Dumitru Stâniloab's Dogmatics

Alf Johansen

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Alf Johansen (Lutheran) is a pastor in Denmark who has devoted his energies to the study of Orthodox theology and church developments in Eastern Europe. He is a previous contributor to OPREE (Vol. I, No. 7). He frequently visits Rumania to do research in Rumanian theological literature.

Professor Dumitru Stăniloae was born on November 16, 1903. He studied at the Faculty of Theology in Cernauti (now in the Soviet Union) from 1922 to 1927 and in Athens, Munich, Berlin, and Paris from 1927 to 1929. From 1929 to 1947 he taught Fundamental Theology, Church History, Pastoral and Dogmatic Theology at the Theological Academy in Sibiu and from 1947 Dogmatics in Bucharest. In 1973 he became consultant professor for further post-graduate studies.

On the occasion of his seventieth birthday, the Romanian Orthodox Church News, which is published by the Department of Foreign Relations of the Rumanian Patriarchate, in its December 1973 issue, announced that he was a member of the Inter-Orthodox Theological Commission for the Dialogue with the Old Oriental Churches. The above-mentioned source also stated that he wrote 111 articles and studies published in Rumania and 20 published abroad, e.g., in Philokalia, Sobornost, Eastern Churches Review, Diakonia, The Greek Orthodox Theological Review, Kyrios (Berlin), and Ostkirchliche Studien (Würzburg). Since 1973 he has published a large number of articles in the Rumanian church periodicals (some abstracted by Alf Johansen in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies) as well as some books abroad. His Dogmatics is now being translated into German. He has also written the third volume of Theologia Morala Orthodoxa, published in 1981.

Professor Stăniloae is regarded both in Rumania and abroad as the most esteemed contemporary Rumanian Orthodox theologian. His articles and books are especially important for ecumenical theology since he, more than other Rumanian theologians, constantly quotes and adopts patristic views, patristics being the common foundation for Orthodoxy,
Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. In his Dogmatics he often compares
the Orthodox teaching with the Roman Catholic and Protestant teachings.

Professor Stăniloae's theology is also important because he
represents Rumanian theology, which is the liveliest Orthodox theology
in Eastern Europe. Up to 1960 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church published
some apologetic systematic literature, which was more advanced than the
Rumanian and Russian Orthodox literature but now it publishes only a
yearbook and two periodicals usually restricted to discussing Bulgarian
church history. Since 1960, the Rumanian Orthodox Church become the most
prolific by publishing eight periodicals which treat all kinds of
theological problems. The third Orthodox national church, The Russian
Orthodox Church, publishes only one periodical and a series called
Theological Works, but no theological textbook or thesis has been
published since 1917. The fourth Orthodox national church, The Serbian
Orthodox Church, publishes two periodicals, but the Serbian theology is
not as rich as the Rumanian. The fifth Orthodox national church, The
Greek Orthodox Church, functions outside the Communist area. The Faculty
of Theology in Salonica has, along with several other universities,
awarded Professor Stănilea the title "doctor honoris causa." The
distinguished Greek theologian Professor Panagiotis Nellas regards
Stănilea as one of the greatest living Orthodox theologians.

As the most eminent Rumanian theologian representing the dominant
national Orthodox theology in Eastern Europe, Professor Stănilea and
his main work, his Dogmatics, may have a very special importance for the
ecumenical-minded American public. His recent Dogmatics consists of
three volumes while the Bulgarian dogmatics by D.V. Džulgerov and I.L. K.
Tonevski (1948) is in two volumes and the Russian dogmatics texts by
Miroljubov (1959-62 and Voronov (1973) are only typewritten. The first
two Rumanian volumes are out of print by now. Some Rumanian theological
students told me, however, that they found Stănilea's dogmatics too
difficult and preferred to study the dogmatic textbook by Professors
Chitescu, Todoran and Peteuta, Teologia Dogmatica si Simbolica (Vols. I
and II), 1958, 1008 pp. A report on this work can be found in Alf
Johansen, Theological Study in the Rumanian Orthodox Church (London:
In 1957 Patriarch Justinian sent me for two weeks to the convent of Hurezi where the diligent nuns taught me Rumanian for nine hours each day. At that time, the very pious and learned abbess Mihaela spoke about Professor Stâniloae as her spiritual father. I did not, however, meet him during my research at the Theological Institute of Bucharest in 1961 as he did not lecture there at that time. During my later visits at the Institute I met Professor Stâniloae, heard him lecture, and conversed with him. The last time I met him was in September 1982 when he, along with some other listeners, responded to my paper on Orthodox sermons at the South East European Seminar in Bucharest. My impressions were always the same; he is a very pious and kind man who dedicated his entire life to Orthodox theology.

