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**DOCTORAL THESIS  
ABSTRACT**

**CREATOR AND CREATION.  
FATHER DUMITRU STĂNILOAE –  
A VALUER  
OF THE AREOPAGITIC WRITINGS**

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## ABSTRACT

The outstanding contribution of Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae to the revivification of the Christian theological discourse in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a unanimously acknowledged fact, both in Romania and internationally. As a natural consequence, numerous works have been written during the last decennia, some of them becoming a landmark, analyzing different aspects of his monumental thinking and work. The doctoral thesis entitled *Creator and creation. Father Dumitru Stăniloae – a valuer of the Areopagitic writings*, which we have elaborated at the Doctoral Theological School of “Ovidius” University of Constanța, under the supervision of Univ. Prof. Dr. Gheorghe F. Anghelescu, goes along this research direction and aims to highlight the significant contribution of Father Stăniloae to the translation in Romanian, the commentary of the text, and the original valorization of the message of the complete Areopagitic works’ theology.

Having, at the beginning of his editorial activity, a few occasional contacts with the text of the *Areopagitic Writings*, occasioned either by his translation of the Philokalic writings or by his long-term involvement in the elucidation of the teaching on the Holy Theotokos, Father Dumitru Stăniloae uses it much more intensely during his preparation of the trilogy *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* and dedicates a special interest to it during the climax of his creation, which coincided with the final part of his earthly life. The comment on the complete works of Saint Dionysius, perfected by the Romanian theologian shortly before his departure to the Lord (1993) and published posthumously (1996), represents a true testament and a supplementary piece of evidence regarding his exceptional creativity in the interpretation and valorization of the Dionysian theology for today’s man.

Undertaken under the impulse of his conscience (in a context in which the authentiqueness of the Areopagitic writings was being questioned and their author openly discredited), out of the need to bring back to the *Corpus Areopagiticum* the glamour of its senses and depths, remarked and evoked with a special consideration by the Holy Fathers, the sustained approach of the Romanian theologian goes significantly beyond the character of a simple exegesis of a text and represents a true dialogical recontextualization of the Dionysian writings in the contemporary philosophical and theological Areopagus. While from the modern history critics the reticence of Father Dumitru Stăniloae concerning the situation of the author of the Areopagitic writings at the turn between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century received some reproaches of outdatedness, in the other aspects: dogmatic, mystical and liturgical, the notes and the comments

to the Dionysian text reflect the “contemporary Philokalic-spiritual and patristic structure” of the unmistakable thinking of our Romanian theologian.

A special concern of Father Stăniloae for proving the general Christian content of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and, especially, of a fundamental topic of the Dionysian theology, namely: the relation between God and the creation. Starting from his unambiguous statement that: “*In general, in the Orthodoxy, the writings of Dionysius were a basis supporting the active presence of God in the life of the Church and in the world, not grounds for a pantheist mysticism or a content that would not have been necessary.*”<sup>1</sup>, I have added in the thesis a second level of the research, dedicated to this doctrinal aspect. This analysis has allowed me to delineate a constructive interpretation model for the Areopagitic writings, and to identify the elements of the Dionysian theology contributing to the shaping of a Christian vision on the realism and importance of God’s presence in the creation for the contemporary man.

The starting hypothesis has been that the Areopagitic writings, according to the opinion of the distinguished Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae, hold a considerable potential for affirming and supporting a Theocentric vision of the world and of man, a potential insufficiently valorized as yet, deserving to be given a special attention, especially as the general secularizing direction of the contemporary society, with anarchic and de-structuring tendencies, can find here an antidote to these extremist attitudes.

The overall analysis of the components of the *Corpus areopagiticum* reveals by comparison the fact that the present ecclesial life is affected in its turn by certain deviations, on the one hand by the egocentrism of the individual perceiving the Church as a way of attaining a spiritual performance individually, rejecting the subordination to the hierarchy, and on the other hand the excess of authority and control exerted sometimes by the ecclesial institutional structure, which leaves the impression that in its turn perceives the believers as an amorphous mass easily controllable in the context of a consumerist society.

Consequently, the Areopagitic writings help us rediscover the authentic spirit of the Church – communion of love and being of the believers, as brothers and limbs of the same Body of Christ, the real Man-God. These writings very suggestively bring to light the unity and interdependence of the created personal beings (angel and men) as revelations of the Holy Trinity and as a mutual support for going deeper in the knowledge and living according to His will, and also the sanctifying communion of the believers among themselves, clergy and people, in and with God. At the same time, God’s presence in the Church is illustrated by Saint Dionysius through unity of life of the Christians, in whose heart flows the same holy and

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<sup>1</sup>*Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul – Opere complete și Scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, traducere, introducere și note de Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, ediție îngrijită de Constanța Costea, Editura Paideia, București, 1996, p. 12.

deifying Blood of Christ (regularly received through the Eucharist) and “breathing” the Same Spirit of love for God and for one’s fellows.

