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# The Monarchy of the Father

*Cataphatic and apophatic dimensions*

## Abstract

The syntagma “monarchy of the Father” was developed by the Cappadocian Fathers during their disputes with antitrinitarian heresies and has not lost its actuality till today. For the orthodox theologians it builds the fundament of the trinitarian dogma and has two essential, complementary dimensions, namely a cataphatic and an apophatic one.

In the area of economy the monarchy of the Father means neither sovereignty nor rule of the Father over the Son and the Spirit and cannot serve therefore as justification of despotic rule or suppression in the society. The Son and the Spirit are co-eternal and have the same dignity like the Father. Between them exists a perfect community of love, so that the monarchy of the Father admits no trinitarian subordinationism.

The cataphatic dimension of the monarchy of the Father has its limits in the fact that the birth of the Son and the procession of the Spirit remain absolute mysteries. The apophatic theology offers a new knowledge of God and of his uncreated, perfect life. The trinitarian unity is based not only on the common being, but also on the monarchy of the Father, i.e. on his quality as principle or spring of the Trinity. The unity of being is only a consequence of the monarchy of the Father.

We can differentiate in the orthodox theology between an apophatism of divine being, of divine persons, of trinitarian relations (intersubjectivity), as well as an apophatism of the divine, uncreated energies.

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The monarchy of the Father expresses the antinomy of the Holy Trinity in which the Father is the spring of the divinity, although all three divine persons are co-eternals, have the same dignity and live in a community without subordination. The words of Christ: „Who wants to be big among you, that should be your servant!“ (Mk 10.43) reveal something from the secret of God the Father and his „Monarchy“. The appropriate understanding of the monarchy of the Father can contribute to the transformation of the church and of the society in the Spirit of love and trinitarian communion.

## Keywords

Monarchy of the Father, Cataphatism, Apophatism, Trinity, Person

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Ever since the times of Father Stăniloae until the present, Moltmann's Trinitarian dogmatic contribution has been very well known and appreciated in the Romanian theological circles. His renouncing the Filioque doctrine and acceptance of the theology of uncreated divine energies, which were crucial steps towards the comprehension and appropriating what makes up the core, or the ultimate basis of the Orthodox faith teachings, worship and spirituality: the Most Holy Trinity.

This return to the Trinitarian theology certainly influenced by the theological friendship between the distinguished German professor and Father Stăniloae, was materialized in his work, "The Holy Trinity and the Kingdom of God", and now translated into Romanian. The lecture delivered at the present Symposium entitled „God the Father and the Life of the Holy Trinity," is a development of his Trinitarian vision, stressing the Person of the Father. The original title of the lecture, according to Moltmann, was, "God the Father as a Hierarchical versus a Trinitarian Concept", and he denotes and proposes an alternative, with an option for the latter.

In our opinion, we should start with two premises in assessing Moltmann's conception on God the Father. The first one is the recent Occidental theological trend, shared by the Protestant and Roman-Catholic theology, which is dedicated to the Person of God the Father, and has no counterpart in the Orthodox theology.

The interest of Occidental theologies in this issue is accounted for by the fact that almost the entire 20th century alternatively dealt with Christology and pneumatology, and by the perfectly justified rejection by the Protestant theology of the too trenchant separation, which scholastic theology established between the Person of the Father and that of the Son, and which conceived the Latter more like an instrument of the Father,

because of the unilateral stress laid on the humanity of Jesus Christ during his earthly life. The Anselmian juridical theory of satisfaction created an enormous gap, in the realm of the divine economy, between the Incarnate Son and God the Father, seen by medieval theology and spirituality as an Almighty Master, interested not so much in regaining people's love, as in restoring justice exterior to both man and God.

