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“THE OPEN SOBORNICITY” — AN ECUMENICAL THEME  
IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE FR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE

**Abstract.** The aim of this paper is to present the position of the Orthodox theology towards the ecumenical movement, in general, and that of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae in particular. We will begin by presenting the pan-Orthodox decisions regarding the inter-Christian dialogues and we will continue by analyzing a corpus of texts belonging to Dumitru Stăniloae. Finally, we will analyze the concept of “open sobornicity” and we will place it in relationship with the Roman Catholic ecclesiology promoted by the Second Vatican Council.

**Key words:** ecumenism; “open sobornicity,” the limits of the Church; Sacraments; unity; diversity; Second Vatican Council.

The Orthodox Church considers itself as the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, having the conscience that the unity and integrity of the Apostolic faith was transmitted and guarded in its heart. At the same time, it is aware of the fact that along the history, Christians were separated because of the heresies and the schism, realities that led to the appearance of many Churches and ecclesiastic communities, that today no longer share completely the same faith. Furthermore, according to the Orthodox Tradition, we confess that during the apostolic period there was a certain unity within the Church that was acknowledged in the apostolic faith, in the Eucharistic celebration and in the existence of a church hierarchy that was established in time. We specify this because in contemporary theology, especially in the Protestant theology, there are opinions according to which there was a doctrinaire or theological pluralism ever since the apostolic period, the unity of faith being a contextual matter understood only in relationship with a local Church. According to the Orthodox tradition, the period of the early Christianity was marked by a theological unity, which, of course, was expressed

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in local forms and contexts, pluralism in this context being understood rather as a diverse form of transmitting the one faith. The unity of the Church being the expression of the presence of the unique God in history, it is God's gift to us. In this theological context, we must understand that for the Orthodox Church the objective of the ecumenical dialogue is not to restore the unity of the Church "per se,"<sup>1</sup> which is an essential feature of the Church and a gift from God and which cannot be destroyed, but to achieve the unity of faith that was destroyed along history.

Since recently (10–17 October 2015) in Chambésy, Switzerland, took place the 5<sup>th</sup> Pre-Synodal Conference which elaborated a project document for the future Pan-Orthodox Synod, named *The Relationships of the Orthodox Church with the entire Christian world*, we think that in order to express the pan-Orthodox view regarding the Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement, it would be useful to see what it records.

Article 1 reaffirms the faith according to which "The Orthodox Church being the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, in its profound ecclesiastical consciousness firmly believes that it occupies a central place in matters relating to the promotion of Christian unity within the contemporary world," article 4 says that the Orthodox Church "always fought for the restoration of Christian unity. Therefore, the Orthodox participation in the movement for the restoration of Christian unity does not run counter to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church. It is the consistent expression of the apostolic faith and Tradition in a new historical context" and in article 5 it mentions that "The bilateral theological dialogues that the Orthodox Church conducts today, as well as the participation in the movement for the restoration of Christian unity are grounded in the Orthodox consciousness and the spirit of ecumenicity, and are aimed at seeking the lost Christian unity on the basis of the faith and the tradition of the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils."<sup>2</sup>

What we must observe in the document mentioned above is that the position of the Orthodox Church is faithful to the previous ecumenical theology, it reaffirms the doctrine according to which the Orthodox Church is the one Church and that the effort of the ecumenical dialogue is to reestablish the unity of faith of all the Christians and not the unity of the Church itself,

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<sup>1</sup> Ion BRIA, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă: A - Z*, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1994), 259.

<sup>2</sup> "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World | The Russian Orthodox Church," <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/01/28/news127362/>. Accessed 10 February 2016.

which, as we have previously mentioned, cannot be destroyed, belonging to the very essence of the Church.

The Romanian Orthodox Church, as an autocephalous Church which is in Eucharistic communion with the other autocephalous or autonomous Orthodox Churches, embraces the same ecumenical pan-Orthodox theology which stands at the basis of the participation of the Orthodoxy in various bilateral ecumenical dialogues and in the ecumenical movement. If in the contemporary ecumenical movement, as understood by the Protestant world, the main idea is that of "denominationalism" and therefore the problem of the Christian unity is usually regarded in terms of understanding or inter-confessional reconciliation, for the Orthodox this approach is unnatural. For the Orthodox the main ecumenical problem is that of the schism.

