MIHAIL NEAMȚU

Born in 1978, in Făgăraș

Ph.D. candidate, King’s College London, United Kingdom (due 2007),
Dissertation: *The Nicene Christ and the Desert Eschatology*

Editor of *Archaeus. Studies in the History of Religions* (founded 1997)

Visiting Scholar, Central European University, Budapest,
Religious Studies Department, 2006

Participation at scholarly conferences and symposia in England, Germany,
Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Spain

Articles and studies in various academic publications and volumes

**Books**

*Buînița din dărâmături. Insomnia teologice* [An Owl Among the Ruins.
Theological Insomnias] (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishers, 2005)
Cultural Wars in Great Romania

It was in 1918 when the great powers acknowledged first, by the Treaty of Versailles, the legitimacy of the monarchist state of Great Romania. This international recognition put an end to the transitional period of struggle for union between Transylvania, and the other two Romanian provinces (i.e., Walachia and Moldavia). At last, Romania felt part of the great family of European countries. Its towns and cities, but above all the capital, were called to a radical modernisation, by emulating one of the many Western models available. It was perhaps also the time to do so. At the dusk of the 19th century, to many English people, for example, Romania seemed more like a Chinese puzzle. Indeed, very few high-browed intellectuals had a first-hand knowledge of the Romanian realities.

“No further back than four years before the Russo-Turkish war [1877-1878], in which the Rumanian army took a distinguished part, we find the English consul in Bucharest complaining that letters sent to that city sometimes went to India in search of Bokhara; and he even tells of a summons from London addressed, ‘Bucharest, in the kingdom of Egypt.’”

In the inter-war period, the Romanian authorities did all they could to do away with this embarrassing stereotype, which placed a South-European country on the intellectual map of Orientalism.

In the wake of the First World War, Romania became finally independent of any direct influence or pressure coming from Russia or the Ottoman Turkey. Its economic and social policies moved clearly towards the West. However, this shift was exempted from a wide range
of cultural ambiguities. While satisfied with their integration into the European project, the Romanian intelligentsia was left stranded between roughly two different options. The first group of liberal intellectuals emerged in counter-reaction to the traditionalist movement, which seemed to be both Romantic and conservative, backward looking, and happy to celebrate the religious dimension of every sober human enterprise. Among the advocates of Western secularism one counts the cosmopolitan sociologist and historian of ideas Mihai Ralea (1896 – 1964), the literary critic Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943), and the social philosopherȘtefan Zeletin (1882-1934). They all criticised Orthodoxy for its alleged contribution to civic fatalism and economic backwardness among the rural population, calling for a complete break from the Slavic influence upon the national ethos.

In response, an ethnocentric group of intellectuals claimed to have at the grassroots level more legitimacy than the camp of the Westernisers. It stemmed from a previous movement represented by the so-called “Sămănătoriștii,” advocating the return to the pristine soil, the untainted roots, and the sublime countryside. “Semănătorismul” was the Romanian equivalent of the Russian pochvennichestvo. The biblical metaphor of the seed (sământa) and the sower (semănătorul) carried with it a vast array of religious and poetic meanings. Among the members of this new elite, one should mention the monumental polygraph Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940), the geographer Simion Mehedinti, the poet and political activist Octavian Goga (1881-1938), the philosopher Constantin Rădulescu-Motru (1868-1957), or the more original thinker Lucian Blaga (1895-1961). None of these luminaries was inclined to shelter his nationalist discourse under the roof of the Orthodox theology, nor were they committed to leave Romania outside the political borders of Europe. Each one in his way favoured the preservation of the local brands, pleading for a better management of the cultural values of traditional Romania in accord with the Western standards. “Synthesis” seemed to have been the watchword of their ideology.

Religious Nationalism: Three Authors and an Argument

A more dramatic form of metaphysical nationalism appears in the writings of Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972) and Dumitru Staniloae (1903-1993). Crainic, in particular, churned out his ideas under the
influence of Oswald Spengler (1880-1936). The epoch-making book entitled “The Decline of the West” (1918) encouraged him to promote the idea of political authoritarianism. His readers went into rapture over the classical contrast between culture and civilisation, derived from Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft, and coined for the first time in 1887. Crainic overlapped these terms with the notions of rural existence and urban life-style. His literary prose and poetry teemed with lyrical solemnities about the purity of the peasantry. At times, Crainic’s journalism would indulge in offensive comments about the ethnic minorities from Romania. Thoroughly nostalgic and regressively utopian, he also believed in the future of an ethnocratic state.

Crainic illustrated at best the messianic trope of the orthodoxist group surrounding the “Gândirea” journal, easily comparable with the Russian Slavophiles, such as Aleksey Khomiakov (1804-1860) and Ivan Kyreevsky (1806-1856). As it is well known, the latter group liked to draw emphatic parallels between the Church vocation to redeem the souls and the call of their particular nation (e.g., Russia) to illumine the world. Lay Christians and ecclesiastical officials were inclined to produce self-centred tracts of defence in favour of Orthodoxy. According to the Slavophile manifesto, which clearly influenced Crainic, a faithful Christian had to be rather weary of secular institutions and shy of technological progress. The genealogy of the Western values was univocally linked to the “heresies” of the Roman-Catholic and Protestant churches. Scholarship was distrusted as mere tool of intellectual scepticism. Anti-Semitism was not uncommon. The attacks of cosmopolitanism commended singing the heroic past of the nation.