Within such ideatic context, the constant concern of Moltmann's Protestant theology is, understandably, to retrieve the trinitarian-perichoretic relationship between the Father and the Son, even at the cost of asserting his distrust of traditional Christian monotheism<sup>1</sup>. The main reason for his rejecting the concept of Christian monotheism lies, in our opinion, in the fact that on its grounds were founded a political monotheism, correlated with a clerical monotheism, which developed in the medieval Christian Occident<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, although he admits the importance of the consubstantiality of the Trinitarian Persons, as well as the Father's capacity as begetter of divinity, Moltmann wants to ground the unity of the Holy Trinity almost exclusively on the perichoresis of the divine Persons<sup>3</sup>. In this case, the Orthodox theologian will ask: what is then the importance and significance of the Father's monarchy, a concept put forth by the Cappadocian Holy Fathers, in their fight against anti-Trinitarian heresies?

In order to emphasize the relevance and apophatic depth of the phrase Monarchy of the Father, which Orthodox dogmatics deem indispensable in defining the Trinitarian dogma, we shall endeavour to describe the two essential complementary dimensions of this faith teachings: namely, the cataphatic and the apophatic dimension. These two dimensions, which may be identified with other dogmas as well, such as the Christological or the ecclesiological ones, reconcile unity and diversity within the Holy Trinity, provided we renounce philosophical, psychological or sociological analogies that impinge on the revealed truth.

### The cataphatic dimension of the Father's Monarchy

First of all we would like to mention that Orthodox theology has always grounded Christology and pneumatology in the dogma of the Holy Trinity. Under the influence of worship and spirituality, Lord Jesus Christ has been understood not only as a Saviour and Deliverer of mankind, but also as a

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Moltmann, *Treimea și Impărăția lui Dumnezeu. Contribuții la învățătura trinitară despre Dumnezeu*, (trans. and afterword D. Munteanu, Alba-Iulia: Ed. Reîntregirea, 2007), p. 67f.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, pp. 241-256.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 195.

Pantokrator of the created world, as the Logos who is a creator and provider, inseparable from the Father and the Holy Spirit. By becoming incarnate in order to fulfil “the will of the Father” (Jn 5.30), He reveals the Father as He reveals Himself as God, insisting on His inseparability from the Father. Similarly, the Holy Spirit, present and working throughout the history of mankind both before and after the Son’s incarnation, will reveal in the act of His Descent on the day of Pentecost, both His eternal proceeding from the Father, anticipatorily confirmed by Jesus Christ Himself, as well as His temporal sending by the Father together with the Son. By bearing witness to the Incarnate Son as eternal Son of the Father, first on the Epiphany then throughout the history and life of the Church, the Holy Spirit Christifies the worshippers and, simultaneously, spiritually extends the Trinitarian perichoresis to include them. Both acts have God the Father as their initiator, as He is with the Incarnation and redemption as well. For this very reason, the Father is never revealed by Himself alone, but always together with the Son, or rather, through the Son in the Spirit.

Our approach starts from the economic Trinity, out of our wish to remain faithful to the Revelation, and also in order to indicate the fact that theology must not accept a stance according to which God the Father remains completely hidden in His transcendence, in the Son’s act of self-revelation and in the act of the Holy Spirit’s Descent. Even though it is only the Son who becomes incarnate, and it is only the Spirit who descends, the Father Himself is present, unmingled, in their act as the One who sent them. This is why the monarchy of the Father, from the economic angle, cannot mean sovereignty or dominion over the Son and the Spirit, and cannot legitimize despotic rule at the level of human society. The Father’s transcendence must never be seen in relation with the Son or the Holy Spirit, but only in relation with the created temporal things.

The fact that every time He reveals the Father by words, deeds or images, the Son mentions Father’s will, must be understood as revealing the Father’s monarchy, as the Father incessantly generates will, as well as being and action, the three divine realities shared by the Trinitarian Persons, yet subjectivized and expressed in different and complementary ways.

Proceeding from the will of the Father we may follow the course from the economic Trinity, as described by the divine Revelation, to the immanent Trinity, within which the council of the will of the Holy Trinity always comes from the Father. This permanent initiative of the Father, however, must not be sought in a spirit of authority of the Father, but in His perfect goodness, which is constantly imparted on the other two Hypostases. It is the only one that determines so to speak, Father’s will, concomitantly with the will of the Son and the will of the Holy Spirit, which coincide with the

three Hypostases. Goodness itself stems from and is nurtured by love: they are both cataphatic as well as apophatic, as they pertain both to the One Godhead and the Trinitarian Persons, who substantiate them perichoretically and personally.

