

**Assessment of the Influence of Maximus the Confessor's
Mystagogia on 20th Century Romanian Ecclesiology
Case study: Dumitru Stăniloae's *Spirituality and
Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy***

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Abstract:

Stăniloae's Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy represents an elaboration in terms of form and content of Maximus's Mystagogia. Stăniloae comments and interprets Maximus' insights that are fundamental for the Romanian orthodox ecclesiology and ritual actions of the Orthodox Liturgy. Though it contains references and quotations from other authors too, one can easily notice that the backbone of Stăniloae's work is represented by Mystagogia. In a similar way as Maximus, Stăniloae starts his work discussing the visible aspect of the Church in a preliminary section and then passes to discuss the spiritual and mystagogical aspects of the Church with a special focus on the Liturgy.

Keywords: *Mystagogia, Dumitru Stăniloae, Maximus the Confessor, Ecclesiology, Spirituality, communion, cosmos, unite, Church*

To be able to fully appreciate the influence of Maximus the Confessor on contemporary Orthodox theology we cannot overlook the contribution brought to it by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) [For a comprehensive study on the person, the theology and the work of Dumitru Stăniloae, see: Berger 2013a; Miller 2000]. Stăniloae handled for almost fifty years Maximus' writings, translating and publishing all his major works: *Mystagogia, Quaestiones ad Thalassium, Ambigua, Capita de Caritate*. He added large introductions and notes to each one of these texts, some of them being translated later into French and Greek due to his important and meaningful reflections on the text. This work of translating and interpreting had a great influence on Stăniloae's theological work, where Maximus' thinking played an important role: no other Church Father is such

extensively quoted in Stăniloae's works as Maximus is. This fact can be observed from his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy, or Theology and the Church* etc. We can add to these the article *The Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* and the introduction made for the translation in Romanian of the *Mystagogia*. It is the Stăniloae's outstanding work and his affection towards Maximus that place him in the realm of the specialist researchers in Maximus' thinking. Stăniloae's sympathy towards Maximus can be evaluated and understood only in the general context of Stăniloae's theological work. First, Stăniloae was a priest thus his work was dedicated to the very needs of the Church and his efforts were mainly directed against the secular trends of the modern world. Stăniloae used the philokalic writings (including Maximus' works) to fight against the new and ambiguous religious movements promoted by subjective intellectualists. The philokalic writings, especially those of Maximus, offered a genuine Christian mystagogy, based on the way the Fathers understood the contemplation of the soul. Moreover, he stressed that these writings were envisaging a practical teaching of the Orthodox life with an effect on our daily life. Thus, this teaching was vital for the life of the Church and was able to provide a precise Orthodox material for the mission and the Christian life (Berger 2013b: 391-392). Because Maximus' *Mystagogia* had the same role at the time, I will analyse it in comparison with Stăniloae's *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* to assess Maximus' influence on the 20th century Romanian ecclesiology.

Stăniloae's view on Maximus's ecclesiology

The first point of my argument consists in analysing the references made by Stăniloae to the Maximus's ecclesiological ideas when he translated *Mystagogia* (Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, trans. by Stăniloae 2000: 3). The reason for this approach is that, as Louth argues as well, „of all the Fathers, St Maximus is perhaps the one from whom Fr Dumitru draws his deepest inspiration” (Louth 1997: 258). Analysing how Stăniloae himself regarded Maximus' *Mystagogia* we will be able to make the first step in assessing the influence it had on the 20th century Romanian ecclesiology.

In the preface of *Mystagogia*, Stăniloae acknowledges von Balthasar's study that was coming against the depreciatory trend of Maximus, one very strong in the twentieth century, and displays the importance of the Patristic thinking. Stăniloae realised that Maximus had an important psychology, a patristic mystagogy and a theological base for the integration of the transcendental and common aspects of the world and the Church and acknowledged their preservation in Orthodoxy and in the spirituality of Romanian culture (Berger 2013b: 393). These facts are significant because only in the context of Stăniloae's intention to create a vivid theology and a spiritual life in Church we can apprehend Maximus' influence on Stăniloae's work. Maximus's discovery represented Stăniloae's peak in the middle of a struggle with a culture, and later with an unchristian government. Stăniloae felt the need to define the true nature of the Romanian Church under the Communist regime. Maximus was showing for Christians the way and the goal and was describing the Church and the world in a broad Christocentric perspective. Stăniloae saw in the maximian thinking a coherent Christological vision of the Church and of the world, expressed very precisely and one that could offer a frame for the evaluation of other theological perspectives. In his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* Stăniloae says that the Church is the unity of all that has existence and it is destined to encompass all that has existence: God and creation. Stăniloae will later state that a primordial Church existed in heaven, the cosmology receiving thus an ecclesiological touch that it is not contrary, but which offers a fresh value to Maximus's Christological cosmology (Toma 2006: 3).