Against this background, many theologians felt free to endorse the exceptional character of the Romanian case. An easy appeal to theological arguments, such as hope in the “resurrection of the nations”, helped the Church officials in their construal of the nation as a metaphysical entity. For Dumitru Stănioae, for instance, ‘nation’ appeared to be that ‘spiritual reality’ working under the divine guidance of the Providence, capable to offer each person a priori schemes of understanding the fallen history and, above all, the meaning of the divine revelation. Stănioae regarded the ethnic determination of the individual as something literally inalienable. Against this background, it is not at all surprising that the understanding of the local traditions often took dualistic undertones. Often, the perception was polarised between two antithetic categories: the local identity (“good”), and the foreign (usually Western) influence (“bad”).

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This agonistic economy of symbols and images characterised both the political debates and the historiographic reconstruction of the Romanian past. According to the national vulgate, which remains valid until today, the emancipation of the Romanian people from its crude oppressors was paralleled by the implacable Christianisation of the nation itself. The unity of the nation was the “basis for the Church unity.” Following this providential logic of history, the enemies of the Romanian people could be seen as the Church’s adversaries, and vice versa. Orthodoxy gradually becomes thus a political commodity. It ceases to speak with equal power to the ethnic groups of Hungarians, Germans or Gypsies. The Gospel was divested from its original universality.

Less enthralled by the myths of the Romanian peasantry and more adapted to the flexible directions of the inter-war Realpolitik was Nae Ionescu (1890-1940). Educated in Germany at the dawn of the 20th century, influenced by Carl Schmitt in his ideas, Nae Ionescu became in the early 1930s an intellectually sophisticated spokesman for the right-wing party, “Iron Guard.” He had numerous disciples in the academic circles, and beyond. Not all did always share his fondness for Orthodoxy and political radicalism. But most of them deplored the limitations of positivism in philosophy (as with Constantin Noica), and sympathised with the antidemocratic movements of the youth (as with Emil Cioran). For the exceptionally gifted polymath M. Vulcănescu (1904-1952), Orthodoxy was an intrinsic determination of the Romanian character, as he pointed out in an influential essay. Mircea Vulcănescu, whose contribution to a Romanian philosophy of nationhood deserves in itself a separate study, can be placed in the context of yet another intellectual movement comprising young intellectuals holding very diverse ideological convictions, namely “Criterion.” This latter group spoke against the narrow tenets of the “Gândirea Movement,” promoting a sober form of cultural ecumenism. Left-wing sympathisers met with right-wing intellectuals, in search for a real dialogue on issues of common interest. Some iconoclastic members of this “sect” condemned all attempts “to indigenise universals such as space, time, and being.” As in the works of Mircea Eliade, a shift towards the more universalistic dimension of religion or spirituality could be noted. The exclusivist logic of “either/or” was never dominant among the “Criterion” circles. This very feature explains its quick dissolution.

At the grassroots level, the message of, respectively, Nichifor Crainic, Dumitru Stăniloae and Nae Ionescu had greater impact than the
intellectual sophistication of the “Criterion” group, or the all too straightforward pro-Western agenda of the intellectuals surrounding Lovinescu. As Christian theologians, Crainic, Stâniloae and Ionescu illustrate a dramatic paradox in the European history of modern ideas. Traditionally, a teacher of Christianity would be expected to stand up for a universalistic faith, called to embrace and harmonise the multicultural texture of many traditional societies.\textsuperscript{21} Despite this fundamental vow to catholicity, some Orthodox theologians used a rhetoric, which did legitimise not only patriotism as such, based on civic values, but even radical forms of nationalism. Often, this was done along with the official Church discourse, at the expense of softening the universalistic criteria of the traditional Christian identity. Ethnic loyalty outstripped religious affiliation. This very fact proves that, at least in the case of some Eastern-European countries, secular nationalism (especially, its 19\textsuperscript{th} century version) did not easily replace religious discourse. It is necessary, therefore, to ask here several questions regarding this cultural dialectics.

What was the main driving force behind the theological arguments, which could currently justify the nationalist proclivities of the mainstream Romanian Orthodoxy? Which was the self-understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Church at the dawn of the national states’ foundation, on the basis of which a particular reading of history (more aptly called, “historiosophy”) could emerge? What was the context, which favoured the outward show of nationalism in protochronist garments? Which were the possible theological rationales behind the nationalist themes, which still persist in the Church official discourse until today? Where was the borderline between blind nationalism and serene patriotism trespassed? In order to answer at least some of these questions, the works of the late Dumitru Stâniloae (1903-1993) provide us with one of the best possible case studies. For the Western reader, this may sound as a paradox. Outside the borders of his native country, Stâniloae is virtually known only for his universalistic message, which encouraged some even to call him “the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century” (Olivier Clément).

Indeed, Stâniloae was one of the most prolific and inspired scholars of Eastern Orthodoxy during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. He penned a great many books on Christian doctrine, liturgy and spirituality, together with translations and exegetical works on the early Church Fathers. Recently, these volumes started to receive a considerable attention among Western theologians.\textsuperscript{22} It remains nonetheless important to understand the contributions of Fr Dumitru Stâniloae towards the elaboration of an “ethno-theology”, together
with its *sui-generis* character. More than Crainic and Ionescu, Stâniloae’s understanding of the rapport between the Church and the nation has been accepted as almost normative in the official circles of the lay theologians and hierarchs. It is therefore paramount that a research of Stâniloae’s contribution to the 20th century Orthodox “ethno-theology” will preface any general assessment of the Romanian, and indeed Eastern European case. A biographical sketch can serve as the best introduction to a more detailed discussion of Stâniloae’s ideas.

