreo* and *perichoresis* in the Fathers’, JTS, 29, 1928, p. 245).

that the trinitarian meaning of *perichoresis* is a minor one in his Dogmatics.

Next in importance for this discussion is the term '*interpenetration*', which, together with its cognates (penetration, compenetration, penetrable), occurs twenty times in this work. The meanings vary, depending on the context. All six occurrences in the first volume are Trinitarian in nature. In volume three, which deals with Christology, the three occurrences are clearly related to Christological *perichoresis*, while the rest of eleven occurrences appearing in volumes four to six are related to deification *perichoresis*.

Another important term describing this concept, be it in a bit more ambiguous manner, is that of '*intersubjectivity*', and its cognates, which appears sixteen times, exclusively in the first volume of the work we discuss in this paper. As Metropolitan Kallistos underlines in the Forward, Staniloae's use of intersubjectivity as related to the divine persons 'constitutes the model and paradigm of all human relationships, and more specifically the model and paradigm of the Church'⁷. Only one of these occurrences are related to 'human intersubjectivity' and thus synonymous to deification *perichoresis*, while all the other refer to the Trinitarian meaning of the term.

Two other terms need to be discussed before we end this terminological overview. They are used quite often and with a certain degree of elasticity by Staniloae, sometimes implicitly connected to the various meanings of *perichoresis*, while in oth-

⁷ Kallistos Ware, 'Foreward', p. XX, in D. Staniloae, *Experience*, vol. 1. This is the reason why Staniloae is criticized, illegitimately, we believe, by a number of contemporary theologians for lending too much support for the so called 'social Trinitarianism', which tends to transfer too easily, and without the necessary qualifications the intratrinitarian dynamics to the ecclesial and social realm.

er places in a more metaphorical manner. The first of these is the term '*interiority*', which appears over twenty times, mostly in the first volume, and describing mostly the dynamic relationship between the divine persons, and sometimes between human beings in their deified state. It is, in some cases associated with adjectives like 'reciprocal', 'mutual', 'complete', or 'wholly'. The last 'perichoretic' term we deal with in this inventory, that of '*transparence*', and its cognates, is by far the most frequently used by Staniloae (over 160 times), but, to the same extent the more imprecise in terms of the Trinitarian meaning of the concept discussed in this paper. At times, in his discourse, Staniloae replaces 'transparence' with 'elasticity', a more dynamic relational term. In some instances, in order to underline the idea he wants to convey, the author uses antonyms, like 'untransparent', or 'opaque'. This term is used in Staniloae's Dogmatics in a Trinitarian sense, as a means to describe on the one side the reciprocal interpenetration of the divine persons, whose perfect way of relating to each other allow everyone of them to reflect in a perfect manner the other two. On the other side, the term describes the ability of deified human beings, and, by extension, of deified creation, to reflect the perfection of the Trinitarian God, or, in opposition to this, the opaqueness or untransparency to God of human beings and of the material creation in its unredeemed state. This second sense of the term would be closer to what Harrison calls 'deification perichoresis', and Otto describes as 'cosmic perichoresis'⁸, yet, without the Docetic risks and the confusions inherent to this secondary meaning of the Patristic term under discussion here.

⁸ R. E. Otto, 'The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology', *SJT*, 54, 2001, no. 3, p. 379.

3 Highlights of Staniloae's use of Trinitarian *perichoresis* ***The perichoretic dynamics of the Holy Trinity***

Staniloae describes perichoresis as 'the dynamic reciprocal interiority of the [divine] Persons'. However, for him, this is not rooted primarily in ontology, as in much of Western theology, but in the intentionality of the three Persons of the Trinity:

The perfect knowledge or perfect omniscience of God consists in the fact that each divine person knows the other in himself, but in his quality as another person. Hence each person himself knows and actualizes himself perfectly and eternally. This is due to the dynamic reciprocal interiority of the persons, what is called the *perichoresis*. This interiority must not be understood, however, after the likeness of physical interiority. It consists in the fact that each person is intentionally open to the others and directed towards them in a love which is total and infinite, and that each person holds on to nothing for himself, but is given wholly to the others. It is a total and infinite spiritual *perichoresis* of conscious love.⁹

The perfect equality of the divine Persons makes their interpenetration very different to the interiority of human persons, argues the Romanian theologian. Because each of the divine Persons 'bears the entire nature in common with the others', their reciprocal interiority and consubstantiality is 'neither preserved nor developed' in the process.