Far from being a pantheistic conception, God’s presence in the world, as illustrated by the Areopagitic writings, confesses the world’s created character and its dependence on God – its Creator and the One Who Takes Care of It. A world like the one of the last centuries, considering God’s presence as a trespassing of its self-determination, proves a serious estrangement from the mission it has received.

In the **First Part** of our work, I have presented several general aspects concerning the person and the work of Saint Dionysius, the mysterious writer of the Areopagitic writings, an extended development being dedicated to the presentation of the conclusions that Father Dumitru Stăniloae expressed and supported in relation to this aspect along his researches.

After a brief, yet, I hope, synthetic incursion in the history of the research on Dionysius, in *Chapter I*, I have enumerated and presented in detail in *Chapter II* the liturgical-historical considerations deemed by Father Dumitru Stăniloae as internal ground supporting the post-apostolic ancientness of *Corpus Areopagiticum*. In the opinion of the Romanian theologian, the specific details provided by the author in the description of the ritual elements from the framework of the cult could only have come from an eye witness, and not just that, but one who lived in the first period of the Church.

*Chapter III* deals with the controversies concerning the Christian training of Saint Dionysius, which divide the researchers into two antithetic camps. The first, more numerous, accuse the author of the Areopagitic writings of having contaminated the Christian teaching with essential influences of the Neoplatonic philosophy, whereas the latter, a minority, yet having written better defended and minute studies, defend and support the Orthodoxy of the *Corpus* benefiting as well of the support of the millenary Patristic Tradition.

The position of Father Dumitru Stăniloae belongs with this “Orthodox” party and consists in the development of an exhaustive analysis of the text that manages to categorically invalidate the pretended Neoplatonic pantheism of the Areopagitic writings. The Romanian theologian first identifies the reasons that have generated a perception so contrary to Christianity with the Western researchers of the Saint Dionysius the Areopagite. There are actually three false premises that have led the opposite camp on a wrong track: 1) the unfounded supposition that all that the author of the *Corpus* says is entirely conditioned by the way in which he prefers to express himself; 2) the confusion that the theologizing of the Holy Fathers would be a kind of philosophic speculation consisting in deductions made on a rational basis, lacking any experiential content; 3) the omission or diminution of the importance of the Eastern ecclesial environment the *Corpus* comes from in the analysis of the aspects comprised in it.

Although apparently spread throughout the Father's comment, the correction of the pantheistic interpretation of the Dionysian theology by the Romanian theologian can be structured, I think, in five precise directions: a) God's transcendence, b) God the Proniator, different from the world, c) the accidental reality of evil, d) God's deification and e) participation of the creation to God's glory in the eternity, directions that we have researched more in detail in *Chapter IV* of Part I.

a) *God's transcendence* affirmed in the Areopagitic writings is valuable especially as it relies on an empirical basis, and it is not just a Philosophical formulation. It becomes more obvious, paradoxically, in the Person of God's Son, embodied and communed in the Holy Mysteries. Commenting a significant passage from the Areopagitic writings (IV, *III*, 10), Father Stăniloae says: "In none of the Holy Fathers' writings can we find so highlighted the presence and the work of Christ as divine and human Person in the Mysteries and all the acts sanctifying men (by means of the matters of the creation and through the gestures of the hierarch and priest), as with Dionysius the Areopagite. His divine personalism, in the free and loving work of Christ's Person, is the most remote thing from the Neoplatonic or any kind of pantheism."<sup>2</sup>

b) God's presence in the world is, therefore, a fact stated firmly by Saint Dionysius. It is about a presence of God as source of life (*ND*, VI, 2), Creator and *Proniator*, but also as Redeemer. Father Stăniloae observes that the author of the *Corpus* grasped like nobody else the relation between God who is above all being and the creation made up of stages partaking of the existence and general life created and supported by Him. The last such stage is neither confounded with Him in a pantheistic sense, nor is it separated from Him. "There is a gap, as the Romanian theologian states, between God as He Who is not caused, but exclusively the cause, but also a continuity between Him and those that have existence, life, wisdom, etc. – caused, therefore radically different by this from Him, having Him as total, and thus creating cause of their existence and life."<sup>3</sup>

c) Fathoming the Mystery by which he does not obscure the perpetration of the *evil act* as it is expressed by the author of the *Corpus*, Father Dumitru Stăniloae sees in it a supplementary piece of evidence regarding God's love: "Without the freedom of some created, and therefore limited, beings, evil could not exist. [However *our note*], God does not give the creatures this freedom as a necessary seed of evilness, and, in this sense, evil is not from God. Yet God did not create all the beings without freedom and conscience either. Because, in this case, they would not have in them God's image; and could not be good, not having the will by which they can be bad; they could not love the good and loving God unless they had the possibility of not loving

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 94, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 216, p. 239.