**An Unsettled Youth**

Dumitru Stâniloae was born on 16th November 1903 in Brașov county, the youngest child of simple and devout peasants. He had a basic education in Brașov founded on strict German principles. The young Dumitru started his theological studies in 1922 at the University of Cernăuți (the cultural centre of the former Romanian province Bucovina, now part of Ukraine). Disappointed by the Scholastic methods of teaching theology in Cernăuți, Stâniloae enrolled at the University of Bucharest, where he read Classics and Literature. At the recommendation of Nicolae Bălan, then the Metropolitan of Transylvania, Stâniloae completed his theological studies, despite the rather dull and compromising environment, which affected this subject. In 1927, he graduated with a somewhat short dissertation on “Infant Baptism in the Early Church tradition.” Shortly afterwards, Stâniloae received a series of scholarships for post-graduate research in Athens (1927), Munich (1928, where he followed the courses of the famous scholar in Byzantine studies August Heisenberg), Berlin and Paris (1929) and, in the event, Istanbul (1930). These trips were often interrupted by short visits to Romania, where his contribution to the improvement of the theological education was expected to make a difference. Thus, in 1928, Stâniloae received his doctorate after submitting a thesis on “The Life and the Works of Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem.”

During his postdoctoral stages of work in Europe, Stâniloae improved greatly his knowledge of German and Byzantine Greek, being also able to peruse to the growing literature on patristics, Church history and systematic theology. It was in the West first where Stâniloae read extensively Protestant authors such as Karl Barth (1886-1968) or Emil Brunner (1889-1966). In Paris and Istanbul, Stâniloae did his first research on the works of the late Byzantine theologian, St Gregory Palamas.
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(1296-1359). Moved by anti-Catholic sentiments, the young Stănîloae first presented the life and the work of Gregory Palamas in his influential monograph published in 1938. Together with Nichifor Crainic, Stănîloae was among the first Romanian professors of theology to substantially redirect the interest of his students towards the rich sources of the mystical tradition of the Orthodox Church. Throughout his approach, which emphasised more the richness of the Oriental Christianity, Stănîloae remained nonetheless fond of the opposition “East versus West,”\(^{25}\) to which he added a distinctive „antirömischen Affekt” (to use here the famous phrase coined by Hans Urs von Balthasar).\(^{26}\) An article published in 1930 put it thus:

“The Roman-Catholic tradition is rationalist and empirical, while Eastern Orthodoxy is mystical and transcendent.”

and,

“For the Roman-Catholics, the Church is a social body opposed to, and fighting other social bodies in search for supremacy within the same life experience, and not the divine-and-human body, which penetrates the other social bodies from above.”\(^ {27}\)

Notwithstanding these polemical exaggerations, Dumitru Stănîloae displayed much more than just an abrasive non-ecumenical ethos, as one recent commentator suggested.\(^ {28}\) His theological position was rooted in the radical eschatological insights professed by great thinkers and mystics of the Byzantine tradition. In his harsh criticism of the Western passion for juridical discipline and rational clarity, Stănîloae echoes again the position of St Gregory Palamas. The latter rejected the claims of Barlaam of Calabria, according to which “profane knowledge” (such as mathematics or natural philosophy) converges necessarily with the “spiritual knowledge” inspired by God. The exercise of dialectics, for example, is not needful for the achievement of salvation, whereas the understanding provided by the divine Scriptures remains fundamental, having saving effects for every single Christian soul. The Western tradition, Stănîloae suggests, has forgotten this crucial truth of the patristic tradition, reappraised later by the Byzantine monastics of the fourteenth century. The limits of scholarship and discursive thought are dramatic, since they cannot pay off the lack of personal communion with the Holy Spirit.
There is first the “human wisdom” pertaining to the created realm of being, and then the “wisdom from above,” which is the effect of God’s revelation in man’s heart. In other words, one should never confuse the uncreated grace of God (which illiterate people, such as some among the apostles, are perfectly capable to receive) with the natural gifts of human intelligence, which can still be associated with a perverted heart. Discursive thought, moreover, is divisive, while spiritual knowledge unites the human self in the light of God’s united being. This is why, in the light of the Christian tradition, the apostles were greater than the greatest philosophers of the Hellenistic age. On the other hand, this does not mean that, before the advent of Christ, grains of truth could not have been found there where the pursuit of goodness was selfless and genuine.

It remains nonetheless important that Christians from all walks of life do not ignore this right epistemological order and adequate hierarchy of gifts. Attributing more value to the scholarly endeavour than to prayer and meditation can have harmful effects for one’s personal salvation, and for the ecclesial life by enlarge. By stating this theological truth, Stăniloae remained indebted to the stark positions adopted by St Mark of Ephesus (†1444) during the “unionist” council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-45). In other words, Stăniloae claimed that the Byzantine tradition was the true heir of the Patristic wisdom, expressed both in the splendours of its mystical theology. Unlike the West, where theologians lapsed into unnecessary speculations on the nature of God, the Orthodox Church focused on the transfiguration of human person through prayerful contemplation of the divine light. It was this theological difference, perceived often in the specific terms of the monastic spirituality, which set limits to the dialogue between East and West, and not mainly a cultural idiosyncrasy.