The divine hypostases are totally transparent one to another even within the interiority of perfect love. Their consubstantiality is neither preserved nor developed by those fine threads which, on the human analogy, might unite them as bearers of the same being. Rather, each one bears the entire nature in common with the others. They are thereby wholly interior to one another and have no need to

⁹ D. Staniloae, *Experience*, vol. 1, p. 203.

leap over even the thinnest of bridges between them so as to achieve a greater unity among themselves by means of such communication. The infinity of each leaves no possibility for any such attenuation of the divine nature among them.¹⁰

In the latest part of the first volume of his Dogmatics, in a subsection titled 'The Divine Intersubjectivity', Staniloae provides one of the most complex, and equally beautiful articulations of the dynamics of *perichoresis*. In it he employs, as he often does, the Buberian I-Thou terminology. Thus, he writes:

In God it is not possible for an "I" to assert himself over against another 'I'; instead he continually considers the other as a substitute for himself. Each sees himself only in relation to the other, or regards only the other, or sees himself only in the other. The Father sees himself only as subject of the love for the Son. But the 'I' of the Father is not lost because of this, for it is affirmed by the Son who in his turn knows himself only as he fulfills the will of the Father. Yet precisely through this the sense of paternity grows stronger in the Father, and the quality of sonship in the Son. This is the circular movement of each 'I' around the other as center (*perichoresis = circumincessio*). Each person discloses not his own 'I', but two together reveal the other; nor does each pair of persons disclose their own 'I's' in an exclusive way, but they place the other 'I' in the forefront, making themselves transparent for that one or hiding themselves (as it were) beneath him. Thus, in each hypostasis the other two are also visible. Saint Basil says: 'See how sometimes the Father reveals the Son, other times the Son reveals the Father... Thus, the entire Godhead is revealed to you sometimes in the Father, other times in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.'¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 255. This idea is developed on the subsequent pages of the book.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 264.

Staniloae is very careful in the way he articulates the specific roles of each of the divine Persons, within the mystery of the Holy Trinity, in order to avoid the erroneous idea expressed by some Western theologians, either Catholic or Protestant, that in the intra Trinitarian process of 'eternal generation' of the Son, and of the 'procession of the Spirit', some divine Persons play an active role, while others are mere passive recipients. The acceptance of this perception would bring serious disbalance within the Holy Trinity. This is where 'intersubjectivity', one of Staniloae's favourite 'perichoretic' terms comes handy and proves its usefulness and adequacy.

The generation of the Son from the Father expresses only the unchanged position of the Father as giver and of the Son as receiver of existence, just as it also expresses the relation between them through the act of generation. Both live this act eternally as subjects, but they live it in common or within an intersubjectivity which does not confuse them, for each lives the act from the position that is his own.¹²

And, further,

The Son is not passive in his generation from the Father, although he is not the subject who begets but the subject who takes his birth. Neither does the term 'procession' in reference to the Holy Spirit mark any passivity on the part of the Holy Spirit such as would make him an object of the Father. The Savior said that the Spirit 'proceeds from the Father' (Jn 15.26). The Spirit is eternally in the movement of proceeding from the Father, just as the Son exists eternally in the movement of taking birth from the Father. But neither does this mean that the Father is placed in a state of passivity. The Spirit proceeds, but the Father also causes him to proceed. The procession of the Spirit from the Father is itself an act of pure *intersubjectivity* of Father and

¹² Ibid., p. 261.

Spirit, without there being any confusion between them. Moreover, as the Father in incomprehensible fashion is the source of both the Son and the Spirit, each of them together with the Father not only lives the act of his own coming forth from the Father, but also joyfully participates along with the other - though from his own position in living that act whereby the other comes forth from the Father. All three in *intersubjectivity* experience the act of the Son's generation and of the Spirit's procession, but each from his own position. Once again this forms a community between the three hypostases.¹³

The context of this discussion provides to Staniloae an excellent opportunity for articulating again, with new 'perichoretic' arguments, his strong (maybe, at times too strong?) rejection of the Western addition of *filioque* to the Creed. Thus, he writes:

In order to achieve communication between himself and the Son and to share *intersubjectivity* with him, the Holy Spirit has no need of an act whereby he comes forth from the Son. Both are within this *intersubjectivity* by virtue of the fact that both are from the Father and in the Father, and each, along with the other, rejoices in the Father not only for that act through which he himself has his origin, but also for the act whereby the other one takes his origin, while each rejoices simultaneously with the other in the fact that both have their origin in one and the same source (...). The pure *intersubjectivity* of the three persons also finds manifestation in their reciprocal affirmation of one another as distinct persons.¹⁴

We would like to end this concise presentation of Staniloae's elaboration of Trinitarian perichoresis in his Dogmatics with a concise formulation which, we believe, summarises well, his views. He says:

¹³ Ibid., pp. 261-262.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 262-263.

