

The Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae

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By

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-4739-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4739-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	38
The First Modern Monograph on Gregory Palamas in the Orthodox World	
Chapter Two.....	59
The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church	
Chapter Three	102
The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: Where is Gregory Palamas?	
Chapter Four.....	126
Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being and God’s Immortal Image	
Chapter Five	146
Studies on Different Aspects of Gregory Palamas’ Theological Contribution	
Final Conclusions	158
Bibliography.....	167
Notes.....	174

INTRODUCTION

Introductory note

The main purpose of this thesis is to present the Neo-Palamite theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. I have chosen an historical approach¹ for the subject, because I want to present not only the main themes of the Neo-Palamite contribution of Father Stăniloae but, as well, the way in which these essential concepts were developed during his entire career and work as an Orthodox theologian.

The thesis will be divided into five chapters which will be preceded by an introduction. The introductory part will be divided into three significant sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter will include the most important chronological details concerning the life and work of Father Dumitru Stăniloae and detailed explanations about why I have chosen to assess in a critical manner this particular part of his Neo-Patristic Synthesis. The second sub-chapter will include a presentation of the way in which Father Stăniloae viewed himself as a Patristic scholar² and why he considered that Gregory Palamas³ was one of the significant Church Fathers underestimated by the Patristic scholarship of Western Europe.⁴ The third part of the introduction will provide a documented literature review about Father Stăniloae as a representative example of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis with a special focus on the way in which modern scholars have assessed the influence of St. Gregory Palamas on his entire theological contribution.

The first chapter of the thesis will provide an analysis of the first major contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae in the field of Neo-Palamism.⁵ One must add here the fact that *Neo-Palamism* represents solely the presentation and interpretation of Palamism in the modern period and its contribution in general for the *Neo-Patristic* current and not a rejection of Palamism. I will analyse in detail in this chapter the influence of his principal book on Gregory Palamas⁶ and also the manner in which Stăniloae has offered a model of Neo-Patristic Synthesis through this important contribution. I will also concentrate here on the common aspects and significant differences that exist between his approach on Gregory Palamas and the ones that have been provided by important Orthodox scholars such as Basil Krivocheine⁷, John Meyendorff⁸ or Anglican scholars

such as A. N. Williams.⁹ This chapter will also be focused significantly on the historical contribution of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

The second chapter will comprise an analysis of Stăniloae's work entitled *Orthodox Spirituality: a Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*.¹⁰ The final part of this work, concerned with deification, has been highly influenced by the writings of St. Gregory Palamas and I will analyze in detail how Father Stăniloae has developed the Palamite 'insights' into a creative and important approach on this particular subject. This chapter will focus, therefore, on the ascetical and mystical themes of Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

The third chapter will analyse the main Palamite themes that have been presented and developed in an extreme interesting manner by Father Stăniloae in his significant *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*.¹¹ In the three volumes of this magnificent work that plays an important role in the general Orthodox Neo-Patristic approach nowadays, the essential concepts of St. Gregory Palamas have played a significant role. Therefore, this chapter shall be concentrated on the systematic character of Father Stăniloae's Neo-Palamite contribution.

The fourth chapter will present the Palamite influence in two of Stăniloae's most important writings that have not been translated in English until now: *God's Immortal Image* and *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being*.¹² This chapter will be an in-depth analysis of the main characteristics of the liturgical aspect of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

The fifth chapter will present a selection of several important studies dedicated by Father Stăniloae to different historical aspects of the life and writings of St. Gregory Palamas.¹³ The studies will be presented into a chronological order so that the progress of Father Stăniloae's theological contribution in this area can be observed. The last part of the thesis will comprise the conclusions of the research.

Thus, the thesis aims to identify, present and analyse critically the Neo-Palamite contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae from four different points: historical, systematic, ascetical and mystical and, nonetheless, liturgical.

Methodology

It is clear that the research one has to develop on a subject as profound as the interpretation given by an Orthodox scholar to Church Fathers cannot be an easy task. This is why I chose to give some details about the

methodology employed in my research. Thus, I will describe my ontological, epistemological and methodological approach to the subject.

Jonathan Grix argued that:

„Examples of ontological positions are those contained within the umbrella terms “objectivism” and “constructivism”. Broadly speaking, the former is an ontological position that asserts the social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. The latter on the other hand, is an alternative ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision.”¹⁴

However, I consider that both these positions are up to some point inadequate for my research. Fr. Stăniloae has interpreted Gregory Palamas inside a certain Christian Tradition, namely the Orthodox one. I believe that my research stands, thus, in discovering what Fr. Stăniloae was able to give further to our theological knowledge about Gregory Palamas and how these results contribute universally to this particular subject. However, I also keep in mind that he acted inside a certain Tradition and presented thus particular features that influenced strongly his approach in this direction.

My epistemological position, however, is clearly an anti-foundational one. I develop a qualitative research and, thus, employ the methods which rely on this type of research in order to achieve my purpose. I use mainly documentary analysis and hermeneutics. I rely mainly on the books and studies of Fr. Stăniloae, but also on the most important books and studies written up to this moment on Gregory Palamas and his theological contribution. I will finish this section with a quote which summarizes very well my ontological, epistemological and methodological position:

“Knowing other’s “worlds” is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them (...). Without knowing the other’s world, one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other’s presence because the other is only dimly present to one. Through travelling to the other’s “worlds” we discover that there are “worlds” in which those who are victims of arrogant perceptions are really subjects, lively beings, resistors, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant, perceive and are pliable, foldable, file-available, and classifiable.”¹⁵

The Life and Theological Contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae¹⁶

Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae was born in Vlădeni, a village near Brasov, in the province of Transylvania on the 16th of November 1903. Though he was born in a family of peasants, he had the opportunity of studying in many important universities.¹⁷ His mother, Reveca, always believed that her son has the capacity of studying at a high level¹⁸ and convinced his father, Irimia, to help Dumitru in this direction. Dumitru was the fifth child of the family and the money were not enough to support his studies. However, between 1917 and 1922, when he pursued the courses of the college Andrei Țaguna in Brașov, he obtained an important scholarship that helped him to finish his studies. Afterwards, between 1922 and 1927, he was awarded another scholarship by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan to pursue his studies in theology at the University of Cernăuți. Between 1927 and 1929, Stăniloae had the opportunity to study abroad and he went to Athens, Munich and Belgrade. In 1928, he took his doctoral degree with a thesis on Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem at Cernăuți. In 1929 he was appointed professor at the Theological Institute in Sibiu and he got married to Maria Miha. He became rector at the Theological Institute of Sibiu in 1936 and remained in this position until 1946 when he was dismissed due to the pressure of the communist regime. In 1947 he was appointed professor of systematic theology at the Theological Institute of Bucharest. Stăniloae was imprisoned for six years between 1958 and 1964 because of his religious beliefs. He continued to serve as a professor at the same Institute from 1964 until 1973. In that year he had to retire against his will. Stăniloae remained a consultant professor for doctoral theses until 1993. He died on the 5th of October 1993.¹⁹

