



RATIONALITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE IN FR DUMITRU STĂNILOAE'S VISION

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ABSTRACT

Two of the key themes running throughout Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae's work are the concepts of rationality and intersubjectivity. The first one is developed in the cosmological context, and the second one in the trinitarian understanding of the unity of the divine being, both pointing to the possibilities of the human being to become united with God without losing the understanding of the created world. The logoi manifest themselves in the world as many, but they are from the One, and form a connection point between the uncreated and the created. They are personal, like words from God, and they are all bound together in the Reason, Logos of the once pre-incarnate, and now the incarnate and resurrected Christ. This is a common point of reference for both science and theology in as much as science has also discovered purpose, principles and information inherent in the cosmos. Modern genetics, with the recent mapping of the human genome, and physicists' openness to the "mind" in the cosmos have profound interconnectivity with the topic the logoi in the works of Dumitru Stăniloae. Along with the current trend of science's opening up to the rationality of the world, scientific apophaticism bears directly on the subject of logoi, and promises a fruitful encounter.

Keywords: cosmology, divine energies, person, rationality, science, Trinity;

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the Orthodox world, inheritor of the Greek and Byzantine patristic tradition, the development of the sciences (in its autonomous sense) could be considered too little relevant for the understanding of the world. On the other hand, within the same Eastern space, the 20th century marked a radical turn, against the background of the political-ideological assimilation of new scientific theories: religion in general has nothing to say about physical reality, representing an archaic conception of the world, a rudimentary stage of knowledge. The "triumph of science" over "religious naivety" has created a barrier difficult to overcome on both sides.

According to Father Stăniloae, "the rational includes the mysterious and vice versa"¹, which implies a specific vision of rationality. One can speak of a simultaneity of rationality and mystery, of a natural unity between the two. Assuming the teaching of Saint Maximus the Confessor, "there is no contradiction between the mystery of God and the rationality of the world".²

¹ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, EIBMBOR, București, 2005, p. 15.

² Silviu Eugen ROGOBETE, *O ontologie a iubirii. Subiect și Realitate Personală supremă în gândirea părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, trad. Anca Dumitrașcu și Adrian Guiu, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 59.



1. DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE IN FR DUMITRU STĂNILOAE'S VISION

According to father Dumitru Stăniloae, the rationality that exists in the universe, however, "...does not exhaust all rationality [...]. Viewed in itself as the only existence, it has led many modern writers and thinkers to go there, to consider the universe, who every person to death, as a huge necropolis, as a universe of absurdity, of meaninglessness, of irrational. However, the rationality of the universe cannot be irrational or absurd. But it acquires its full meaning when it is considered as having its source in a rational person, who uses it for an eternal dialogue of love with other persons".³

Also, considering the consequences of these visions, he could observe that "...the thought of the last centuries sought to see in existence only rational, which reduces to a superficial aspect. Recently, he has gone to the other extreme – he sees existence only as absurd, which also reduces reality to a superficial opacity. Only in the ever-proven fact that in everything we know there is, on the one hand, a rational meaning, on the other, a revealing one as a mystery, which can never be finished being known, it is shown that there is also an unfathomable mystery, but, at the same time, an endless wealth of meanings".⁴

Creation participates in God in various degrees, having at its base the "preexisting *logoi*" in the divine will. All things are in God, but they are not God in essence (*ousia*). There is a gradation of the created world. The lower levels constitute a condition or threshold for the higher levels and the higher levels are meant to spiritualize the lower levels.

Christ appears to us in the patristic tradition as the Word/Logos in which all the reasons of things are gathered. The origin of the world is a dialogical one, of creation through the Word, and the ultimate meaning of things means, passing through salvation, a unity of interpersonal communion. If salvation means, in the theology of father Dumitru Stăniloae, first of all *personalization*, a suggestive etymological aspect is the fact that, in the Greek language, *logos* meant both *reason* and *word*. Rationality presupposes communication, presupposes the Word as the foundation and meaning of creation. The divine Logos constitutes the inexhaustible common meaning of things.

