FLOROVSKY’S ‘MIND OF THE FATHERS’
AND THE NEO-PATRISTIC SYNTHESIS
OF DUMITRU STĂNILOAE

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The call of Georges Florovsky for a return to the Fathers¹ and the ensuing effort of twentieth-century Orthodox theologians² to create a Neo-Patristic synthesis is now being critically examined.³ Regardless of how successful or not it might be considered, the Neo-Patristic synthesis was precisely an effort to create a vibrant contextual Orthodox theology, one that was both guided by patristic thought and able to address contemporary concerns.

¹ Florovsky first made the appeal for a return to the Fathers in two influential papers delivered at the First Congress of Orthodox Theologians in Athens, 1936. These addresses were ‘Western Influences in Russian Theology’, reprinted in Georges Florovsky, Aspects of Church History: Collected Works 4 (Belmont/MA, 1975), pp. 157-182 and ‘Patristics and Modern Theology’, reprinted in Diakonia, 4.3 (1969), pp. 227-232.

² Florovsky, Lossky, Romanides, and Zizioulas figure most in the discussion; less so, Stăniloae and Popovich. It goes without saying that the Neo-Patristic synthesis was worked out differently amongst these thinkers.

Florovsky’s project has been contrasted with the “modernist”\textsuperscript{4} proclivities of his elder contemporaries, primarily Sergius Bulgakov, and has even been accused of an “anti-Western” polemicism.\textsuperscript{5} Yet the advocates of the Neo-Patristic synthesis and those of the Russian Religious Renaissance\textsuperscript{6} shared a great deal in common.\textsuperscript{7} For example, both Bulgakov and Florovsky sought guidance in the patristic tradition, both wished to revitalize Orthodox theology, and both were keen to address contemporary issues.

A dividing line between the two groups however did exist: they disagreed on the authority of patristic thought. Bulgakov saw the writings of the Fathers as contextually conditioned,\textsuperscript{8} and thus for modern times they were informative, but not normative. For this reason he was not afraid to break with the consensus patrum when it suited his theological agenda.\textsuperscript{9} Florovsky on the other hand held the consensus patrum as a necessary component in acquiring a “catholic consciousness”, without which no authentic theology could be created.\textsuperscript{10} The understanding of patristic thought’s role in contemporary theology thus constituted a crucial difference between them.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{4} Bulgakov wrote: “Since new is the synonym of creativity, we are scolded for our modernism … But our modernism is and desires to be a living tradition, which we serve in faithfulness to the Church” (Gavrilyuk, \textit{Georges Florovsky}, p. 2 n. 4).

\textsuperscript{5} On this question, Baker (‘Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Ecumenism’, p. 250) calls Gallaher’s claim that Florovsky’s neo-patristic synthesis was based on “anti-Western polemicism” (Gallaher, ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’, pp. 660, 677) “demonstrably false”. Plested concurs: “Florovsky’s vision of a ‘neo-patristic synthesis’, then, expressly includes a sustained and sympathetic engagement with Western theology” (Plested, op. cit., p. 202).

\textsuperscript{6} The central figures are Pavel Florensky, Nicolae Berdyaev and Sergius Bulgakov.

\textsuperscript{7} For the most recent assessment of the relationship between these two groups, see Gavrilyuk, \textit{Georges Florovsky}.

\textsuperscript{8} Bulgakov writes: “The writings of the Holy Fathers … must be understood within their historical context. … In any case the writings do not possess a universality applicable to all periods in history. The writings of the Fathers are historically conditioned and therefore limited in their meaning” (‘Dogma and Dogmatism’ (1937), ET Michael Plekon, ed., \textit{ Tradition Alive} (Lanham/MD, 2003), p. 17; cited in Ladouceur, ‘Treasures New and Old’, p. 204.)

\textsuperscript{9} Gavrilyuk, \textit{Georges Florovsky}, pp. 141-142. On the other hand, Florovsky felt that Bulgakov, Florensky and others were more interested in promoting their own teachings than expressing the mind of the Church (Ibid., pp. 143, 158).

\textsuperscript{10} Gavrilyuk, \textit{Georges Florovsky}, pp. 142, 158 n. 93, 175.

\textsuperscript{11} Gavrilyuk states that the issue is “not whether patristic theology was foundational – for both sides accepted that it was – but rather how to engage the patristic tradition this side of modernity” (Gavrilyuk, \textit{Georges Florovsky}, p. 3). Elsewhere he states: “Bulgakov and Florovsky understood the authority of the patristic tradition differently” (Ibid., p. 141).
same issue divides the advocates and antagonists of the neo-patristic synthesis today.\textsuperscript{12}

One cannot help but notice that in this on-going discussion the issue of methodology has been generally neglected. Applying patristic thought to modern theology must be done, or not, based on some \textit{criteria}. The first question that must be asked is: what are the foundational principles of Orthodox theology by which it employs patristic teachings to address contemporary questions?

The purpose of this paper is to ask how Orthodox theology can be contextual by broaching the issue of methodology and guiding principles. I will suggest three such principles of Orthodox theology that might describe the notion of the mind of the Fathers – invoked but inadequately defined by Florovsky – by drawing from the thought of another exemplar of the neo-patristic synthesis, the Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae.

Stăniloae sought to create a theology at once guided by Patristic writings and yet very much open to contemporary thought and pastoral concerns. I will subsequently analyze his methodology, using his Triadology as an example. I thereby hope to both distinguish Stăniloae’s efforts from his contemporaries and also to draw guidance from him for the ongoing efforts of contemporary Orthodox theology.

\textbf{Contextual and Neo-Patristic}

The term “contextual” is generally applied to two distinct forms of theological work. The first is to describe an aspect of the historical-critical study of texts – for example, the recent resurgence of scholarly interest in fourth-century Trinitarian theology, which has produced a number of noteworthy studies.\textsuperscript{13} Essential to this research has been a hermeneutical approach which

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ladouceur notes: “Indeed the ‘fault line’ between contemporary critics and defenders of neopatristic theology is much the same as it was when the neopatristic approach first appeared on the scene in the 1930s: What role and authority should Orthodox theology accord to the teachings of the Fathers?” (Ladouceur, ‘Treasures New and Old’, p. 205).}
\footnote{For example, the works of R. P. C. Hanson, Michel René Barnes, John Behr, Lewis Ayres and most recently, Khaled Anatolios. See, for example, the discussion surrounding Ayres’ book in an entire issue dedicated to it in the \textit{Harvard Theological Review}, 100/2 (2007). For a recent summary of contemporary Orthodox Triadology, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, ‘Contemporary Orthodox Currents on the Trinity’, in \textit{The Oxford...}}
\end{footnotes}
pays close attention to the historical, cultural, and linguistic circumstances in which texts were written, in order to yield a clearer, more nuanced understanding of their thought.\textsuperscript{14} Paradigms of understanding are being continually challenged and revised.\textsuperscript{15} The result of this contextual approach has been a wealth of insight and analysis, in a truly ecumenical effort.