Though Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae had to live under the communist regime for more than forty years, this did not impede his theological creativity. Before the communist regime he published, in almost sixteen years, between 1930 and 1946, five books²⁰ and five translations (mainly writings of Church Fathers such as Maximus, Evagrius or John Cassian).²¹ During the communist regime, he concentrated more on publishing studies until 1973. From 1973 and until his death, Fr. Stăniloae published his most important books and translations, taking, thus, to perfection his research activity.²² During this period of time, he was invited to important conferences in Western Europe²³ and recognized as one of the most outstanding theologians of the twentieth century.²⁴ Nowadays, several of his books and studies have been translated in other languages, but still,

many of them remain unknown to important researchers in the field of systematic and liturgical theology.²⁵

The communist regime persecuted the intellectual elite of Romania between 1946 and 1960. Many intellectuals were put in prison and most of them died there, while others left the country and sought asylum in Western Europe. Fr. Stăniloae did not want to take his family and leave. He was courageous, but this did not protect him from being arrested, judged in a few weeks and put in prison for more than five years, under the charge of being subversive to the regime.²⁶ The only charge against him lay in the fact that he attended for some time the meetings of an important intellectual group entitled “The Burning Bush”²⁷ which was concerned with religious beliefs. Of course, this was not an isolated case. There have been reported situations in which people were condemned just for listening to radio programmes that were forbidden by the regime. However, Fr. Stăniloae was released after five years of imprisonment, a period of time in which his entire family was put under close surveillance by the police. The main problem that appeared after his release was the fact that he needed books and studies for his core research on Church Fathers and it was almost impossible to gain access to important theological books written in Western Europe.²⁸ However, at the beginning of the 1970s, observing that Fr. Stăniloae was beginning to be appreciated in Western Europe, the regime permitted him to attend important theological conferences but, at the same time, obliged him to resign from his post at the University of Bucharest. Of course, this was a strange way of acting, but the regime wanted to be perceived as a permissive one in Western Europe. It allowed him to go to important conferences, but would not give him even a place in a small parish as a priest. Fr. Stăniloae had to serve as a priest only in parishes where he was known by the other priests. It was a very hard time for him. His daughter, Lidia Stăniloae-Ionescu, argues that even the Romanian Patriarch, Justinian Marina, was unable to give him a parish. After Fr. Stăniloae was released from prison in 1964, he went to see Patriarch Justinian Marina (he has been Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church between 1948 and 1977):

“Two days later he went to see the Patriarch. At last he received him, after so many years, and told him that he would be unable to take him back at the cathedral. “Perhaps we can find something for you at the archdiocese”, he told him. Father was extremely bitter and told me: “How can I live off your earnings? He has to give me something!” I told him that he should not create problems for himself. With my salary as a professor we would be able to get by; what was all this when compared to the happiness of being together again?”²⁹

Modern researchers know very much about the theological contribution of Fr. Stăniloae, but very few things about how he was able to achieve it. He was never given the necessary conditions for pursuing research. Most of his last years were spent in a house where hot water was considered a luxury. He had to live and work in two small rooms together with his wife, his daughter and his nephew. Many people came to him for financial help or advice, but, at least according to his daughter, very few were really his friends.³⁰ He was never truly appreciated in his own country and even his theological contribution was not taken into consideration until after his death. Lidia Stăniloae mentions a strange episode that happened during the 1980s. Fr. Stăniloae was asked in that period of time why he wrote so much. If it had come from the communist regime, the question would have seemed normal, but it was addressed by the director of the Patriarchal Publishing House.³¹ For a priest and a theologian in his eighties, with a vast experience, these questions were really painful. In these moments he used to return to his small desk and read or write something.

“The little room did not have electrical light and he had to keep a small desk lamp lit. (...) Anyway, entering his own thoughts again was for him the best cure against daily problems. He was hiding in a domain that belonged to him, where nobody was acting badly against him, where nobody was envying him and where the ideas were his beloved friends. He wrote them down on paper and the ideas rewarded him with the satisfaction of offering people a new life perspective.”³²

However, despite of all the hard conditions that he had to get accustomed to, Fr. Stăniloae left a magnificent theological contribution. Nonetheless, an important part of this contribution is represented by his Neo-Palamite Synthesis.

Why Gregory Palamas?

Stăniloae considered always that Gregory Palamas is an important figure of the history of the Church. Unlike most Western theologians³³, who considered that Palamas was more or less just a heretic³⁴, Stăniloae saw in his work an important synthesis of the Tradition of the Church with a fundamental focus on the distinction between the essence of God and His energies. However, what Stăniloae noticed from the beginning of his research³⁵ was that even the Orthodox scholars were not defending the fruitful results of the Palamite Synthesis. Some of them³⁶ were even supporting the opinions of Catholic scholars such as M. Jugie who were highly critical towards Palamas. Thus, Stăniloae began by being polemical

against what he considered to be “a Roman-Catholic view” on Palamas that was shared up to a great extent by the Orthodox scholars. This is why when he published the first monograph dedicated to Gregory Palamas³⁷, he was aware of the fact that he was doing something extremely important, although he did not know that writing it in Romanian would not make him known in Western Europe.