In the Holy Trinity all is common and perichoretic, and yet in this common movement of the subjectivity of the one in the other there is no confusion of the distinct modes in which this subjectivity is experienced together.¹⁵

Building on the above considerations, we would like to move now to the implications of the Patristic concept of Trinitarian perichoresis as expressed in Staniloae's *Dogmatic Theology*.

4 Implications of Trinitarian perichoresis

The interiority of the divine Persons to each other is, for Staniloae the model for human interiority. Certainly, because of their sinfulness, human reciprocal interiority is imperfect. Yet, in the process of deification, as they are permeated progressively by the Spirit, human beings become more 'interior' to each other, in the likeness of and through reflecting divine interiority.

The Trinity cannot show forth its visible image except in created persons who are situated in a space that is common. Space in this sense, that is, as a medium common to human persons, stands in relation to the holy Trinity. But just as the Trinitarian persons are interior to each other, so are human persons spiritually interior to one another in part and are capable of growing in this mutual interiority. Once this has occurred, human persons are in a certain fashion present in all space or transcend space.¹⁶

The unity in diversity which exists within the Holy Trinity is, again, a model for unity in diversity among human subjects. The more these are 'raised up into the divine intersubjectivity', the more perfectly they reflect, or become transparent to the unity in diversity existing among the Persons of the Godhead.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Through the omnipresence of God in Trinity, there is given from the beginning an ontological unity of all things in diversity in the same diversified space as well as in the diverse unity of our beings which are striving towards a greater and greater unity. Just as time will be overwhelmed in the interiority of reciprocal and perfect communion, so will space also be overwhelmed in the interiority of the same reciprocal and perfect communion, in the perfect human intersubjectivity that comes about when it is raised up into the divine intersubjectivity.¹⁷

Interiority does not obliterate distinctiveness, either within the Godhead, among human beings or between the Triune Creator and created human beings; humanity is not absorbed into divinity, as in pantheism, nor are individual human persons losing their distinct identity in their reciprocal interiority. In fact, that is strengthened in the process of deification, not for the purpose of self-affirmation, but in order to strengthen the unity of all things, according to God's eternal purposes:

God as person remains always a "Thou," distinct from the man united with him. In the communion of persons each one remains at the same time a boundary for the other; each has the other in himself, but as a distinct person. In their interiority to one another there is otherness. According to Christian faith man remains defined as man even within the highest degree of union with God and even as he participates in God's infinity. To express the matter more exactly, in union with God the believer is strengthened to the greatest possible extent precisely in his own character as a creature distinct from God.¹⁸

The Romanian theologian underlines that, because of the limited character of created human beings and, even more so, because of their sinfulness, there is at work a certain paradoxical

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

dynamic related to the process of growth towards interiority between humans and God.

The fact that rational creatures must progress along a course until they achieve complete interiority among themselves and in God and until full knowledge of God and of his works is granted in the paradox that while, on the one hand, God is fully united with creatures from the beginning and hence knows them fully in his quality of being their cause, on the other hand, inasmuch as they on their part have not achieved union or reciprocal interiority with him, God is not united with them nor has he thus realized fully on his part the state of reciprocal interiority with them. Consequently, God does not see creatures fully realized as they progress along the road towards this goal.¹⁹

Christ's incarnation, his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection are making possible this progress towards perfect interiority between God and the redeemed. Thus, says Staniloae, In Christ, humanity is at the peak of its realization or perfection: this is true in a potential manner before the general resurrection and in an actual manner after it, for humanity then will be found in complete interiority with God. God knows humanity, therefore, in its fullness, or, as we might say, in its fully actualized form.²⁰

And also,

In Christ the process of God and humanity becoming totally and reciprocally interior to one another has been accomplished, and it is a process realized even more than through grace: the interiority has been accomplished within a hypostasis.²¹

At this point in his development of the implications of *perichoresis*, Dumitru Staniloae brings in the discussion, in a highly

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 204-205.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 209.

²¹ Ibid., p. 210.

poetic way – a remarkable quality of all his writing – the elements of the process of deification, through which the human person, on her way to spiritual perfection, attains ‘transparence’, ‘communicability’ and ‘goodness’. This process involves, on the one side, the attaining of ‘purity from passions’, and, on the other, that of acquiring ‘virtue’, supremely the ‘virtue of love’, which was made possible, potentiality, for humans, through the incarnation of the Son of God.