The second use of “contextual” refers to the efforts of contemporary theology to express the truths of the Christian faith in a way that is meaningful to specific social, linguistic or cultural circumstances.

Thus, however valuable historical scholarship may be, it remains the task of theology to connect patristic teaching to life. Critical editions of texts and historical monographs can certainly help us to understand and interpret patristic thought. Yet it goes without saying that scholarship by itself cannot address the existential problems of the soul or of society. That is the task of theology, though informed by scholarship.

But how does theology do this? How does theology bridge the gap between the knowledge gained from the contextual study of patristic texts and the need to relate the truths of these texts in a meaningful way to the contextual circumstances of today? Based on which principles? In many ways, this question inherited from the efforts to create a Neo-Patristic synthesis remains unanswered in contemporary Orthodox theology.

One issue is the yet ambiguous meaning of “Neo-Patristic”.\textsuperscript{16} Whatever Florovsky may have understood by this phrase,\textsuperscript{17} the goal of his Neo-Patristic


\textsuperscript{16} “One of the main difficulties in understanding Florovsky’s neopatristic synthesis is that he rarely inquires into the operation of a synthesis with methodological precision” (Gavriljuk, \textit{Georges Florovsky}, p. 262). Schmemann also noted: “Florovsky… never explained the essence and, first of all, the method of ‘neo-patristic’ synthesis” (Russian source cited by Gavriljuk, \textit{Georges Florovsky}, p. 270).

\textsuperscript{17} In a speech prepared at the end of his career, Florovsky wrote: “What I am calling now ‘the Neo-Patristic Synthesis’ … should be more than just a collection of Patristic sayings
Florovsky’s ‘Mind of the Fathers’

The synthesis was not to reduce the richness and complexity of the patristic tradition to an artificial *consensus patrum*, a *summa*, or a Christian Talmud. Florovsky therefore appealed to the mind of the Fathers. But what is the mind of the Fathers? Perhaps it would be misguided to reject at the outset the very notion of a *mind* of the Fathers, since St. Paul repeatedly employs a similar concept, boldly stating at one point that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). The “mind”

that St. Paul invokes is obviously something existential, involving a way of life and an active communion with Christ. Florovsky similarly stated that the patristic mind is something acquired as an “existential attitude” or “spiritual orientation”.

Though Florovsky’s appeal to the mind of the Fathers cannot therefore be reduced to a *method*, it nevertheless includes an aspect of what we could call a *patristic methodology*, a way of theological thinking integrated with

or statements. It must be a *synthesis*, a creative reassessment of those insights which were granted to the Holy Men of old. It must be *Patristic*, faithful to the spirit and vision of the Fathers, *ad mentum Patrum*. Yet, it must be also *Neo-Patristic*, since it is to be addressed to the new age, with its own problems and queries”, cited in Andrew Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood/NY, 1993), p. 154. According to Gavriluk, “This is Florovsky’s most explicit statement of what he intended by the neopatristic synthesis” (Gavriluk, *Georges Florovsky*, p. 263).

18 Compare Bulgakov’s swipe at Florovsky (in Gallaher, ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’, p. 667 n. 65; also pp. 670-671).


21 St. Paul employs both *νοῦς* and forms of *φρόνημα*. He calls for a laying aside of the “carnal mind” and the acquisition of the “mind [φρόνημα] of the Spirit” (Rom 8:6-7; Col 2:18, 3:2), even a “transformation” through the “renewal” of the mind [*νοῦς*] (Rom 12:2), and states that “we have the mind [*νοῦς*] of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), or should have it (Phil 2:5). In many places, he calls for the church to be of one mind (e.g., Rom 12:16ff.).

22 He writes: “Should we not recover ‘the mind of the Fathers’ also in our theological thinking and teaching? … as an existential attitude, as a spiritual orientation. Only in this way can our theology be reintegrated into the fullness of our Christian existence. … One has to go to the very roots of this traditional ‘piety,’ and to recover the ‘Patristic mind’” (Florovsky, *St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 113).
Christian life. Florovsky may have left the notion of this mind inadequately defined, but the issue he raised cannot be avoided: any effort to create a contextual Orthodox theology must be based on some foundation from which it acquires its principles, its grammar – in short, its *phronema* – by which it will both assess and utilize the findings of scholarship for the needs of the contemporary world.

**Dumitru Stăniloae and the Contours of the Patristic Mind**

Though he has received far less attention in the West, Stăniloae was also part of the effort to create a Neo-Patristic synthesis. Among his accomplishments, Stăniloae translated twenty-four volumes of patristic writings, including the entire *corpus* of St. Maximus the Confessor and a greatly expanded twelve-volume *Philokalia*, all with extensive annotations. Additionally he wrote over two dozen original books and hundreds of studies, which included one of the first monographs on St. Gregory Palamas.

More than a scholar, Stăniloae was also a man of the Church who consciously saw his theological work as a service to the spiritual needs of the faithful. Already in 1943 he expressed the view that theology “must be fresh, contemporary, speaking to each time in its language”. Yet he added: “but it also must always maintain itself firmly connected with the tradition of the Church”, so that “readers can, without much difficulty, identify the Jesus

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23 “The main distinctive mark of Patristic theology was its ‘existential’ character … Theology of this kind can never be separated from the life of prayer and from the practice of virtue” (Florovsky, *Patristic Theology*, p. 17).

24 The others include two volumes of St. Athanasius, one of St. Gregory of Nyssa, three of St. Cyril of Alexandria, the complete works of Dionysius the Areopagite, the theological orations of St. Gregory the Theologian, and the Hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian.


26 Dumitru Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigore Palama* (*The Life and Teachings of St. Gregory Palamas*) (Sibiu, 1938). As with Lossky, the thought of Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory Palamas figures strongly in Stăniloae’s neo-patristic synthesis.
Christ who is depicted anew with the Jesus Christ whom the Church has confessed at all times in its teaching and worship”.27

Stăniloae’s dual commitment to the writings of the Fathers and the needs of the church remained the defining characteristic of his theological activity throughout his long and productive career.28 He consciously sought to bring the dogmas to bear on everyday life.29 In distinction to Bulgakov, however, Stănileanu held that patristic teachings and not simply dogmatic decrees had normative value for contemporary theology.30

Stănileanu is certainly therefore a worthy exemplar for any analysis as to how Orthodox theology can be contextual. In what follows I will draw from his works and examples from the patristic era to address the question: If the patristic mind is an “existential attitude” or “spiritual orientation”, then what would be some of its defining characteristics for the purposes of theological methodology? Due to the constraints of this essay, I will suggest just three: an approach to theology which is inseparable from life experience, a respect for tradition as a guide and not an obstruction for creativity, and a continual engagement with the Scriptures.

27 Preface to Dumitru Stănileanu, Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului. [Jesus Christ or the Restoration of Man] 2nd ed. (Craiova, 1993).