One might say that, after discovering the works of Maximus the Confessor, Stăniloae got so overwhelmed by them that the role of the other Fathers was reduced drastically. I totally disagree with this opinion. It is true that the concepts and ideas of Maximus the Confessor embellish all of Stăniloae’s works after 1947, but this does not mean that Stăniloae leaves aside important names such as Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa and, especially, Gregory Palamas. Gregory Palamas continued to play an important role in Stăniloae’s theological contribution. I rank him second after Maximus the Confessor in what concerns the influence on Stăniloae’s work. The third important figure that very few scholars seem to remember is Cyril of Alexandria. The fact that Stăniloae was influenced by Maximus the Confessor is attested by all the researchers, but very few seem to acknowledge the influence of Palamas. Furthermore, there were even fewer researchers that were capable of identifying also the main areas where Stăniloae developed with substantial results the Palamite legacy.³⁸ This is why I consider that it is time to bring forth the features and the effect of the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Fr. Stăniloae. Although I am aware that this is a very difficult task, I believe that I will be able at least to open this subject so that it could be researched in detail later by other scholars.

I will now analyse the way in which Stăniloae saw himself as a person that has used the Church Fathers in order to provide a background for his theological contribution. The autobiographical fragments that will be used demonstrate that he viewed himself not only as a systematic theologian as it is the general opinion among the researchers of his work, but also as a Patristic scholar.

Fr. Stăniloae as a Patristic Scholar

I believe that it is important to present the way in which Father Stăniloae considered himself to be a Patristic scholar for two important reasons. The first one is that even if modern theologians who have analysed his work take into consideration his Patristic research they still believe that he should be viewed as a systematic theologian and not as a Patristic scholar.³⁹ The second reason is that Stăniloae viewed himself

solely as a humble spiritual disciple of the Fathers.⁴⁰ He was eager in developing their concepts through massive commentaries when he translated their works and he proposed many important Neo-Patristic projects so that the long cherished heritage of the Church Fathers could still be applied in the practical life of the Church.⁴¹ What is more important is that he *lived* by respecting the advice of the Church Fathers, ready to become not solely a good Christian in the moral sense of the word but a truly transfigured man.

Did Fr. Stăniloae consider himself to be a primarily Patristic scholar? What we have is mainly indirect testimonies. We have to take into account not only his writings, but also the testimony of the people he knew. I will begin by quoting a passage from his biography written by his daughter Lidia Stăniloae Ionescu:

“He enjoyed his work and spoke ceaselessly about the texts of the Holy Fathers (...). The [translation] of the Philokalia changed him. His life got a new dimension of existence, unknown before. This did not influence solely his thinking but also his daily life. In 1930, he translated the Dogmatic of Andrusos. Now he used to say: “I have to write a new Dogmatic and another book on Jesus Christ, on the grounds of the theology of the Holy Fathers. The Christological elements of the Philokalia have such a rich spirituality that no theological book has ever had before.”⁴²

Thus, the first thing that captures our attention is the fact that he *lived* was he was doing. Fr. Stăniloae was one of the few Patristic scholars that were not simply able to translate, present and assess the essential ideas of the Church Fathers, but also capable of conforming to their advice in a practical way as well. He knew that his mission was, from the moment in which he started to translate the *Philokalia*, not only to present accurately the concepts of the Fathers, but also to live a spiritual life.

However, his short introduction to the first edition of his monumental systematic treatise *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*⁴³ is rather programmatic and specifies in a very clear manner the way in which he views his own importance as a Patristic as well as a Systematic scholar. I will quote this in full length because, unfortunately, it does not appear in the English translation of the book:

“We have tried, in this Synthesis, as well as in our previous studies, to discover the spiritual significance of the doctrinal teachings, to underline their truth in its correspondence with the profound needs of the soul which searches for its salvation and progresses in this manner in a more positive communion with its neighbours. Through this communion the soul reaches God as the supreme communion and source of the power of communion. We have, thus, left aside the scholastic method of treating doctrines as

abstract phrases, which have only a theoretical interest that remains in its greatest part obsolete and which have no connection with the profound spiritual life of the soul. If an Orthodox Dogmatic Theology means an interpretation of the doctrines – in the sense of revealing the deep and infinite rich salvation content (...) comprised in their short formulations, - we believe that an authentic Orthodox Dogmatic Theology is the one that keeps on the road described above.”⁴⁴

I strongly consider that this is the main passage which provides the clue towards what Stăniloae thought he was doing when he was writing his most important work, the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. This marvellous piece of Neo-Patristic Synthesis, one of the best, if not the best work of this kind, remains, as its title indicates, a work of systematic theology. However, although the structure of the book and the main subjects that are tackled inside certainly belong to the area of systematic theology, the way in which they are analysed and dealt with remains truly patristic. No subject is presented without an appeal to the writings of the Church Fathers. Stăniloae does not agonize on formulas and different theological “systems”. He prefers a different way of discussing his systematic subjects, namely, the traditional development of these important truths in the writings of the most important Church Fathers. However, before analyzing in more depth these ideas, I want to focus on the passage given above.

Father Stăniloae is concerned here with the fact that the doctrines of the Church have been presented before his “synthesis”⁴⁵ just as simple propositions that have no meaning whatsoever for the modern population and which seem to provide just some interesting theoretical truths that cannot appeal to the inner spiritual life of a Christian. Thus, he considers that the doctrines of the Church need a new presentation, in which their spiritual content has to be underlined more directly, without insisting too much on their “rational” explanation. However, he makes a very important statement at the end of his brief introduction:

“We led ourselves in doing this work by the manner in which the Holy Church Fathers have understood the teaching of the Church, but we also took in consideration when we interpreted the dogmas, of the spiritual needs of the souls that hunger for their salvation in our times (...). We tried to present the teaching of the Church in the spirit of the Fathers, but we also tried to understand it as they would today, because the Fathers would not have left aside the needs of our time, as they have not left aside the needs of their time.”⁴⁶

Thus, our systematic theologian is, in fact, also a humble follower of the Fathers. Not only does Stăniloae try to use the contribution of the

Church Fathers in the most important of his systematic works, but he also seems to consider himself a modern continuator of their legacy. Thus, what Stăniloae offers us through his majestic *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* is, in fact, not only a systematic treatise, but also a Patristic treatise, in fact a proof of Patristic erudition. However, although he claims that the teaching of the Fathers has to be presented in our times, Stăniloae does not forget about the critical view of their works and contribution. We have to be *as* the Fathers, not simply to copy the Fathers, but also to have our own view, dictated in some cases by the different circumstances that exist today. Time goes on. Problems change as well. Thus, we have to be able to discover which are the problems and the new challenges of the present, while we can look in the past in order to find out whether the Church has faced something similar, to reflect on the differences and similarities between the past and the present and then proceed with the solution. Very often, we find out that modern problems are just the same as in the past and the teaching of the Fathers suffices in order to provide a solution. However, this is not always the case. The Fathers were not able to anticipate everything and, thus, we have to break new ground without the direct guidance of the patristic tradition at some point and, with humility, discernment and thoughtful analysis, to try to respond to our modern and unprecedented problems. This stands at the core of the Neo-Patristic Synthesis. This is what Stăniloae tried to underline in the extract quoted above. This is the mission of the Orthodox Patristic scholar nowadays when he is forced more or less to give an answer to some burning issues.