The Orthodox cannot accept the idea of "confessional equality" and cannot see the Christian union as an inter-confessional adjustment. The unity was broken and it must be restored. That is why, the Orthodox Church, through its inner conscience and beliefs, has a special and extraordinary place in the divided Christianity, as the bearer and confessor of the Tradition of the early undivided Church, from which all the existent denominations formed through reductionism and separation. From an Orthodox point of view, the present ecumenical efforts may be characterized as "ecumenism in space," which attempts to achieve an agreement between the different denominations that exist today. This attempt is inadequate and incomplete. The common basis or better said the common frame of the existing denominations may be found, and must be looked for in the past in their common history, in that old and apostolic tradition from which all of them emerged. This manner of approach may be called "ecumenism in time."<sup>3</sup>

For half of century of ecumenical participation, the Orthodox Church never stopped confessing its creed of identity with the one, Holy catholic and apostolic Church. According to professor of ecumenical and missionary theology Ioan Sauca, the Orthodox theologians have proved some sort of timidity when it came to defining clearly their identity in relation with the Christians of other Christian Churches and denominations. If we are the one Church that we confess in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, what are the other Christians and what is their relationship with the Orthodox Church? This is the fundamental question that the Orthodox theologians address when they speak of the inter-Christian dialogue. And to this question, the now-

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<sup>3</sup> *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages and Reports of the Ecumenical Movement, 1902-1992*, ed. Gennadios Limouris (WCC Publications, 1994), 30-31.

adays Orthodoxy doesn't have yet a unique and coherent answer, a situation which causes confusion and attitudes which are pro and against the participation in the ecumenical movement.<sup>4</sup> The Russian theologians from diaspora, confronting the reality of living, as a minority, with other Christians of different denominations, "preferred the use of an ecclesial agnostic phrase," saying that "we know where the Church is, but we don't know where the Church isn't".<sup>5</sup> Among the pioneers of the participation of Orthodoxy to the ecumenical movement and the first who approached the delicate problem of the "limits" of the Church was father George Florovsky, who in 1933 had published an article entitled "*The Limits of the Church*."<sup>6</sup> "The merit of this article is that it sets the problem and it asks the right questions, it proposes a reconsidering of the position of Saint Augustine on the charismatic limits of the Church in relation to the positions of the Eastern Fathers while it remains in a descriptive and general frame without offering a clear answer regarding the nature of the relationship between the Christians of different denominations and the Orthodox Church."<sup>7</sup> Only few of the Orthodox theologians who followed Florovsky tried to debate this problem and remained in the area of a broad generic and descriptive approach, without offering a clear coherent and theologically convincing answer.<sup>8</sup>

Even though the ecumenical theology about the *charismatic limits* of the Church of father G. Florovsky can become the subject of a theological debate, this theological paradigm continues to stand at the basis of the involvement of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical dialogues. Father G. Florovsky has the merit of interpreting in an inclusivist key the Augustinian tradition, according to which "in the Mysteries of the heretics the Church is no longer active, through the very elements that they took from it («the inner sacred nucleus of the Church») is not entirely destroyed). According to *Ephesians* 4:3, the unity of the Church is based on the double relationship between «the unity of the Spirit» and «the bond of peace», and in sects and schisms «the bond of peace» is broken and torn, but «the unity of the Spirit» in Mysteries is not destroyed."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ioan SAUCA, "Vocația Ecumenică a Ortodoxiei," *Mitropolia Olteniei*, no. 58 (2004): 31.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Georges FLOROVSKY, "The Limits of the Church," *Church Quarterly Review* 117 (1933): 117–131.

<sup>7</sup> I. SAUCA, "Vocația Ecumenică a Ortodoxiei," 33.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel CLAPSIS, "The Boundaries of the Church: An Orthodox Debate," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 35 (1990), 2: 113–27.

<sup>9</sup> Aurel PAVEL and Ciprian Iulian TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și Falsul Ecumenism. Perspective Ortodoxe asupra Dialogului Dintre Creștini* (Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2010), 36.