28 Near the beginning of his career, in the preface to the first volume of the Romanian Philokalia, Stănileanu notes the great importance of the collection because it is able to transform the dogmas and “methodically change them into practical precepts, into powers which can transform us from day to day”, providing “step-by-step” guidance based on a tried and tested “science of the soul” (Dumitru Stănileanu, Filocalia I, (Bucharest, 1946), p. 9). He reiterated the same message at the end of his career: “We have striven in this synthesis … to uncover the spiritual significance of dogmatic teaching, in order to manifest its truth which corresponds to the deep needs of the soul” (Preface to Stănileanu, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă, vol. 1, p. 7).

29 Stănileanu sees theology as an ever-deepening of understanding of the dogmas, according to the needs of the faithful. Theology is thereby always new, but remains within the limits of the dogmatic formulations, through which the infinite content of the dogmas is guarded. See ‘Theology as Ecclesial Service’ in Stănileanu, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă, vol. 1, pp. 66-80; English translation in The Experience of God, 6 vols., transl. by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer (Brookline/MA, 1994-2012); here vol. 1 (Brookline/MA, 1994), pp. 79-94. Henceforth I will cite this work and the English translation together as: TDO vol.: pp., ET vol.: pp.

30 E.g., “Not all theology, however, becomes Church teaching, but only that which the Church takes to itself by unanimous consensus in time and space. And the Church takes to herself only those teachings which time shows have been organically assimilated to the previous way Christians have lived out that content contained in Christ” (TDO 1: 70, ET 1: 84).
The patristic mind includes an existential dimension which is a personal experience of God, without which there can be no theologizing. The importance of this can be seen in the many calls for purification as a precondition for theology in patristic writings and the appeals to sacramental and personal experience in their theological argumentation. In Stăniloae’s view, theology both arises from and should enhance our experience of God.

It is important to distinguish from the beginning, as did Florovsky, subjective religious experience from “catholic experience”, the latter being “onestness in thought and feeling” transcending time and alone contributing to doctrinal formulation. See Georges Florovsky, ‘The Catholicity of the Church’, Bible, Church, Tradition: Collected Works 1 (Belmont/MA, 1972), pp. 44, 49. Stăniloae in fact wrote an entire book on this subject, his Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă. Ascetica și Mistica. 2nd ed. (București, 1992); English translation: Orthodox Spirituality, transl. by Jerome Newville and Otilia Kloos (South Canaan/PA, 2002). Henceforth I will cite this work and the translation together as: SO pp., ET pp. For Stăniloae, any synthesis of Orthodox theology could not ignore the decisive contributions of St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Gregory Palamas and the writings of the Philokalia, precisely because they articulated a theology of experience.

Alfayev writes: “[T]he task before us is also to think and to live in a patristic way. For we shall never be able to understand the Fathers if we do not share, at least to some degree, in their experience and endeavors” (Alfeyev, ‘The Faith of the Fathers’, p. 373).

For example: “The climax of purity is the foundation of theology … he who has not come to know God merely speculates. Purity makes its disciple a theologian, who of himself grasps the dogmas of the Trinity” (St John Klimakos, Scala Paradisi 30; PG 88:1157CD); the well-known statements of Gregory Nazianzus (Or. 27.3); Evagrius’ correlation of theology and prayer (On Prayer 61, PG 79:1180AB). One might also mention the integration of virtue and the proper understanding of the world and the meaning of Scripture in St Maximus the Confessor (e.g Ad Thal. 17; see SO 183-188, ET 224-229).

For example, when the arguments from Scripture were exhausted, Athanasius appealed to the experience of baptism for the Spirit’s divinity (Ad Serapion, 1.29; PG 26:596C), as did Gregory Nazianzus (Or. 31.29). Cyril of Alexandria appealed to the Eucharist to demonstrate Christ’s divine identity (Third Letter to Nestorius, Anathema 7).


“A theology which feeds on the prayer and spiritual life of the Church is a theology which expresses and deepens the Church’s thinking, her spiritual life, and her work of sanctification and serving” (TDO 1: 72, ET 1: 87).
Importantly, in Stăniloae’s view our experience of God includes the world. More accurately, it has both a ‘cataphatic’ element which is obtained through our relationship to creation and to our neighbours, as well as an apophatic element, obtained in a direct experience of God through prayer. Both ways of knowing God are necessary and interwoven. Together they serve to connect theology to the entire existential fabric of life. Only then can the dogmas be properly understood as a means to preserve the authentic freedom and communion with God of humanity redeemed in Christ, and not as a mere set of propositions.

The centrality given to apophaticism has been strongly associated with the Neo-Patristic synthesis. Lossky first pointed out that it is not simply rational negation, articulated in theological language, but primarily an existential unknowing. Yet Florovsky disagreed with Lossky’s sharp division between reason and unknowing. Stăniloae also did not agree with Lossky’s notion of apophaticism as an “absolute, total ignorance”. Rather, Stăniloae saw it as an ignorance which is a surpassing knowledge. In refining Lossky’s position, Stăniloae also pointed out that Lossky did not distinguish the various types of apophatic knowledge, not all of which involve a “total unknowing”. For Stăniloae, even in our highest union with God, a union

\[ 37 \] TDO 1: 93-99, ET 1: 110-117.
\[ 38 \] TDO 1: 56-58, ET 1: 66-67.
\[ 40 \] See his remarks in TDO 1: 87 n. 7, ET 123 n. 8; and SO 188-211, ET 230-254.
\[ 41 \] For example, Stăniloae says it “is not an apophaticism pure and simple” but “a positive vision and an experience in a reality superior to any knowledge” (SO 299, ET 350), not an ignorance “due to the absence of knowledge, but because of its superabundance” (SO 195, ET 236; commenting on Gregory Palamas, Triads 2.3.17). Compare Dionysius the Areopagite’s notion of ignorance being a superabundance of knowledge, “darkness” a superabundance of light, etc. (e.g., Divine Names 1, 2).
\[ 43 \] Stăniloae distinguishes three levels of apophatic experience: [i] the apophaticism present even in our cataphatic knowledge of God through the things of the world; [ii] the apophaticism of that which can be experienced, yet not conceptualized (such as love, or the vision of uncreated light); [iii] the apophaticism of that which cannot be experienced (the divine essence). See, for example, TDO 1: 87, ET 1: 103.
“beyond reason”, there is a form of knowledge to be obtained.\textsuperscript{44} This knowledge cannot be reduced to discursive reasoning, but neither does it annul it.\textsuperscript{45}

According to Stâniloae, because the divine Logos of God contains all the meanings and \textit{logoi} of creation, and simultaneously “transcends the \textit{logos} of all the \textit{logoi}”,\textsuperscript{46} cataphatic and apophatic knowledge are always interwoven.\textsuperscript{47} “[T]he connection between reason and contemplation is not one of mutual exclusion … they condition and nourish each other”. This is because “God is beyond discursive reason, but He is not devoid of reason – He is the Supreme Reason [Logos]”.\textsuperscript{48}