One of the main reasons for which the texts quoted above seem to be more general and abstract and do not point directly towards the person of Father Stăniloae is that he always considered himself to be just a humble follower of the Fathers and not a Patristic scholar in the more obvious or usual meaning of the word. Furthermore, in his time, intellectual life in Romania was greatly impoverished. When Father Stăniloae gave an interview in the last few years of his life and he was asked which theologian he was mostly like, he gave a striking answer:

“I believe that Lossky is the one to whom I feel closest. I began to read Berdyaev first and afterwards Bulgakov, but I realized that Lossky is more rigorous [than them]. However, they all had a very important role. It is a pity that we [the Romanians] never had such men, neither priests, nor laymen from the Diaspora. Almost all of these Russians were laymen. We never had such men.”¹⁷

Of course, these statements have to be seen in a different light and not necessarily understood in their literal meaning. There were important theologians in Romania, even during the communist era. There were important theological schools and there were also some important writings. However, sadly, very few of the respective Romanian theologians who were active during the life of Father Dumitru Stăniloae was able to approach the high intellectual level of the Greek theologians or Russian theologians. Nonetheless, he could not include consider himself to be highly important without appearing arrogant or simply unrealistic.⁴⁸ This explains in part why he never presented himself directly as a Patristic scholar or as a systematic theologian, although he belongs to both kinds, as I have stated above.

In Stăniloae's conception, Patristic research cannot be divorced from the spirituality that the Church Fathers have experienced. A scholar must be able not only to analyze the texts of the Fathers from a historical or philological point of view, but also to use their *spiritual method*. Stăniloae offers the example of the spiritual exegesis of the Bible offered by many of the Church Fathers in contrast with the scientific method that has so many followers in the theological domain nowadays:

*"The Church Fathers have a method: in all the words of the Bible they always searched the spiritual meaning and the work of God. When they explain a word, they see a new meaning, which rises above the meaning that can be discovered by the natural man. They see the purpose of God's action, His intention. (...) Their exegesis is a doxology and almost a prayer."*⁴⁹

If humility is the first quality of a theologian and especially of a Patristic scholar, then the search for the spiritual meanings of the writings of the Fathers and their application nowadays is the second one. A third characteristic is the *liturgical* one. Every exegesis, every interpretation of the Fathers remains somehow a *liturgical celebration*. If prayer and doxology do not emerge from our interpretation, then it is clear that we are far away from the spiritual experience that the Fathers had. Stăniloae argued that:

*"The Fathers had this [spiritual] experience. We must always return to their theology. The Theology of the Church Fathers is a kind of Liturgy in itself, because it represents a meeting with God. In its expression, this theology remains a worship offered to God who has made himself known to us. (...) The experience of God (...) is something we can reach if we follow Christ through a continuous invocation."*⁵⁰

The interpretation of the Fathers is always a liturgical action. It nourishes our prayer and evolves from it. However, Stăniloae was not against using scientific approaches towards the texts of the Fathers. He strongly considered that modern methodological approaches are useful and must be used, but they are merely instruments and not goals in themselves.

One of the few places where Stăniloae speaks boldly against a theological approach that simply repeats the words of Scripture or of the Fathers without taking into consideration modern methodological developments and the new problems, is in the first chapter of the first volume of the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. Here, Stăniloae speaks in general about the mission and the goals of theology. First, he proclaims the fact that, even though dogmas are inviolable truths that cannot be questioned or considered obsolete, the task of theology does not simply stand in repeating them and proclaiming them without offering a good interpretation. The first task of theology relies, thus, in interpreting the doctrinal tradition and consolidating its understanding in the Church. Stăniloae argues that:

“When theological explanations are organic manifestations of doctrines and are useful for renewing ecclesial life – and as such enter into the general and permanent preaching of the Church – they are included in the teaching of the Church in a broad sense. In the case of the Church Fathers, that is what happened with almost the whole of their theology. A basic identity exists on the one hand between dogmas and the teaching of the Church, while, on the other hand, they are formally distinct. Church teaching, as the content of dogmas made explicit, depends on the dogmas. Nevertheless, until the teaching has been officially defined by ecumenical synods and appropriated by the consensus of local synods, it remains as ecclesiastical teaching in this broad sense.”⁵¹

If the task of theology is to interpret correctly the dogmas of the Church, this means that the work of modern theologians continues the one which was began by the Fathers. Stăniloae does not speak about himself in these lines. He was, generally speaking, a very discrete person. However, we can recognise why he chose as a lifetime project the interpretation of dogmas and why he was so closely related to the writings of the Fathers. One is dependent on the other in his conception. We can certainly ask ourselves how was it possible for the majority of Romanian researchers to consider Stăniloae only as a systematic theologian, when he was certainly a Patristic scholar as well.

Stăniloae does not forget to add the fact that a theologian must not be divorced from the liturgical experience of the Church or to lack in personal prayer. “The theologian must take part in this prayer and in the life of the

Church, for theology wishes to know God from the experience of his salvific activity among the people.”⁵² Nonetheless, although Stăniloae underlines deeply the traditional frame in which a theologian must do his own research and develop his insights, we cannot consider himself as a person that lacks any respect for social and scientific progress. Stăniloae argues that the progress of theology consists of three different aspects: fidelity to Tradition, responsibility towards the believers and “openness to the eschatological future.”⁵³ Although one might suspect that Stăniloae is under the spell of traditionalism, when he argues so strongly that a theologian must be faithful to the Tradition of the Church, the following words point exactly in the opposite direction:

“An inadequate theology is one that consists in a literal repetition of the words and the formulae of the past. A damaging theology is one that remains fixed in the formulae of a past system and confuses them with revelation itself. (...) This was a theology⁵⁴ that hindered any spiritual revival and any spiritual progress, a theology void of all dynamic meaning and reflecting a static and exterior order which it continued to think of as perfect. Furthermore, it implied a lack of responsibility shown towards the faithful of its own time, and consequently also towards the faithful of its own time, and also towards theology’s duty to work for religious renewal in its own time. This, in turn, implies also a lack of responsibility shown for the richness of revelation expressed in the Holy Scripture and in Apostolic and Patristic Tradition.”⁵⁵

