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# The place and the theological significance of God the Father in the Communion of the Holy Trinity

*according to Dumitru Stăniloae and Jürgen Moltmann<sup>1</sup>*

## Abstract

The study presents, comparatively, some theological considerations regarding Jürgen Moltmann's and Dumitru Stăniloae's views concerning the place and the significance of God the Father and of the Holy Trinity. The German theologian J. Moltmann rediscovered in Western theology a new appreciation for a teaching considered by some contemporaries and predecessors as being unimportant for theology and for the life of the Church and of the world. On the opposite side, Dumitru Stăniloae showed that the Holy Trinity represents a kind of revolution for human thinking, with not only soteriological and

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ecclesiological consequences but also philosophical, cultural and social ones. The Romanian theologian brings a completely new theory with his bold ideas, which are in consonance with the major assertions of the Eastern Fathers regarding the Holy Trinity; however, they are arranged in a new language more accessible for contemporaries. He discovered the beauty and the depth of the mystery of the Holy Trinity in the light of an eternal love and kindness which are inseparable from the eternal Father, who has an eternal Son and with whom He is united in the joy and light of the Holy Ghost. His whole theological thinking is Trinitarian, placing God-The Holy Trinity at the center of his theology, as well as at the center of Orthodox worship and confession in the world.

### Keywords

Dogmatic Theology, Holy Trinity, Jürgen Moltmann, Dumitru Stăniloae.

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### General Considerations

The Christian teaching about God - The Holy Trinity - represents the main part of all spiritual thinking as well as experience. Therefore, it has at all times a very important role in theology, theological reflection, in liturgical ministry as well as in the entire witnessing work of the Church.

The Holy Trinity is the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, clearly highlighted by the Nicene- Constantinople Symbol of Faith: "I believe in one God the Father Almighty ... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God .... And in the Holy Spirit, the life-maker...." Deepening through reflection on the mystery of the Holy Trinity in theological thinking was increasingly present in the last century, not only in Orthodox theology but also in Catholic and Protestant forms. For all the important theologians of that decade, the Holy Trinity was a very a special attraction.

Western theology began to notice and increasingly emphasize the profound implications this doctrine has for theology and also for Church life and even for humanity. Among Western theologians who have superbly understood the significance of Holy Trinity for today's thinking is the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann<sup>2</sup>. In the Roman Catholic theology

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<sup>2</sup> Among his works of reference in this particular issue we mention: *Trinität Gottes und Reich*, Ch Kaiser Verlag, Munich, 1990; *Gott in der Schopfung "Ökologische Schöpfungslehre*, Munich, 1984, trans. rom. "God in creation", Alba Iulia, 2007. Father Stăniloae said about J. Moltmann: "With all his works, he is one of the most active and

of the last century as well we meet theologians who asked with special poignancy the theological significance of the Holy Trinity Church's life and saving work.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the thinking of the Holy Fathers, orthodox theologians have emphasized with particular insistence the teaching of the Holy Trinity, which they have deepened with a constant passion. Let us mention only a few of them:: Vladimir Lossky<sup>4</sup>, Boris Bobrinskoy<sup>5</sup> and Dumitru Stăniloae.

The last one showed that the entire life of the Church and theology is permeated by the Holy Trinity, and that everything which is related to ecclesiastical structures and the whole process of theological reflection is supported and carried by the life of love and communion of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has thus many consequences on different levels.

In what follows we will try to grasp how the Holy Trinity, and especially how God the Father is understood in this communion, by two leaders of Trinitarian theology: Jürgen Moltmann and Dumitru Stăniloae<sup>6</sup>.

## 1 Marks of Trinitarian theology in the theological thinking of J. Moltmann

### 1.1 On the way of understanding God - the Trinity of Persons

A very special importance in theological thinking is that man reporting to God is an intrinsic human presence. J. Moltmann starts from the fact that God must be thought not only as an absolute subject but more importantly as the Trinity of Persons.<sup>7</sup>

In Moltmann's view the starting point for understanding of God as Trinity of Persons is the story of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God made human for

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interesting theologians of our time" [Review *Trinität und Reich Gottes in Orthodoxy* XXXIII, 4 (1981), p. 629].

