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The Rationality of the World and Human Reason as expressed in the Theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae: Points of Connection in the Dialogue between Theology and Science

Abstract

The relationship between man and cosmos, between the rationality of the world and human reason, are significant coordinates for Orthodox Tradition and very well expressed in the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. The deepening of the dynamic reciprocity between the world's rationality and human reason could contribute to the articulation of a dialogue between theology and science. The internal relationship between natural and supernatural, and respectively the dynamic reciprocity between the world's rationality and man's reason evidenced by the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae could be a good interface in the dialogue between



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theology and science in the contemporary epistemological context.

Keywords

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Father Dumitru Stăniloae: a witness for ecclesial theology that is open towards dialogue with contemporary science

Father Dumitru Stăniloae remains an overwhelming figure in contemporary theology through the way in which he assumed and deepened the encompassing dimension of Patristic and ecclesial Tradition. He developed theology that bore witness, that was anchored in the life of the Church and that responded to the concrete and deep needs of society, at the same time surpassing any unilateral position and isolationist attitude. The theology of Father Stăniloae is the kind that generates and strengthens the consciousness for dialogue. Dialogue does not mean the evasion of identity or monotony, but the expression of identity in a perspective open and capable of assuming otherness.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae embodies through his personality, ingenious synthesis and balanced theology, the capacity to establish points of contact between different traditions of Orthodox Theology and the encompassing power of universal Orthodoxy. The theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is not gratuitous, where information is displayed in an artificial way. It is not a pretext for a proud affirmation, but the expression of striving and sacrificing through which he attempted the recuperation and valorization of theology's ecclesial dimension. In this perspective, theology is open to the real problems of the world.

In the condition in which the paradigm of contemporary science offers significant epistemological mutations through the heights of research in different scientific domains, the limits of the scientific approach being recognized and assumed, there is a chance for honest openness of scientific knowledge towards that of theology. One of the ecclesial responsibilities of contemporary theology is to respond to the honest openness on behalf of many reputable leaders of the scientific community, in such a way as to update the framework for developing a dialogue between theology and science. The relationship between science and religion was distorted by different ideological tendencies.

Orthodox theology does not have to defend any kind of ideology, but must confess the full Truth that saves the world. Father Dumitru Stăniloae through his encompassing theology can offer significant reference points on the path of dialogue between theology and science. In my paper, I will emphasize on two suggestive aspects of Father Dumitru Stăniloae's theology that can be correlated by scientific research, thereby contouring the possibility of a dialogue between science and religion. These two aspects are: the internal relationship between natural and supernatural, and respectively the dynamic reciprocity between the world's rationality and man's reason.

The Relationship between Supernatural and Natural Revelation

Through different areas of research, contemporary science brings into evidence the fact that the reality of the world is not exhausted in gross matter, that the profound structure of the world cannot be explained exclusively through empirical experiments. Research in quantum physics has especially permitted the intuition of certain realities that are more profound than what is perceptible through empirical experiments. Through the implications of the research from

quantum physics, there is a possibility of relating physics to metaphysics in an effort to gain knowledge that recuperates the valences of symbolic thinking, which is specific to traditional knowledge.

This recognized connection in the framework of research in quantum physics could be an interface in the dialogue between theology and science. In this perspective, the internal relationship between natural and supernatural that there is in the Orthodox Tradition could be valorized, which is suggestively affirmed in the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Orthodox Tradition does not make a separation between supernatural and natural Revelation. There is no pure natural, because the natural is founded and structured by the supernatural. [In the past,] under the influence of a dualistic vision, an exclusivist theology was promoted that favored a fragmented and separated perception of Revelation. Nevertheless, one can speak of natural and supernatural Revelation, because supernatural Revelation brings natural Revelation into a clearer light and makes it more explicit. On one hand, man and the cosmos are realities of the natural world since they are components of natural Revelation. On the other, both the cosmos' rationality and man's reason are determined and recapitulated in supreme reason, the Logos of Christ Who is the archetype and Telos of the entire creation.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae begins *The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*¹ with the following affirmation:

“The Orthodox Church does not make a separation between natural and supernatural Revelation. Natural Revelation is fully known and understood in the light of supernatural Revelation (...). The two Revelations are not separated: supernatural Revelation unfolds and produces its fruit in the framework of the natural, as a

¹ The three volume series of *Theologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa* have been entitled, *The Experience of God*, the first volume being published in 1994, the last volume of which should soon be available in English.

kind of more accentuated outbreak of God's energy into relief, which leads the physical and historical world towards the goal it was created for (...). As such, supernatural Revelation only brings natural revelation itself into a clearer light."²

The meaning of natural existence, however evident it is, cannot be forced into a positivist, instrumental methodology that could empirically identify and eventually measure meaning. Accepting the meaning of the world presupposes a superior intelligence that implicates the reality of faith. Supernatural Revelation represents a return of human nature to its true state, giving it at the same time the power to reach its final goal, towards that which it aspires naturally. In this way supernatural Revelation shows and fulfills the true identity of natural Revelation.

There is a convergence between natural and supernatural Revelation. God speaks both through the material of nature and through the history of salvation (Psalm 18:1-4; Job 33:14-26). However, supernatural Revelation specifies the goal of natural revelation and its modes of realization. In the light of supernatural Revelation, Christians observe how God guides through things, the good or bad circumstances in their lives, through the conscience of each person or through their ideas, to an ever increasing depth and living communion with Him. This communion is fully realized in Christ in as much as in Him all the different meanings of creation are fulfilled, Christ being the true foundation of the union between God and man. In the framework of supernatural Revelation the personal character of God comes out with overwhelming evidence and emphasizes the fact that the connection between God and man is founded on interpersonal relationship. Deepening the personal relationship with God and becoming conscious of His existence

² Father Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, EIMBOR, București, 1996, p. 11.

as a perfect communion between the divine Persons leads to a more genuine living of inter-human relationships.

The internal relationship between natural and supernatural Revelation shows that the entire creation (man and cosmos) is brought into existence, sustained and fulfilled through the same unique God. The attempt to explain the reality of the world and of man while excluding God represents great dissatisfaction.

“The removal of God from the nature through which He speaks and works, or speaks while working, easily leads to different kinds of conceptions that desire to explain the world exclusively on the basis of immanent realities. Natural Revelation is indivisible from the supernatural and the faithful feel an immediate connection to God through it (...). God speaks and continuously works through created and guided things, through the creation of ever new circumstances, through which He calls each man to a dialogue with Him and with His neighbors. These things and (circumstances) are also the manifested thoughts of God, words molded (...). Through all, God guides us as through a continual dialogue, towards our perfection, opening up for us a perspective towards the fulfillment of the meaning of our existence in communion with the infinite God.”³

In order to further evidence the superiority of person in comparison with nature, God made Himself known in supernatural Revelation and through supernatural actions that could not be identified with the phenomenon of nature. A supernatural action never destroys the natural, but transfigures it. The history of salvation is marked by numerous supernatural acts, and these only reveal the final purpose of creation: that of being transfigured in Christ. Both through the new periods that are inaugurated and through the perspectives that open up

³ Ibid, pg. 26.

towards the end, the actions and words of supernatural Revelation that explain them have a prophetic character. Christ fulfills supernatural Revelation (Hebrews 1:1), and this does not mean a static understanding of revelation because each one of us are implicated in the history of salvation, being called to assume the fruits of Christ's victory over sin and death. In this way we have a dynamic of Revelation, but not in the sense that there is something superior to Christ.

Revelation's dynamic does not mean renouncing the constitutive actions of Christianity, the specific terminology of ecclesial experience. Making Revelation current does not presuppose the accommodation of the exigencies of this world's logic, the theories of one or another period. From the perspective of articulating an honest and constructive dialogue between science and theology, this includes assuming ecclesial consciousness, which is essential, according to which theology establishes itself on Revelation. The exigencies of dialogue's logic do not presuppose an adaptation of Revelation to the capacity of human understanding, which often proves itself powerless even in the mysteries of this world and of man.

The fact that Revelation is complete and definitive in Christ does not presuppose a static vision. Each one is called to continually partake of the actions and spiritual power of Revelation.