In the Romanian Orthodox theology, there are important theologians who have developed their own vision on the implication of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the ecumenical dialogues, but only one of them constitute the object of the present research. We will refer to father Dumitru Stăniloae. We will analyze below the ecumenical theology of father Dumitru Stăniloae, the most renowned Romanian contemporary theologian and representative of the neopatristic theology in Romania

“THE OPEN SOBORNICITY”  
IN FATHER DUMITRU STĂNILOAE’S WORK  
OR “THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH”  
BEYOND THE CANONICAL BOUNDARIES

Father Dumitru Stăniloae was not an ecumenical theologian in the strict sense of the word, because he was never among those who have represented along the years the Romanian Orthodox Church in the structures of the Ecumenical Council of Churches from Geneva. However, through his work he stands out as one of the most prolific Romanian theologian who built bridges of dialogue with other Churches and Christian denominations, emphasizing the dimension and the ecumenical vocation of the Orthodox theology.<sup>10</sup>

The question of the Orthodox theologians regarding the participation of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical dialogues is supported by the ecclesiology of Saint Cyprian of Carthage who developed the teaching according to which grace is completely absent in any group separated from the Church. The Holy Sacraments being “established” only within the Church, may be officiated only in communion and in sobornicity, and by the fact that the schism means to step out of the Church, standing willingly “outside” it, there is no salvation here (*extra Ecclesia nulla salus*)<sup>11</sup>.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae, approaching the matter of the presence of the grace beyond the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church in 1931 explained in a short article published in *Revista teologică*<sup>12</sup> the problem of the acknowledgement of the Christian baptism in the un-Orthodox churches.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I. SAUCA, “Vocația ecumenică a Ortodoxiei,” 35.

<sup>11</sup> A. PAVEL, C.I. TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Cari dintre eretici și schismatici vor putea fi primiți în sânul Bisericii Ortodoxe: a. Prin botez, b. Prin mirungere, c. Prin libelos pisteos?,” *Revista teologică* 21 (1931), 11–12.

<sup>13</sup> See the analysis of the ecumenical theology of father Dumitru Stăniloae in Ioan MOGA, “Har și ființare eclezială în afara granițelor canonice ale Bisericii? Schițe de răspuns, pornind de la contribuția Părintelui Stăniloae,” *Tabor* 11 (November 2013).

D. Stăniloae made a very brief presentation of two divergent theological attitudes: one which acknowledges as “valid *per se*” “the baptism made with water and in the name of the Holy Trinity,” “even though granted outside the Orthodox Church.” The second attitude states that “all the baptisms from outside the Church, without exception, are invalid *per se*.”<sup>14</sup> Those outside the Church even though they were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity cannot be considered, by no means, members of the Church as long as they do not return inside it. When they decide to return, the Church accepts their “baptism”, but only by “economy” and will not ask them to be baptized again. Such a position tries to avoid the possibility of acknowledging any sign of ecclesiality in the Churches and the denominations outside the Orthodox Church and of the charismatic work of the Holy Spirit within them. Father D. Stăniloae considers the second theory to be wrong, saying that “if no external baptism is valid,” why would the Church validate only one type of Baptism and not all the types performed outside its boundaries. D. Stăniloae is the supporter of the first theory which he corrects: “. . . the baptisms in water and in the name of the Holy Trinity from outside the Church are valid in their nature, but the actualization of the Grace in them is achieved only and when the Orthodox Church wants this.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, he proposes a leveling of the pan-Orthodox attitude towards the “foreign baptisms,” as follows: “a) those who have a spiritual or anti-Trinitarian baptism will be baptized; b) those who weren’t confirmed or don’t have the Chrismation and Priesthood as a Sacrament will receive chrismation; c) those who have the material-Trinitarian baptism and priesthood as a Sacrament will be received with *libelos pisteos*”<sup>16</sup> (meaning the Roman-Catholics, the Greek-Catholics etc.)<sup>17</sup>.

In 1956, father D. Stăniloae resumed the discussion on the two directions of interpretation in the Orthodox theology mentioned above. The Romanian theologian considered that the dogmatic solution should be looked for “somewhere in between, between the two theories, between the acknowledgement of the character of the Sacrament of the Baptism and the negation of any objective content that they might have.”<sup>18</sup> The solution proposed would be that since the Sacraments are “the means through which man comes into full

<sup>14</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, “Cari dintre eretici și schismatici,” 446.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> I. MOGA, “Har și ființare eclezială în afara granițelor canonice ale Bisericii?,” 102.