Stăniloae draws the reader's attention to the ecclesiastical character of the cosmos expressed in the Romanian Orthodoxy. He makes a connection between Maximus and Denys Areopagite, acknowledging a shared similarity of thinking between them but, in the same time, acknowledging Maximus' own originality. This originality consists in Maximus's idea of the presence of the whole in its constituent parts and of the new nature received by the organic whole unlike the mere sum of its constituent parts. We find at Maximus the seed of the spirit of communion of the true Church, preserved by Orthodoxy, a spirit called to offer to the future times crucial solutions for the social problems. As Berger states, Stăniloae, „following the Cappadocians, sees *common nature* as

foundational for interpersonal communion (both in the Trinity and human life), and following the Christology of St. Maximus, sees freedom as a part of *nature*” (Berger 2013a: 398).

For Stăniloae, the best way of dealing with the ecclesiological thinking of Maximus is through the analysis of a paragraph or more. Such a comment, argues Louth, consists of a rethinking of Maximus’ thoughts, „one that is inevitably, if it is to be rethinking, not repetition but an engagement with contemporary concerns” (Louth 1997: 258). As we will see, in these commentaries and explications, Maximus’ ecclesiological thinking is not being reduced to a system, „whether imposed on him or deduced from him”, but it is seen as a source of insights of our encounter with God in the Church and in the world; „fostered by the Church and the life of prayer: the commentaries are to help the reader benefit from these insights” (Louth 1997: 259).

The second thing to which Stăniloae draws the reader’s attention is the relation between psychology and mystagogy. Being a theologian of contemporary thought, he argues that in Maximus’s *Mystagogia* we can find a teaching about human psychology and mystagogy that corresponds with the contemporary views about the human person. He offers two examples: the teaching about the future of fullness that belongs to each feeling of the soul (*Ganzheitstruktur*) and the one about transcendental and communal meaning of the spiritual life. Stăniloae engages in finding an alternative to the social reality of the twentieth century, one ripped apart by a worldwide conflict that was going to affect billions of people and caught now by a new and ruthless regime developed behind an „iron curtain” (Ică jr. 2012: 177-245). Stăniloae was going to experience this regime in 1950s Romania, when he was going to be incarcerated. This holistic vision and the search for a cosmology, psychology, and anthropology of the twentieth century represented his spiritual goal. Thus, Stăniloae’s contribution informed by Maximus’ *Mystagogia* not only deserves a place within the vast amount of work done in ecclesiology over the last century and a half, but as will be seen below, his contribution remains relevant for the Orthodox ecclesiology of today (Berger 2007: 24).

What Stăniloae did not do was to analyse and interpret Maximus’s ideas concerning the Church and Liturgy, stating that he limits himself only to translate because such an analysis cannot be done outside the whole

theological and mystical system of Maximus. Now, though he left the analysis of Maximus's teaching about the Church and Liturgy for another study, which he never wrote, I suggest not to postpone the analyse of Maximus' influence on the Stăniloae's teaching about ecclesiology just because Stăniloae postponed the one on Maximus.

Formal analysis of Mystagogia and Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy

The formal difference between Stăniloae and Maximus' works is a quantitative one. While Maximus devotes the first seven chapters of his work to the doctrine of the Church and sixteen to the teaching on the Liturgy, Stăniloae devotes only a 170 pages preliminary section to the teaching on the Church and the rest of 500 pages to the teaching on the Orthodox Liturgy. However, we can see maintained the same relation between the first part and the second part of the work in both authors: the first part smaller than the second.

Considered to be an introduction for the second part, Stăniloae's preliminary part consists in a commentary on the arrangements of the Orthodox architecture, which depicts the church building as an image of the cosmos and of the human being, all having Christ as the High Priest. In Stăniloae's view, the place of the saving work of Christ has a central location in the cosmos represented by the Church and the spiritual life of the believer from baptism to burial. Then, the book is divided into matching sections of moments of the Liturgy. Throughout his work, one sees Stăniloae's integration of Byzantine Pneumatology in the liturgical ecclesiology, in which the Spirit proceeds from the Father, rests in the Son and shines forth from the Son to the Father (Berger 2013a: 397). The book contains notable comments both on the larger parts of the Liturgy (i.e. the Liturgy of the Catechumens and of the believers) and details of the rites like the reading of Bible, the Small and the Great Entrance, the Kiss of Peace, the Epiclesis, and the Holy Communion but also detailed interpretations of the Anamnesis.