As the mode of existence of the Most Holy Trinity is absolutely perfect, and moreover, beyond any human perfection it can be described in antinomic terms, the only ones able to suggest the meta-rational, meta-logical character peculiar to this mode of existence.

St. Gregory of Nyssa identifies the most striking antinomy within the Holy Trinity – which can shed light, even if only partial light, on the other antinomies: “For this is the ultimate paradox: the fact that movement and rest are the same”<sup>4</sup>. Father Stăniloae’s commentary on St. Gregory’s statement is the following: “This paradox is accounted for by the perfect love among the consubstantial, eternal Persons. Love is both the movement among them, and their complete union, and each one’s remaining close to the others, thus the resting, dwelling of each of them in the others (perichoresis), as each of them has everything in the others and needs not seek anything beyond the others”<sup>5</sup>.

This antinomic view on Trinitarian interpersonal relationships reveals such interiority beyond our comprehension and expression, and which is meta-logically reconciled, and in agreement with the monarchy of the Father.

Receiving before all ages as a gift, His personal existence encompassing the nature, will and action of the Father, the Son feels and experiences the bliss of Father’s self-giving as His own joy, while at the same time He is not separated from the Father and the Holy Spirit. Returning to the Father the gift of existence of the life received by begetting (the Son), and procession (the Spirit), the two Hypostases perfect and co-eternal with the Father, never relate to the Father as an exterior, distant cause, preceding Them, due to their deep, ineffable mutual interiority. In this case, questions such as „Is God the Father already a Father in Himself, prior to begetting the Son before all ages?”<sup>6</sup> cannot be raised in the Orthodox theology, because it avoids the temptation of excessive rationalization, employing analogies where they do not belong. Of course, we find analogies in the thought of the Holy Fathers when they make positive or cataphatic assertions on the

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<sup>4</sup> S. Gregorii Nysseni, *De vita Moysis*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus 44, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 405 C.

<sup>5</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (Craiova: Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, 1987), p. 221.

<sup>6</sup> J. Moltmann, *Gott der Vater im Leben der Heiligen Trinität*, in: *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 1:1 (2010), p. 55.

Holy Trinity, but only concerning the perichoretic relationships employing the image of the family in general, or that of the first family (Adam, Eve and Seth), in order to emphasize the Trinitarian hypostatical diversity, engendered by the different manner, in which the Son and the Holy Spirit originate from the Father. However, we shall not seek any analogy for the capacity as a Father of the first divine Hypostasis, because in the human acceptance time is needed to acquire this attribute.

Not even when it is restricted to its cataphatic dimension, can the monarchy of the Father fall into subordinatianism due to the specifically Orthodox conception on the person, which is not influenced by the philosophical substantialism that led scholastic theology to postulate the logical primacy of divine nature over Trinitarian Persons. Everything is fully given in the Person of the Father, yet the other two Persons of the Trinity hold everything just as fully; the only difference is that the Father has it uncausatively, as a begetter of Divinity, or begetting Divinity. St. Dionysius the Areopagite describes the unitary diversity of the Holy Trinity by employing an iconic image able to guide, and direct the knowing mind towards the „thrice glorious” Divinity: „We have received from the Holy Scriptures that the Father is the begetting divinity and Jesus and the Spirit are the offspring of the begetting divinity, if we may say so, or the shoots put forth by God, or transcendent flowers or lights”<sup>7</sup>. The dynamism of this image expresses the fact that the existence of God the Father is not static; it develops “according to the nature” within the communal, dynamic Trinity<sup>8</sup>. Because the divine nature is, in a meta-logical, meta-rational way, a fully communal nature undivided in Persons, yet open from inside (so to put it) to interpersonal communion, that is to the simultaneous, eternal, unitary and diverse subjectivization of the three divine Hypostases. Again, we must avoid the shallow analogy of movement within the created world, because at the intratrinitarian personal level “movement does not mean the becoming and deriving of the created realities; it is the uncreated, self-manifesting movement of the Holy Trinity”, as states the Greek theologian Nikos Matsoukas<sup>9</sup>.