“Political” versus “Mystical” Theology

Married in 1930 to Maria, his life-long wife and companion, Dumitru Stănîloae was ordained priest in Sibiu, just one year later. Before and during the World War II, Stănîloae exerted his influence for more than a decade in the field of theological and historical studies, despite not having a mentor in whose footsteps he could walk. Gradually, he became a public intellectual, very keen on making the voice of Orthodoxy being heard among the more secular members of the political elite. This exercise
was rather novel among the Romanian advocates of the Orthodox Church, which for centuries remained silent, adorned only in its liturgical garments. During the 19th century, in comparison to Russia, for instance, Walachia and Moldova benefited from much less theological debates regarding the rapport between tradition and modernity, or the transfer of concepts from the private to the public sphere. In such an impoverished context, Stăniloae’s theoretical indecisions strike the reader as normal. At times he seemed in favour of Crainic’s apology for an ethnocratic state, while in other cases the same Stăniloae rejected any form of political fascism, xenophobia or cultural exclusiveness.

In 1934, Stăniloae could brand communism as anti-Christian, while ten years later he identified the roots of social equalitarian in the Gospel. It is more than obvious that Stăniloae’s indulged himself in sweeping generalities about the history of the nation, and the role that Christianity had played in the invisible formation of the Romanian ethos. He simply did not use any elements of social and economic expertise, which could have illuminated more the past of his own nation. Equally, an inadequate training in political theory pushed him to make risky statements, often tainted with utopian elements. Some of his theological inquiries were nonetheless groundbreaking, given the rudimentary level of religious instruction at that time. He was a person that could read with genuine interest not only the writings of the Church Fathers, but also the books of Sherlock Holmes, or even the essays of an ultimate nihilist figure, such as Emil (E.M.) Cioran. His literary input was extraordinary.

Stăniloae published hundreds of articles, some of which tried to show the compatibility between political nationalism and the distinctive theological tenets of the Church. There must be a specific way of being Romanian, not only in social terms, but also in a religious sense. Stăniloae overlapped the modern category of “nation” with the more ancient concept of “ethnicity” (the “civic nationalism” being branded as “insufficient”). The Greek word ethnos is widely used in the classical and biblical literature, being commonly translated either as “people” (Romanian: neam), “tribe” (Romanian: seminție) or, somewhat misleadingly, with the more modern equivalent of “nation” (Romanian: națiune). Particularly in the New Testament corpus, the meaning of ethnōs (often taken as identical with laos) covers a historical reality that can hardly match the modern configuration of the European national identities, in the wake of World War I. For example, in St Paul’s speech recorded by Luke the Evangelist in the book of the Acts of the Apostles
(13, 16-41), there is a reference to the “seven nations (ethne hepta)” from Canaan, which perished at the will of God so that the Israelites could finally seize the Promised Land. The nations taken here into consideration could not have possibly represented the socio-political units, which flourished during the modern period in Europe and elsewhere. The Israelites and their foes alike (with the exception of the Egyptians, perhaps) could be at best described in a contemporary language as “tribes” in search for geographic expansion and economic sovereignty. Stâniloae did not, or could not appreciate the historical transformation of the notion of “nation” and “nationality”, which instead of the previously ethnic connotations (“the blood”) acquired a strong political significance.

On the other hand, it has to be said that Stâniloae’s ethnic sensitivities had no totalitarian connotations. Albeit rejecting pacifisms as such, and while critiquing the weaknesses of modern democracy, Stâniloae called for the implementation of the virtue of moderation in the every sort of political endeavour. Under this warrant, he condemned the acts of violence perpetrated by the members of the “Legionary Movement” in their exercise of power. Critical of communist internationalism, and sceptical of papal universalism, Stâniloae tried to explain how only the Orthodox Church is capable to welcome and blend the character of every nations by performing a particular theological synthesis that resembles, to some extent, the Platonic paradigm of the “One-among-many.” Stâniloae thought this was the vocation of a strong participatory theology, that sees in the event of the Incarnation the very paradigm for the union between the human and the divine.

Stâniloae’s interest in the “prophetic”, that is to say public dimension of the Church life had its pair in the purely theological concerns that he developed from an early age. He penned several apologetic books, among which the most notable is his first essay in Christology. A close knowledge of the Patristic authors (St Maximus the Confessor, in particular), and the fruitful dialogue with the modern Russian tradition (Metropolitan Anthony Khраповицкы and Serghei Bulgakov, in particular), along with the interaction with some major Western philosophers (Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blondel, Louis Lavalle, Ludwig Binswanger), placed the early Stâniloae in the frontline of Orthodox thinking. In his book on “Jesus Christ and the Restoration of Man,” Stâniloae showed himself to be one of the most notable Orthodox theologians of the 20th century ready to defend the doctrine of deification (theosis), in the footsteps of the Church Fathers. His growing interest for the monastic spirituality of
Eastern Christianity determined Stăniloae to start his monumental translation of *The Philokalia*. The first volume appeared in 1946, and the last in 1991. This famous compilation of texts on prayer and contemplation, comprising the wisdom of the ascetic Church Fathers from the fourth up to the fourteenth century, was issued in Romanian in not less than twelve volumes. In contrast, the English edition, following the initial design of St Nikodemos the Athonite and St Makarios of Corinth, has only five volumes (the latter to be published soon). Regarded by Stăniloae himself as the best achievement of his theological career, the Romanian edition of *The Philokalia* had and perhaps still has a significant impact on the development of monastic life in Romania, shortly after the Soviet occupation, and following the political revolution of 1989. To this day, *The Philokalia* is a best seller on the religious book market.