Him. So we would fall again into a pantheism devoid of goodness, of love, of sense.”<sup>4</sup>

So, evil needs to be seen, according to the Dionysian vision, as something assumed, yet not caused by God. It appears as the weakening of the synergy between the creation and God or, more seriously, as the free, although irrational, breaking of his will (in the case of the angels and of men). God assumes it as it is in His power to annihilate the effects of evil and to change them into stages towards a higher good. For this reason, evil “cannot be explained by pondering on its source as an essence identical with the essence of good. It cannot be explained by pantheism.”<sup>5</sup> In this case, no real differentiation between good and evil would be possible anymore.

d) Saint Dionysius sees the goal of man’s life in the lifting to the stage of increasingly living person, by assuming God’s loving work, therefore by an increasingly higher growth in communion. “This is done by our loving God”<sup>6</sup>, yet it needs to be exerted and perfected within the hierarchy. The goal of the hierarchy, says the Romanian theologian commenting on a fragment of the Areopagitic writings, “is to get us used with the love for God. God is love in Himself and source of love for us. To grow in love is the same as being deified. From here, it results very clearly the importance given by Saint Dionysius to hierarchy in general and especially to the sacramental one (the clergy). The members of the latter have the primordial mission from God of helping us grow in love (and in deification) not just by talking to us about it, but by making us see it realized in them, as love for God and for people.”<sup>7</sup> They have the power of purifying, illuminating and deifying the believers through the Mysteries of the Church where Christ Himself invisibly works through the hand of the priest who blesses and through the work of the hierarchy who teaches.

*Deification* is, therefore, the goal of the whole rational creation (in heaven and on earth) (*IC* III, 1; *IB* I, 3), and its realization is a synergic, divine-human act, namely realizable through the free participation of the personal creatures to the uncreated divine life shared in grace from the Trinitarian interpersonal communion. This fact is frequently highlighted by the author of the *Corpus*, who, after having shown how the objective redemption of everyone occurred in Christ, also adds the conditions that depend on us for its acquisition on a subjective level. It goes from the actual to the real stage “if we also harmonize ourselves with Him as limbs of His Body (cf. I Cor. 12, 27) in the same complete and divine life and do not remain like this, not harmonized, not attached and not living together with His divine and all-healthy limbs. (...) We need to tend in us towards His all-divine life according to the body and the likeness to its holy sinlessness, we need to run towards a living entirety of divine image. Because this is how we shall be given the

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 188, p. 236.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 235-236.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibidem*, note 50, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibidem*.

gift of the communion with the One Who we will be like.” (*IB* III, 12).

The Holy Eucharist, as the Romanian theologian affirms, “is the culminating mystery (...) because it makes us partakers of what comes in a full measure to be shared with us according to our measure from the divine source. (...) God does not remain closed in Himself, but has been since the creation of the world and is eternal by the fact that He communicates the source of power, of grace, of light, of happiness to what is not Him by being.”<sup>8</sup>

This liturgical vision of the ascension of the created beings toward God, as Father Dumitru Stăniloae concludes, “shows Dionysius once again radically different from the Neoplatonic pantheism. A non-transcendent essence cannot have the character of a mystery that can never be comprised. And it cannot represent the source of the holiness in which everything needs to progress advancing towards it.”<sup>9</sup>

The accusation that by this, it would be suggested the communication of a divine essence, as in the Neoplatonic pantheism, is not founded, because Saint Dionysius calls God directly, the *creator of the symbols* (*IB*, III) and mentions that not all gather together again in Him, although they really partake of Him. “The world is not considered [by the author of the Areopagitic writings, *our note*] as being of the essence of God. As, at the Mystery Supper, Jude, who did not partake in a worthy manner of Christ’s Body and Blood, got separated from Him, similarly, those who do the same thing at any time or those who simply refuse to partake of Him through the *symbols* of His body and blood, the bread and the wine, get increasingly further away from Him. Similarly, Dionysius could not talk about a *deification* of some or would not call them divine, if all were to emanate and return in Him on the basis of a uniform law.”<sup>10</sup>

e) Remarking in the Areopagitic writings the affirmation of the fact that every creature has the capacity of being deiform (*DN* IX, 10), Father Stăniloae mentions as well in what its spiritual growth through the *participation to the divine powers* consists: the creatures “are not just subjects of the existence and of the powers created out of nothing, but also of the divine powers supporting the first. Their differentiation from God is that God has them through His being, whereas they receive rays from God. By this, they are neither one with God, nor separated from Him. It is neither pantheism, nor separatism between the world and God. God is different from the creatures by being, or by the fact that He is above the creature or the existence (ουσία, from εἶναι) of the creatures, which they have from Him as cause, whereas He has it not caused and causing. In this quality, God as Being is not participable.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibidem*, note 69, p. 124.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibidem*, note 3, p. 62-63.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibidem*, note 72, p. 125.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibidem*, note 254, p. 244.