One important aspect of Stâniloae’s approach to apophatic knowledge therefore is its indissoluble connection to the cataphatic, through which he gives a wholly positive assessment of human reason as a means to spiritual growth and communion with God. In his view, which is strongly dependent on St. Maximus, one of the ways that human beings act as a unifying factor in the world is through their faculty of reason, which assimilates the meaning of creation through a passionless contemplation of the world’s reasons, or \textit{logoi}.\textsuperscript{49} Stâniloae sees the \textit{logoi} not only as the models and goals of all things, but also as personal expressions of the one, personal Logos of God. Through asceticism and virtue, one begins to see the true purpose of things as being

\textsuperscript{44} SO 311, ET 364.
\textsuperscript{45} SO 169, ET 208; also SO 181, ET 220.
\textsuperscript{46} TDO 1: 239, ET 2: 30. Elsewhere he writes, “Apophatic knowledge is not irrational but supra-rational, for the Son of God is the Logos and contains in Himself the ‘reasons’ of created things” (TDO 1: 84, ET 1: 100).
\textsuperscript{47} “Dionysius the Areopagite does not completely separate rational knowledge from apophatic knowledge – a separation not made by the other Fathers either – but alternates in speaking about them both” (TDO 1: 93, ET 1: 110). Nyssa and Nazianzus are given as examples (TDO 1: 84-89, ET 1: 99-105). Apophatic knowledge of God is “not an irrational act, but supra-rational” which “does not do away with reason, but involves it” (SO 169, ET 208).
\textsuperscript{48} SO 181, ET 220.
gifts from God and the means for divine-human communion, rather than as a means for egotistical gratification. By thereby seeking the logoi, or true meaning of things, man communes with the thoughts and loving intentions of God.\footnote{Such an activity of seeking the logoi was fulfilled by Christ, who “as the divine Logos, re-established human reason within an activity that was entirely passionless” (TDO 1: 146, ET 1: 180).} This positive view of reason is one way that Stăniloae includes all activities of life (science, art, or progress in any area of human achievement) into the spiritual life and theological thought.

**Creativity and Continuity: The Role of Tradition in Theological Development**

Another principle of the patristic mind is a concern for continuity, or tradition. The importance of tradition is already seen in the New Testament, where the Gospel is something “received” and “delivered”,\footnote{1 Cor 11:23, 15:3.} “not from man” and therefore abiding irrespective of human and angelic authority.\footnote{Gal 1:8-12.} Such a notion is continued in patristic writings.\footnote{For example, St. Athanasius writes: “[T]he very tradition, teaching, and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers kept. Upon this the Church is founded, and he who should fall away from it would not be a Christian, and should no longer be so called” (Ad Serapion, 1.28, PG 26: 593D-596A).} In Stăniloae’s view, this is not merely a formal transmission, but one that is charismatic and experiential, passed on from one generation to the next ‘in words of fire’.\footnote{TDO 1: 65, ET 1: 77. For Stăniloae’s view of tradition in general, see Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Studii catolice recente despre filioque’, Studii Teologice, 25 (1973), pp. 417-505, and TDO 1: 37-66, ET 1: 37-78.}

Ultimately, Stăniloae sees tradition as the presence of the *same Christ* (Heb 13:8) in the lives of the faithful, leading them by the same words and the same Holy Spirit to the same resurrection, the same salvation, the same Kingdom. To live in Christ is therefore to be contemporary with all those who have lived in him before us.\footnote{Dumitru Stăniloae, ‘Unity and Diversity in Orthodox Tradition’, Greek Orthodox Theological Review, 17 (1972), pp. 19-36, here 20.} “Individuals change”, he observes,
generations change, but the Christ of their communion is unchanged”.56 For Stăniloae, tradition thereby involves “receiving Him in the way inherited from the Apostles”.57 Tradition as a mediator of Christ becomes simultaneously a mediator of both Apostolicity and Catholicity.58

At the same time, Stăniloae understands that each generation has its new problems that may necessitate not only “a renewal of language” but also a deeper understanding of the life of Christ and the tradition which might have been “insufficiently perceived previously”.59 Yet, this necessary renewal must be in accord with the past tradition, not simply to demonstrate continuity, but to ensure the authenticity of any theological development.

The pattern of creativity in continuity is exactly what we see in the patristic era. For example, the words of St. Athanasius: “In accordance with the Apostolic faith delivered to us by tradition from the Fathers, have I delivered the tradition, without inventing anything extraneous to it”.60 Yet, these words were written precisely as Athanasius was breaking new theological ground,


56 Stăniloae, ‘Unity and Diversity’, p. 25.

57 Stăniloae, ‘Unity and Diversity’, p. 20. Andrew Louth writes: “This is the tradition which has been handed down from the apostles and is received in baptism: the fact that it is received is almost as important as what is received – tradition is not something we make up, but something we accept” (Andrew Louth, Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology [Oxford, 1983], pp. 84-85).

58 Compare Florovsky’s comments that to be Apostolic is to be Patristic, and vice versa (Florovsky, ‘St. Gregory Palamas’, p. 107; also, Florovsky, ‘Patristic Theology’, p. 16). Stăniloae sees tradition as the “practical application of revelation” which appears simultaneously with the Church, whereas the Scripture arises afterwards, within the Church. He continues: “Hence, tradition cannot be changed or rejected, because to change or to reject it would be tantamount to mutilating revelation and its full and authentic application, and this, in turn, would mean a mutilation of the Church” (TDO 1: 49, ET 1: 55-56).

59 Stăniloae, ‘Unity and Diversity’, p. 29. He continues: this renewal, however, must occur “without overstepping the bounds of Tradition, which is the guardian and the witness of Christ in His wholeness, so that this progress should not cause a break in the continuity of Tradition”.

60 St. Athanasius, Ad Serapion 1.33; PG 26:606CD. He continues: “What I learned, that have inscribed conformably with the Holy Scriptures; for it also conforms with those passages from the holy Scriptures which we have cited above by way of proof. In other words, Athanasius was using tradition and Scripture simultaneously to judge his own advancement in theological language”.
applying the *homoousios* to the Spirit,\(^1\) which was then without precedent. St. Gregory the Theologian also sees himself as a defender of Nicaea when he, similarly, breaks new ground by calling the Holy Spirit “God”, which the Fathers of Nicaea did not do.\(^2\) In other words, Athanasius and Gregory appealed not to the letter but to the intent – the vision, or the mind – of the Scriptures and the Fathers before them. What they said was new, but to be confirmed as authentic it had to arise from and uphold the same universal experience of the divinity of the Holy Spirit of all those who came before them, without abrogating it.

We see the same approach employed in the sixth century when Neo-Chalcedonian theologians began to systematically apply Cappadocian Trinitarian terminology (hypostasis, ousia, etc.) to Christology. Though it had some precedent in the Chalcedonian definition, the application of Trinitarian terminology to Christology did not come ready-made,\(^3\) nor did it have precedent in the Cappadocian Fathers themselves.\(^4\) The Neo-Chalcedonians were thus breaking new ground,\(^5\) which they did with great caution so as not to abrogate the Trinitarian settlement that came before them. They did so by abiding by a frequently employed if not explicitly stated rule (which I

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\(^1\) *Ad Serapion*, 1.27; PG 26: 593C.\(^3\)

\(^2\) “I never have and never can honour anything above the Nicene Faith, that of the Holy Fathers who met there to destroy the Arian heresy; but am, and by God’s help ever will be, of that faith; completing in detail that which was incompletely said by them concerning the Holy Spirit” (Ep. 102, *Ad Cledonium II*; PG 37:193C).