**The Imprisonment**

Starting with the summer of 1940, the “The Burning Bush Conferences” started being organised at the most important ecclesiastical centre of Bucharest, namely the Antim Monastery. However, Stăniloae’s involvement in this movement was short-lived and not comparable with the strong commitment of even more influential figures, such as the hieromonk Ioan Kulighin, Rev. Benedict Ghiuş or Rev. Sofian Boghiu, the poet Sandu Tudor (the future Fr Daniil) and Dr. Vasile Voiculescu. Stăniloae’s arrest and imprisonment eighteen years later was not so much a result of his connection with the “Burning Bush Movement” from Antim. Indeed, under pressure during the criminal investigations, he claimed that his link with the monastic and literary circle of Antim was casual. The explanation, then, must be found elsewhere. It would seem that it was his public defence of the “hidden treasure” kept by the great theological tradition of Orthodoxy, which precipitated the arrest of *doctor philocalicus*. Between 1947 and 1955, Stăniloae was severely marginalised, and his courses at the Faculty of Theology in Sibiu were totally suppressed. In 1947, he had to move to Bucharest. It was more than ten years later, in 1958, when Stăniloae was allowed to author a book (in cooperation with other colleagues from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest) on Church dogmatics.

From 1955 to 1958, Stăniloae attended some private seminars, arranged by his former friends of the “Burning Bush” movement. They read and
commented on books on early Christian spirituality. Under surveillance by the secret police, the members of the “Burning Bush” were arrested again on the night of 13/14 June 1958. Stâniloae was arrested on 3rd September 1958, when his friends had already been sent to prison. On 8th November 1958, Stâniloae was sentenced to five years imprisonment, considered as an “obscurantist propagandist” of the ancient régime. On 15th January 1963, he was released from prison and allowed to enrol as a teacher at the Institute for Orthodox Theology in Bucharest. In 1964, all the political and religious prisoners of Communist Romania had to be liberated, given the increasing pressures exerted by international bodies. Stâniloae spent most of his time in the dreadful prison of Aiud. Later on, he used to say that this harsh period of deprivation and humiliations helped him to practise the unceasing prayer of the heart (“Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me”). Over the centuries, this prayer has been much cherished by the hesychast monks of Eastern Christendom, being regarded as the corner stone of the Christian path to deification.

**After Liberation**

In 1963, Stâniloae was released from prison, and was asked, in return, to write some articles with positive appreciation of the Communist regime. However, the maltreatment continued until 1969, when the communist Department for Religion set out to project a better image of Romania in the West. Thus, Stâniloae and other theologians were allowed to travel abroad. In 1970, he went to Oxford, hosted by the Convent of the Incarnation (“Sisters of the Love of God”). There he met his life-long friend, Canon A. M. Allchin, and other Anglican friends. He also received innumerable international awards, among which one could mention “The Cross of St Augustine of Canterbury” offered by the Bishopric of London. In 1976, the second series of *Philokalia* (from volume five onwards) started being published in Romanian, though in a very small number of copies, badly circulated. In the same year, the State University of Thessalonica offered Dumitru Stâniloae the title of *doctor honoris causa*.

In was in the same period that, quite embarrassingly, Stâniloae endorsed his former views on the Uniate Church. Seeing the Orthodox Church as a constitutive element of the Romanian national identity, Stâniloae approved in 1948 of the artificial “union” between the Uniates and Orthodox congregations. Like most of the other Orthodox leaders at
that time, Stâniloae overlooked the forceful character of this “union”, accomplished under the diktat of the Communist government. Stâniloae’s take could have only pleased the Communist officials, who aimed at the total suppression of the last remnants of the Greek-Catholic Church, called the “Church from the underground.” Unlike the Orthodox, the Greek-Catholic theologians and historians had no rights to worship, to gather publicly, let alone to defend themselves in journals or newspapers. Quite surprisingly, the polemical perspective embraced by the young Stâniloae survived also his personal experience in the Communist prisons, where he must have met and shared the friendship of many people with different Christian backgrounds. In 1973, Stâniloae published a collection of essays under the provocative title: “The Uniate Church in Transylvania: an Attempt to Tear Apart the Romanian Nation.” Here, Stâniloae reinforced his views on the Uniate Church, seen as a mere expression of the Roman-Catholic proselytising action within the traditionally Orthodox frontiers. The immediate consequence of this theological decision had a political character: namely, that of dividing along religious lines the Romanians from Transylvania, from their brothers and sisters living the Orthodox faith beyond the Carpathians. Stâniloae’s reading of history was inevitably biased, since it ignores the voluntary commitment of a great number of Uniate intellectuals to the national cause, in a time when the Romanian Orthodox faithful from Transylvania were still under the jurisdiction of the Serbian ecclesiastical see from Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci). With the dim exception of Inochentie Micu, whose patriotic deeds Stâniloae does praise, the activity of most other Uniate characters who were responsible for the political emancipation of the Romanians in Transylvania seem not to count. Stâniloae evokes instead the exceptional, but almost solitary personality of the Orthodox Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna (1809-1873), who indeed played fought as few others for the setting free of the Romanian Orthodox Christians from Transylvania.

It is noteworthy that Stâniloae constantly balanced his polemical moves in the field of theological and intellectual debate, with a prominent dedication for the common spiritual roots of the Christian Church: namely, the patristic tradition. In the late 1970s, though aged and fragile, Stâniloae had the great stamina and inspiration to write his monumental work of systematic theology, issued in three volumes. His commentaries on the works of the spiritual masters of the East (from St John Climacus to St Isaac the Syrian and St Symeon the New Theologian) drew the attention
of many Romanian intellectuals and monastics. Among them, one should mention Fr Ilie Cleopa (1912-1998) from Sihăstria and Fr Paisie Olaru (1897-1990) from Sihla, who both had words of praise for the work of Reverend Stănîloae. Moldavians by birth, these towering figures of Romanian monasticism are remembered nowadays as two unmistakable candidates for canonisation, along with other Romanian hermits and confessors who died during the 20th century. Stănîloae’s publication of *The Philokalia* was a direct appraisal of this radical Christian culture, which put obedience, poverty and chastity at its hear. A clear indication of Stănîloae’s recognition among the monastic circles is also offered in the writings of Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan.