<sup>3</sup> See here, especially: K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol 14, Benzinger Verlag, Zurich Einsiedeln Cologne, 1980, p. 48; Rene Laurentin, *Traité sur la Trinité*, Fayard Le Sorment, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Vl. Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, Editura Anastasia, f.a; Idem, *Introdocere în teologia ortodoxă*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> B. Bobrinskoy, *Le mystère de la Trinité*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (TDO)*, vol. I, București, 1978, About this topic the theologian J. Moltmann said: „Dumitru Stăniloae ist ein durch und durch trinitarisch deukender Theologe. Seine dynamische Formulierung der orthodoxen Trinitätslehre wird bei uns auf eive offene Diskussion treffen und mit grossen Interesse aufgenommen werden”. (Preface, trad. german of *Teologiei Dogmatice Ortodoxe*, Benzinger Verlag, 1985, p. 12)

<sup>7</sup> J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, p. 25: „Über diese beiden Antworten hinaus (Gott als höchste Subsanz und Gott als absolutes Subjekt), führt die spezifisch christlich-theologische Antwort: Gott ist der dreienige Gott.”

the salvation of humankind. At the same time, it shows that the Western tradition began with the unity of God and then dealt with the Trinity, while his theological speech is the one which starts with the Trinity of Persons and then leads to the unity of God.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the understanding of the Holy Trinity as supreme substance, or as absolute Subject, the noted theologian also develops the social implications of Trinitarian doctrine based on the testimony of Holy Scripture, where we can see how the relationship of communion and love meet in the Trinity.

Therefore, understanding the Trinity remains not only at the level of divine transcendence, or the historical perception of the Holy Trinity in relation with the philosophy and culture of the different ages that passed over the theology of the last two millennia: its understanding must have a relation to the concrete lives of human beings in society.<sup>9</sup>

The social dimension of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is based on the understanding of its threefold purpose: humanity's relationship with God, with other persons, and with all creation.

## 1.2 The importance of Trinitarian thinking and its experience

In Western theology J. Moltmann noted with great force of argument and persuasion the way in which Trinitarian thinking is to be approached . When approaching a relationship with the One Absolute, Holy, and Almighty, one is filled with wonder, fascination and sometimes even dread. This does not refer to an abstract human being but to the concrete one, the believer approached by the Beloved One, the Christian who is filled with the spirit of gratitude, joy, worship and Doxology. On the basis of this experience faith in God is found – as well as the Holy Trinity, which stimulates and supports the experience of the believer's relationship and dialogue with God.

The life of prayer and meditation supports the active human believer's life: without the presence of the Spirit and Purifier, an active life falls "into actions and into a pragmatic consumer life"<sup>10</sup>. Only dialogue with God,

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34: „Die Einheit Gottes wird weder als homogene Substanz noch als identisches Subjekt vorausgesetzt, sondern aus dieser trinitarischen Geshichte heraus erfragt und darum auch trinitarisch entwickelt.“

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35: „Im Unterschied zur Substanztrinität und zur Subjektrinität werden wir versuchen, eine soziale Trinitätslehre zu entwickeln. Wir verstehen die Schrift als das Zeugnis von der menschen- und weltoffenen Geschichte der Gemeinschaftsbeziehungen der Trinität.“

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23: Theology appears to be a necessity sustained by religious life. „Theologie ist darum die kritische Reflexion dieser notwendigen Praxis im Lichte des Evangeliums. Sie

based on faith in Him, makes possible the experience and living-out of His mystery, which then reflects on all of human thinking and work. The nature of this experience is totally different than the one we know in other sciences. This living out of faith takes place on other levels and has other coordinates.

Starting from the history of the crucified Christ, in Western theology a theology of the cross developed which has been transformed into a Doxological theology.

Having faith in the Holy Trinity, believers enjoy its manifestation in their life and in creaturely life, and enjoy the gift of Christ's Cross made to the people.