Thus, a theology that simply repeats all the words of the Fathers or the words of the Church dogmas is, in reality an *inert theology*. All these words apply in fact as well for the research that Stăniloae undertook during his lifetime concerning the writings of the Church Fathers, only in the other way round. He knew that his Romanian Orthodox predecessors did nothing in order to discover and value the writings of the Church Fathers. He was pragmatic, bold, active and ambitious. He did everything that was needed in order to translate accurately many writings of the Fathers.⁵⁶ Furthermore, he knew that the simple translation of the Fathers was not enough in order to awaken an interest in Romanian Orthodox theology. He had to do more than that. So, he adorned everything he translated with commentaries. Father Louth observes that: “the commentary (...) is his preferred way of interpreting the Fathers.”⁵⁷ His commentaries were not necessarily scholarly notes. They sometimes lacked a scientific analysis, but right through this aspect they seemed to be more connected to the spiritual meaning of the writings of the Church Fathers. However, Stăniloae knew also that what the Orthodox Church really needed were not so much translations of the Fathers, even if they

might have been adorned with useful commentaries. The Orthodox Church needed new theological works. Not everything that the Fathers said was directly useful in the modern period. Thus, he focused on the examination of the doctrinal tradition of the Church. He appeared as a systematic theologian, but he rejected the high rationalist aspect that these theologians used to propagate in Romania during his time. This happened because in his own works he brought the useful contribution of the Fathers that seemed to be forgotten and whose works were still used only as means for supporting several philosophical systems that were transformed into "Orthodox" theology. I strongly consider that Stăniloae was, basically speaking, a Patristic scholar that turned his attention towards systematic theology because he considered that this is where the most arduous problems of his time existed.

Although Stăniloae does not speak too much about certain Church Fathers that influenced his thought, we can observe that, in his theological contribution, Palamas played a very important role. There are four main areas where Stăniloae was highly influenced by Gregory Palamas. First of all, he reconsidered his entire interpretation of the history of the Church through the hesychastic controversy. In the second edition of his monograph on Gregory Palamas, Stăniloae argues that "the hesychastic controversy was the most significant event in the history of Orthodox spirituality after the Patristic era."⁵⁸ Furthermore, he observes that "we cannot say anything serious and concrete about Orthodoxy without taking into account the contribution of this profound Eastern theologian."⁵⁹

The second area in which Stăniloae was influenced by Palamas is the aspect of deification that one may encounter analysed profoundly in his work *The Ascetical and Mystical Life of the Orthodox Church*⁶⁰. Here, Stăniloae uses mainly Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Palamas when he speaks about the visual experience of the divine light by the believer that has reached a high spiritual level. Nonetheless, the whole discussion that Stăniloae initiates on apophatic knowledge has a Palamite sound and he criticizes the errors of Vladimir Lossky from what he considers a Palamite perspective.⁶¹

The third area is of course the distinction between the essence and the energies of God that appears everywhere in his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*.⁶² This distinction stands in the centre of Stăniloae's conception regarding knowledge of God and His encounter not only with the human being but also with the created realm in general.

The fourth and final area is represented by the liturgical aspect that embellishes all his works, not just his final works of synthesis entitled *God's Immortal Image* and *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the*

Deifier of the Believer[in Rom.] and which draws material not only from Maximus the Confessor, but also (and especially) from Gregory Palamas.

Now it is time we turn our attention to what other researchers have said until now about the Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae. I will also include here some points of view that, although make no mention of Gregory Palamas, speak in general about the Neo-Patristic synthesis of Fr. Stăniloae. I consider that it is important to see also the larger background of Stăniloae's Neo-Patristic synthesis in order to assess not only the theological results of his Neo-Palamite Synthesis, but also the methodology that he used and the reasons that stood behind his choice of certain themes over others.

Literature Review

There are a number of scholars that have identified and tried to present the Patristic work undertaken by Father Dumitru Stăniloae. However, the Romanian theologians who have tried to realize this objective are very few.

The most significant contribution in this direction appears in the study written by Father Andrew Louth.⁶³ Father Louth discusses in his study only some particular aspects of the treatment of the views of the Church Fathers in the three volumes of Stăniloae's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. First of all, Father Louth considers Stăniloae to be a significant figure of the Neo-Patristic synthesis current.

*"If one looks at the Greek Fathers who are central to Fr. Dumitru – Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril, Denys, Maximus, Symeon and Gregory Palamas – a familiar pattern emerges: for these are the Fathers central to the "Neo-Patristic" synthesis that was so dear to Fr. Georges Florovsky, but was only sketched out in his mainly occasional writings."*⁶⁴

Father Louth goes on and even argues that Stăniloae was not a "marginal theologian"⁶⁵ in the West and that "he is at the centre of what many would regard as the liveliest and most original movement in modern Orthodox thought."⁶⁶ Does this mean, however, that Father Louth avoids the cliché according to which Stăniloae is primarily a systematic theologian? Yes and no. Father Louth is clearly avoiding this general cliché at least from some points of view. First, he is one of the few that acknowledges that the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (I focus on this particular case because it represents the main book on which Father Louth concentrates in his study) *is not a systematic treatise*, or, at least, not in the

classical meaning of this concept. However, Fr. Louth believes that what we have in front of our eyes is a *paradoxical* example.