\(^3\) The problem was that the Basilian *hypostasis*, defined as the *ousia* with the *idiomata*, could not avoid two hypostases in Christ. This it had to be refined and expanded for usage in Christology: *hypostasis* was no longer understood only as the *ousia* with *idiomata*, but also as that which “exists by itself” (καθ᾿ ἑαυτήν).

\(^4\) For example, Daley states regarding Gregory’s anti-Apollinarian Christology: “The language of φύσις and ὑπόστασις, ousia and πρόσωπον, which were to frame the debates of the fifth and sixth centuries and which had been given stable definition for Trinitarian discussion by the Cappadocians themselves, are strikingly absent … from Gregory’s discussion of Christ” (Brian E. Daley, ‘Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa’s Anti-Apollinarian Christology’, *Modern Theology*, 18 (2002), pp. 497-506, here 502).

\(^5\) Of course, though they were indeed breaking new ground in the coherent application of technical vocabulary, Christology and Triadology were never formally separated. On their intrinsic connection in the early Church, see Brian E. Daley, ‘One Thing and Another: The Persons in God and the Person of Christ in Patristic Theology’, *Pro Ecclesia*, 15 (2006), pp. 17-46.
like to call the Neo-Chalcedonian principle): whatever *new* was said about the Christological use of *hypostasis*, *ousia*, etc., had to be applicable to its established Trinitarian use, and vice versa. This methodology – developed by John the Grammarian, Leontius of Byzantium and his namesake of Jerusalem – was employed most conspicuously by St. Maximus the Confessor.66 These theologians thereby ensured that their theological development occurred in a way that conformed with tradition and was indeed guided by it. Their work subsequently became permanent and normative for subsequent generations.

However, not everyone accepted the Neo-Chalcedonian effort to create a coherent, ecumenically-accepted theological vocabulary.67 Severus of Antioch explicitly rejected it because it was not in accord with the terminological usage of St. Cyril of Alexandria.68 So, this advancement of theological terminology, which was carried out with great care to remain faithful to the tradition, was also rejected on the basis of a misplaced fidelity to tradition.69

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66 On this, Balthasar has written: “In the midst of the complexities of the Christological debate, Maximus always took his refuge in Trinitarian theology. Against the argument of Sergius … Maximus repeatedly countered with an appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity: Sergius’ thesis leads to three wills in God”. “The Logos, having once become human, still remains, as Logos, one of the three who are God, and therefore a proposition in Christology may not contradict a proposition about the Trinity” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, transl. by Brian E. Daley [San Francisco/CA, 2003], p. 213).


68 The Severans refused to accept the transposition of trinitarian distinctions to christology because of fidelity to Cyril’s terms (Nicholas Madden, ‘Composite Hypostasis in Maximos the Confessor’, *Studia Patristica*, 27 [1993], pp. 175-197, here 176; see also Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 28-78). “From Cyril’s words, as from a sacred anchor, I do not depart” (Severus, *First Letter to Oecumenius the Count*, in E. W. Brooks, *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch (Letters I to LXI)*, Patrologia Orientalis, 20 (Paris, 1919), p. 185). For Severus, fidelity to Cyril meant adhering literally to Cyril’s inconsistent use of technical terminology, such as his confusing double usage of φύσις to refer to both general nature and to the concrete, individual subject.

69 Regarding the Severan rejection of the Neo-Chalcedonian effort to bring coherency to terminology, Grillmeier has written: “That amounted to an ostrich policy. The Chalcedonians received the more difficult inheritance by taking over the Cappadocian terminology and the combination of the theologies of the Trinity and of the incarnation, introduced by Gregory Nazianzen” (Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p. 278).
In the former case, tradition guided development and confirmed its authenticity; in the latter, tradition excluded any development.\(^70\)

**Continual Engagement with the Holy Scriptures**

A third principle of the patristic mind is the continual engagement with the Holy Scripture. The work of the Fathers was inextricably exegetical,\(^71\) for without the correct understanding of Scripture there can be no authentic theology.\(^72\) Nor can there be, as Stăniloae notes, any authentic spiritual life without a ‘Scriptural communion’ with Christ, who continues to speak to every generation through the same words which are made alive in the Church by the Holy Spirit, who gives them a dynamism that bears upon real life.\(^73\)

Certainly, Orthodox scholars have not been on the forefront of critical Biblical scholarship. Yet I do not believe it is fair to place the blame for this on the Neo-Patristic synthesis, for the later does not imply a rejection of critical scholarship. For example, Stăniloae acknowledges that further explanation of the Scripture is always necessary.\(^74\) New exegesis can provide fresh insights into the life of Christ, even when not found in patristic writings.\(^75\)

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\(^{70}\) Here the words of Stăniloae are *apropos*: “To the same extent that a theology fixed in the formulae of the past is damaging, so a theology which clings exclusively to the present is inadequate” (TDO 1: 74, ET 1: 90).

\(^{71}\) “The Fathers themselves were always servants of the Word, and their theology was intrinsically exegetical” (Florovsky, ‘Patristic Theology’, p. 17).

\(^{72}\) As Florovsky notes, only the Scriptures *correctly understood* are foundational for theology, as the Gnostic controversies of second century and the Arian and Pneumatomachian controversies of the fourth demonstrate. Irenaeus, Hilary, Tertullian and Vincent of Lerins all invoked therefore the rule of faith to this end, which Florovsky importantly points out did not add anything to the Scriptures, but only ensured they were correctly understood (Georges Florovsky, ‘The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church’, *Bible, Church, Tradition: Collected Works 1* (Belmont/MA, 1972), here at pp. 74-75). John Behr notes that “the articulation of the canon, the rule of truth, which we see for the first time in the writings of Irenaeus, was not meant to curtail or prohibit creative, critical thinking. The canon functioned, rather, to make genuine theological reflection possible” (John Behr, ‘Faithfulness and Creativity’, in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West. Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos Ware*, eds. J. Behr et al., [Crestwood/NY, 2003], pp. 159-178, here at 165).

\(^{73}\) For an overview of Stăniloae’s view of Scripture, see TDO 1: 37-47, ET 1: 37-51.

\(^{74}\) TDO 1: 45, ET 1: 47.