Another similarity that can be noticed is the one between the purposes that both authors had in mind when they wrote their works. The purpose of both authors is to show that the unceasing prayer of the believer presupposes a preliminary warming of his soul through praying with the

others. The true spirituality is the living spirituality that engages the whole human being and is sustained through prayer and by manifesting the identity of belief among the others (Stăniloae 2004: 7).

The ecclesiological influence that Mystagogia had on Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy

In this section I will analyse several themes that Maximus discussed in his *Mystagogia* and which influenced Stăniloae and made him to elaborate them. To show the influence that Maximus had on Stăniloae's ecclesiology I will analyse, and comment four ecclesiological themes raised and encountered in Maximus' *Mystagogia* that have been picked up and developed by Stăniloae in his work *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Church*. These themes are: „Cosmos”, „God and the Church”, „images of the Church”, and „unity”.

„Cosmos”

From the very first paragraph of his book Stăniloae makes a direct reference to Chapters II-IV from *Mystagogia*, where we find Maximus' concept of church building as an image of the created universe and man, both in a process of becoming Churches (*The church, the liturgy and the soul of man: the Mystagogia of St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans. by Stead 1982: 68-72). Stăniloae argues that as the church building keeps united the lay people that stay in the nave and the priests that stay in the sanctuary, also the universe keeps united its visible and invisible parts, and both the church and the universe go towards a greater unity with God and by that becoming more united within themselves (Stăniloae 2004: 21). The church building, the created universe, and the created man are not independent one from the other, but they interfere. The created man and the created universe are not only an image of the Church, but they are to some extent a part of it, in the same way the Church is a part of the created universe and of the created humanity and works within them. All three are in a relation of interpenetration and at the same time are called to become even more interpenetrated. Stăniloae acknowledges that Maximus does not restrain himself from calling the universe not only an imitation of the church building, as an image of it, but even the Church itself (Stăniloae 2004: 23; Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, trans. by Stăniloae 2000: 68). God's creation

is a Church of another image and undeveloped, having the Church inside of it working as ferment (*cf.* Ezekiel's vision) and helping it to become actualized in its proper sense. The Church penetrates the creation and the creation accepts to be penetrated by the Church because the Church has the Spirit of the Incarnate Word through which the world had been created. Even if Stăniloae establishes this relation he does not envisage three different Churches, or three Churches one inside of the other, but one whole Church in three aspects. Thus, the eternal foundation of the Church is reflected from God in the human nature creating a human-natural ground of the Church because of the primordial Church that existed in Paradise. In other words, the creation is a preparation of the Church which will have its beginning in the earthly paradise with the first people. 'No wonder – says Stăniloae – that today, the cosmology receives a new ecclesiological touch that does not contradict, but rather gives a new value to the Christological cosmology of St. Maximus' (Stăniloae 1953: 273).

Cosmic liturgy

Another ecclesiological and cosmological element that Stăniloae approached inspired by Maximus is the „cosmic liturgy”. In Stăniloae's terms, Maximus understood this „cosmic liturgy” as a journey towards God and as a closer and closer unity among Christians by walking towards God. The Church „(here, seen primarily as a world-wide community, than as a building) is interpreted as an image of God, since both of them bring about union” (Louth 1996: 75). To this Maximian concept, Stăniloae found a practical application in the daily life of the believer. The work and the self-sacrifice – to one's own being – represent the two parts of the human's vocation (Stăniloae 2004: 32). They form our mutual liturgical ministry in the broad sense of the word, as a journey towards unity with God and among us within the created universe. It becomes obvious that if the work is avoided, the ecclesiological feature of the created universe is not being developed and those avoiding work and self-sacrifice not only they do not fulfil their holy and liturgical ministry, but they multiply in the world the force of evil and the hatred. God, towards Whom the world goes, is the Crucified Christ. In another place, Stăniloae argues that, the permanently presence of the Holy Eucharist on the Holy Table shows the continuous existence of Christ in a state of sacrifice to be partaken by the believers:

not even for a moment Christ will cease to be in a state of sacrifice and to be partaken as sacrifice (Stăniloae 2004: 78). For this reason, human's journey is not an easy but a rather hard one with struggles and pain and in the end - death. The reason is that, „Orthodox asceticism is a fight not against nature, but for it, that it might enable interpersonal communion. Asceticism is not a scorn of the world, but a discovery of the world” (Berger 2013a: 399). If man does not accept the difficulties of this world he will not reach the state of Resurrection (Stăniloae give two examples for following: Job and the crucified thief that assumed his wrong doings). If man rebels against his hard times he loses their meaning and blames God for being unfair or blames the nature for his difficulties (Stăniloae 2004: 34). Stăniloae observes that, Maximus' eschatology has a clear character, the end representing a full revelation of the Trinity, praised by the entire creation, men and angels united in a catholic human - angelic assembly (Barna 2010: 101). Thus, the union of the human beings in the very church building has as goal to help through the liturgy celebrated inside of it, in the strict sense of the word, to the fulfilling of this liturgy in the broader sense, in the universal „nave”.

The man as priest

Stăniloae sees man, or the whole human community, as a priest of this cosmic liturgy. Man fulfils best his priestly office of the created universe in the extent in which it reveals the invisible reasons [*Rațiunile* (literally, *reasons*) as *logoi* (for Maximus) is a technical term in Stăniloae's thought, borrowed mainly from Maximus] (*cf.* Berger 2004: 142] of the things and makes them be efficient from their true nature, the visible creation (Stăniloae 2004: 25). Once man attains this knowledge he observes the angels doing the same thing - highlighting these reasons and fulfilling their role of mean of communication with God (Stăniloae 2004: 26). In this way, the angels reveal God to humanity in the created universe and make more efficient the serving of God by man in this creation. The lay people are imprinted with the priestly state and not vice versa by leading the former by the latter towards the unity with God and among them (Stăniloae 2004: 27). This represents one of the deepest meanings of the universal priesthood of the lay people found in Stăniloae's ecclesiology. It is a „«universal sacramental community» in which each member is dependent on the others,

and on the entire Church, in all the Church's work" (Berger 2007: 36, n. 45). Stăniloae likens the Church's dependence on Christ and the Spirit to a relationship between human persons, which, even when stable, yet needs constant renewal through interaction (Stăniloae 1966: 535). He describes the Church's prayer as „a synergy with the Spirit” and for this reason, every prayer, of the Church and of her members, „constitutes in a broad sense an epiclesis” (Berger 2007: 52). The universal priesthood of the lay people helps the sacramental priesthood to be manifested and the sacramental priesthood has the duty not to distance itself from the lay people but to bring them closer by helping them to advance, towards the unity in God.

„God and the Church”

Stăniloae was a faithful disciple of Maximus in terms of his teaching on ecclesiology not only by developing his teaching but also by criticising and completing it. Where Stăniloae did not follow Maximus was in terms of the relation between God and the Church. Stăniloae critiques Maximus for not including God in his definition of the Church as a dwelling place of the liturgical community of believers and as an image of the created universe and of the human being (Stăniloae 2004: 24). Maximus sees God, being uncreated, above the Church and he acknowledges God's relation to the Church implicitly when he sees God linked with the creation in a similar way to the one in which the Church is linked with creation. What Stăniloae does is to include in the definition of the Church, in all its three aspects shown above, the presence of God. He says that God is so closely connected with the created universe that without Him, the Church would not exist anymore in its three aspects (Stăniloae 2004: 25). Or „the true Church is Christological and Pneumatological, institutional and spontaneous at the same time, or it is rather Christological because it is Pneumatological, and vice-versa” (Stăniloae 1980: 40). In the church building of the liturgical community God is staying in its most important place - the Holy Table; in the created universe He is One from Whom all take their existence; and in the human being as unlimited foundation and vision able to encounter in the heart. From this one notice another difference between them: if Maximus placed the Trinity in the end of his work, Stăniloae builds his work on the teaching of Trinity.

„Images of the Church”

Altar and nave

Another ecclesiological idea borrowed by Stăniloae from Maximus is how the two parts of the church building represent an image of the entire visible and invisible universe (Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, trans. by Stăniloae 2000: 68). In Stăniloae's terms, Maximus sees the lay people represented by the nave and the priests by the altar not as being fixed in this state but the lay people as potential priesthood and the priests as those from the lay people that actualised their potential priestly calling. Even if they influence one another, they do not become a confounded unity. Because Maximus saw the human beings as potential priests, Stăniloae distinguished in the visible creation as nave a special category of human subjects, as future priests, which serve God and open the world for a more effective work of God in it. He sees here „a «symbolic realism» specific to the Orthodoxy and considers that the Patristic theology fully elaborated the teaching it articulated as *the theology of the uncreated energies*” (Herea 2013: 57).