Fighting against Arius’ and Eunomius’ subordinatianism, St. Gregory of Nazianzus pointed out the danger of heretics’ intellectualist claims to provide a strictly rational account of intratrinitarian relations: „I would have liked it, he says, to extol the Father as the greatest, He from Whom the equals derive their equality as well as their being... ; yet I fear that I

<sup>7</sup> D. Areopagitul, *Opere complete* (trans. D. Stăniloae, București: Ed. Paideia, 1996), p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> N. A. Matsoukas, *Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică*, (vol. II, trans. N. Deciu, București: Ed. Bizantină, 2006), p. 68, note 54.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 68.

might thus turn the Principle into a principle of the lower ones, and so offend Him, while I only wished to glorify Him, for the glory of the Principle does not lie in downplaying those who proceed from Him”<sup>10</sup>.

It is absolutely necessary to avoid projecting onto the Holy Trinity the subordination existing within a human family, between parents and children, in order to grasp the eternal, antinomic divine reality, whereby the Persons are beyond any temporal or spatial determinism, characteristic to human thought. Although intratrinitarian relationships define the Trinitarian Persons to a certain extent, they cannot exhaust Their mystery, because the Persons are superior to the relations among Them, preserving total freedom in their relationships. On the other hand, the content of the Persons, the absolute, infinite divine nature, even if mutually imparted (the Father imparts His entire nature onto the Son through begetting, and onto the Holy Spirit through procession, yet possessing it entirely just like the Son, and the Holy Spirit fully possess it as well), do not diminish this self-giving, so that the divine Person might be defined as a mere space for the dwelling of the other Persons. In other words, in no context must interpersonal communion or perichoresis diminish the coherent identity of the Trinitarian Persons, and dim Their personal, intransmissible attributes.

The hierarchy within the Holy Trinity is utterly different from that in the created world, as it has nothing coercive, it does not oppose persons to each other, and does not restrict their absolute freedom, as it evinces the highest spirituality; moreover, it is felt or experienced as a surplus of sacrificial self-giving: the Father as Begetter and Proceeder has the initiative of giving, while the Son and the Spirit respond to this self-giving in the same way and at the same intensity, out of the same infinite love and goodness as the Father does. This is possible because the Persons have been interior to each other since eternity, as we cannot talk of a temporal constituting of the Most Holy Trinity or of purely exterior relations, as is the case with the human society. At the same time, as they are eternally oriented towards each other and assert each other, the Trinitarian Persons without exceeding their attributes or peculiar traits, experience the joy of perfect yet diverse unity, each from His own position, which does not confound them and does not cause the loss of their personal characteristics.

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<sup>10</sup> Gregorii Theologi, In sanctum Baptisma, XL, 43, J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus 36, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1838), p. 419 B, after V. Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit* (trans. V. Răducă, București: Ed. Anastasia, 1998), pp. 91-92.

We find a necessary statement concerning the hierarchical position of the Father within the Holy Trinity with St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who maintains: „The Father is greater than the Son not by nature, but by „causality”, for there is neither greater nor lesser among those who are equal by their nature”<sup>11</sup>. This paradoxical definition is the only one able to express both the Father’s capacity as a Principle or Begetter of everything pertaining to the Holy Trinity (Persons, nature and uncreated energies), and His consubstantial perichoretic equality with the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the opinion of Rev. Boris Bobrinskoy, the role of the Father’s monarchy as defined by the Cappadocian Fathers, consists in “asserting the Son’s and the Holy Spirit’s atemporal origin. The Father distinguishes the divine Persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and brings Them to existence before all ages, and he finds in Them the plenitude of His inexhaustible nature, as in the mystery of begetting and procession the two Persons contain the same divine nature as the Father (not similar, which would be Tritheism, but the same)”<sup>12</sup>. The limitations of the Father’s cataphatic dimension become obvious in the above quotation, where the two engendering acts are called „mysteries”, as they cannot be rendered by mere rational definitions. Therefore, we consider that the cataphatic perspective alone is not sufficient in order to reveal the entire divine reality of the relationships among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, of the Trinitarian unity grounded in the monarchy of the Father, of divine intersubjectivity. In the following part we shall turn to the other dimension or way of knowing God better suited to His uncreated, perfect, infinite life, namely the apophatism.