### 1.3 The distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity - and its implications in the position of God the Father in the Trinitarian communion

An important key in developing his treatise regarding the Holy Trinity, Moltmann emphasizes with great accuracy the distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. This distinction is necessary to grasp the depth of the mystery of salvation, which The Trinitarian God has made through the incarnation of the Father's eternal Son. "Immanent Trinity" refers to what is God Himself as the eternal communion of eternal persons, as we see in the divine revelation, while the economic Trinity tries to capture the way in which God as the eternal communion of persons realizes the work of His salvation – without making us talk about two different "kinds of Trinity."<sup>11</sup>

The distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity is important for understanding the meaning of salvation and its reception by man through God's grace. What makes possible the outward Trinitarian manifestation is God's absolute freedom. This, in everything He does, is not constrained by anyone or anything; on the contrary, he is acting Himself, on the basis of absolute freedom and His absolute love. His

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*will die Welt nicht nur anders verstehen, sondern auch verändern. Sie versteht sich selbst als eine Komponente in dem Prozess, durch den die Welt befreit wird."*

<sup>11</sup> J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, p. 168: „Die ökonomische Trinität bezeichnet den dreieinigen Gott in seiner Heilsveranstaltung, die ihn offenbart. Die ökonomische Trinität wird darum auch Offenbarungstrinität genannt. Die immanente Trinität bezeichnet den dreieinigen Gott, wie er in sich selbst ist. Die immanente Trinität wird auch Wesenstrinität genannt.“

decision is always made freely, but in virtue of relations between persons of the Trinity.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, what God is in Himself, He reveals out into history. Thus, the salvation history of mankind is nothing other than the history of the living God in the Trinitarian communion of persons, manifested in creation. The Eternal God's love for His creatures moves the love of the creatures, receiving them into the eternal communion of the Holy Trinity. God's love for the world is love itself, which exists in the perichoretic relations of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

#### 1.4 Cross of Christ - point of intersection between the immanent and economic Trinity

We couldn't attain knowledge of God the Father in the absoluteness of his love if He hadn't been on the cross of His Son, and thus all mankind has been able to know God's interest in it and love for it.

J. Moltmann, based on these ideas, began to think about Christ's saving work, which culminated on the Cross, in light of the Holy Trinity - which means he began to think in a Trinitarian manner. Therefore any too strict separation of the immanent and economic Trinity could no longer be categorically stated, because the fundamental work of Christ - His Cross - actually can be known only in the fellowship of God the Father's salvation through His Son.

J. Moltmann's position in this matter coincides with that of K. Rahner, according to whom "The economic Trinity is just the immanent one and vice versa"<sup>13</sup>.

The word of Sacred Scripture "God is Love" is a summary of the giving of the Son through the Father for us, and this gift cannot be separated from the event of Calvary. Christ's Cross has an essentially revelatory nature because through the Savior's cross, we humans attain true knowledge of God. The economic Trinity not only reveals the immanent Trinity; the basic acts of the economic Trinity are reflected in the immanent One. In the Cross of Christ the entire Holy Trinity is revealed, Its life, intention, and Its love towards all creation, but above all the Cross reveals the

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174: „Wir haben die Einheit der trinitarischen Geschichte Gottes als die offene, vereinigende Einigkeit der drei göttlichen Personen in ihren Beziehungen zueinander verstanden... Sie liegt dann in der ewigen Perichorese des Vaters, des Sohnes und des Geistes. Die Geschichte der trinitarischen Gemeinschaftsbeziehungen Gottes entspricht der ewigen Perichorese der Trinität.“

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177: „Deshalb habe ich die These Karl Rahners zustimmend aufgenommen: Die ‚oikonomische Trinität ist die immanente Trinität und umgekehrt.‘“ Vezi despre aceasta și *Diskussion über „Der gekreuzigte Gott“*, Ed. M. Welker, München, 1979..

salvation work of the Father, through His Son killed on the Cross, in the Holy Spirit's power. In other words, Christ's Cross reflects a reciprocal relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinity<sup>14</sup>.

The economic Trinity reflects in a certain sense the immanent Trinity, manifested mainly in the painful events suffered by Christ on Calvary, keeping the first one in a fundamental openness to a reality in which God will be "all in everyone", in other words, towards the eschatological, towards the eternal kingdom of the Holy Trinity.

### 1.5 The Recognition and doxology to God the Father in the context of His kingdom

J. Moltmann starts to understand the infinite horizon of the kingdom of God from Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came into the world to announce the arrival of the God's Kingdom: "The kingdom of Heaven is near"(according Matthew 4, 17; Mark 1, 15).

When we address God it is equivalent to: "Abba, Father!" meaning to be in the presence of the Father's Kingdom, when God will "wipe every tear" (according to Revelation 21:4) away from people's faces. Starting from Jesus Christ, we can tell that he had in His attention two basic things: the revelation of God the Father, whose will came to fulfill it and the kingdom of the Father, which was announced to have come into the world through the Son. In fact, the revelation of the Father whose will He came to fulfill and Father's kingdom which was announced as having arrived in the world through the Son.