Now, Stăniloae acknowledges that the one that explained in the deepest way the architectural meaning of the church building (with a direct reference to Aghia Sophia) is Maximus: on the one hand, the church building is like an universe partially united with God, and on the other, it is like an universe that goes towards a perfect union in Christ and under His leadership (Stăniloae 2004: 71-72). Christ fulfils through Church the same work that He fulfils as Pantocrator in the world. Christ takes care of the world, starting from a few people with the goal of spreading His fulfilling work upon all creation.

Church as a reflection of man

Then, Maximus' teaching about „[t]he Church of God as a reflection of man, itself symbolized by man” (Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, trans. by Stăniloae 2000: 71), is being put together by Stăniloae with the priestly character of the people. Stăniloae says that „the believer must develop also in his own being his ecclesiological feature that has God in centre and his attribute of priest that serves God placed on the altar of his heart” (Stăniloae 2004: 34). The human heart becomes a Holy Table on which God starts to be present from Baptism, the same God that is present in the hearts of the

other and the same God that is present on the Holy Tables of the Church. The hearts filled with God meet with other hearts that have in them as hearts that open themselves towards the same infinity without confounding among them and with Him, the same infinity that is the all-powerful foundation of the creation. But, Stăniloae's greatest contribution is taking from Maximus the idea of human person as a microcosmos and articulating the idea of human person as macrocosmos; a term which Maximus did not use but engaged in *Mystagoga* with the main idea that lies behind it (Louth 1997: 260).

„Unity”

From the ecclesiological ideas that we have analysed until now we see that Stăniloae focusses on the unity of all in God as much Maximus did. Stăniloae not only did much to create such a synthesis within a highly developed *Triadology*, but also fashioned his ecclesiology on it (Berger 2007: 28).

The unification of all for which the Church prays is not an articulation of individuals one in the others based on their natural instincts, but an extension of the Trinitarian unity, that takes form as a liturgical body: „the holy Church is an image of God; it works the same unity in the faithful as God” (Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, trans. by Stăniloae 2000: 68). Here we notice a strong aspect of Stăniloae's theology: the Trinitarian dimension. However, we should note that „Stăniloae is careful not to depersonalize any Person of the Holy Trinity in his synthesis” (Berger 2013a: 401). Christ incarnated to reveal the spiritual ministry of the body; how all came to light for a life in unity, through the Trinitarian unity; and how through the Trinitarian unity all grow and are transfigured (Stăniloae 2004: 234). The mystery of unity lived and understood as Church is the Kingdom of God, of Son, and of Holy Spirit. In Stăniloae, the unity in the Trinity is based both on the common divine „super-essence” and on the mutual indwelling of Hypostases (Berger 2007: 34). Again, to this unity this time, Stăniloae finds proper to link another practical aspect from the daily life of the believer in Church: loving your neighbour following the example of love of the Trinity. He says that the Son became incarnate to reveal us the Father, to reveal us the love between Him and the Father and

Their love towards us which would not have been possible if there was no love among them (Stăniloae 2004: 643).

Conclusion

Maximus's influence in Stăniloae's work dominates the discussion on ecclesiology. In the present Orthodox theology Stăniloae's affection for Maximus and his later influence on Stăniloae's thinking are probably singular. Not only as content but also as methodology we can say that Stăniloae is a genuine modern disciple of Maximus. The result was a rich theological synthesis, both traditional and contemporaneous. This study represented only a small amount of what can be said about the influence that Maximus had on Stăniloae which would be possible by unpacking these ideas in a more elaborate study also considering other questions raised by Maximus and elaborated by Stăniloae.

Because one way of explaining and commenting on the teaching about ecclesiology of both scholars have been to use images, I will make use of the same mean to resume the findings of this paper. The influence that Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogia* had on the 20th century Romanian scholar Dumitru Stăniloae is a similar one to that of a backbone on a human body. Stăniloae, strongly interested in an authentic and patristic ecclesiology suitable for the contemporary period, developed, completed, adjusted to the Romanian personality, and nevertheless critiqued and added new layers of meaning the essential ecclesiological elements from Maximus' *Mystagogia*.

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