### The apophatic dimension of the Father’s monarchy

We must specify from the beginning the meaning given by Neopatristic Orthodox theology to the notion of apophatism, as a way of knowing God. In Father Stăniloae’s opinion apophatism is different from the rational negative theology, dubbed “apophatic knowledge” by Occidental theology. “In the Oriental patristic tradition apophatic theology is the mysterious, direct experience of God, where the human subject experiences God’s presence as a person more strongly, which means to recognize His very mystery”<sup>13</sup>. Unlike Vladimir Lossky and Christos Yannaras, Father Stăniloae attaches importance to cataphatic knowledge too, attempting to

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<sup>11</sup> Grigory of Nazianz, Omilie despre Botez, XL, 43, after B. Bobrinskoy, *Taina Preasfintei Treimi* (trans. M. & A. Alexandrescu, București: Ed. IBMBOR, 2005), p. 310.

<sup>12</sup> B. Bobrinskoy, *Taina Preasfintei Treimi*, pp. 310-311.

<sup>13</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (vol. I, București: Ed. IBMBOR, 1978), pp. 114-115.

achieve a felicitous synthesis between the two ways of knowledge. He argues for the necessity of such synthetic by stating that “all existence, from the uncaused, eternal God to the created world designed to live in God, is both rational and ineffable. All existence is a mystery which man cannot explain. Yet, it is entirely rational having as its source and target God’s goodness or happiness in God”<sup>14</sup>. Thus, the more we progress in the knowledge of God based on the supernatural Revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition, the more aware we must become that the mystery of His existence does not decrease, but on the contrary it actually increases. In this case, resorting to the spiritual expertise provided by the Holy Sacraments in the Church and by one’s personal ascetic struggle becomes indispensable. For this reason, the teachings on the Holy Trinity provided by the Orthodox spirituality can be “experienced” both in the worship practices and liturgical texts, and in the personal spiritual life, fostered by the prayers of the Church.

Orthodox theology considers it may remain faithful to the key contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers, in their turn faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the apostolic Tradition, only to the extent that it maintains a personalist basis of the unity of the Holy Trinity, in agreement with the specificity of the Orthodox approach, which highly acknowledges experience. This personalist vision allows the grounding of the Trinitarian unity not merely in the common nature, but as we have stated above, in the monarchy of the Father, which to the Orthodox does not designate Father’s primordial dominion, but origin and principle; in this case, the unity of nature is just a consequence of the monarchy of the Father<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, the philosophical notion of causality must be employed cautiously, to avoid suggesting a Trinitarian subordinatianism<sup>16</sup>. Here, the apophatic perspective proves itself beneficial, as it does not allow idolizing a term, but presupposes going beyond it. God the Father does not exert His dominion within the Holy Trinity that is within the economic Trinity, but only over the created world, which perceives Him as Almighty, as well as Sustainer (Pantokrator).

To enlarge on the Trinitarian apophatism, we mention that recent Orthodox theology asserts the apophatism of the divine Persons, besides the apophatism of the divine nature. Like Vladimir Lossky and Christos Yannaras, Father Stăniloae explains Trinitarian apophatic theology starting from God as a Person. Thus, it is not only nature that ensures

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<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost iubirea* (București: Ed. IBMBOR, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> See K. Chr. Felmy, *Dogmatica experienței eclesiale. Innoirea teologiei ortodoxe contemporane* (introd. and trans. I. Ică, Sibiu: Ed. Deisis, 1999), pp. 98-99.

<sup>16</sup> B. Bobrinskoy, *Taina Preasfintei Treimi*, p. 276.