\(^{75}\) For example, Andrew Louth mentions the interpretation of Jesus bestowing the Spirit from the Cross in John 19:30, supported by the text, but quite unknown in the Fathers (Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, p. 88).
Indeed, we cannot ignore the critical, contextual study of Scripture, from which there is much to gain. We might take as an example the work of Richard Bauckham,76 C. Kavin Rowe,77 and Larry Hurtado.78 By employing contextual hermeneutics, each of these scholars has demonstrated that the writings of the New Testament express the highest possible Christology,79 albeit by utilizing the Hebrew theological categories of the era, and not a Christology in an embryonic stage on its way to a patristic ontological development.80 The New Testament Scriptures thus both presuppose and call for a certain type of metaphysics for their intelligibility.81 The work of the fourth-century Fathers consequently is not to be seen as a capitulation to Hellenic philosophical categories, but rather an attempt to readapt them to avoid their implications and thereby save the New Testament’s witness of Christ’s divinity.82 Clearly, the contextual, critical study of the New Testament thus both presuppose and call for a certain type of metaphysics for their intelligibility.81 The work of the fourth-century Fathers consequently is not to be seen as a capitulation to Hellenic philosophical categories, but rather an attempt to readapt them to avoid their implications and thereby save the New Testament’s witness of Christ’s divinity.82

79 For example, Rowe writes: “[I]f my reading of κύριος is correct, then the commonly espoused position that Luke has overall a rather ‘low’ Christology … becomes impossible to maintain” (Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, p. 28). Furthermore, “to understand the implications of Luke’s use of κύριος for the construal of Jesus’ identity is to join hands with Paul and John … he shares with Paul and John a remarkably similar – if not the same – underlying judgment about the identity of Jesus, namely, that as κύριος he is the human presence of the heavenly κύριος of Israel” (Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, p. 29). Hurtado notes that Paul’s use of κύριος for both God and Jesus is something he inherited from Aramaic speaking Christian circles, not Gentile ones. Thus Jesus’ divine status was already established before the very first New Testament writings, not later when it encountered the Gentile world, as Bousset claimed (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 108-118).
80 For example, Bauckham states that the “Fathers did not develop it [a high Christology] so much as transpose it into a conceptual framework” (Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p. viii). Elsewhere, he states: “the New Testament’s lack of concern with the divine nature of Christ is by no means an indication of a merely functional Christology” (Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p. 42).
81 For example, Rowe writes: “[I]n no way does ‘scriptural intuition’ and the like preclude metaphysical developments – indeed, the narrative logic may well press for their necessity” (Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, p. 21, n. 74).
82 For example, Bauckham calls for a “fresh evaluation of the continuity between the New Testament and the patristic development of dogma, in particular the achievement of
Testament is an invaluable resource to understand the exegetical efforts of the Fathers and their theology of the Holy Trinity.\textsuperscript{83} It can once again confirm the constitutive nature of Scripture for all theology of every era.

**STĂNILOAE’S TRIADOLOGY AS AN EXAMPLE OF CONTEXTUAL METHODOLOGY**

Let us now examine the methodology\textsuperscript{84} of Stăniloae’s Triadology. Though rich with patristic citations and commentary, his writings also include his own meditations on the Trinity which draw from human experience, such as the love of the Father for the Son.\textsuperscript{85} Stăniloae is well known for these Trinitarian reflections and has even been called “the theologian, *par excellence*, of the Holy Trinity”\textsuperscript{86}.

Stăniloae develops his Triadology\textsuperscript{87} not only from the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers, but also from Dionysius, St. Maximus the Confessor, and St. John Damascene. He fully incorporates the later Byzantine Pneumatology of Joseph Bryennios, Gregory II of Cyprus, and St. Gregory Palamas.

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\textsuperscript{83} Florovsky writes: “The Church is equally committed to the kerygma of the Apostles and to the dogmata of the Fathers. Both belong together inseparably. … only by being ‘Patristic’ is the Church continuously ‘Apostolic’” (Florovsky, ‘Patristic Theology’, p. 16).

\textsuperscript{84} For a brief analysis of his methodology in Christology as compared to Bulgakov, see Berger, ‘A Contemporary Synthesis’, pp. 423-426.

\textsuperscript{85} See, for example, the beautiful reflections, ‘The Love of a Son’, in chapter 4 of Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost iubirea* (Bucharest, 1993).

\textsuperscript{86} Patriarch Teoctist of Romania, Preface to Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost iubirea* (Bucharest, 1993). However, to my knowledge, there has been no critical study of his Triadology to date.

Additionally he gathers insights from medieval and contemporary theologians, and even personalist philosophers.\footnote{Spread throughout his works, these include M. Buber, L. Lavelle, L. Binswanger, G. Marcel, M. Zundel, and B. Vyschevslavzev.}

How then are these diverse sources synthesized in Stăniloae’s Triadology? If we scrutinize his methodology, we see that Stăniloae often refers to a “framework”, a set of principles, established by what he calls the “delicate balances” and “essential directions” found in patristic Trinitarian thought.\footnote{For example: “Holding in what follows to the framework provided by these two essential patristic directions” (TDO 1: 197, ET 1: 247). Stăniloae explicitly states that he uses the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} Ecumenical Councils as standards to evaluate and assimilate ideas from Lavelle, Bulgakov and others (TDO 1: 126, 135, 138) and “general principles” from Leontius of Byzantium, St Maximus the Confessor and St John Damascene (Stăniloae, \textit{Iisus Hristos}, pp. 108, 110).} He first extracts these principles from the patristic text and then employs them to guide his own reflections and those drawn from contemporary thought.

As an example, let us take his analysis of the begetting of the Son from the Father in the thought of St. Athanasius.\footnote{See discussion in TDO 1: 204-209, ET 1: 256-263.} Athanasius states that, “as the Father is always good by nature, so is he always generative by nature”\footnote{\textit{Contra Arianos} 3:66; PG 26:464B.}. He continues: “[T]o say that ‘the Father’s good pleasure is the Son’, and ‘the Word’s good pleasure is the Father’, implies not a precedent of will, but a genuineness of nature”. St. Athanasius will go on to equate this “will” and “good pleasure” with the Father’s love for the Son.\footnote{St. Athanasius, \textit{loc. cit.}, “Since then the Son is by nature and not by will, is He without the pleasure of the Father and not with the Father’s will? No, verily; but the Son is with the pleasure of the Father, and, as He says Himself, ‘The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things’. Let no one then, with Valentius, introduce a precedent of will ... for it were madness to place will and consideration between them”.}

Scholars have noted the balance and complexity of Athanasius’ exposition.\footnote{\textit{Contra Ar.} 3: 59-66; PG 26:445C-464C. See the brief discussion in Georges Florovsky, ‘Creation and Creaturehood’, in \textit{Creation and Redemption: Collected Works 3} (Belmont/MA, 1976), here at p. 69. More recently, Khaled Anatolios, \textit{Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine} (Grand Rapids/MI, 2011), pp. 152, 153: ‘Athanasius’ account of this relation accommodates a certain synthesis between being and will, substance and action ... to insist that the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit is one of being, and not merely of will. But to insist on unity of being is not to deny unity of
by associating the former with the will of God and the latter with the divine essence. Here however he states that the generation of the Son, being essential, does not occur without the Father’s will. By “will” Athanasius does not mean a single volitional act, but His eternal love for the Son.

Stăniloae recognizes this complexity in his own analysis and abides by it, underscoring the distinction yet inseparability of person and nature in Athanasius’ teaching, and in patristic Triadology in general. He notes that the reciprocity between the Father and Son is evident from Athanasius’ statements, “The Father’s good pleasure is the Son”, and “the Word’s good pleasure is the Father”. It is only at this point that Stăniloae adds his own insight: the Son, like the Father, is totally free and responds freely to the Father’s love with His own love. If he did not do so, His begetting would make Him a passive object, something less than an equal divine Person.