“Complete Revelation was realized in a way through the actions of the incarnation, resurrection, ascension of Christ and the descent of His Spirit into the world. We make this Revelation in Christ current, which is at the same time the state of Christ-Man realized, through the recounted actions of Revelation. In this way Revelation is shown as not a simple communication of teaching, but a continual new state of man, through drawing close to God. Revelation in Christ is a new state of Humanity assumed by the Son of God, and the Revelation of future life is a similar state to that of Christ-Man in all that will believe. Through this it is

shown that Christian Revelation is given in a person, in the divine-human person of Christ, that it is the effect of the actions of the Son of God, of incarnation as man, of crucifixion, resurrection and ascension as man, of the sending down of His Spirit into the world. Without Revelation understood in this way, Christianity cannot be. An adaptation of Christianity to the world, through the rejection of these actions of Christ, essential actions of Christian Revelation, is equivalent to abandoning Christianity. A theological terminology, in its desire to adapt Christianity, would no longer express the contents of these acts of Revelation it would no longer be a Christian theological terminology.”⁴

Dynamic reciprocity between man and cosmos, between the rationality of the world and human reason

In contemporary cosmology the close connection between man and the world is evidenced, the fact the universe is for man. It has formulated the anthropic principle through which it has specified that the cosmological variants do not have arbitrary values and that the universe is that way in order to permit the existence of the human observer. The anthropic principle is one of complexity and coherence. It unfolds coherence in the entire world, in which both man and the cosmos are realities that are assumed together.

The theological perspective surpasses the implications of the anthropic principle in as much as the foundation and meaning of creation does not constitute the complexity of humanity as a foundational event in the history of the cosmos, but the Creating and Saving Logos of entire creation: Jesus Christ [is the One that does]. Orthodox Tradition underlines the reciprocity

⁴ Father Dumitru Stăniloae, *Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini*, from, *Teologia icoanei*, Anastasia, București, 2005, pg. 18-19.

between man and the cosmos, which is founded and fulfilled in Christ. A theological interpretation of the anthropic principle shows that the connection between the theological and scientific perspectives, starting with the anthropic principle, is not exhausted within the bounds of an exclusively natural order.

The relationship between man and cosmos, between the rationality of the world and human reason, are significant coordinates for Orthodox Tradition and very well expressed in the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. The deepening of the dynamic reciprocity between the world's rationality and human reason could contribute to the articulation of a dialogue between theology and science.

The world's understandability and the possibility of the world to be known lack sense in the absence of human reason. Only man as a knowing subject conscious of his own reason can, through the contemplation of the divine rationality of the cosmos, raise himself up to the eternal Reason and Truth, Christ. There is interdependence between God-man-world and man deepens the consciousness of his own identity only to the extent to which he adequately assumes the rationality of the world, and man has the role of subject. The world is called to be transfigured through the sanctification of man and not inversely, man diminishes his personality through being melting with the indefinite of nature. In this way man works his true reason, entering into the communion of life with infinite Person.

The rationality of the world and man's reason cannot be expressions of absurd realities. Both the meaning of the world's rationality and of human reason are fulfilled in the mystery of the supreme Person, the Logos Christ that structures and fulfills entire creation.

“The rationality of the universe cannot be absurd. It gains its full meaning when it is understood as having its source in a rational person that uses it for an eternal dialog of love for others. So the rationality of the

world implies the existence of a superior subject for its fulfillment (...). The world as object is only the means for a dialogue of thought and loving actions between the supreme rational Person and rational human persons, as well as among themselves. The Universe bears the mark which its origin in the rational creating Person gives it and [it bears its mark from] its destination to be the means of an interpersonal dialogue between that Person and human persons, for the eternalization in that joy of communion between them. The whole universe bears the mark of rational persons destined for the eternalization of human persons. Only through the eternal participation in the infinity of these supreme Persons does our being believe that it will see its meaning fulfilled.⁵

The reasons of things cannot be exhausted through discursive knowledge. Analytical reason researches only partially the inexhaustible reality of the world's rationality. This inexhaustible character derives from the connection between the rationality of the world, human reason and the divine Logos. The divine reasons of the world are spiritually contemplated through a vision of the dispassionate mind illumined by grace. In this kind of knowledge intuition evidences a kind of knowledge that is less intermediary, beyond the specific processes of analytical reason. In the same way, at the heights of the domains of science the internal limits of analytical knowledge are recognized. So the mystery of the world that cannot be exhausted through analytical reason is assumed.