“From what has been said about the essentially unsystematic nature of patristic theology, it might appear something of a paradox to publish a Neo-Patristic dogmatic theology: this is partly why Fr. Dumitru holds the field alone. It does not seem to me that the completion of the work simply dispels the paradox (as Achilles overtakes the tortoise by simply walking). There is the danger that Fr. Dumitru will be drawn back into the constraints of the “systematic” that he sought to avoid by turning to the Fathers.”⁶⁷

What is really striking in this argument of Fr. Louth is the observation that Stăniloae has written a systematic treatise from a *Patristic perspective*. Stăniloae does not follow the methodology of the systematic theologians that preceded him. He is generally speaking, a Patristic scholar that is preoccupied not solely with translating and commenting on the Fathers, but also with the subjects of systematic theology that need a refurbishment from the Patristic perspective, because these were influenced too much by modern philosophy or theological insights that are not necessarily Orthodox either in structure or in exposition. This is clear from the fact that, although Stăniloae relied not only on the works of the Church Fathers in order to accomplish his magnificent “systematic” synthesis, but also on the useful approaches built by different Western theologians such as Rahner, Barth, Althaus, von Balthasar, he still remains extremely critical towards the Western results. This particular aspect is underlined as well by Fr. Louth who argues that Stăniloae’s “attitude to Western theology is quite negative, even uncomprehending.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, Fr. Louth writes that Stăniloae’s sources “are Orthodox. This means, predominantly, the Fathers.”⁶⁹

Thus, I argue that Fr. Louth is one of the first scholars that pointed out the fact that Stăniloae must be considered not only as a systematic theologian, but also as a Patristic scholar, a true representative of the Neo-Patristic synthesis movement. However, Fr. Louth has also identified two significant things that point towards the *methodology* used by Stăniloae in his important Patristic contribution. First, Louth is clearly interested in the fact that Stăniloae was not only an academic scholar, but also a very good priest. His spiritual life was nourished from the writings of the Church Fathers and, as a result, it has also put an important seal on his theological contribution. Thus, Louth argues that:

“To return to the Greek Fathers in such a spirit is more than an academic “return to the sources;” it is the recovery of an understanding of theology

that seeks to set men and women on the road to an openness to God and experience of His healing grace: it is a theology that is both spiritual and pastoral."⁷⁰

Louth observes as well that the commentaries provided by Fr. Stăniloae almost on every page of his translations of the works of Church Fathers, represent admirable spiritual interpretations that offer to the reader the possibility of not only understanding better the difficult works of some of the Church Fathers, such as the works of Maximus the Confessor or Gregory Palamas, but also of obtaining spiritual guidance.

The second important aspect that Louth observed is the fact that Stăniloae does not simply rely on the writings of the Church Fathers or the contribution of significant Eastern or Western theologians, but also on the liturgical experience of the Church. This choice is pointed out by Louth:

*"This emphasis on the lived – the "existential" Fr. Dumitru often says – nature of theological reflection constitutes the dynamism of his thought. (...) Fr. Dumitru is concerned with an engagement that takes place within his own mind and heart – and if there, then in the minds and hearts of those who engage with what he says – minds and hearts shaped by an experience in the modern world (where else?), but also endeavouring to live in the Tradition of the Church that goes back to the apostles and beyond, through the experience of Israel, to creation itself."*⁷¹

The theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, whether we speak about his achievements in Patristic or in systematic studies, is ultimately pointing towards a liturgical theology.

The second most important source where I discovered a lot of important information about the Patristic contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae was in the *Foreword* written by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware to the first volume of *The Experience of God*.⁷² Here, Metropolitan Kallistos begins by arguing that Stăniloae was a theologian that highly respected the Fathers and their theological contribution.⁷³ However, although Stăniloae was deeply indebted to the writings of the Fathers and his magnificent *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, he never lacked critical awareness.

"The fact that Fr. Dumitru is patristic in spirit does not mean that he is enclosed in the past. On the contrary, he totally rejects a theology of mere repetition. He acknowledges that the Early Fathers are by no means exhaustive. In certain areas, he believes – most notably, in our understanding of the human person and of interpersonal relations – modern thought has given us new and vital insights not to be found in the writers of the ancient Church or of Byzantium. He sees tradition as open-

ended and constantly creative, “not a sum of propositions learnt by heart, but a lived experience.”⁷⁴

I would like to say that Metropolitan Kallistos Ware is almost completely right in what he argues here, but I also have to criticize two of his insights. First, Stăniloae was never really able to go “beyond” the Fathers. He never criticizes any aspect of their works. He never even alludes to the fact that the Fathers could be wrong in a certain aspect or another. In fact, I am convinced that the only persons that are criticized by him are either the heretics, or different important figures in the history of the Church that were condemned post-mortem (as it is the case with Origen or Theodore of Mopsuestia), as well as several Western scholars. Thus, it is not quite correct to present Stăniloae as a theologian that considers that the Fathers are not “complete” in every way and that their writings are not all that we need in order to find out important answers. It is true that Stăniloae had a critical awareness and he was more or less convinced that the fruits of modern scholarship are useful as well in order to provide solutions to the actual problems of Christianity, but I do not believe that he ever thought of the fact that the Fathers might not be enough from the theological point of view. I strongly consider that Stăniloae was not so much the person presented here by Metropolitan Kallistos, especially when I turn to another important quote such as this one:

“For Fr. Dumitru, tradition represents in this way the critical spirit of the Church. A “traditional” theologian, if he is genuinely such, is called to be bold and prophetic. He needs to ask not just “What did the Fathers say long ago?” but “What would they say if they were alive today?” Our aim as Patristic theologians, rather than mere historians of doctrine, is not just archaeological exactness but “pneumatic anamnesis”. We seek to present not just the letter of the Fathers but their vital spirit, their mind or phronema, what has been termed their “eternal youth.”⁷⁵

The works of Stăniloae do not demonstrate that he achieved this dimension as well from the practical point of view. Of course, there are many instances in which Stăniloae seems to encourage theologians to be prophetic, *but never bold*. He is never bold. He is never as critical as a Western theologian expects this critical awareness to manifest. He never questions the Fathers except in a positive manner. He never ever considers that there are certain arguments in their works that simply are not of use anymore. Let us take just an example. When Stăniloae comments different important arguments from the writings of the Fathers, either in his monumental *Philokalia* or in other translations, he always seems to try to

identify a *positive* understanding and meaning of the texts. This is a very good achievement, but sometimes it does seem unrealistic. Yes, we could say that Stăniloae tries to identify the “mind of the Fathers”, but sometimes he seems to be the prisoner of the letter. He seems to know that he must criticize some opinions, but he lacks this courage. We cannot call this particular action a *bold one*.

Although I disagree with the arguments used by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware which were presented until now, I strongly agree with two other facts that he mentions. The first one is about the fact that Father Stăniloae was not only an academic scholar, but also a very good priest:

“His life has been devoted to researching, writing and teaching, and yet he has never been an “academic” in the narrow sense. He is not only a professor, but a priest who loves the Liturgy, not only a scholar, but a spiritual father. This link between theology and prayer, so often underlined in his works, is evident also in his own person. Theology is not merely what he studies, but what he lives and is. He speaks with the wisdom of the heart.”⁷⁶

Thus, we have here once again a testimony for the importance that spiritual life played in the research of Father Stăniloae. His theology has something liturgical in it. His research on the Fathers is matched by his inner prayer.