From within the personal God there radiates our goodness, the purity of his disinterest towards himself - or, more positively, of his interest in man - transparence, and communicability. He thereby attracts into communion with himself any person who desires this, transmitting to him the same goodness, transparence, and communicability. From one perspective we give the name "purity from passions" to this goodness, transparence, and communicability, from another, "virtue." For there can be no virtue where there is passion. Passion is the blindness of exclusive concern with self. Hence, freedom from passions or dispassion - without which there is no virtue - is not the absence of sensibility but rather a supreme sensibility for others. To be able to acquire sensibility, you must suffer in the struggle against your own passions. Only through the cross do we attain the sensibility of sinlessness, that is, of virtue, for virtue means living for others. According to their rank the virtues receive different names. The virtue of love represents the culmination of goodness, transparence, and communicability. In itself all the virtues are concentrated, namely, that dispassionate sensibility which is sinless *par excellence*. It is the virtue identical with deification which is simultaneously identical with the highest degree of humanization. Only in God can man become fully man, as the definition of Chalcedon demonstrates.²²

²² Ibid., pp. 227-228.

In the second volume of his *Dogmatics*, which deals with creation, the author discusses what we may describe, loosely, as the 'ecological implications of *perichoresis*, in the soft sense of this term. Thus, nature itself is called to play its role in the process of deification, as humans go about their daily work, which is not seen as a curse, but as a means of sanctification. 'Nature itself will thus serve as a perfectly transparent and elastic medium for communication among human beings and between them and God'²³. In the course of this process, not only human beings are becoming more 'transparent' for God, but the same is also true about the material creation itself, which is called to be progressively 'transfigured'.

Humans must work and think in solidarity with regard to the transformation of the gifts of nature. Thus, it is through the mediation of nature that solidarity is created among humans, and work, guided by thought, is a principal virtue creative of communion among humans. Human subjects become transparent to one another through nature in this way, that is, through their thought and work applied to nature in solidarity, as mutual help. Furthermore, inasmuch as the communion between human subjects is maintained by responsibility toward the supreme subject, God becomes, in His turn, transparent through the nature He has given, so that men might grow in communion through their work.²⁴

This perception of the role of creation in the process of transfiguration of humanity and of the whole of reality, in the power of the Spirit provides a solid theological foundation for non-idolatrous ecological engagement on the one side, and also an effective protection against the irresponsible exploitation of nature, which is the root of the current possibly irreversible

²³ *Ibid.*, *Experience*, vol. 2, p. 61.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

ecological crisis with which our planet is confronted, as a result of the relentless pursuit of profit at any cost. Therefore, argues our author, 'man is called to grow by exercising spiritual rule over the world, by transfiguring it, by exercising his capacity to see the world and make of it a medium transparent of the spiritual order that radiates from the person of the Word'²⁵.

Creation viewed as gift is a rich theme in Staniloae's theological thought. Thus, for him, nature is not meant just to fulfil some basic human needs, but it can become an instrument through which the human beings can express their gratitude to the creator. There is, in other words, an educational and a dialogical dynamic related to the theme of 'creation as gift'. Furthermore, there is an obvious sacramental dimension of this process, which is in line with the basic call of all human beings to be 'priests over creation'.

The world is necessary for the human person not only because he needs it to be given to him, but also because he himself has need of it so that, in his turn, he may make a gift of it for the sake of his own spiritual growth. Thus, the world proves once more its educative character for the human person. The human person makes further use of the world by the fact that he in turn gives it as a gift. Moreover, he does not lose the world totally in this act of offering it as a gift, but through it is enriched still more by the very fact of his own offering of it. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Hence the human person is genuinely enriched not only through God's gift to him, but also through the complete dialogue of the gift, that is, through the reception and return of the gift. The paradox is explained by the fact that the gift received and returned draws the persons close to one another to such an extent that the object of the gift becomes something common and comes to be the transparent means for the fullest commun-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p 102.

ion between persons. And not only is the gift something common, but it is also increased through the life which the persons communicate to one another through the love manifested in the gift they make; in this way the persons give themselves as gift, and through this giving they grow spiritually.²⁶

Such an endeavour is not without risks, argues the author. Humans can become too attached, even dominated or enslaved to material things, 'forgetting of their spiritual needs'. In spite of the implicit risky dualism implied in this formulation, we welcome Staniloae's call for human beings to 'make use of them with a certain moderation and train themselves to treat created things as occasions for practicing a reciprocal attention and generosity'²⁷.