In messianic times or in those of the Messiah's coming into the world, God Himself descends into the world, approaching people. In the context of this approaching humanity God's people carry out Jesus Christ's saving work. He understood this himself, as "Son of the Father", as "Son of God." The reality of this close relationship between the Father and the Son is expressed in the words: "All things were given to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except

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<sup>14</sup> In this sense, J. Moltmann shows that the passion of Christ has defined the Holy Trinity eternal life since the beginning of time . You can see in this sense: *Ibid.*, p. 178: „Wenn das richtig ist, dann bestimmt auch die Freude der erwiderten Liebe in der Verherrlichung durch den Geist das innere Leben des dreieinigen Gottes von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit. Wie das Kreuz des Sohnes das innere Leben des dreieinigen Gottes prägt, so prägt auch die Geschichte des Geistes durch die Freude der befreiten und mit Gott vereinigten Kreatur das innere Leben des dreieinigen Gottes.



the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal himself " (according Matthew 11, 27).<sup>15</sup>

God's kingdom is a kingdom of true freedom, in which God always remains the Creator of everything, including the human. In this human quality of God's creature, he feels a close connection with his Creator.

J. Moltmann brings into this vision of the kingdom of God not only the concept of "creation" or of "freedom" but also that of the "servant (Knecht) of God", which has nothing to do with anything derogatory or demeaning to humanity but instead represents a title of honor and nobility.

Through the "servant of God" man is elevated above all other creatures, becoming a child of God. The status of "servant of God" thus follows the one of "son of God." But the quality of "servant" and the "son" cannot be separated from the kingdom of God<sup>16</sup>.

But these degrees of human freedom in God can't be considered fully and finally here on earth, as this man's thirst for true and full freedom can't be satiated unless man receives God "face to face." This will be possible only in the kingdom of God's glory, when faithful people will be able to participate without any barrier to eternal life, in that unlimited, inexhaustible and unending communion of the Holy Trinity.

## 2 D. Stăniloae and the understanding of God the Father in the communion of The Holy Trinity

Orthodox Theology has begun itself to develop with more passion the Trinitarian doctrine in the last century, reflecting on the important aspects of it, with its large relevance for Church confession, the salvation of Christians and the advance of all creation towards the full eschatology.

Although, as a doctrine, The Holy Trinity has always very present in the Church, receiving particular accent during its worship, theology hasn't always been able to show the depth, the richness and the real significance of the Holy Trinity for the Church and for the world in the way that it was realized in the last century by certain significant Orthodox theologians. We

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<sup>15</sup> More aspects regarding this connection between the Father and the Son, you can see: Idem, *In der Geschichte des dreieinigen Gottes. Beiträge zur trinitarischen Theologie*, München, 1991, p. 36-38.

<sup>16</sup> J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, p. 238: „Die Freiheit der Knechte, die Freiheit der Kinder und die Freiheit der Freunde Gottes entsprechen der Geschichte des Reiches Gottes. Sie sind gleichsam Stufen auf einem Wege, ohne jedoch Stationen einer kontinuierlichen Entwicklung zu sein.“



can cite as examples the theologians Vladimir Lossky<sup>17</sup> and Dumitru Stăniloae<sup>18</sup>.

Starting from the Trinitarian terminology, these two theologians developed a relevant theology of the Holy Trinity as a basis for their entire theology and even a basis for the entire Church. These Orthodox theologians, but also others, pointed out some important aspects for theology, which are listed as follows: the unity of the divine nature as premise of the personal character of His hypostases; the divine inter-subjectivity and God the Father's importance in the Trinitarian communion; God the Father as center and principle of provenance within the divine nature; and finally, the importance of God the Son in receiving and comprehending the communal life of the Father through the Holy Spirit.

## 2.1 Theological and terminological definitions regarding the Holy Trinity

This aspect of the Holy Trinity has significant relevance for the Christian life and for theology, because depending on this one can understand the place, the role and the theological significance of God the Father in the Holy Trinity's communion. The patristic era had a principal function in the classification of Trinitarian terminology, starting from its insistence upon the unity and the diversity of The Holy Trinity at the same time. The Church Fathers' contribution in this process was huge, because they used the philosophical and cultural language of their time, but they also changed it, adapting it to all the meaning underlining the understanding of the Trinitarian terminology regarding the personal quality of the Holy Trinity.