<sup>18</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Numărul tainelor, raporturile între ele și problema tainelor din afara Bisericii,” *Ortodoxia* 2 (1956): 211.

and natural relationship with Christ," it means that the so-called Sacraments from outside the Church intermediate relationships with Christ, but based on the personal faith: "man in general cannot receive Christ or from Christ more than he believes."<sup>19</sup> Hence, according to the theology of father D. Stăniloae, the human being receives Christ within his or her faith, even though he or she is outside the canonical boundaries of the Church, but what exactly is received through these sacraments one cannot know: "We cannot say exactly what do those from outside the Church receive in their so-called sacraments. [...] We still lack the formula, the adequate image for this objective basis for their ceremonies, in order to rise and pass these to the level of Sacraments."<sup>20</sup> In this case also we speak of an ecclesiology of an "agnostic" type which we may find in other Orthodox theologians as well.

However, the contribution of father D. Stăniloae to the ecumenical theology consists of the manner in which he applies the principle "unity in diversity,"<sup>21</sup> to the matter of the relationship between Orthodoxy and the other churches. According to D. Stăniloae, although the Orthodox Church is considered the true complete Church of Christ, however, the other Christian denominations are not bare of value. D. Stăniloae considers that there is a gradual relationship between the Orthodox Church and the other churches, named *incomplete*. "We consider that they are incomplete churches, some of them closer to completion, others more distant."<sup>22</sup> By this position, the Romanian theologian corrected the opinion of metropolitan Platon,<sup>23</sup> who considered that "all the denominations are equal separations" from the One Church. Following the Orthodox tradition, according to Fr. Stăniloae, we must "consider that the unorthodox denominations are separations that formed in a certain relationship with the complete Church and exist in a certain relationship to it, but they do not commune with the full light and power of Christ the sun."<sup>24</sup> In a way, following this logic, the One Church comprises, to a certain extent, "all the denominations separated from it, because they could not separate completely from the Tradition present in it."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid..

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>21</sup> AUREL PAVEL, CIPRIAN IULIAN TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, p. 143.

<sup>22</sup> DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, Ediția a doua (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997), 176.

<sup>23</sup> We refer to metropolitan Platon Levshin of Moscow (1737–1812), who wrote a *Catechism* in 1839.

<sup>24</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, 176.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Father D. Stăniloae, faithful to the Eastern patristic tradition,<sup>26</sup> considered that the whole creation “is objectively framed by the rays of the same pre-incarnational Logos, thus in the phase of the Church before Christ, called to become the Church of Christ. Objectively and subjectively, the entire human-kind of different beliefs knows to a certain extent the pre-incarnational Logos. And objectively and subjectively the other Christian denominations know Christ, but incompletely.”<sup>27</sup> Hence, “a certain church subsists even today, outside Christianity, because there still are several ontological links of the human forces between and with the divine Logos. All the more so this church exists in the other Christian groups, given their relationship through faith with Christ, the incarnated Logos, and given the fact that they have partially a common faith in Christ with the Orthodox Church, the complete Church.”<sup>28</sup>

Hence, speaking of this gradual completeness, father D. Stăniloae applies it to the life of the faithful and asks himself to what extent do the unorthodox receive salvation? Here’s the answer: “In different Christian denominations there are a lot of faithful whose Christian life did not limit to the official doctrinarian formulas of their denominations. The old Christian tradition was stronger than the doctrinarian innovations brought by their founders and supported officially until today by those denominations and their theologians. In Catholicism for example, the Sacraments are practiced until today together with the faithful’s belief that through them they are intimately and directly united with Christ, hence, that Christ in working within the Church,”<sup>29</sup> although theologically there are differences compared to the Orthodox Church. Then, D. Stăniloae adds, “one must take into account [...] a second agent: the faithful of the different Christian denominations woke unwillingly within these denominations with the faith of a Christ, Who is not present with all His redeeming efficiency within them. Their incomplete participation to Christ, and this to a great extent without their fault, may have as consequence an incomplete participation to Him and to the future life, according to the word of the Savior: «My Father’s house has many rooms...» (John 14:2).”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See for example: Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