A unifying vision of the world becomes possible through the connection of the various reasons of creation with Christ-the Logos. Understanding the various reasons of creation gives us a partial knowledge of God. The act of creation *ex nihilo* meant a plasticizing diversification of the pre-existing reasons in God. Virtual reasons become *plasticized*⁵, according to the expression used by father Dumitru Stăniloae. Although diversified, they still remain in unity in the Logos-Christ. Thus, "...there is a general logos of the logos of units, or one above the logos of all logos. The more general reason is the meaning or wealth of meanings of a thing related to the reasons and meanings of all its components and all other things. There is thus an inexhaustible common meaning of things, a meaning that binds them, a meaning of indefinite wealth towards which man advances. Their single supreme meaning is the divine Logos. In Him are the meanings of all. Only this one explains everything..."⁶

Father Stăniloae summarizes the first verses of the Gospel according to John in the idea that the world was created from the dialogue-love between God the Father and God the Word (the Logos). Here he finds it interesting that the Romanian *word* comes from the Latin

³ D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 18.

⁴ D. STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos, Lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului*, Ed. Anastasia, București, 1993, p. 22.

⁵ D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, pp. 253-254.

⁶ D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 239.



conventus, indicating the fact of *coming together*, thus suggesting a personalist-dialogical foundation of the reason for creation.⁷

Discussing, in *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, about the "reflexes of the Holy Trinity in creation"⁸, Fr. Stăniloae applies the communicational structure of the divine triunity to fundamental cosmological and anthropological explanations. Rationality involves both an aspect of *substantiality* and one of *relationality*. The entire creation is a triple reflection of the Trinity.⁹

Fr. Stăniloae observed, in one of his studies from 1967, that: "...today there is talk of the transition from substantialist thinking to functional thinking. This is nothing but the discovery of reality as reality in relation. Reality does not consist of independent units, but of wholes made up of interrelated elements. The atom consists of electrons moving in their orbits, the giant stars move steadily around a central star. The universe is a unique complex of correlations, people exist and develop only in such relationships. This is the fundamental Christian truth, this is the truth as an intellectual formula of the ultimate Reality".¹⁰

The structure of the creation assumes not only the idea of logos, but also that of dialogue, in a vision that tries to overcome a substantialism as an image of a closed world. A personalist-communitarian representation of the world allows for much more possibilities for dialogue and constitutes an important meeting point between the orthodox theological paradigm and the contemporary scientific one.

Beyond the multiple patristic premises that he brings into discussion, I will limit myself here to specifying the fact that this type of personalism constitutes an extremely important and determining element in the structuring of the Romanian theologian's thinking.

According to him, "eternity must be a fullness of life. [...] The true eternity is [...] that of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is the eternity of tripersonality with a being-source of inexhaustible energies".¹¹

For Fr. Stăniloae, in Western thought theology risked oscillating between an "immutability of God", which makes him "unable to enter into a real relationship with temporal creatures", and a consideration of God's being as "ever changing, identifying the immutability with His constant change, which does not diminish Him, but neither does it represent something real new".¹² Beyond these alternatives lies the reality of the Holy Trinity, the only one that can save, from all points of view, the reality of the human and the world.

The world in its entirety acquires a personalistic dimension. Thus, time is defined as an interval of interpersonal closeness, and space "...is not made to be oneself. It has no full meaning and content in itself. It requires to be filled by one person for another person. It is destined to be filled with the fullness and beauty of communion, to be transfigured by communion [...]. Space is the form of our communion moving towards the state of perfect communion. Through this environment we must climb in the direction of the perfect Trinitarian communion".¹³

⁷ D. STĂNILOAE, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, pp. 48-49.

⁸ D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 199.

⁹ D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 199.

¹⁰ D. STĂNILOAE, „Iubire și Adevăr; dincolo de dilema ecumenismului contemporan”, în: *Ortodoxia*, XIX (1967), nr. 2, p. 283.

¹¹ D. STĂNILOAE, „Dumnezeu este iubire (1 Ioan 4, 8)”, în: *Ortodoxia*, XXIII (1971), nr. 3, p. 379.

¹² D. STĂNILOAE, „Dumnezeu este iubire (1 Ioan 4, 8)”, p. 374.

¹³ D. STĂNILOAE, „Dumnezeu este iubire (1 Ioan 4, 8)”, p. 394.



2. INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN MAN AND THE WORLD

Space, thus, "is not a theory or a form of intuition, just like time is not. The space also depends on the other, or overcoming the distance depends on the other. [...] The space is given to be overcome in communion"¹⁴.

Father Stăniloae insists on the interdependence between man and the world. The rationality of creation is related to human reason. The world has the meaning of gift, it has a relational anthropic centrality. The rationality of the world becomes irrational in the absence of a rational subject, which presupposes both other subjects of dialogue and a supreme personal reality, as the supreme source of existence.