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<sup>17</sup> *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, Trad. rom. de Pr. V. Răducă, f.a., p. 75-94; Idem, *Introducere în Teologia Ortodoxă*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1993, p. 43-76; Dumitru Stăniloae, *Relațiile treimice și viața Bisericii*, în „Ortodoxia” (Ort), XV, 4 (1964), p. 503-525; Idem, *Sfânta Treime – Structura supremei iubiri*, în „Studii Teologice” (S.T.), XXII, 5-6 (1970), p. 333-335; Idem, *Ființa și Ipostasurile în Sfânta Treime după Sf. Vasile cel Mare*, în „Ortodoxia”, XXXI, 1 (1979), p. 53-74; Idem, *Sfânta Treime – creatoarea, mântuitoarea și ținta veșnică a tuturor credincioșilor*, în „Ortodoxia”, XXXVIII, 2 (1986), p. 142; Idem, *Sfânta Treime și creația lumii din nimic în timp*, în „Mitropolia Olteniei”, XXXVIII, 2 (1987), p. 41-69; Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (T.D.O.)*, București, 1978, vol. I, p. 282-320; Idem, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Ființa și Ipostasurile în Sfânta Treime, după Sf. Vasile cel Mare*, în „Studia basiliana I”, Editura Basilica, București 2009, p. 60

The main term “ousia,” like “omoousia,” preoccupied a lot of time in the Fathers’ thinking, because through them an articulate response was given to the Sabellians, which is as follows: they couldn’t understand the sense of existence in the same divine Nature of three different Hypostases.

When Reverend Father Stăniloae referred to this aspect, he said: “In the uncreated God there is exceeded the opinion: or the natural unity without the Trinity of Persons, or the classification of the relation between the Persons or Hypostases. In the divine plan, which is above the classification, but also above the lifeless unity, there exists a perfect unity, without being separated, but also an interhypostatic or interpersonal life. The natural unity and the trinity of hypostases are brought together in a superior way of human thinking. In the Holy Trinity, every Person is bearer of the entire divine common nature, but the Trinitarian Persons are not factors of nature separation. “Through this Trinitarian theology of Eastern Church Fathers, Saint Basil the Great made the very first important contribution, protecting the biblical teaching about God being one and still Trinitarian in Persons from every pantheist influence, according to which there exists the nature first of all and from it arises the persons, as a second grade reality and less consistent and material. For the Eastern Fathers there existed nothing before the Divine Persons, because the Persons have always existed”<sup>19</sup>.

These theological explanations have great poignancy, because through them we find that none of the Persons of the Holy Trinity are secondary, but every Divine Person is equal in importance with the divine Nature, because the eternal Persons have the divine eternal substance as infinite content. The ontological and the personal coincide in the theology of Fr Dumitru Stăniloae, inspired by the Cappadocian Fathers’ thinking.

Each hypostasis of the Holy Trinity possesses the entire nature of God’s being in a different way, in a personal mode, in the sense of relationship to other hypostases as a total dedication, complete and eternal, with multiple consequences in all theological thought but also in Church life.

## 2.2 The unity of the divine nature – premise of the personal aspect of His Hypostasis

“The One who is” (cf. Exodus 3, 14) is in the vision of Father Dumitru Stăniloae the very secret of existence that explains everything in existence, while God remains an impenetrable mystery. But since this reality is unique, we can understand His unique character, or as the above-

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

mentioned theologian says: "If the divine being were in a single person, It wouldn't be good or forever loving, so It wouldn't be divine. Only existing in Three Persons, these Three Persons are divine, because they have a value and a relationship which make them worthy and capable of absolute love. And They are so because They exist one in the other so that in every Person God is seen entirely, thus there are not three gods"<sup>20</sup>.

The meaning of the unity of the divine nature as a premise for her personal character is revealed by St. Athanasius the Great, as follows: "To say that the Son may not be, is an offense – also against the Father's nature, because how can he not be what is of his own? This is like saying the Father may not be good. But, as Father is always good by His nature, He is also a Birth-giver forever. And to say that The Father wills the Son, and the Logos wills the Father doesn't show an antecedent (of giving birth) but it shows the authenticity of the same nature and its quality"<sup>21</sup>.