The personal contribution and the key term<sup>31</sup> that synthesizes the availability of the Orthodox to the members of the other denominations, is the "open sobornicity."<sup>32</sup> In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Church is characterized as "catholic"; from this perspective, it is "an organic whole, a spiritual body or organism, a plenitude that has it all, and this all, this plenitude is present and efficient in each of its members, acts, parts". In other words, the Church is catholic not only in a universal sense, but also in a local sense; not only its "whole", but also each of its "parts"—of course, only that which remains in relationships with the other "parts"—without this fact to determine a monotonous uniformity: "The Church has Christ complete with all His redeeming and deifying gifts and each local Church and even each faithful has Him complete, but just as long as it stays within the whole body. As in every cell of a body there is the whole body with its work, with its features, so is the Church complete in each member or part of it and through it there is Christ complete, but just as long as the respective member or part of it stays within the Church. The members are not identical, but they are complementary, because of the fact that the life of the whole body or Christ Himself through the Holy Spirit is actively present in all of them."<sup>33</sup>

This plenitude of the Church as the Body of Christ, achieved through the presence of the grace of the Holy Spirit in it, needs the binomial "unity in diversity," meaning, surpassing all forms of unilateral emphasizing of one aspect or the other in the ecclesial Tradition. In the words of father D. Stăniloae, "a tradition cannot last forever when it is incomplete, insufficient, because the future generations realize this incompleteness and try to surpass it, or at least to complete it through a broader conception, through a way of life bare of the incompleteness that it had until then."<sup>34</sup> It is the point in which the conception on the "incomplete Churches" meets that on the "open sobornicity": the ecclesial plenitude of the complete Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church, is open to everyone, but in this sobornicity can only enter those who renounce the excessive accentuation of a part of the Apostolic faith and wish to live "according to the whole," in the one Holy catholic and apostolic Church.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See: A. PAVEL, C.I. TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, 147–158.

<sup>32</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Sobornicitatea deschisă," *Ortodoxia* 23 (1971), 2: 165–180.

<sup>33</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, 186–187; A. PAVEL, C.I. TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, 146.

<sup>34</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, "Unitate în diversitate în Tradiția Ortodoxă," *Ortodoxia* 22 (1970), 3: 333; A. PAVEL, C.I. TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, 146–147.

<sup>35</sup> A. PAVEL, C.I. TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, 147.

According to the opinion of father Pavel Aurel and theologian Ciprian Toroczkai, father D. Stăniloae takes in the development of his conception on the “open sobornicity” the relationship created in general by the Orthodox theology between the Greek word καθολική [*katholikē*] and the Slavonic word *sobornaia* (derived from the verb *sobirati*, “to gather in one place,” “to reunite”). The intention of this equivalence was to express more emphatically the ecclesial plenitude presented previously. Calling the Church “sobornaia” we express the closest sense to the understanding of the term “catholic”, and by this we express “the synodal manner to guard the faith of the Church on a bishopric level, but also the general communitarian manner to practice the teaching. The entire Church is a permanent Synod, a communion, a convergence and a permanent cooperation of all its members, because this is the only state in which its spiritual goods can be kept and valorized”<sup>36</sup>. Hence, this “general synodality” implies complementarity, which differentiates the Orthodox sense of the term “catholic” from the Western one, understood, according to D. Stăniloae, in Roman-Catholicism as *universality* or by the Anglican theology as *doctrinarian integrity*. In the Orthodox meaning, *sobornicity* expresses “the sense of the active participation of all the faithful to the spiritual goods of Christ in the spirit of the full communion, this constituting the Church itself as organism or body of Christ”. Thus, the Orthodox sense does not exclude, but it includes the other two senses, for “this communion would enrich each of us all the more so as it comprises more members, if possible all the Christians and all the people.”<sup>37</sup> “Hence, catholicity in the full sense of the word is the active fruitage by all Christians, in full communion, of the whole treasure of truth and life brought by Christ. The word *sobornicity*, according to D. Stăniloae, is able to express better than the word catholicity, this triple sense, for it means the assembly of many (the extensive sense), their council, (the intensive sense), in all the problems of interest for everyone (integrity of the doctrine).”<sup>38</sup>

This open sobornicity is a concept which places the limits of the Church beyond the proper canonical boundaries. Even though the Christians are members of an “incomplete” church, through their spiritual experience and through the proper meaning of the revelation they may participate to the

<sup>36</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, 186.

<sup>37</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox,” *Orthodoxia* 19 (1967), 4: 516.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 516–517.

discernment of the mystery of the world and of man. In other words, the apostolicity of the faith may be partially found to the members of several "incomplete" churches, since they by virtue of the open sobornicity, participate to the unity of the Church.