The cross of analytical reason is spiritual vision enlightened through faith. Spiritual effort on the path of faith does not cancel the potential for analytical reason, but it transfigures it

⁵ Ibid, pg. 18.

through the intuition of meanings that are ever deeper, uncontainable for reason exercised exclusively analytically. Through spiritual contemplation of the world a unitary knowledge of the world is developed, which evidences the common meaning of both the rationality of nature as well as human reason. These are fulfilled in the fullest way in the Logos Christ. Analytical reason researches the world fragmentarily, and the results of its knowledge are always surpassed and integrated in a larger vision.

From the patristic tradition there is interdependence between analytical reason and contemplation. Grasping the divine reasons in things presupposes a kind of contemplation that permits the rapid intuition of the spiritual sense of things. Contemplation can be the result of a striving process in which analytical reason is exercised in its fullness. Contemplation brings additional knowledge that cannot be captured and expressed in concepts. The power of searching and researching things are inlaid in the nature of people. That is why the rational, human process of research and of expressing the rationality of the world is natural.

The illumination that is produced through spiritual contemplation does not appear spontaneously, without any effort of man along the path of rational knowledge and spiritual life. The spiritual man refers everything to God and thinks about them in connection with Him. In this way, through contemplation he transcends analytical reason without excluding it.

“The man who has matured spiritually immediately and continuously refers everything to God, through everything he contemplates God. Of course he cannot abandon discursive reason. But he usually performs this operation after he has contemplated the thing in a moment, simultaneously with its relationship to God. This unfolding into components and this rational demonstration of a lightning direct vision in turn leads it further on, just as he has prepared for it in advance.

Discursive reasoning and flashing contemplation are not exclusive, in as much as the latter has grown from the former, being a new point of departure for it. Contemplation is reasoning, or a series of reasonings plus an element that is not contained in them, but made possible by them, and the reasonings are a developed contemplation up to a point, in that it has meanings in itself that are possible to define.”⁶

Bearing in mind that the world is a gift from God, man does not stop at the world as ultimate reality. On the contrary, through the spiritual assumption of the world an ecclesiastical dynamic of the entire cosmos is made current, and in this way the divine reasons for things become transparent through the creation. From this perspective man through his reason no longer considers the rationality of the world as being exclusively objective and neutral, but rather considers it in connection with the Source of the world’s rationality and of human reason, Christ the Word, the supreme Reason of being for all that is.

The reciprocity and unconfused relationship between man and the world are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Through ecclesial experience man transfigures the cosmos, personalizes it through his spiritual presence. The personalized world that is marked by the unconfused unity of people gathered in Christ is recapitulated in Christ in order for God to become transparent through all. In this way St Paul the apostle confesses, “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (I Corinthians 15:28).”

Things are the *plasticization*⁷ (in the terminology of Father Stăniloae) of divine reasons and in this way they represent the words through which God addresses Himself to man. Therefore

⁶ Father Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă*, pg. 178-179.

⁷ This is one of Fr. Stăniloae’s favorite terms. It is particularly hard to translate, so I have used alternatively according to context, molding and modeling, and marked them with an asterisk.

man through his own reason contemplates the rationality of the world, grasping at the divine reasons for things. Through words people share and communicate the experience of the rationality of the world and things as molded realities of divine reasons. From this perspective, man responds to the calling of God, the world being a medium of dialogue between God and man. Each thing is a word through which God addresses Himself to man, awaiting a response on his part. The reciprocity between the rationality of the world and human reason strengthens and permanently brings the condition of man as being a partner for dialogue with God.

Conclusion

The internal relationship between natural and supernatural, and respectively the dynamic reciprocity between the world's rationality and man's reason evidenced by the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae could be a good interface in the dialogue between theology and science in the contemporary epistemological context.