In such an ordered world, believes Fr. Staniloae, there is also room for beauty and human creativity, which is not seen, from an Orthodox perspective, as a mere embellishment, but as an essential expression of the beauty that is at the core of the God-head.

If beauty consists in the manifestation of the spirit through matter, the irradiation of the living spirit through the living body is the greatest beauty. This irradiation occurs, moreover, when the body is no longer mastered by materiality, but through materiality the body's higher qualities become transparent in unimpeded fashion. This fact does not demand artistic talent so much as ethical effort. The saint may be said to have realized in himself the true beauty of the human being: decency, balance, captivating spiritual light.²⁸

Furthermore, creativity has an indelible spiritual dimension to it.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

The creative gift is bound up with the mission of spiritual mastery. By spiritualizing matter humans give it the transparency that can make the divine spirituality visible in many forms. In particular, this creative gift is a means whereby the image is made spiritual as beauty, and beauty reaches its fullness when it possesses purity within itself.²⁹

At this point we may multiply even more the examples of implications of perichoresis in Staniloae's *Dogmatics*. Yet, our space is limited and we believe we have already done justice to the richness of the perichoretic thought of our author.

His theological mastery was exercised to its fulness in the exposition of these implications in his *magnum opus*. His use of a multiplicity of terms, some more precise technically (*perichoresis*, *circumincessio*, interpenetration, even intersubjectivity), together with others, less precise, but more elastic and versatile (interiority, transparency etc), resulted in a nuanced exposition of this rich Patristic concept.

Even such a sketchy presentation of this concept in Staniloae's textbook on Dogmatic Theology, done by a modest non-Orthodox admirer, could constitute, we believe a good motivation to extend such a study at his entire theological corpus, which, in our opinion, would be best if done by an Orthodox theologian.

5 Conclusions

In the light of our discussion above we cannot argue that, necessarily, Trinitarian *perichoresis* played a prominent role in the way Dumitru Staniloae framed his *Dogmatics*. Yet, we cannot say either that this was for him a secondary or neglected concept. It is true that he never wrote a monographic article on this

²⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

concept. One such text existed already in Romanian Orthodox theology, published by Vasile Loichita in 1958³⁰, which may be, to this day, the most serious elaboration on this concept in the Romanian language. On the other side, as we have argued in the first part of the present paper, although the term itself was rarely used by the Romanian author in his *Dogmatic Theology*, the Trinitarian concept was expressed through a varied terminology and permeated, explicitly or implicitly large sections of this book, particularly in the first volume, while the other volumes concentrated more on the implications of this *theologoumenon* in the process of deification.

The Christological meaning of *perichoresis* is even less present in this book. Staniloae does not discuss explicitly the risk of Docetism involved in the use of this meaning. Nevertheless, like other theologians who are favourable to this meaning, he insists that, whatever we make of it, the human nature of the incarnated Christ needs to be preserved without diminution, for salvation to be effective, and he believes that the use of Chalcedonian adverbs provide sufficient protection from this danger. As we have argued extensively in our analysis of the concept published in *Archaeus*, we dare to humbly differ from the acclaimed author on this point. And we believe that the ubiquity of various forms of Docetism (Christological or otherwise) in contemporary Christianity, in academic or popular forms points to the fact that this meaning of *perichoresis* is mined with dangers and should be handled with much more care, if at all.

One other observation we could make on *perichoresis* in Staniloae's *Dogmatics* is that the author does not really interact with authors who discussed this topic and who wrote about it before

³⁰ V. Loichita, 'Perihoreza si enipostasia in dogmatica' [Perichoresis and Enhypostasia in Dogmatics], *Ortodoxia*, 10, 1958, no. 1, p. 3-14.

he first published his book. We believe there are a number of reasons for it. An important one was the limited availability of academic theological literature in other languages in communist Romania. But, even more importantly, the purpose of this book was to provide a textbook for theological schools. As such, the author majored on reiteration the Patristic tradition of the church, reinterpreted according to the neo-Patristic paradigm which the author shared with some of his contemporaries. And, when he ventured to engage with contemporary authors from other traditions, he did it mostly for confessional polemic reasons.

Finally, we would like to argue that it is the responsibility of younger Romanian Orthodox theologians to engage with rich contemporary discussions around this Patristic concept, in the light of the present challenges of the Church living in a progressively more secularised world.