The summary below is of Dumitru Stâniloae's Teologia Dogmatica Orthodoxa (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology) (Vols. I-III), published in 1978, which this author believes to be one of the most important Orthodox theological writings produced in Eastern Europe.

Introduction: Revelation

Natural revelation informs us that the world is created to be humanized and the human being is to be assimilated to the world, to nature. Through reason and liberty the human being is, however, open to a communion with a transcendent and free absolute person who is superior to nature. Supernatural Revelation confirms and completes natural faith and is necessary because of human sin. It gives hope for humans to rise over nature by divine grace and human liberty. Christ became man in order to make human beings divine. The Holy Spirit shall sanctify human nature and also make it divine.

Through Scripture and Tradition Revelation is kept within the Church. Holy Scripture is connected with the Church through Holy Tradition, the true interpreter of Scripture. In liturgy and sacraments Tradition vitalizes Scripture which is born within the Church as a part of the Apostolic Tradition. Without the Holy Spirit the Church would not have been born nor would it have kept its faithfulness to Scripture and Tradition. The Church understands Revelation in an infallible way.

Dogmas reveal the saving faith. They are defined by the Church and
express the plan of making all rational creatures divine. The foundation of the dogmas is the Trinity which is the communion of complete mutual love. The union of Christ's two natures is also a dogma of love. Only Christ's human nature makes the unity between the three Divine Persons and human persons possible, a communion which takes place through human resurrection. The Holy Spirit creates a communion between human persons. Theology explains dogmas. To Orthodoxy the Church is infallible as the body of Christ, guided by the Spirit, while to Roman Catholicism only the Pope is infallible.

Part One: God

The Knowledge of God: There is both a natural rational knowledge of God and a superior knowledge through faith in Revelation. The latter is founded on a conscious experience of God's presence and is inferior to the apophatic knowledge which is seeing God and living in God, knowing that God according to God's own nature is beyond being seen and beyond this life. This apophatic life in God is characteristic of Orthodoxy in liturgy and is a sense of the mystery, but it does not exclude reason and feeling. Concrete experiences of life can also bring us knowledge of God, impelling us to prayer and awakening our responsibility for the poor, oppressed and sick. In these persons we meet Christ.

God's Nature and Attributes: St. Gregory Palamas maintained that God is comprehensible according to God's works, but not according to God's nature. God cannot be imparted to people according to God's nature (apophatic), but after the divine energies or uncreated works.

Attributes Related to the Superior Nature of God: In union with Christ people can participate in God's infinity and in the unity of the three divine Persons. God's eternity means that God's nature is unchangeable while God's uncreated energies are changeable. God's love remains unchangeable. People can gain eternity in time which is the interval between God's calling and human answer. This interval marks God's respect for human liberty and consciousness. We can only reach eternity by transcending time, not by evading it. Christ shall help us. God's omnipresence shows God's independence of space, a distance between
God and humans and between humans. Christ transcended the distance descending to us and raising us unto God. Christ asks for our free love, removing the distance not by force, but by the cross. God's omnipotence means to the West that God may work contrary to the world, to Roman Catholicism against states and societies, to Protestantism quite without human efficiency, being only sin. Orthodoxy puts the accent on God's love towards the world leading it to complete communion with God in love. Salvation is determined by God's inter-trinitarian love. The whole created nature shall be bearer of uncreated energies. God's omnipotence is most of all shown in Christ's resurrection showing that spiritual power has conquered nature.