This nature is epitomized as the eternal Father and in this way the Father gives birth to the eternal Son and the Father is the eternal Father. In this way the divine nature is epitomized as Father Giving Birth and the Born Son. We can talk about the divine nature only in a very abstract form, because there wasn't a moment when the divine nature was unshared into the Trinity hypostases. To think like this is a misunderstanding of the real meaning of the relationship between unity and divinity in the Holy Trinity.

It is based on goodness and love that we firstly understand the unity of the Divine Nature, but also the real existence of the Third Person. Both goodness and love must be understood as a relation, so as the Divine Nature is one, It must also be seen simultaneously as a unity-relation, as a relation in the bosom of the unity. "Neither the unity should be broken in favor of the relationship, nor the relationship should be set aside in favor of unity. The Trinity is above the difference between unity and relationship in the way we understand them"<sup>22</sup>.

### 2.3 The position of God the Father inside the Holy Trinity: the center and the principle of Divinity

In the Holy Trinity God the Father is the cause or the principle of the Son and the Holy Spirit. In God's nature the Father is just one, and therefore in relation to the Son, a Unique Son compared to the Father and the Holy

<sup>20</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, p. 26. In this sense Vl. Lossky describes the unity of the divine nature as follows: „The Trinity is absolutely stability. We can say a necessity ,but in the same time the idea of necessity is not appropriate for the Holy Trinity „(Vl. Lossky, *Teologia mistică...*, p. 76).

<sup>21</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Idem, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Vol. I, București, 1978, p. 297.

Spirit in a special relationship with both of them. Therefore, when God the Father is meditated upon and he is called the "Father," He is the Father solely and has in relationship with Him the Son, and when God is meditated upon and called the Son, he is understood in full and exclusive relationship with Him and the Father. And similarly, we understand the Holy Spirit<sup>23</sup>.

God the Father is always thinking of himself, in a paternal relationship with his eternal Son, the eternal Son of one Father, who receives all the love from His Son. Thus, the Father proves himself in all the feelings and intensity of his Father-feeling, but also lives and feels the Son's love to the Father. In this way we can understand how God is one even if we say that there are three hypostases or Persons of God's nature. It helps for this perspective to recall saint John the Evangelist, who reports Christ's words in response to Philip's question: "Show us the Father." Our Savior says: "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father ... Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you do not come from Me .The Father, who remains in me, does his own work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father in me." (John 14, 9-11)

God as One has the status of unborn in the Father, but also the quality of giving birth and the quality of proceeding. God's nature also has the quality of being begotten in the Son, and the quality of proceeding in the Holy Spirit<sup>24</sup>.

The Father's place in the communion of the Holy Trinity is the one of principle, the source of the other two Persons, but which is raised above the categories of space and time. There is another way than the rational one, the logical one or the human one to understand the meaning of the way in which the Father gives birth to the Son and of the way in which He sends forth the Holy Spirit but remains with the other two Persons while coeternal and same in His divinity. The explanation of this position of the Father in the communion of the Holy Trinity lies in the premise of love which is without beginning and without end, a premise highlighted by the Person of God the Father.

The divine Persons, as eternal existence, not only show the love that is without beginning but also highlight the fact that one of the persons is

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<sup>23</sup> Idem, *Sfânta Treime sau la început...*, p. 31. Vl. Lossky, *Introducere în teologia ortodoxă*, p. 58: the term of „monarch” used for God the Father appears very often in the theological writings from fourth century. The Father is defined as divinity, but the very fact that He is the Father makes the assignment of divine being to the other two Persons...”

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78

Father, the other one is Son and the other one is Holy Spirit. It's about love "that starts from the Father to the Son and comes back in response to the Father from the Son"<sup>25</sup>.

For the human mind which tries to understand the Father in the Holy Trinity, His position can look like a hierarchy, but if we seek more deeply we will see that we cannot talk of such a hierarchy of Trinitarian persons, but only of an eternal, infinite and perfect communion, which excludes the human hierarchy in its meaning.

#### 2.4 God the Father seen in the expression of intersubjectivity and Trinitarian communion

The Holy Trinity is understood not only from the need to assume a divine eternal love by the eternal Trinity of Persons: we can also talk of "a con-penetration of their consciences"<sup>26</sup>, part of the Holy Trinity that Dumitru Stăniloae calls "intersubjectivity."