**Part II** of the thesis looks at the Areopagitic theology through the prism of its originality as basis of the authentiqueness of the Areopagitic writings, in the vision of Father Dumitru Stăniloae.

Chapter I presents the relation between God and the creation, as it appears from the content of the *Corpus*. On this occasion, we have enumerated a few of the defining elements of Dionysius' thinking, namely: the personalism of his theology; the Trinitarian character of God the Creator and the Proniator of all creature; the mystic (experiential) origin of the divine names; the unitary aspect of God's creation; Jesus Christ, the embodied Son of God – the complete revelation; and the transfiguration of the creation as a consequence of the deification of man nature in Christ.

Unlike the doctrine of the supreme Principle – the One in the Neoplatonic philosophy, Saint Dionysius affirms the unity of the Divinity not as an abstract thing, but in the Trinity of the divine Persons. "By the whole Divinity, the author understands not the being of God in Itself, but the being carried by the Three Hypostases. Dionysius does not think about God as a uniform unity, but as of the Trinitarian God (*DN II, 1*)"<sup>12</sup>.

For the author of the *Corpus*, as the Romanian theologian observes, God "is a source without beginning and the beginning of goodness and of light and this is why it is impossible for Him not to be a Person."<sup>13</sup> The fact that He creates the world out of goodness "shows Him as interpersonal since eternity. Because goodness can only be of the person and can only address another person."<sup>14</sup> God, as Trinity of Persons is the source of life and goodness. His willing relation with the creation is not for Him a necessity, nor does He impose it making use of a constraint. It is, however, fundamental for the progress of the aware creatures, helping them acquire, through grace, some of the non-passive divine stability that God has in His without having acquired it through a temporal progress."<sup>15</sup> The aware creatures live this reinforcement in virtue as a communion-based act, not a mechanical or magical one.

Commenting on the prologue of the *Celestial hierarchy* in which the author of the *Corpus* illustrates God's descent to His creatures, Father Stăniloae enumerates the basic features of the divine Persons, as they are perceived by us, as creatures, and shows their significance: "The Person, as supreme source of light, is the Father, and the fullest light that comes from Him to us is His Son. The Son comes like full divine light to us with all the shining rays spreading out from Him. All that God gives, in all the degrees and forms, is light, is sense, is goodness. And all our illuminations come to us from the Father through the Son, or from the divine personal

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 149, p. 231.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 3, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 125, 229.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 276, p. 283.

communion, and from the divine loving communion. Only the connection with this personal God can take us out of darkness.”<sup>16</sup>

It is the embodiment of God’s Son that most confirmed to us the personal character of God and the sense of our calling – to resemble, as sanctified persons, with Him, the One Holy through Himself. It is an impenetrable mystery, but also the supreme revelation. Through the Embodiment “We have known, as a Subject among us, One of the Subjects of the Trinity, and by Him, the Holy Trinity came closest to us, yet through the curtains of man symbols, which are as well ways of His love for men.”<sup>17</sup>

The divine-human communion of the Son of God made a man shares to us the conscience that God has put in the whole creation the seal of His love and goodness, but also the mystery that the created universe is full of creatures able of communication and meaningful personal relations. “Even the «celestial minds» or the angels’ spirits are revealed to us by the great light of God the Word. If God is not personal existence, if He is not a father having a loved and loving Son, there can be no personal «angels’ minds» either, wanting to know Him and to love Him, because they are also endowed with the capacity of a loving conscience. Yet, helped by the angels as well, we go up through the divine light that exists as well in them, towards the simple, beginning-and-without-beginning light of God, yet without being melted in Him.”<sup>18</sup>

Saint Dionysius affirms that, in fact, holiness is also the goal towards which the created personal hierarchies need to tend: “The common goal of the whole hierarchy is to love or to get close to God and the divine things, which occurs through holiness in a divine and unitary way” (*IB* I, 3).