God's Attributes Related to God's Spirituality: God's omniscience means that God knows Godself through inter-trinitarian love. There is no full knowledge without union in love. People only know themselves in relation with others and with God. God knows all beforehand, but God does not predetermine everything respecting human liberty. If God were only righteous God would not be completely free. If God were only merciful God would not reckon with and encourage human efforts. To Protestants, Christ's righteousness makes people passive. God is both righteous and merciful. God is holy. If we deny that the human being can become holy and divine we also deny that Christ as man had kept his divinity. The saints become pure and holy by the help of God and God's uncreated energies. Having kept the image of God they reveal God in a human form. The mutual inter-trinitarian love fills through Christ human nature with love and unites through the Spirit humans with God and with one another.

Trinity, the Supreme Love: Through the Son we become children of God. Both the Son and the Spirit are active subjects and not passive objects. The mutual love between Father and Son can only be distributed to people because there is a third Person, the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic teaching on Filioque does not maintain Father and Son as two separate Persons. The Spirit connects the Father and the Son without ceasing to be a separate Person.
Part Two: The World

The Creation of the Visible World: Western Christianity speaks often about human salvation, separated from nature. People shall transform nature by work. The world is created in order to participate in the inter-trinitarian love. The talents and things God has given us we should give back to God. The rationality of the world is "for" the human being and culminates in the human being. Without spirit the world would be automatically repetitious, with no progress. Through the body the free spiritual person can transform the whole world and nature, which is the work of a free creator. This transformation is a work of both God and the people.

The human being has been created with a soul with qualities related to God's consciousness and liberty. Even after the Fall people have kept some divine grace and relations with God. People have preserved some image of God, but have not actualized it into a likeness of God. Christ has restored the image, rather than creating a new one. The image of the Trinity shows up in human communion. A distorted nature in individuals is not a true nature. In order to control nature people have renounced their liberty. God has chosen to be non-omnipotent in order to respect human liberty. The likeness of God can only be reached by divine-human cooperation.

The Creation of the Invisible World: Angels have been created to serve the plan of human salvation. The privileged position of human beings is shown in the fact that Christ became a man and not an angel. The "sobornost" of the Church includes also angels, because only together can angels and people glorify God.

Evil originates in a free decision of some created spirits who have been created good, but wanted to be independent of God. Evil does not come from God. Passions mean that people lose their true nature as a free person and become inhuman. The human motive is pride. Evil in its essence has not been bound to people and the world. People are also a passive victim of evil. Through his body Christ has been able to destroy the works of the devil.

The Fall of the First People: Liberty as a spiritual power is not only a gift, but also a result of human efforts. People have chosen
evil, but are not quite overwhelmed by it. Evil can be conquered more easily in free communion and love. Perishableness and death are not God's punishment. We became, however, alien to the source of life. God can use suffering and death to cure evil if they are endured in faith.

Divine Providence: God uses both evil and good forces to lead people and the world to salvation and a divine life. Providence means cooperation between God and the conscious creatures. The love of God is a source of mutual loving.

Part Three: Jesus Christ and His Work

The Person of Jesus Christ: The experience of his resurrection has given his disciples certainty of the "historical" existence of Christ as God and man. The risen Jesus is the historical Jesus. Through his human nature he unites the world with himself, as God working through human nature he cures the ill and raises the dead. Christ's incarnation is the union of the divine and the human natures. Every human is both person (subject) and nature and cannot exist merely as nature (as object). The human reason and will of the Logos is not used against other free humans, but is in his person united with his divine reason and will. The Son of God is humanized and human nature made divine so that humans can be made divine.