**Struggle and Triumph**

Gradually, the depths of Stănîloae’s theological thinking and his well-balanced ecumenical openings received the just appreciation among Western theologians. Jürgen Moltmann and John Meyendorff saluted the freshness of Stănîloae’s approach to historical theology. The way he dealt with the sources was rejuvenating and inspiring for many young theologians, less acquainted with the patristic tradition. According to his daughter Lidia, in the early 1980s, Stănîloae travelled to Chicago, where he met the celebrated Romanian historian of religions, Mircea Eliade. Allegedly, Stănîloae had a prayerful conversation with Eliade in private. Returning back home, Stănîloae plunged into his studies with an indefatigable energy, writing even more theological books, with a particular emphasis on the meaning of Christian worship. This theological orientation is no surprise, since the Communist authorities emphasised that the Orthodox Church, like any other Christian communities, should not manifest herself outside the liturgical borders. Religious education, work for the charities and public mission were all forbidden. Limited by this environment, Stănîloae continued his translations of the theological works written by great theologians, such as Sts Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria or Maximus the Confessor. Not all of his translations have been published during Stănîloae’s lifetime, given the strict regulations that governed the publishing houses in Romania at that time.

By the end of the 1980s, Romania was probably the most badly damaged country by Communism in Eastern Europe. Many intellectuals
learnt how to forget their captivity into the social misery of Communism
by taking refuge into a mild sort of Platonism. Utopias of any sort, from
the mystical journey into that self which is “interior intimo meo”62, to
the most whimsical forms of artistic, literary and philosophical escapism,
proved to be little short of a personal redemption.63 In those days, theology
lost is access to prophecy, while philosophy was embarrassed to face
the naked truth of the historical reality. For those cared for his mental
sanity, the world of culture seemed to be the last resort. In the words of
Andrei Pleșu, “the only reason to concern oneself with culture, to do
culture within a totalitarian system, is that it must be done, regardless of
audience, circumstances, outcome.”64 In one or another way, this attitude
required a certain belief either in the secular judgement of history, or the
theological aftermath of eschatology. After years of deprivation and
harassment, Dumitru Stăniloae was prepared to regard history, like the
great philosopher Constantin Noica did, as if it were a matter of sheer
meteorology.65 In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the time for a
confrontational approach had long passed. Noica and Stăniloae, who
both supported in their youth the idea of political action, were favouring
now, each one in his different way, a solitary form of asceticism put in
the service of a great tradition: either the philosophical, or the theological
one.

The somewhat open character of the collaboration between the State
authorities and the Church, and the incapacity of most of the Orthodox
theologians to resist to the ideological pressures exerted by the dictatorial
regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918-1989), damaged the image of
Romanian Orthodoxy.66 The “national Church” seemed to have failed
the test of real patriotism, which would have meant for her leaders a
more active resistance against the horrific acts of social engineering
perpetrated by the Communists. The recovery from this slump of
unpopularity among the local intelligentsia was rather slow. After 1989,
Romania trapped in political and economic corruption. Rampant poverty,
especially among the elderly people, and loss of hope for the youth,
made the ruthless plague of the post-communist transition. In this rather
gloomy atmosphere, dominated by corruption on all levels of the social
structures, the Orthodox Church was more often silent than vocal. Only
rarely one could hear the traditionally Christian plea for truth, justice
and reconciliation in a society haunted by the traumas of the past.
The Later Years

Encouraged by the freedom gained after December 1989, Stăniloae voiced his criticism, calling the Church to act with greater responsibility in the social sphere. He complained for the lack of sobriety and prophetic spirit among the ecclesial milieu, defending also the promotion of Christian values in the public realm. Not unlike other Orthodox theologians, such as Metropolitan John Zizioulas, Fr. Stăniloae joined some circles of the civil society in his criticism of the non-ecological policies of the state. As a citizen of the world, he was anxious for the future of humankind, sharing with Heidegger an ongoing concern for the global spread of destructive technology (expressed by the German philosopher through the concept: das Gestell). On the other hand, Stăniloae did not trouble himself for the lack of political emancipation and for the economic backwardness, which was responsible for so many social disorders and educational shortcomings in the rural area. Until his later years, Stăniloae did not show much confidence in the historical agents of modernisation: free market, political institutions, and a civil society regulated by critical reasoning. He remained a pessimist, prone to hold onto unilateral solutions.

On the other hand, Fr Stăniloae stayed in touch with many personalities of the Romanian Diaspora, among whom one counts Eugène Ionesco, former member of the French Academy. In 1991, Stăniloae was welcomed in the Romanian Academy, being also awarded the doctor honoris causa of the Universities of Athens (1991), and Bucharest (1992). Only in these last years of life, Stăniloae published his more serene Reflections on the Spirituality of the Romanian People, in which he envisages, not without utopian moments of thining, a societal model for the new Europe emerging from behind the Iron Guard. Stăniloae pleaded for the rediscovery of the Christian principle of personhood after so many years of Communist dictatorship, and against the nihilistic drive of Western individualism. In this sense, Stăniloae’s ideas were in accord with the theology of other contemporary theologians, such as John Zizioulas or Christos Yannaras. They all thought that only the retrieval of the dialogical, Eucharistic and self-giving attributes of Christ could open new ways of experiencing communion among people.