Even the laws put by God in the world, as well as the objects created by Him (the non-personal beings) are elements having the role of inviting us to practicing love for one another and acquiring love for God, therefore to a personal relation to one another. Being aware that the world has been given by God to multiply the happy personal connections among people, we “realize that God is a loving Being, that He has nothing of a thing in Him, that He is not at all submitted to any laws, whereas man is partly free, partly submitted to laws showing that he is not through himself, (...) laws, as a condition of the affirmation of love.”<sup>19</sup> There is here a reciprocity: men can “freely love God as Creator and God can turn Himself into a man, as well, to reinforce their love for Him and for one another through His union, as loving subject, with them. This shows, however, that humanity can also be lifted to the stage of a subjectiveness going beyond all the laws imposed to man as created object.”<sup>20</sup>

A fundamental difference between the Areopagitic theology and the religious thinking of

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 1 c, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 135, p. 230.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 3, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 133, p. 230.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 133, p. 230.

the pagan philosophers is the ecstatic love that God shows to His creation. “God is eros and love, as He Who creates and supports, and beloved and loved as He Who attracts the created things towards Him, showing Himself beautiful and good. Through the first, He moves in Himself, in His love with no beginning and no end, through the second, He moves the created things, turning them towards Himself.”<sup>21</sup>

Saint Dionysius has a very profound understanding on the existence of creation. He sees in the very fact of the beings’ existence a universal tendency of the beings towards God as towards the good and beautiful One. This proves the dependence of the creation on God, because the creation cannot be outside Him, but also because, “being in Him, they are in a way through a power above their own, therefore in a way above the being. There is nothing without having its ultimate support in He Who is above the being and without participating to this quality of His.”<sup>22</sup> This unity of origin of the creation gives it a unitary character and confers an internal solidarity to the creatures, to some, consciously, to others, through their nature, without their being aware of it. “It is for this reason that they all support one another, because in this mutual support is manifested the supporting power of the Good they are in.”<sup>23</sup> Being Goodness itself, God “loves them all, attracts them all, perfects the all” unselfishly, according to their will. Those that oppose Him, He just maintains into existence and allows them to partake of His gifts temporarily, until the time of the Judgement, when the accomplishment of their will shall occur.

The Areopagitic writings are true mystagogical treatises highlighting the profound senses of the Christian cult and theological teachings. By highlighting these divine meanings, the author of the *Corpus* indirectly rejects the philosophical conceptions of pagan origin of his time: pantheism, Manichean dualism and the abstract spirituality of the pagan philosophy. A statement summing up his conception on God and the world could certainly be this: “God did not make the world to keep it separated or to melt it in Himself, but to transfigure it.”<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, a major implication of Christ’s embodiment is that of the spiritualization of matter and of the material world in general. Matter, as Saint Dionysius says, is the “simple existence” (*DN IV*, 26), inferior to the biological, rational or intelligible existences (the celestial minds). However, this qualitative inferiority does not situate it in the category of evil, and does not identify it with the source of evil (*DN IV*, 28), as the pagan philosophies erroneously taught. In the economy of creation, matter has its own value: “without it, as Saint Dionysius says, there would not be the bodies, by means of which the forms of the spiritual life are experienced increasingly more.”<sup>25</sup>

Commenting on these aspects, Father Dumitru Stăniloae affirms: “and it [matter] is part

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 184, p. 235.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 181, p. 235.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 181, p. 235.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 89, p. 128.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 229, p. 240.

of the world, in which there is reason and beauty.”<sup>26</sup> “God Himself has brought it into being (...) spread into space, able of being organized in many forms (...) [and] wants to show Himself as well through them, giving to them, by this, a beauty, an order and a capacity of getting transfigured as environment of the divine works.”<sup>27</sup>

Being submitted by God to man and dependent, to a certain extent, on the spiritually trajectory of this master, matter reveals its depths only through him and for him. When man breaks, by not listening, his connection with the Source of life – the interpersonal Trinitarian communion –, his mind growing dark, he “introduces”, by this deformed perception, evil in the matter, as well.<sup>28</sup> The sinful man transmits to the surrounding world his spiritual disposition, darkening it, yet without turning it into a totally evil world. It becomes corrupt because it cannot support an existence that is opposed to God, the world’s Creator. It is a curse felt by the man who, isolating himself from God, wants to live his existence using sinfully and selfishly the things created by Him. The corruptibility of matter is a consequence of sin, just as its opaqueness.<sup>29</sup> In the beginning, God created it by the words: “Let there be light!” (*Genesis* 1, 3), yet this created light and its rationality can be fully sensed by a God-bearing man, a bearer of God or of light.

Regarding this issue, Father Stăniloae notes: “considering that the world is going to lose the connection with God, and is going to be more inclined toward this environment, God also provided the possibility of its becoming opaque and, at the same time, of being subjected to the laws that make it necessary as man’s food and corruptible. But, by this, the matter does not become completely bad. It has remained useful for the man’s life and may get a higher and higher transparency for the pure people. During the future life, it is going to be completely bright for those who are absolutely close to God.”<sup>30</sup>

The author of the *Corpus* underlines in numerous moments the special value of matter, either when he presents the material creation stages as interdependent creations of God, or when he shows its character of secondary support of the biological existence (second to God) or when he states convincingly the raising from the dead, in body and soul. He shows himself as an innovator for the time of his life also by comparison with his coevals who considered matter as inform and passive existence, as well. Summarizing the above-mentioned issues, in his comments, Father Dumitru Stăniloae, brings numerous original contributions which may constitute theological backgrounds for appreciating the world as a gift from God.