There are two stages of his kenosis, his incarnation and his suffering, both strengthening human nature. The Protestant theory that Christ has renounced his omnipotence and omnipresence is false. The crucified Christ does not present ultimate weakness, but rather great strength, conquering death by his human body with power from his divine nature which has not been changed during his kenosis, since love is power. His suffering has restored human nature which was created for liberty and not for slavery of the passions. Christ was born by the Virgin Mary when human nature was overwhelmed by the divine Spirit. In his body Christ also defeated sin and can likewise defeat it in the believers. In spite of his human nature he is praised as a divine person together with the Father and the Spirit.

Jesus Christ Reflected in His Works: Jesus Christ is identified with his teaching. "He is the truth." The Revelation of the prophets is
fulfilled in Christ. Roman Catholic and Protestant theology has eliminated his work of restoring human nature (in Christ and in all believers) through his sacrifice which sanctifies and makes the human being divine. This theology reduces the sacrifice to a legal work, outside human nature, satisfying God's insulted honor. To Orthodoxy, Christ's sacrifice is directed both towards God and people, restoring the community between the human Christ and God and between God and man. Christ is both high-priest and sacrifice. God takes the initiative of the communion with people in order to bring about the human repenting response and the subsequent divine forgiveness. The consequences of sin, selfishness, suffering, and death are not so much punishment as they are means of liberation from sin. Christ, with our cooperation, turns us into holy sacrifices.

**Jesus Christ as King:** Jesus had his royal power before his resurrection. This resurrection is a historical fact. Western theology considers the resurrection as an act of the Father. Orthodoxy believes that Christ is not the object of the Father, but is active together with the Father and the Spirit. Christ made his body divine here on earth. Death did not deprive him of divinity. His resurrection begins in the land of the dead where he liberated those hoping for his coming. His ascension represents the full spiritualization and divinity of his human body. And he sits at the right hand of the Father at the same time as he dwells in people, if they love God and have purified themselves from the egoism of the passions.

**Part Four: The Church**

The Church, Christ's Mystic Body in the Holy Spirit: Protestantism has weakened the visible church while Roman Catholicism made it into an institution. Christ has by his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension founded the Church in his body. If we imagine Christ in heaven and the Spirit in the Church we deny the unity of the three Persons. Through the Spirit's descent Christ descends into human souls.

People cannot really become a complete image of Christ without the work of the Spirit. Our sacrifice renouncing our sins takes the form of virtues and leads us towards resurrection.
Christ makes people into both passive sacrifices and active sacrificial priests. The serving priests are called and sent by Christ (not by the church) as he was sent by God. Protestantism does not recognize the serving priesthood. Roman Catholicism makes a single bishop a substitute for Christ. Orthodoxy maintains that only the communion of the apostles and later on of the bishops can conduct the body of Christ, the Church. The validity of the sacraments does not depend on the worthiness of the priest because his unworthiness is not the unworthiness of Christ and of the Church. The service of teaching and leadership is closely connected with the priestly service of the sacraments. Laymen can only teach individuals. The Church in its totality as the body of Christ is infallible because Christ is infallible. The Church is both visible and invisible (Christ, Spirit, saints and angels).

The Church's unity is founded on one Christ and one Spirit. The (Orthodox) Church is one in dogmas, cult and hierarchy. Its holiness is both a gift and a duty. The body of Christ is holy because its head is holy. The believers are sanctified in Christ in Baptism. Even sinners remain, however, in an inward communion with the Church if they do not contest its teaching. Its sobornost is communion in the Holy Spirit. Its apostolicity is founded on the apostles' personal knowledge of Christ and of the Spirit. The bishops keep the apostolic teaching through apostolic succession.

Grace is an uncreated energy of the divine nature of the three Persons. This grace is absolutely necessary for our salvation, but it does not impose upon human liberty. God seeks through love to awaken our free love. The Spirit connects the members in love. The Spirit is united with Christ in their work. In Roman Catholicism the created grace (Christ's merit) is at the disposal of the Church, but not connected with its nature as the body of Christ. In Protestantism justification is only a legal declaration. In Orthodoxy human righteousness is a new life—the opposite of sin. After a preparation, rebirth follows through Baptism which means that Christ dwells in the soul and we experience our burial and resurrection with Christ. Protestants contest the necessity of good works for salvation, but they do not speak of Christ as present
in the human soul with his love. Good works come from this love as a gift, but they are also a duty.