Throughout his life, Dumitru Stăniloae had an ascetic conduct. Even when 90 years old, he would still wake up at three or four o’clock in the morning, saying his prayers and writing unabatedly, while in the afternoon and during the evenings he was ready to welcome visitors. He was known
and remembered as a cheerful, and yet conservative character, as an affectionate father and gentle professor, immune to depression, always compassionate, and jovial. A man of prayer and a pastor, Stăniloae showed much consideration for the people forming the body of the Church, trusting their “spiritual instincts.” On the 4th October 1993, Reverend Dumitru Stăniloae passed away, leaving behind an impressive theological legacy.

**Bucolic Nostalgia**

Before we scrutinise at the institutional aspects of Stăniloae’s spicy attachment to religious nationalism, one should grasp his subjective perceptions, as filtered through various articles, essays, interviews and testimonials left in the religious press of his time. It is probably apt to look especially at the literary style used by Stăniloae in order to celebrate the marriage between the Gospel and the nation. A certain romantic rhetoric betrays the inebriation with the idea that the peasants are the only true heirs of Christian spirituality. Notwithstanding, Stăniloae was one of the many Romanian hierarchs and theologians who claimed during the interwar period that the rural life was the matrix of pristine religiosity, and the only source for the spiritual renewal of the nation. He shared the values of the Slavophile intelligentsia, being himself born into a family of peasants who lived their Christian faith in strict accordance with the traditional norms of Eastern Orthodoxy. For many personal reasons, and less perhaps from a scientific perspective, Stăniloae saw the life of the peasants before the industrial revolution “filled with many blessings.”

This puritan dream for the Romanian village never completely lost its stamina, remaining particularly attractive for those members of the urban intelligentsia who have been brought up and educated in strongly secular centres of Europe. This phenomenon represents a specific pathology of modernity, which encourages a somewhat essentialist bovarism of a poetic kind. Often, an almost complete lack of instruction in social and economic history contributes to the literary idealisation of the “perennial village.” There, against the odds of modern history, the “archaic ontology” of the Romanian peasant unfolded its pre-modern (though not anti-modern) story.

It is true that the church, in the Romanian territories and elsewhere, was at the heart of the traditional Christian village. Like an *axis mundi*, the temple structured the symbolic geography of ordinary people. Time and space were shaped by an innate sense of awe towards the sacred.
The Psalter was widely known among the more committed believers. Crucifixes and shrines would mark the crossroads and the entries into every village. Pilgrimages to monasteries were omnipresent during the great festivals of the Church. Often, a turreted belfry would inform the peasants living at a distance about the time for daily prayer, or the time for mourning for those departed. Normally, Orthodox Christians had their work and food sanctified in prayer by the sign of the cross.\textsuperscript{73} The presence of God was felt in the most ordinary circumstances of life.

Stǎniloae’s attachment to bucolic nostalgia has, therefore, a profoundly sentimental touch. Later, in the 1980s, Stǎniloae recalled during his conversations with Costa de Beauregard, the cardinal virtues of the peasant family life: modesty, discreetness, and kind-heartedness. Such human qualities were the essential ingredients of “the joys,” as opposed (in Augustinian fashion) to the mundane “pleasures” of life.\textsuperscript{74} Ideally, Stǎniloae thought, the community life of the peasant Christians would be shaped by the oblatory ethos of Orthodoxy. Ascetic endurance and humility were the virtues that fed their natural admiration for the diversity and order of creation. The young Stǎniloae strongly believed that the Gospel had nourished the substance of the Romanian folk traditions. Different rites of passages celebrated anticipated patterns of the “cosmic liturgy.” He would have subscribed to the words of Mircea Eliade, in whose eyes “the Romanians have preserved, deepened and valued the Christian vision on cosmos, as it was expressed in the first centuries of Christianity. Thus, the conservatism and archaic character of Romanian folklore protected a heritage that belonged to Christianity, but which historical processes of various sort wanted to destroy.”\textsuperscript{75}

Looking at the ancient culture of the Romanian peasants, Stǎniloae did not put on the critical eyeglass of the cultural anthropologist. He never took the trouble to identify the pagan reminiscences in the fables, stories, and legends that perhaps even nowadays, in folk music and dances, capture the imagination of the last Romanian peasants. In his youth, he went so far that he conceded a certain theological orthodoxy to the uncanny experiences of “illumination” and “prophecy” ascribed to the Wallachian peasant Petrache Lupu, nicknamed “Moșul” (“The Elder”).\textsuperscript{76} This elder from Maglavit (Dolj County) claimed that God bestowed on him the miraculous gifts of healing, clairvoyance and prophesying. Though not a monk and without sticking to a specific churchmanship, Petrache Lupu was revered by thousands of people, who in the 1930s visited him in great numbers. Some other Orthodox theologians, such as the layman
Mihai Urzică, resisted the claims made by Petrache Lupu and his adepts, putting them under a serious doubt. On the other hand, the learned Stâniloae felt the need to give a patristic explanation of that phenomenon by comparing the hesychastic tradition of the Byzantine mystics with this dogma-free manifestation of folk religiosity. Never did he express an explicit embarrassment with regards to this episode, which suggests that his personal belief (never officially validated by the Church) did not change.