Between the sobornicity of the Church, understood as "the perfect Christian unity" and the apostolicity of the faith there is an organic relationship. According to D. Stăniloae, "sobornicity is the perfect Christian unity in confessing and living by all the Christian in communion of the Apostolic inheritance; therefore, one may say that the one Church which the ecumenism must aspire to accomplish is the Apostolic and the sobornic Church. Without apostolicity, sobornicity is meaningless, and without sobornicity, Apostolicity or the Revelation in Christ cannot be fully known and valorized, it cannot develop all the human valences, it cannot fully perfect any believer."<sup>39</sup> In another study, where sobornicity is equated with synodality<sup>40</sup> and is also linked with apostolicity D. Stăniloae notes that the basis of this sinodality is: 1. In *humanity* as whole identical in nature, but diverse in the persons that constitute it; 2. In the fact that *man was created in God's image* and called to the likeness with Him; 3. In a broader sense, within *the family and nation*; 4. In Christ and in Church, *in the assembly of everyone in Christ*, under the action of the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of communion."

According to Pavel Aurel and Ciprian Toroczka, by sobornicity, father D. Stăniloae wanted to emphasize the concrete, practical dimension of the term and not the theoretical one: "Sobornicity must in fact be a living of the faith in a vivid communion; it is Christian universality in shape of communion (*koinōnia*)"<sup>41</sup>. The term universality used here is not chosen randomly. It implies both the teaching and the living of the teaching—sobornicity is "the all-embracing unity of the Christian faith lived by the universal and free community of the Christians"—not only in a narrow sense, but also as mission for all the Christians: "the assembly of everybody, in which *all the Christians* bring their understanding of the whole divine revealed reality and of the whole humanity seen in the light of the complete revelation, to share it with everybody and for everyone to commune with the understanding of all the others."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>40</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, "Natura sinodicității," *Studii Teologice* 29 (1977), 9–10: 605–606

<sup>41</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, "Sobornicitatea deschisă," 172.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 172; A. PAVEL, C.I. TOROCZKA, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, 149.

Indeed, the Romanian theologian underlines the fact that to the actualization of the Christian faith, and to its more concrete understanding, corresponding to the level of understanding of each generation, *the traditions of other Christian groups*<sup>43</sup> are called to contribute, even though they maintained fewer elements or emphasized too exclusively others from the whole divine-human spiritual reality of Christianity. “The subject” of the theological knowledge is a Who, not a what, and that is why the divine being remains always unknown to the human reason, which cannot comprise it fully even when God reveals to it.<sup>44</sup>

Without claiming to have analyzed exhaustively the ecumenical theology of father D. Stăniloae, we will try to synthesize this section with several ideas of a conclusive nature. We will also use the considerations uttered by Ioan Moga<sup>45</sup> on the theology of father D. Stăniloae. In the study published 1931, the Romanian theologian refuted the idea according to which the Sacraments officiated outside the Orthodox Church would be simple forms lacking the charismatic content. As an organic practice, he even recommends not to repeat the Chrismation and the Ordination in the case of those converted from the Roman-Catholic Church, agreeing on this matter with the Russian tradition. He is reserved in making any speculation regarding the quality or the reality of these Sacraments, choosing a more nuanced discourse in which one must distinguish *not* between “valid” and “invalid”, *but between “complete” and “incomplete”*—the level of sacramental “incompleteness” depending not only on the classical criteria (Apostolic succession, confession of the faith etc.), but also on the sacramental theology of each unorthodox community. “This holding also underlines the fact that the discussion regarding the validity of the Sacraments officiated outside the

<sup>43</sup> D. STĂNILOAE, “Sobornicitatea deschisă,” 172.

<sup>44</sup> A. PAVEL, C.I. TOROCZKAI, *Adevăratul și falsul ecumenism*, 150

<sup>45</sup> IOAN MOGA (n. 1979), priest, PhD in Orthodox Theology (University of Munich), now lecturer at the Department of Theology and History of the Eastern Churches of the Faculty of Roman-Catholic Theology of the University from Vienna. Monographies published: *Teologia ortodoxă și provocarea antropologică a neuroștiințelor* (in German — Hamburg: Dr. Kovac, 2006); *Biserica - Mireasă a lui Hristos, între Cruce și Parusie. Ecleziologia lui Hans Urs von Balthasar din perspectivă ortodoxă* (in German — Berlin, Münster: LIT, 2010); *Sfânta Treime, între Apus și Răsărit. Despre Filioque și alte dileme teologice* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2012); *Simfonia dialogului catolic-ortodox. Omagiu adus lui Joseph Ratzinger / Papa Benedict al XVI-lea la împlinirea a 85 de ani, de către noul cerc al foștilor studenți (“Neuer Schülerkreis”)*, (in German, volume coordinated together with Michaela C. Hastetter and Christoph Ohly — St. Ottilien: Ed. Eos, 2012).