Father Stăniloae emphasizes the fact that an impersonal infinity constitutes a limited infinity, if we could express ourselves this way, while the personal finite can be unlimited - through the grace opening to the "trinitarian infinity"¹⁵, through the continuous progress in this communion. Hence the contradiction between the limited person, whose progress in knowing God is unlimited, and the limitation of the concrete universe that he can know in his worldly experience.

In this sense, of a limited universe, but in which we can reach the ultimate reason by following the lines of the reasons of creation, Paul Davies could observe that "it may seem bizarre but, according to me, science offers a safer way to God than religion".¹⁶

According to theology, an infinite progress in knowledge becomes possible, but not only through the possibilities of reason, but through reason aided by divine grace. Moreover, it is not simply reason that can perceive the deep meanings of things, but a reason purified of passions, so that "not even reason, in its common sense, is the one that perceives the "reasons" of things, and, through them, God, but is it is about a reason that is exercised also by choosing the rational facts required by divine commandments and by the gradual rationalization of man, acquired through virtues".¹⁷

Science is concerned with the theoretical description and explanation of reality, with the question: "what is the universe?". Theology proposes, first of all, the question: "what is the meaning or purpose of human existence in the universe that we know?". The attempt to understand, and not simply to know, involves an existential consideration of rationality.

Father Stăniloae's insistence on the rationality of the cosmos underlines the positive role of science. Divine energies constitute a "link" between creation and God. The concept of *logoi* is often used to describe a specific aspect of these divine energies. Sometimes, however, it is used to strictly describe natural reasons or the laws of nature. The laws of nature, as described by science, can find a sufficient explanation in the integrative framework of the rationality of the cosmos, in which the ultimate Reason, however, implies a personal principle. Science inevitably progresses towards God, but the ultimate Reason implies dialogue, it implies the opening of a God - who cannot be distant, perceived as only the one who fixed laws, but no longer intervenes in the history of created worlds - towards the possibilities of human reason supported by grace.

The reasons of things are considered by theology to be more than the object of theoretical knowledge, as the means of realizing the dialogue between human beings and

¹⁴ D. STĂNILOAE, „Dumnezeu este iubire (1 Ioan 4, 8)”, p. 393.

¹⁵ D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 168.

¹⁶ Paul DAVIES, *God and the New Physics*, Dent, 1992, apud John Polkinghorne, *Quarci, haos și creștinism. Întrebări pentru știință și religie*, trad. A.C. Stavinschi, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2006, p. 47.

¹⁷ D. STĂNILOAE, *Ascetică și mistică creștină sau teologia vieții spirituale*, Ed. Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 1993, p. 167.



God. Contemplating the reasons of things, human reason ascends to the "supreme reality", all things being connected to the ultimate reason, the personal Logos. Observing the reasons of things, man responds to the Logos. Progress in understanding the meanings of things meets here with progress in knowing God.

There are major differences between the two models, but we can no longer speak of mutual exclusion. If for the science of a century ago a better knowledge of the laws of nature, of the physical world in general, led in the opposite direction to meeting God, for theology a better knowledge of the world leads to the knowledge of God. Especially at the point of awareness of the huge complexity both at the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, as well as at the level of the general interdependence of things, "the rational beauty and fertile balance of the world strongly suggest the existence of an intelligence beyond it".¹⁸ If many of the classical cosmological models presuppose the hypothesis of God, often described as the Great Unknown, Orthodox theology presupposes a better knowledge of the world, dispassionate, in order to climb towards the thread of God's "darkness full of light". Rationality presupposes a gradual union of man with God through the world. Without adequate knowledge of the world, God cannot be known either. Without God, the world cannot be fully known. Natural and supernatural knowledge are inseparable and impossible to dissociate.

CONCLUSION

The rationality of the world appears, in Father Stăniloae's vision, as one of the defining elements of the relationship between the world and man. In this context, we discover a dynamic aspect of rationality, as a continuous movement towards the inexhaustible reason of God. The rationality of the world is, in the end, the possible means to deification. From the image of a closed world (even in its own limitlessness) as an object of autonomous reason, one can move to the dynamic image of an anthropic universe progressively open to spiritualization, deification.

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¹⁸ John POLKINGHORNE, *Quarci, haos și creștinism. Întrebări pentru știință și religie*, trad. A.C. Stavinschi, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2006, pp. 46-47.