In harmony with Saint Dionysius, who had asserted the “ontological” connection between body and soul (as being two realities which make up a single nature – man one), the Romanian

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 193, p. 237-238.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 47, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup>*DN* IV, 28: „nu din materie vine răul în suflete, ci dintr-o mișcare neregulată și greșită.”

<sup>29</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 282, p. 284-285.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 193, p. 237-238.

theologian highlights the deep connection between them and the spiritual finality for which the matter has been brought to existence: “It is in man body that matter gets its highest organization form, as it is within man body that it has become most intimate to the spirit. In man’s view, matter has become a means of communication of the meanings of the spirit. But man’s spirit is in a connection with the angel as a pure spirit and with God as the supreme Spirit, comprehensive in the form of the non-composed unity of all meanings and powers of supreme efficiency throughout the universe. Matter has not been created with no reason. It has been made as a means of revelation of the divine spirit, indirectly, but in a more intimate mode, and of man’s spirit. Man has received the particular honesty of giving matter spiritual meanings and functions, of getting it spiritualized, of having it fully transfigured, within God, through Him.”<sup>31</sup>

Deepening this association between the material and the spiritual issues, between the created and non-created reality, the Romanian theologian notes the capacity of matter of receiving, impressed in it, not only the cognitive productions of the spiritual creations, but also the spiritual realities themselves (souls, angels, God)<sup>32</sup>. This is due to the fact that it is the creation of God – the supreme Spiritual and Personal Reality, Who, creating it, makes it able to receive His Divine works, and those of the spiritual creations, and also at “the end of the time” (*Galatians* 4:4) the Son of God Himself through Incarnation<sup>33</sup>

Chapter II reflects exactly this grain of truth of the Dionysian theology: identity between existence and good. The heavenly hierarchy represents the unseen mark of God’s kindness, and the ecclesiastical one is the necessary condition of the spiritual improvement of the Church members. In both of them, Jesus Christ works, unseen, in His quality of their Saviour and target. Despite evil, as a corollary accident of the rational beings’ freedom, the Dionysian universe reflects a positive dimension, the stages of the seen and unseen creation showing a unitary character.

In chapter III, we have shown and analyzed the influences which the apophatic Dionysian theology generated on Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s thinking, as well as his ingenious way of presenting the affirmative and negative theology, revealing its report dynamics and experimental character. The dynamism and transparency of the knowledge of God for the creations shows both the possibility of the creation of having access allowed to the knowledge of God, and the personal and non-created character of God, using no useless syllogistic conceptualization.

*The creation ‘s symbolic character* – the subject of chapter IV – comes to complete this issue.

Saint Dionysius shows, being particularly concerned about it, that also, in the material world there are different existence stages, in a more and more ascendant hierarchy, therefore, more and more capable of capturing - like in a mirror – the Supreme Spirit’s rationality (*IB* I,

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<sup>31</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 5, p. 63.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 6, p. 64.

2)<sup>34</sup>. Generally, he expresses the faith that, not only the matters within the Holy Sacraments have the mission of becoming the messenger of the holiness and knowledge of God, but the whole creation is “thought”<sup>35</sup> by God to represent, in particular ontological states, different revelations of the Divine on Earth. This correspondence is supported by the fact that God has impressed the whole creation by rationality, supporting on all levels the progress in knowledge and strenght in existence. In this respect, each superior stage represents a symbol for the one equal or immediately inferior to it, a reflection of the divine, adapted to the receiver’s level of understanding, by which the latter acquires a higher knowledge of the greatness of God’s sacrament, paradoxically accompanied by a more complete sense and by a more present power in existence.

In case of both theologians, the supreme proof of the value of the creation, in general, and of the material world, in particular, for God is represented by the Incarnation of the Logos. Saint Dionysius highlights its innovative, and Father Stăniloae highlights its Sacramental and revelatory character. “Here, the sacrament of man’s union – including of man’s body – with the divine Hypostasis of Jesus Christ is emphasized. This is an inexplicable sacrament.”<sup>36</sup> “God the Word has created man being as an environment to be capable of understanding all the universe, since it is the means of creation, having a conscious relation with the angels through the spirit and with the material order. God the Word may unify, by means of man, all the creation in Himself, He may deify it entirely.”<sup>37</sup>

The Romanian theologian highlights, at the same time, the personal character the organized form of matter takes in man’s body, as well as its role of sacrament or means by which the holiness of Jesus Christ’s Body is shared to humanity: “through the resurrected Body of Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit Who from Himself is communicated to the Christians by means of the Holy Sacraments, strenghtening their spirit, matter becomes an environment to meet God and the whole universe moves forward towards transfiguration and perfection in the future life (for which miracles are an anticipation).”<sup>38</sup>

In **Part III** we have treated more punctually the different aspects by which Father Dumitru Stăniloae contributed to the exploitation of the Areopagitic writings.