Part Five: The Sacraments

The Church does not represent an absent Christ in the sacraments. The grace of the visible sacraments is an uncreated energy of the present invisible Christ which the priest performs in a visible way.

Through Baptism Christ and the Spirit have restored the image of Christ in the human being. Baptism means the death of the old person and the birth of the new person as well as entry into the Church. Baptism is necessary for salvation. If a person does not develop the received purity many more demons will dwell in him or her than before.

The holyunction, with the help of the Spirit, enables the powers received in Baptism to work, so that the believer becomes another Christ.

A person reborn in Christ (Baptism) and strengthened through the Spirit (Chri sm) is completely united with the risen Christ and led towards resurrection in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is preeminently the sacrament of the unity of the Church, in heaven and on earth. Protestantism does not quite recognize Christ's real presence and not at all his sacrifice in the Eucharist and in the sacrifice of the believers. Christ is in a continuous state of sacrifice, even after the ascension. Roman Catholicism has eliminated the epiclesis from its liturgy and diminished the role of the Holy Spirit. The transformation has become an automatic consequence of Christ's words of institution. To Orthodoxy all sacraments are performed through the Spirit. Intercommunion is not acceptable because communion follows unity in faith.

Penance is composed of the sinner's confession and repentance and the priest's absolution repeating Christ's absolution. Holy Orders are the condition of the other sacraments. Christ's invisible priesthood is the source of the visible priesthood in the Church. The bishop is the visible representative of Christ. The general priesthood means the "royal priesthood" of all Christians who make their personal sacrifices, helped by the serving priesthood in defeating their passions, and in teaching within the family and society. The Orthodox Church recognizes
the Roman Catholic and Old Catholic, but not yet the Anglican ordination. The Wedding shows that a person is only realized in communion, their unity in Christ being a small church. The Uction is not for the dying (as in Roman Catholicism), but for life in health and purity.

Part Six: Eschatology

Death is a consequence of human being's abandonment of the communion with God and leads the believer in Christ to eternal communion with God.

The immortality of the soul is due to Christ's dwelling in the soul. Without this immortality God would interrupt relations with humans after death. Protestantism often denies this immortality.

Universal salvation would abolish human liberty—to choose or refuse communion with God. Iad [a Rumanian word] is not God's direct damnation, but human (painful) refusal of this communion. God will not annihilate human liberty, the image of God, and man living eternally in iad. The judge is Christ and the person involved through his or her works. Those seeking communion with Christ will go to heaven after death, but without meeting all other believing humans and without a body. The church on earth and the church in heaven (angels, the Mother of God, martyrs and saints) are praying to God to forgive the souls and free them of eternal pain. Orthodoxy rejects the Roman Catholic notion of purgatory. On earth humans can ask the saints to pray for them. By venerating rather than adoring the saints we praise Christ. Protestantism rejects this veneration, underestimating Christ's efficiency. The Mother of God is not a co-savior (as in Catholicism). Those in iad, not totally deprived of the faith, may be moved into heaven before the universal judgment through the prayers of the living and the saints.

The end of the present world and the eschatological perfection is prepared by humanity and decided by God. History will be exhausted not by accidents, but by means of cooperation of divine providence and human liberty.

The new world and our risen body reach a maximum of immateriality and spirituality according to divine grace, however, keeping materiality
and sensibility according to nature. Every person remains an *unicum* in soul and in body. The mystery of the risen body and of the restored universe is the mystery of spiritualized matter. Matter is made thereby holy and the body divine.

The criterion of universal judgment is the application or non-application of the love of humans, seeing God in humans and understanding the neighbor as the image of God.