The starting point of this dimension of the Holy Trinity of "pure intersubjectivity" is the eternal Father who gives birth to Son, but at the same time, in order to avoid the mistake of assuming the Son to be a quality of object of the Father, Christian doctrine says that "the Son is born from the Father" and not only that "the Father gives birth to the Son." "The birth of the Son from the Father expresses only the unchanged position of the Father as the giver, and the position of the Son as receiver of the existence and the connection between them through the act of birth. Both live this external act as subjects, but they live together in an intersubjectivity in which everyone remains unmistakable, for each One lives this act of birth from His own position"<sup>27</sup>.

The Holy Trinity's intersubjectivity ensures perfect communion between the Persons, because each divine Person does not live only for himself in a distinct and personal life, but each lives the two other Persons' subjectivity. For "as the Father lives the subjectivity of the Son in his own paternal subjectivity, without confusing them, but increasing them, so the Son lives the paternal subjectivity in his own son subjectivity. Everything is common and mutual in the Holy Trinity"<sup>28</sup>.

God the Father has the initiative in this experience of divine living as one who lives from one parental position for the ones who are born and

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, München, 1980, Review, in „Ortodoxia”, XXXIII, 4 (1981), p. 630.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, *TDO*, vol I, p. 301.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

proceed, i.e., to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, respectively. This distinction of the Father introduces no distance or interval between Himself and the Other two; on the contrary, in the Holy Trinity everything above what we call simultaneous for the Trinity should be understood above all categories of time and spatial relations and our knowledge of such things, differing so completely from what we humans are used to understanding through human modes of existence, origins relationships.

## Conclusion

The German theologian J. Moltmann has rediscovered in Western theology a new perspective on a teaching considered by his predecessors and contemporaneous to be not so important for theology and especially for Church life, not to mention the world's life.

Yet J. Moltmann has written many books regarding the Holy Trinity, showing that the Holy Trinity is a kind of revolution for how humans think, with major consequences not just in soteriological and ecclesiastical thought, but also in philosophical, cultural and social as well.

J. Moltmann regards the relations between the Persons of Holy Trinity and the communion between them as the basis of advancing creation by the Kingdom of God, and, at the same time, as a premise of progress on many planes of human historical existence.

At the same time, the living God of the Gospel is present with humanity and in the development of historical actions, taking His responsibility to help in the development of history so it can reach its deepest aspirations.

The theologian introduces a deep theological renewal with his works, through his bold ideas which he expresses and whose ideas are in consonance with the main affirmations of the Holy Fathers regarding the Holy Trinity; but he also expresses them in a new way so that the ideas can be understood by contemporaries. In this way, the theology of the Blessed Augustine is exceeded as well as the theology of many western theologians from last century, for example K. Barth, emphasizing the reality of God's unity, but at the same time the real existence of Three Persons in God.

J. Moltmann argues strongly that the Trinity is the engine that drives the world towards freedom and brotherhood. Another important dimension of his theological thinking on the Holy Trinity is that he understands It in the light of the saving Cross of Jesus Christ. Referring to this aspect of Trinitarian theology, the theologian Stăniloae says: "Of course, the idea of an uncaring God towards human suffering and towards the glory we bring to Him after we've been saved does not match the biblical God, and therefore we agree with the accent that J. Moltmann puts on His

participation in human suffering accompanying His mercy. Therefore, we believe that this issue should be considered by Orthodox theology. But we believe that the Orthodox theology may find in this theme many shades and a rich complexity”<sup>29</sup>.

Dumitru Stăniloae found in Orthodox theological thought the beauty and depth of the mystery of the Trinity, he understood this regarding the existence of eternal love and eternal goodness that would be inconceivable without the existence of an eternal Father, who has an eternal Son, fully united in the joy and the light of the Holy Spirit. His entire theological thinking is thinking that puts the Trinitarian God – the Holy Trinity - at the center of theology, worship and witness of the Orthodox faith in the world. The perfect communion of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is seen by the Romanian theologian in the context of pure intersubjectivity.

Both theologians met in the place marked by the existence of fascination and love of the Holy Trinity, opening in a promising, hope-giving way a theological dialogue on how to approach the Holy Trinity in East and West.

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<sup>29</sup> D. Stăniloae, J. Moltmann *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, München, 1980, review in „Ortodoxia” XXXIII, 1 (1981), p. 630.