Chapter I contains a chronological approach of the Dionysian influences on the Romanian theologian’s works outlined, more concrete, through the synthetic exposition of its vision on the presence of God in creation.

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<sup>34</sup> „Unul este Cel pe care îl doresc toți cei asemănători lui Dumnezeu, dar nu se împărtășesc în mod unitar de Cel Ce e Același și Unul, ci precum împarte fiecăruia cumpăna judecății dumnezeiești.”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, nota 286, p. 285.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, nota 163, p. 233.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, nota 164, p. 233.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, nota 282, p. 284.



Creation, in its interpretation founded on the Dionysian cosmology, is not understood as an object outside God, perceived, in His turn, as an object. On the contrary, there is unequivocally asserted the fact that God creates the world within Himself, out of goodness (*DN* IV, 1), through a manifestation of His spiritual energy: “God is unseparated from humanity and humanity is unseparated from Him, but He is the non-conditional cause of humanity”<sup>39</sup>

In other words, when we think of God, we have to avoid the idea that God has an isolated life, that He lives only within Himself, as well as the idea that He would need anything when He creates. God being over existence in the perfect Trinitarian communion, He decided from eternity to flood out His love outside His nature, namely on the level of an existence which He creates from nothing. Therefore, for good reason, we may say that “the first act of God for humanity – which may also be considered the basis of all the other acts and of His future Revelation, is creation”<sup>40</sup>.

The Dionysian theological creation states that we are not here by chance, but because we have been created by God on purpose. All the creations have an organization according to the hierarchic principle and represent “is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine. And it is uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the enlightenments divinely given to it.” (*IC* III, 1). That is because God is personal, He is an living Creator, Who manifests Himself within the power of godness and of love.

Chapter II highlights Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s contribution to the authentic understanding of the Areopagitic writings, as well as his contribution as a translator and exegete to the improvement of the Dionysian vocabulary into the Romanian language.

Summarizing all the affirmations stated so far, I may say that the Romanian theologian’s contribution to the exploitation of the Areopagitic writings has been a major one, particularly significant through the re-discovery of the practical character of the dogmatic contents contained in them, essential by the highlighting of the cosmos internalness within God, of the Persons created within the communion of the Holy Trinity and the Christian’s mind in the altar of the heart enlightened by the divine eros. The variety of the theme and the flooding creativity in their Orthodox way of presentation make Father Stăniloae’s action a door opened to everybody towards the re-discovery of the natural action of theologizing, thinking of the One Who is communicated and using the authority acquired out of the experience of faith.

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<sup>39</sup>Dumitru Stăniloae, *Revelația prin acte, cuvinte și imagini*, „Ortodoxia”, nr. 3 (1968), p. 352. Vezi și *DN* II, 3.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 350.

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite the reserves concerning their authenticity, more or less important, the Areopagitic writings have enjoyed a continual support in the Christian Orthodox area, based mainly on the Holy Fathers' tradition, who commented and recommended them with a special respect and interest, impressed by their theological content and by the variety of the topics approached, some of them new. It is true that the Holy Fathers expressed no doubts concerning the identity of these writings' author, yet from the comments that have been preserved from them we understand that the prestige of the Areopagitic writings had to do more with the Orthodoxy of their teaching and only secondarily was due to the apostolic dignity of their possible author.

As in the case of the translation and annotation of other patristic works, the principal goal of the attention given by Father Stăniloae to the Areopagitic writings is a deeply spiritual one, meant to promote the real presence of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in everything through the actualized cross.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, we can affirm that for the Romanian theologian, the patristic writings selected throughout his life for translation represent rather a support, an authorized source, yet with a secondary role compared to the unitary message they transmit and which Father Stăniloae wanted to re-uncover to the present man: the acquisition of salvation.<sup>42</sup> They are an untarishable source of inspiration for the theologian, but also a "cloud of authentic testimonies" (*Hebrews* 12:1) confirming the Orthodoxy of the Christian faith and the possibility for each man to acquire this way of living.

For this reason, although the preference of Father Stăniloae for certain Church Fathers, such as the Saints: Gregory Palama, Maxim the Confessor, Gregory the Theologian, Cyril of Alexandria, Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory of Nyssa, is obvious, his principal concern is constant, namely to highlight the reality and therefore the importance, of God's personal work and presence in the world, in general, and especially in man's life. Before being a scientific research in itself, with a strictly theoretical role, the theology of Father Stăniloae, reflected in the comments to these patristic translations, is the fruit of a research centered on the highlighting of the value and accessibility of the living of the Christian Orthodox faith for today's man.<sup>43</sup>

In harmony with the writings of the Greek Fathers, in the present case, with the writings of Saint Dionysius, Father Stăniloae identifies the grounds of creation in the life of the Holy

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<sup>41</sup>Victor Botez, *Interviu cu Dumitru Stăniloae*, in „Revista de filosofie”, nr. 6 (1992), p. 554.