The second aspect that Metropolitan Kallistos Ware stressed in his important *Foreword* is the influence of Gregory Palamas on the theological contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware acknowledges that Stăniloae’s work on Gregory Palamas⁷⁷ was the first truly ground-breaking study that appeared in the Orthodox world and one far better than the one written by B. Krivocheine. Stăniloae’s study was more accurate and was based on the unpublished manuscripts of Gregory Palamas while the study written by Krivocheine lacked this significant aspect. Furthermore, Stăniloae remained interested in the subject even after he published his important book, while Krivocheine followed in a different direction. Metropolitan Kallistos remarks that: “Stăniloae has always remained a theologian in the Palamite tradition, ascribing central significance to the distinction that Palamas made between the essence and the energies of God.”⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Metropolitan Kallistos observes that Stăniloae is the first Orthodox scholar that uses extensively the works of St. Gregory Palamas in his dogmatic treatise.

“To express this saving dialectic of God’s otherness yet nearness, Fr. Dumitru employs the Palamite distinction-in-unity between God’s essence

*and His uncreated energies. The central place that he assigns to this distinction is a new and significant development so far as the works of modern dogmatic theology are concerned. The Palamite teaching is ignored in the Dogmatic of Andrusos and allowed no more than a passing mention in that of Trembelas. There is no reference to it in the main text of Fr. Michael Pomazansky's Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, although a few lines are devoted to St. Gregory Palamas in an appendix. Fr. Dumitru's is thus the first dogmatics in which the distinction is seen as fundamental to the Orthodox understanding of God."*⁷⁹

Thus, the Neo-Palamite contribution of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is acknowledged and considered to be one of the most important developments in this direction. This distinction between the essence and the energies of God is considered to be in the heart of the dogmatic treatise of Fr. Dumitru by Metropolitan Kallistos. However, the main researchers of Stăniloae's contribution would not totally agree with this view, simply because it is widely recognized that the Church Father with the greatest influence on Stăniloae is Maximus the Confessor and not Gregory Palamas. I will get back to this aspect when I will discuss the Palamite influence on the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* treatise.

The third author that provides some interesting insights about Stăniloae's Neo-Patristic synthesis is Emil Bartoș. He is one of the few Romanian theologians who were able to develop a critical approach towards Stăniloae. Although belonging to a different confession (Bartoș is a Baptist and not an Orthodox), he was able to identify and present thoroughly Stăniloae's contribution to the concept of deification.⁸⁰ The first important insight that Bartoș provides about the Neo-Patristic synthesis of Father Dumitru stands in describing the negative approach that Stăniloae took towards the "Orthodox" theologians of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century. Bartoș argues that "Stăniloae struggles to liberate Romanian Orthodox theology from these influences (rationalism, theosophy, positivism and scholasticism) combining the modern approach to philosophical and dogmatic studies with an emphasis on Patristic sources."⁸¹ However, this argument of Bartoș has to be taken not at face value. Stăniloae was concerned by the fact that Orthodox theology was becoming scholastic under Roman-Catholic influence, but he never criticises even once a previous Orthodox theologian for being overwhelmed by Western influences in his own work. What Stăniloae did differently from his predecessors was that he returned mainly to the Patristic sources. For him, Patristic studies became the primary goal before all other possible areas of theological research.

Bartoș goes on by providing two important insights about the way in which Stăniloae's Neo-Patristic synthesis was articulated. The first one

lies in the fact that Stăniloae gave much attention “to the need for a re-evaluation of certain theological formulations in the light of the writings of the Fathers and Christian mystics.”⁸² The second one consists of the Patristic perspective that Stăniloae had when he analysed the Western contribution. “Stăniloae’s openness to the West is supplemented and balanced by a Neo-Patristic spirit.”⁸³ However, Bartoş goes too far when he argues that Stăniloae “tries to show that certain Orthodox theologians of the modern period have failed to do justice to the Patristic tradition of the Church.”⁸⁴ The only evidence that Bartoş has for this very bold argument is given by the somewhat critical attitude that Stăniloae had towards a few aspects of Vladimir Lossky’s presentation of apophatic theology and his rejection of the sophiology of Father Bulgakov. Stăniloae was more than enthusiastic about the Patristic revival and the contribution of ‘modern’ Orthodox theologians.⁸⁵ Another bold but mistaken argument brought by Bartoş stands in the idea that “Stăniloae (...) serves as a mediator between the thought of the Greek Fathers and modern Orthodox theologians”, an argument which is simply exaggerated.⁸⁶ Bartoş argues that this can be seen from

“Stăniloae’s stress on the Neo-Patristic spirit and philokalic practice, in abandoning the scholastic schemes of nineteenth century Orthodox theology and promoting a revitalising return to the Patristic and Byzantine tradition with its spiritual inheritance of hesychasm and Palamism.”⁸⁷

We want to remind readers here that probably the first “modern” Orthodox theologian is Aleksey Khomyakov (1804-1860) and, generally speaking, Stăniloae is not critical of any of the nineteenth century Orthodox theologians. Furthermore, he is quite open towards the works of Russian and Greek theologians of the twentieth century. These theologians were already trying to go beyond any scholastic approach and they were themselves highly critical towards Western influence on Orthodoxy. Stăniloae did not need to preach the importance of Patristic theology to anyone of the Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century. Bartoş tried to emphasize the influence of some of the Church Fathers on Stăniloae in his important work, but he failed to offer a general view in this direction.⁸⁸

A more fruitful and critical approach is given by the book written by Jürgen Henkel.⁸⁹ Here, Henkel analysed an entire writing⁹⁰ of Father Stăniloae from every possible point of view (historical development, sources, subjects, influences etc.). He offers some fresh perspectives on how Stăniloae used the Fathers, especially the Fathers of the *Philokalia* in his important synthesis. Henkel is one of the first scholars, or probably the

first one, who considered that Stăniloae is highly uncritical towards patristic texts and that he takes them as having an absolute authority.