From this we see Stăniloae’s methodology: he does not impose a conception of person or nature on the subtle paradigm of St. Athanasius in which both are interwoven. Rather, Stăniloae is guided by the paradigm, deftly incorporating his insights within it without abrogating it. Here as elsewhere, Stăniloae does not attempt to attribute his reflections to the Fathers.

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94 “The Fathers … do not conceive of the divine essence separately from the person; for them, the goodness of the essence shows itself in the relationship between Persons … in the act of generation there is simultaneously manifested, in a certain personal way, the attribute of goodness belonging to the divine being. From His own position, each Person manifests those attributes common to the being” (TDO 1: 204, ET 1: 257).

95 “The Father therefore establishes the Son in existence from all eternity by his integral self-giving, while the Son continually affirms the Father as Father from all eternity by the fact that He both accepts His own coming into existence through the Father and also gives Himself to the Father as the Son” (TDO 1: 205, ET 1: 257, emphasis mine).


97 “There is a certain honesty, too, in Staniloae’s treatment … for he does not pretend to derive his ideas directly from the Fathers; nor does he pretend to be explicating the content of their thought, as though they had miraculously anticipated such currents of thought as existentialism and had cunningly hidden existentialist theology in the rich ambiguity of Byzantine Greek” (Augustine Casiday, ‘Review of Dumitru Stăniloae: The Experience of God’, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, 2: The World: Creation and Deification’, Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly, 49 [2005], pp. 367-369).
Neither is Stănîloae using the Fathers – whether Athanasius, Cappadocian Triadology or even Neo-Chalcedonian Christology – to develop a theory of personhood. Rather, he is importing a notion of personhood from his own reflections and contemporary thought, which he cites, which is then made to comply with patristic boundaries, not vice-versa. He is able thereby to utilize contemporary insights guided by patristic boundaries to illumine Triadology for his readers. In this way what has been canonized is open to further elaboration with new insights.

Such a methodology has important implications for theology. For example, because he is consciously guided by the “framework” created by the “delicate balances” of Patristic thought, Stănîloae, perhaps uniquely among those attempting a Neo-Patristic synthesis, explicitly refuses to create a disjuncture between person and nature.\(^98\) He disagrees with Lossky, for example, that to be person is to be free from nature.\(^99\) Neither does Stănîloae allow the divine nature to be somehow associated with necessity,\(^100\) an idea absent from patristic thought. As we shall see, this has important implications for understanding human nature and its role in establishing interpersonal communion.\(^101\)

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\(^99\) Stănîloae explicitly disagrees with Lossky’s idea that to be a person is to be free from nature (TDO 1: 277-279, ET 2: 97-100). One finds the idea throughout in Lossky, for example, in Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (New York, 1989), pp. 42, 72, 124-29). Stănîloae notes that Lossky often makes an insufficient distinction between fallen and redeemed nature.

\(^100\) For example: “The fact that we speak of the divine Hypostases as subjects does not mean that we are reducing the divine nature to a nonsubjective reality. The person does not bring the character of subject as something new to divine nature. For the person is nothing other than the mode of real subsistence that belongs to a nature” (TDO 1: 203, ET 1: 256).

\(^101\) “Animated by the spirit, human nature is a nature proper to person and to freedom; it is nature hypostasized. The passions represent the departure of nature from the power belonging to the fully personal state, that is the power of freedom” (TDO 1: 311, ET 2: 152). In other words, since all human beings have free will, freedom is part of human nature.
Whether from contemporary personalist philosophers or his own life experience, Stăniloae’s contemporary insights are thereby utilized in a manner that illumines and does not abrogate the framework established by the delicate balances of Patristic thought. Such a methodology results in his contextual Triadology which reflects both an openness to creativity and a concern for continuity.

**Stăniloae’s View of Trinitarian Unity and Its Reflection in Human Existence**

Stăniloae’s view of the unity of the Divine Persons will serve as our final example because it is this aspect of Trinitarian thought that contemporary theology has sought to ‘contextualize’ more than any other. How Trinitarian unity is understood carries with it countless implications for our understanding of human personhood and society.

Stăniloae does not simplistically attribute unity in the Trinity to either a communion of persons or a unity of essence. Rather, a systematic progression through his work reveals an integration of several patristic directions, all held simultaneously in balance. These are: (i) God is one, because there is one Father, who is the one *arche*.

(ii) God is one, because there is one divine, common ‘super-essence’ which is a simultaneity of divine being possessed wholly by each Person individually and mutually by all together.

(iii) God is one, because the Three Divine Persons are all wholly interior to one another in *perichoresis*.

One model is not to be preferred or emphasized.

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102 For example: “The patristic writers emphasized that in God there exists one principle only… this centre is the Father, therefore a person secures the personal character of all the persons, not that being which is common” (TDO 1: 218, ET 1: 275).

103 For example: TDO 1: 202, ET 1: 254-255: The hypostases of the Holy Trinity are “perfectly one in the other, together possessing the whole of the divine nature with no weakening of the continuity between them. … the divine nature … transcends all spirituality known or imagined by us … The Divine Hypostases are totally transparent one to another … each one bears the entire nature in common with the others. They are thereby wholly interior to one another…”. Compare St. Maximus the Confessor, *Cap. Theol. et Oecon.* 2, c. 1, PG 90:1124D-1125A; ET *Philokalia* v. 2, 137-138.

104 For example: “To each Subject of the Trinity the others are interior and at the same time perfectly transparent as other ‘I’s of His own” (TDO 1: 205, ET 1: 258); “perfect reciprocal interpenetration and transparence – what Saint John of Damascus termed *perichoresis*” (TDO 1: 203, ET 1: 256). Stăniloae’s reflections on *perichoresis* are among his
to the detriment of the others and each model is to be understood with an apophatic qualification. Moreover, the three models are held in conjunction with the relations between the divine Persons as articulated in Byzantine Pneumatology: the Spirit proceeding from the Father, resting in the Son, and shining forth from the Son to the Father.

Because Stăniloae sees our own union with God reflected in each of these models of unity in the Trinity, albeit at an infinitely reduced level, each model has implications for our salvation and deification in Christ. Stăniloae makes this point explicitly. For example, we too enter into unity with the Father specifically as his adopted sons, to whom the Holy Spirit is sent, who rests in us, and returns our petitions back to the Father “with groans too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). Moreover, as we enter into communion with the Divine Persons, so we experience their common being as is possible for us by means of the uncreated energies. Finally, we too will

most profound. Compare Dionysius (Divine Names 2.4, 641AB): “the undivided Trinity holds in a common (κοινόν) unity without distinction its super-essential existence (ἡ ὑπερούσιος ὑπάρξις) … It possesses the mutual abiding and indwelling of its indivisibly supreme Persons (ὑποστάσεων) in an utterly undifferentiated and transcendent unity, and yet without any confusion … wholly interpenetrating one another … and in their unity are kept distinct”.