God's transcendence over the created world, but also the divine Person. If God's transcendence were confined to the divine nature, this would entail the impossibility for Him to be open towards us, and this transcendence would not be free, imperfect. The paradoxical fact that divine transcendence lies in the Trinity of Persons as well, shows that for the Orthodox theology, "apophatic knowledge implies both God's lowering to the level of man's capacity to grasp Him, and His transcendence... His personal character ensures His transcendence, for His Person transcends even His infiniteness"<sup>17</sup>.

Before approaching the apophatism of the divine Persons, stressing the apophatism of the Father, we mention that Father Stăniloae distinguishes another kind of Trinitarian apophatism, whose direct source is the relation between the divine nature and Persons, more exactly the way in which nature is the content of the Persons. If the divine Persons commonly possess full nature<sup>18</sup>, this means that each Person holds the entire divine nature, not just a part of it, but holds it together with the other Persons, in perfect unity or communion. To human understanding, this relationship between Persons and nature, which has no counterpart in the created world, visible or invisible, is certainly one of the greatest mysteries of divinity. The inseparability of the divine Persons is ensured, on one hand, by Their ineffable content – the divine nature – and on the other hand by the monarchy of the Father, which is the basis for the specific attributes of each Hypostasis<sup>19</sup>. The special interior relationship, grounded in these two postulates, binding together the three divine Persons from the interior, has been named intersubjectivity. This divine intersubjectivity is the object of apophatic knowledge, since it has no counterpart with the created persons, angels and people, even if the latter ones have the calling (ingrained in the divine image constituting their spiritual basis) to be united to each other as fully as possible; they can never become "pure subjects", like the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity. Secondly, the apophasis peculiar to this "reciprocal interiority and conscious interpenetration of divine Subjects"<sup>20</sup>, also stems from the fact that divine intersubjectivity acknowledges the lack of passivity in God. This lack of passivity directly concerns the Son's and Holy Spirit's eternal acts of originating from the Father, which are apophatic in themselves. Neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit can be regarded as objects, because they originate from the Person of the Father; this is why the faith teaching concerning the Trinitarian

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<sup>17</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> Idem, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost iubirea*, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> S. Buchiu, *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea părintelui Stăniloae* (București: Ed. Libra, 2002), pp. 82-83.

<sup>20</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost iubirea*, p. 30.

dogma alternates the phrases: “the Father begets” and “The Father gives procession”, with “The Son is begotten of the Father” and “the Spirit proceeds from the Father”, to indicate the apophatic truth of the participation of the three divine Hypostases, each from His own position in the eternal acts of originating from the Father<sup>21</sup>. And if the manners of originating from the Father are apophatic in the highest degree, then the Person of the Father is so much more, as a Begetter and a Proceeder. In this sense, the capacity as a Principle or Source of divinity (the monarchy of the Father), is also highly apophatic, because it does not transform the Trinitarian relationships in juridical, exterior relations, nor does it confound the other two Hypostases as they would be confounded if they were seen in relation with the divine nature conceived impersonally.

We must specify that this apophatism of the person is antinomic, and it differs in a sense from the apophatism of the nature: while the latter cannot be experienced, the apophatism of the person ineffably agrees with the self-revelation, which is imbued, however, with apophatism; the Persons of the Holy Trinity are absolutely free to reveal Themselves and if they do, remaining apophatic even as they do it<sup>22</sup>.

The apophatism of the divine Persons, which in the thought of Father Stăniloae is in agreement with the possibility of Their revelation, on the grounds of Their freedom is both unitary and diverse. In the former sense we maintain an apophatism common to the three uncreated, eternal Persons, stemming from their personal character; in the latter sense we distinguish an apophatism peculiar to each Hypostasis, related to the place each of Them holds within the Holy Trinity. This apophatism specific to each divine Person, prevents us from confounding personal Trinitarian relationships, and at the same time underlies the diversity within the Holy Trinity, as each Hypostasis subjectivizes being and activates will and action, volitional agency, in His own way. In this context we must state that not only the “sonship” and “procession” must be considered apophatic, but also the “glory” defining the special relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Son has in its turn a strong apophatic character. Hence in this case, too, we must understand it is a personalist, not essentialist apophatism, for the Holy Spirit shines forth from the Son towards the Father, “maintaining the Son in the light before the Father, and thus Son, and Father are neither mingled nor separated”<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> S. Buchiu, *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea părintelui Stăniloae*, p. 86.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>23</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 319.