Orthodox Church must be taken to a broader theological context. On the one hand, from an ecclesiological point of view, for father Stăniloae, there are *different levels of participation to the Sacraments of the Church*. Using the term "incomplete Churches", Dumitru Stăniloae emphasizes the vivid dimension of the ecclesial nature and the *cosmic openness of the body of Christ*. On the other hand, this openness is not allowed to lead to a relativization of the unity of faith as being the premise of the sacramental unity."<sup>46</sup>

Then, promoting the theology of the "open sobornicity," in an ecumenical sense, all the Christians must contribute to the understanding of the mystery of the world and man in the light of the integral revelation and of the spiritual experience in the Spirit of the living Christ.

Comparing the eschatology of father D. Stăniloae with that of father G. Florovsky that we mentioned with the study on the limits of the Church, we observe that what Florovsky calls the *charismatic boundary* of the Church D. Stăniloae through the *open sobornicity* explains the manner of subsistence of the Church within these charismatic boundaries. In our opinion, the two positions, if conjugated, may create a coherent image of the inclusivist ecclesiology, which offers the possibility of the ecumenical dialogue. In fact, as the above mentioned document for the future Pan-Orthodox Synod confirms, this type of open or inclusivist ecclesiology seems to be the one embraced now by the whole Orthodox world.

Also, it is interesting to mention the opinion of father I. Moga, regarding the thesis of father D. Stăniloae, on the *gradual affiliation to the mystery of the Church*, who remarks that this type of theology "is also the theological «solution» chosen by the Roman-Catholic Church for this matter, starting with the Second Vatican Council". If in the encyclical "Mystici Corporis" from 1943, the Roman Church "chose an ecclesiological exclusivism, stating that there is an unexplained longing of the un-Catholic Christians, but also of the un-Christians to come into full communion with the Church, the Second Vatican Council will change radically the vision, speaking of a gradual affiliation to the Church. In the decree «Unitatis Redintegratio» of the Second Vatican Council it is said that «baptism creates a sacramental bond of the union between all those who are born again through it» (UR 22), but Baptism is only the beginning oriented towards «achieving the fullness of the life in Christ». To this statement regarding a baptismal relationship between all the Christians the Orthodox might also subscribe."<sup>47</sup> It is well

<sup>46</sup> I. MOGA, "Har și ființare eclezială în afara granițelor canonice ale Bisericii?," 105.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

known the fact that the Roman-Catholic ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council states that the Universal Church “subsists in” (UR 4) the Roman-Catholic Church, avoiding the verb “to be”, in other words, leaving room for the possibility of the existence of an un-Catholic community outside the Roman-Catholic Church.<sup>48</sup>

Taking into account these similarities between the theology of father D. Stăniloae and the theology of the Councils regarding the manner of understanding the relationship between the one Church with the other churches, a direction of communication between the two churches is opened, which, in future, may result into a more elaborate comparative analysis.

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<sup>48</sup> See: Richard LENNAN, “Roman Catholic Ecclesiology,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion, Lewis S. Mudge (London: Routledge, 2007), 234–50.

„OTWARTA SOBOROWOŚĆ” – EKUMENICZNY TEMAT  
W TEOLOGII DUMITRU STĂNILOAE

Streszczenie

Celem tego artykułu jest przedstawienie stanowiska teologii prawosławnej wobec ruchu ekumenicznego ogólnie i w szczególności teologii Dumitru Stăniloae. Prezentacja rozpoczyna się od panprawosławnych decyzji odnośnie do dialogów międzychrześcijańskich i będzie kontynuowana poprzez analizę tekstów Dumitru Stăniloae. Wreszcie następuje omówienie koncepcji otwartej soborowości i ulokowanie jej w perspektywie eklezjologii rzymskokatolickiej promowanej przez Sobór Watykański II.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ekumenizm; otwarta soborowość; granice Kościoła; sakramenty; jedność, różnorodność, Sobór Watykański II.