105 For example: “Unity must not be destroyed for the sake of relation, nor relation abolished in favour of unity. Yet the Trinity transcends the distinction between unity and relation as we understand them” (TDO 1: 205, ET 1: 258). See also, Stăniloae 1970: 74. Compare Gregory Nazianzus, Or. 21.13, PG 35:1096C; Dionysius, Divine Names 13.3, 981A.


107 “Salvation and deification are nothing other than the extension to rational creatures of the relations that exist between the Divine Persons” (TDO 1: 197, ET 1: 248).

108 “The revelation of the Trinity … has no other purpose than … to draw us through the Holy Spirit in to the filial relationship that the Son has with the Father” (TDO 1: 198, ET 1: 249).

109 Stăniloae writes: “God is not afraid to raise man to communion with His own nature, even so far as deification. Because even if man becomes a god, by the very fact that he has a created nature he is only a god by grace, and as such never endangers the sovereignty of the divine nature” (SO 116, ET 148). Compare St. Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua 41.5 (PG 91:1308B): “And finally, in addition to all this, man unites created nature with the Uncreated through love (oh, the wonder of God’s love for mankind!), he shows them to be one and the same by the state of grace, the whole man wholly pervading the whole God, and becoming everything that God is, without however identity in essence”.

110 “We are called to grow in perfect love among ourselves and in perfect love for God through the uncreated divine energies, for these represent God’s unity of being which is
experience a *perichoresis*, which is a mutual interiority, the substitution of our ‘I’ with that of Christ and our neighbour,\(^{111}\) as is already indicated in the New Testament.\(^{112}\)

Stăniloae’s integral view of person and nature and his positive view of nature have further implications for our unity with our fellow human beings. Just as the *perichoresis* of the Holy Trinity presupposes the unity of nature, so human *perichoresis*\(^{113}\) presupposes the re-establishment of the unity of human nature.\(^{114}\) The unity of human nature, however, necessitates asceticism, which removes the sinful inclinations (*gnome*) and egotism that have fragmented it.\(^{115}\) Once removed, human nature becomes “transparent” for interpersonal communion.\(^{116}\) Being consubstantial with us, the incarnate Son of God is a catalyst from within human nature itself for the reestablishment of its unity in many hypostases.\(^{117}\)

According to Stăniloae therefore our unity with God and with each other is personal and essential simultaneously,\(^{118}\) as it is in the Trinity. Also as in the Trinity, we never lose our personal identity or uniqueness in this union.\(^{119}\)
Person is always the goal of communion, and nature with its faculties and energies is always the means by which it is realized. The person, or hypostasis, “cannot be understood emptied of nature or separated from communion”.

Therefore without an ascetical healing of nature there can be no true interpersonal communion amongst human beings.

By first extracting the principles of patristic Triadology in its own context, Stăniloae can then use these principles to adjudicate and incorporate the insights from our context (contemporary thought and his own life experience) into his theology. His own insights serve not only to bring patristic Trinitarian doctrine to life but also to illumine how humanity itself is conceived as a common nature held by many persons, a view which no doubt carries many ethical and social implications.

CONCLUSION: FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND SYNTHETIC METHODOLOGY

The world of the 21st century is facing unprecedented challenges – from pluralism, secularism, post-modernism, and globalism. New moral, cultural, religious, political, and technological paradigms are being formed at a pace so precipitous that it almost outstrips our ability to assess them critically. However, in this rapidly changing environment the task of Orthodox theology remains the same: to preach and expound the faith in the unchanging God revealed in Jesus Christ, with all its implications for the human person and society. The question of how Orthodox theology can be contextual and address contemporary questions has therefore become acute. Here the issue of methodology and of the foundational principles of Orthodox theology – the criteria by which Orthodox theology completes this task – becomes unavoidable and crucial. In this essay I have suggested three such

human persons can have a full unity without confusion of persons” (TDO 1: 60, ET 1: 70-71).

TDO 1: 279, ET 2: 100.

principles in an effort to characterize Florovsky’s existential category of the patristic mind, but more could be easily added.\textsuperscript{122}

In recent years, the difference of opinion expressed between Florovsky and Bulgakov on the role of the Fathers has become even more polarized. History and eschatology are often placed in opposition to one another. I believe this approach to be incorrect, for if indeed the ‘final things’ were bestowed from the beginning, from Pentecost, then the Spirit himself has guided the Church in every age. Each age of the Church therefore cannot be confined to itself and each reflects a sacred, abiding element in every aspect of her life. Since every age has tasted the \textit{eschaton} in the Spirit, history cannot be merely prosaic and eschatology cannot be overly speculative, lest it be confused with the \textit{Zeitgeist}. Rather, in a synthetic methodology both poles must be held together. As Stăniloae states:

real progress of theology … [is] linked to three conditions: fidelity to the revelation of Christ given in the Holy Scripture and Tradition and lived uninterruptedly in the life of the Church; responsibility for the faithful who are contemporary with the theology as it is being done; openness to the eschatological future … If one or the other of these conditions is not fulfilled, theology arises which is inadequate and to a great extent useless, and at times even damaging to the Church and to the faithful.\textsuperscript{123}

It could be argued that Stăniloae’s version of the neo-patristic synthesis was one of the most successful. It includes, for example, a positive assessment of human reason grounded in St. Maximus’ \textit{Logos-logoi} doctrine, an incorporation of the Latin Fathers and even Western medieval thought, and a well-articulated description of the role of experience wholly shaped by the ascetic writings, such as those of the \textit{Philokalia}. These aspects serve to give his

\textsuperscript{122} For example, Florovsky himself mentioned the spiritual formation that arises from the Church’s liturgical life (Paul Gavrilyuk, ‘Florovsky’s Neopatristic Synthesis and the Future Ways of Orthodox Theology’, in George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., Orthodox Constructions of the West [Fordham/NY, 2013], pp. 102-124, at p. 119 n. 56).

\textsuperscript{123} TDO 1: 73, ET 1: 88. He continues: “Even more damaging, however, is theology which entirely abandons the revelation in Christ which has been preserved in Holy Scripture and in the Tradition of the Church in order to adapt itself to what it thinks is representative exclusively of the spirit of the age” (TDO 1: 73, ET 1: 89).
synthesis both an ecumenical breadth and a foundation in real life. His theological methodology likewise exemplifies both a respect for the thought of the Fathers in their context and an openness to the pastoral concerns and contemporary thought of our context. Theological creativity is thereby guided by the abiding framework of tradition and not ossified by it, and new insights can illumine the dogmas without abrogating them. His neo-patristic synthesis exemplifies a methodology that consciously seeks to integrate theologia, philokalia and diakonia.

Abstract

The challenge of Orthodox theology is both to assimilate patristic knowledge and to apply it in a vibrant and transformative way to the existential state of the contemporary world. However, the question of which principles are to be applied is still in many ways unanswered in contemporary Orthodox theology. The author seeks to answer this query by resorting to the work of Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) as a paradigm.