The concept of “monarchy of the Father” favours the definition of the divine Persons not only in the perspective of perichoretic communion, but also in that of apophasis. This approach is able to protect Trinitarian theology from the danger of the unilateral emphasis laid on communion to the detriment of the identity, uniqueness and specificity of each Person, within the Holy Trinity. This danger is real and identifiable in some contemporary theologies; it is due to shifting the stress from the centrality of the Person of our Saviour Jesus Christ, onto the Person of the Holy Spirit. The consequence is obscuring the capacity as a Pantokrator of the created world, humanity and Church, of the Incarnate Son of God, the Logos – creator, provider, saviour and judge, Jesus Christ.

The final element we wish to dwell upon in reference to the monarchy of the Father, is the fact that Orthodox theology, worship and spirituality were prevented from erroneous interpretation of the relationships among the Trinitarian Persons, by a spiritual reality which only the Orthodox Church knew how to fully appreciate – namely, the reality of the uncreated divine energies. We shall not enlarge on this principle which is peculiar to the Oriental theology, but we confine ourselves to saying that the apophatic character of these divine energies – eternal, distinct but not separated from the divine being or the Trinitarian Persons, has preserved the Trinitarian apophatism. Therefore, neither did the divine nature prevail over the Persons, nor did the Persons subordinate or obscure the One Godhead, but all three eternal, uncreated, divine realities of the Holy Trinity – Person, nature and energy – have been understood, experienced (obviously through the divine grace) and professed in a personalist-communitarian perspective, both dynamic and spiritual. The great Saints of the Undivided Church and of the Orthodox Church enjoyed the sacramental and ecclesial experience of the presence, and action of the Triune God in history, in the concrete circumstances of everyday life, thus confirming the words of Origen, who exclaimed centuries ago: “The Church is full of Trinity!”

Besides the conclusions presented throughout this paper, we also state the following:

Far from deeming the “monarchy of the Father” as a shallow or obsolete concept, Orthodox dogmatics sees in its great spiritual depth, in the perspective of an apophatic-cataphatic synthesis as the one achieved by Father Stăniloae, expressing the antinomy between the One Person, begetting Divinity and the three eternal Hypostases, co-eternal, all-creating, all-providing and deifying, and also holding dominion over the Kingdom of everlasting love.

Capitalizing on the misunderstood notion of “the monarchy of the Father,” in the management of human society or the administration of the Church is unconcordant with the divine revelation; it erodes Christian spirituality and impinges on the relationships of genuine fraternity within the Church, which must be extended throughout the society. The personalist-communitarian dimension as well as the spiritual one are destroyed by instating juridical, exterior relationships, wrongly derived from the divine Revelation.

In regard to the Holy Trinity the concept of hierarchy must not be opposed to that of communion, since if they are understood cataphatically-apophatically that is rationally-spiritually, they are not divergent but convergent. The „law” that governs the existence and life of the Most Holy Trinity is sacrificial love, all-free and all-righteous and perfect, present and active through Christ in the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church. As long as this term is understood not merely rationally, not starting from the actualities of a secular world, unresponsive and impervious to faith and piety, but rather from the meta-logical, fully spiritual reality of the Holy Trinity, it may designate a spiritual reality, even within the created world. A concrete example is the invisible world of the angels, where, in the belief of the Church, higher-rank hosts sustain the lower-rank ones, in advancing the knowledge and comprehension of God. We forget much too easily our Saviour’s words, teaching us what kind of hierarchy must be established among His disciples: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant!” (Mk 10.43). The perspective of this divine commandment reveals some of the mystery of God the Father, theologically expressed by the phrase “monarchy of the Father.”