<sup>42</sup>Pr.Prof.Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. I, Ediția a II-a, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup>This method of theologizing is specifically patristic. In *Introducere (Introduction) to Ambigua*, (p. 38-39) Father Stăniloae remarked: „Just like other Fathers, Saint Maxim did not theologize for the sake of theologizing, but to answer the needs of the Church of his time.”

Trinity: “Only because He is through Himself the plenitude above any determination and becoming, of any increase and decrease, God has been able to create a world destined to partaking of His eternity, understood as plenitude of the interpersonal communion. Because there can be no other sense for the creation of the world. And a world existing through itself, as an impersonal eternity, continually increasing and decreasing in a closed circle, would have no reason and would be totally unexplainable.”<sup>44</sup>

In the act of creation, God shows His love, and man answers God in love (*DN IV*, 12-14). In harmony with the Areopagitic theology, the Romanian theologian affirms that the created personal beings participate, responsibly and aware of themselves, to the formation of the world and to its advancement towards its final perfection. Consequently, “man is the collaborator of God and the continuator of the creation. Stăniloae often draws the attention on the paradoxical character of the relation between the world and man. We are constantly aware of the unity and diversity of man and of his relation with the whole cosmos. Man and the world depend on each another in the accomplishment of their destiny”<sup>45</sup>, that of actualizing increasingly more their character of symbol of the divine light.

While in the case of the invisible world, this actualization means a deeper and deeper knowledge of God, in the Church<sup>46</sup> the higher hierarchic ranks help the lower ones and themselves ascend in the living of God’s mysteries, using the mediation of the visible symbols (the Holy Mysteries) and their own model of communion. In these two “forms” is – invisibly – Christ Himself, the embodied Word of the Father, He Who represents the source of holiness and the man deified to the supreme degree. “The knowledge of God – as the Romanian theologian observes – is to know Him as mystery, as infinite mystery bringing holiness to those who partake of this knowledge”<sup>47</sup>. Similarly, yet to a lesser degree, are revealed one’s fellow’s persons. “In the common partaking of Christ, the believers realize and continually reinforce not just the communion among themselves, but also with the One, becoming one with one another and each unifying his impetuses in a common unity.”<sup>48</sup>

We have presented here a very small part of the richness of ideas and significances rediscovered and presented in an Orthodox form and in an original comment by Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Maybe the most evident form of valorization of these writings is his own person,

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<sup>44</sup>Pr.Prof.Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. I, Ediția a II-a, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1996, p. 124.

<sup>45</sup>Emil Bartoș, *Conceptul de îndumnezeire în teologia lui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Editura Institutului Biblic „Emanuel”, Oradea, 1999, p. 179.

<sup>46</sup>Teologia deschiderii Bisericii față de lume constă în însăși manifestarea naturii dialogului divino-uman unit cu responsabilitatea umană ce decurge de aici. Sensul prezenței Bisericii în lume este acela al spiritualizării și transfigurării progresive a omului și a lumii. În viziunea dionisiană, lumea este destinată să devină Biserică.

<sup>47</sup>*Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul – Opere complete și Scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul...*, nota 45, p. 121.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibidem*, nota 64, p. 123.

about which Father Ion Bria affirmed with objectiveness: “Sanctification, this is the topic of his life (...) His whole person speaks about God – great theologian, he shies away from theologizing. (...) All his work is a «mystagogy», a great work for elucidating the metaphysical and theological grounds of the Orthodoxy, for broadening the vision on the world, for interpreting mankind’s future.”<sup>49</sup>

The distinguished way in which he translated the Areopagitic writings and the profound comments that he wrote with patristic faithfulness to the living truth of the Church, have often made me believe, reading and rereading the posthumous edition, that between the Romanian theologian and Saint Dionysius, in time, a very mysterious communion has grown permanent. It is what one of his disciples, today the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, inspiredly affirmed: “There is a mysterious communion between people who think alike, though confessing Christ in different. They realize a communion over time, therefore they meet not just in synchrony, but also diachronically.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Pr.Prof.Dr. Ion Bria, *Spațiul îndumnezeirii. Eternizarea umanului în Dumnezeu în viziunea teologică a Părintelui Stăniloae*, „Ortodoxia”, an XLV, (1993), nr. 3-4, p 77-78.

<sup>50</sup>I.P.S. Daniel Mitropolitul Moldovei și Bucovinei, *Părintele Stăniloae – creator al unei sinteze neo-patristice în teologia ortodoxă contemporană*, în „Studii Teologice”, nr. 1 (2005), p. 149.

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