“The constant references from the Philokalia that Father Dumitru Stăniloae provides in his book are given consequently and thematically by the fact that he wants to insert himself in the Orthodox doctrinal tradition. The texts of the Philokalia represent absolute authorities for him. He discusses at the most the historical relation of the texts that they have between themselves, but he receives them integrally, without a critical reflection upon them. Through this, he creates a special method that could be named as “the philokalic argument”. Father Dumitru Stăniloae does not know what a critical distancing from the texts really means. These texts serve for him as evidence with almost the same rank as the quotations from the Scriptures.”⁹¹

Henkel seems a bit outraged by the fact that an international scholar such as Father Stăniloae could make such a mistake as relying and believing too much in the Patristic texts. He seems surprised that Stăniloae really considers the Patristic texts as having almost the same authority as the Scriptures. However, what Henkel seems to consider as a minus, Stăniloae always considered as being his main and most important achievement. Furthermore, Stăniloae does not try to get inside the flow of the Tradition of the Church simply by quoting many Patristic sources so as to seem “correct” in his views and be accepted as an authoritative voice. However, we must give credit to Henkel and to his realistic approach from another point of view. Generally speaking, Stăniloae indeed lacks a critical approach to Patristic texts. Not only does he not interrogate some of the Patristic points of view that really seem outdated, but he also takes them as being correct and important, uncritically. A fundamental question arises here: how can we speak of a Neo-Patristic synthesis when Stăniloae does not know how to *summarize* the Patristic arguments?

The answer may be that although Stăniloae lacks a critical approach, he does not lack a good view of Orthodox Patristic scholarship and the way in which this differentiates itself from its Western reading. Orthodox Patristic scholars are not keen on pointing to mistakes, outdated elements and subjective opinions in the texts of the Fathers. They first want to see the spiritual progress of Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, from this point of view Stăniloae is very successful. Patristic texts have a great significance for him. He seems to consider the Fathers as his own spiritual Fathers guides. Thus, as one person refrains more or less from criticizing someone close to his heart, so does Stăniloae when speaking about the texts of the Fathers.

Henkel proves to be extremely accurate, however, in a different essential point and this is the Neo-Palamite contribution of Stăniloae. Henkel gives us the opportunity to discover what St. Gregory Palamas really meant to Stăniloae and how we can assess the Neo-Palamite contribution of the latter.

Henkel considers that Stăniloae's turn to the writings of Gregory Palamas at the very beginning of the '30s marked "his definitive rejection of the 'Orthodox' theology that carried a certain rationalistic imprinting due to the Western influence."⁹² Furthermore, Henkel considers that Stăniloae started the "movement of neo-hesychasm" through his writing on St. Gregory Palamas, published in 1938, and his very first translations of the philokalic texts.⁹³ However, Henkel recognizes that, although Stăniloae was the first one⁹⁴ to write a major work on Palamas, the most renowned Palamite scholar is Father John Meyendorff.⁹⁵ Without agonising too much on the differences and similarities between Meyendorff and Stăniloae, Henkel jumps to an interesting conclusion. Agreeing with F. Von Lilienfeld, Henkel considers that Stăniloae is the most significant figure among modern Orthodox theologians who "considers the Palamite hesychasm as an authentic Orthodox way of thought."⁹⁶ Henkel goes on and argues that:

"The personal orientation of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, which was massively influenced at the beginning by Christos Andrusos, towards the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas, is more than a simple enlargement or a new accent of his research interest. Father Dumitru Stăniloae has recognized in Saint Gregory Palamas and in hesychasm the doctrinal tradition in its authentic Orthodox feature and, thus, he decided to turn his back to the theology that had imprinted the mark of the occidental rationalism."⁹⁷

Thus, Henkel considers Stăniloae to be not only one of the greatest Palamite scholars of all time, but also *the first one* who undertook the mission to present the important features of the writings and life of St. Gregory Palamas. Nonetheless, Stăniloae's work on the Palamite legacy has taken him away from the scholastic features that accompanied the Orthodox theology of his time. Stăniloae was one of the first theologians to ask why Gregory Palamas had not yet been taken into consideration by the main modern theologians of the Orthodox Church.

However, although he considers Stăniloae to be a great Patristic researcher and one of the first theologians who tried to identify the importance of the writings of Gregory Palamas, Henkel is of two minds about Stăniloae's critical attitude towards Patristic texts. Although above

he certainly considered Stăniloae's methods of critical approach as being more or less inconsistent, Henkel softens his earlier view:

“The multitude of the Patristic material that enters in the presentations of Father Dumitru Stăniloae demonstrates that he transmits faithfully the hesychast and mystical tradition of the Eastern Church. His way of working with these texts is a traditional one. He uses them as a support of his own arguments and develops many of his ideas from the constant dialogue with these traditions. The greatness of this approach stands in the fact that he ties in a general frame such a large multitude of traditions and presents thus a synthesis of the Orthodox hesychast and mystical theology. He synthesises thus corresponding texts from the most different eras and backgrounds.”⁹⁸

Thus, Stăniloae offers a very interesting example of Neo-Palamite Synthesis although Henkel does not name it so in his own account on this matter. Henkel appreciates that Stăniloae is faithful in transmitting the hesychast tradition, but he is clearly unfavourable towards the way in which he chooses to do so and we will see below that the word “traditional” used to characterize Stăniloae's manner of approaching the Patristic texts is merely a euphemism. However, Henkel seems to be positive towards the way in which Stăniloae developed some of his arguments, closely relating them to the Patristic ones, although above he seemed somewhat annoyed by the same fact. Henkel considers that Stăniloae must be praised for the way in which he managed to create a synthesis of the hesychast and mystical tradition of the Eastern Church, but only because he strongly considers (and argues this elsewhere) that hesychasm was not a unitary movement, but one that had many different ways of manifesting itself.⁹⁹ In Henkel's view, Stăniloae has, thus, the merit of creating an original synthesis that puts together movements and ideas that had something in common but were not necessarily the same in every other aspect. However, Henkel presents afterwards as well what he considers to be the limits of Stăniloae's method of critical approach:

“If this synthesis seems partially artificial and the dialogue with it is not as alive as the one with the modern traditions, this fact appears because of the method used which is predominantly one of transmission and recording. The efforts that Father Dumitru Stăniloae made in order to prove the authenticity of the hesychast and mystic thesaurus of ideas take place occasionally with the price of sacrificing the necessary critical distance towards the texts.”¹⁰⁰

Henkel considers that Stăniloae's synthesis seems to be artificial in some points and this happens in his opinion because the critical method is