Stâniloae’s strong attachment to the rural values of Christianity was not exceptional in the interwar period. On behalf of Stâniloae himself and other Church officials, this attitude betrays only the hesitant acceptance of the inevitable changes that the modernisation of Romania brought about. For those acquainted with the history of early Christianity, this seems to be a real paradox. In the New Testament texts, rural culture hardly enjoys a privileged status. On the contrary, nearly all the Pauline letters were sent to important city centres from the Roman Empire, and the later success of the Byzantine project cannot be explained without reference to the urban network, which eased the proximity of the religious and the political decisions.

**Trauma of Secularisation**

Albeit the urban ethos of early Christianity, the shift from the rural to the urban setting in modern times had traumatizing effects for any religious individual or community, particularly in the case of those who received no historical instruction. For a better understanding of the roots of this modern and still persistent perception, one has to look at the phenomenon of secularisation connected (though not exclusively) to the Westernisation of various religious habits and practices. In Europe, particularly, secularisation was seen as an integrative, if not dissolving factor, which allowed the dialogue between different cultures to emerge. Among all the other Romanian principalities, Transylvania was the first to have experienced the explosion of different strategies of secularisation, regarded as necessary steps in the process of modernisation. Transylvania was the space where the Roman-Catholic Christians encountered the Evangelicals, and where the Uniate Christians met with the Eastern Orthodox. They all agreed and had disputes on many points, only to notice later that the new Christian confessions (such as the Baptist or the Adventist churches)
emerged and prospered among their former coreligionists. Different
churches had different attitudes towards food-rites and their symbolism,
allowing a greater or smaller degree of flexibility in terms of cuisine
innovation. The neo-Protestant churches, in particular, seemed prone to
forget the deep symbolism of the religious meal ceremonies, which
represented the backbone of traditional Orthodoxy. The idea that “bread”
was intrinsically sacred was inconceivable for those who refuted the
argument of the tradition, for the benefit of biblical literalism.
Notwithstanding these tensions, all Christian bodies came across the
secularisation vector, especially during the second half of the 19th century,
and the early 20th century (when a mass migration of workers boosted the
hybridisation phenomenon). Between 1848 (a time of political and cultural
revolution) and 1948 (when the cross-fertilisation culture disappears under
the “red horizons”), Transylvania staged ambivalent actions, which pertain
to different interpretations. Dumitru Stăniloae preferred to see
secularisation as the by-product of Western theology, and thus as having
exclusively negative effects.

Priestly sermons, local magazines, journal chronicles, travellers’
diaries, some pieces of private correspondence – all these documents
reflect at times the radical transformation of the traditional understanding
of fundamental practices, such as the religious feasting and fasting.
Different vestigia record the loosening up of certain dietary rules ascribed
for different periods of the liturgical year. They were, indeed, paralleled
by the appearance of new codes of dressing (e.g., priests shaven, wearing
no cassock in public), challenging beliefs, demythologised attitudes
towards courtship and love. The rhythms of nature had been ignored for
the benefit of labour efficiency and economic profit. Time and space
started being shaped according to non-hierarchical categories, while the
old narrative practices (such as the reading of the Psalter in connection
to the Great Lent period) disappeared.

Thus, the church ceased to be the very axis mundi of the symbolic
geography of ordinary people. Crucifixes stopped marking the crossroads
of the new towns and cities, the religious festivals becoming the object
of mockery for many sceptics. Food was not anymore sanctified in prayer
by the sign of the cross. The unity between the micro- and the
macro-cosmos became blurred, with the special status ascribed to the
matter (regarded as apt to become an incarnational vehicle) disappearing
almost completely. The natural ecology insured by the theological
economy of the basic elements (air, fire, earth, water) seemed endangered.
The bread was not anymore capable to carry out an universal symbolism, or to display metonymically a theological significance (pars pro toto: the Eucharist being the crucified and resurrected image of the world, taken as gift). Where it was still practiced, fasting lost its connection to the all-encompassing narrative of ekklesia. The acts of piety became dramatically individualised. The connection between the body and the word was simply defected. New tastes appear to surface, but also old recipes are lost. Soaked in the new liberal ethos, the notion of rite itself is put under question. In fact, the very idea of religious identity cannot hold as it used to, in the past. The urban majority does not hail anymore the seasonal ceremonies of the religious communities. The “natural symbols” (Mary Douglas) embedded on the traditional system of food prohibitions lose their force and integrity. “Pure” and “impure” are not anymore categories as clear as they used to be. Less and less ambiguities (or taboos) confront the experience of eating. The immediate connection between the acts of, respectively, refraining and repenting, looks almost nonsensical. Readings ascribed to specific parts of the liturgical year are simply lost. The complementarity of virtues (such as fasting and almsgiving, or supplication) seems not obvious. Thus, what is threatened is the very notion of celebration (with “frugality” or “abstinence” as its correspondent term).

The sense of belonging to a “cosmic Christianity” faded away, with the entrance into the complex space of modernity. The implementation of the functionalist approach to food, the invention of new medical notions of hygiene, the oblique attachment to scepticism among the intellectuals and the new bourgeoisie, the loss of authority of the traditional fortress of Christian piety (exemplified by the opposition established by Metropolitan Andrei Şaguna between the schools, seen as necessary, and the monasteries, seen as futile), the industrialisation process, the constant changes of the urban calendar and time perception, the erosion of the Byzantine memory among the traditional Orthodox, along with the appearance of an informal ecumenical practices at the grassroots level (triggered, in part, by mixed marriages) – all these events contributed to the transformation of all rites of passages.

It is because of all these losses that the young Ştânioae did not disguise his liking for the “humble character” of the Romanian ethos. Ştânioae sided with those religious leaders, rural conservatives and the supporters of old folk traditions who expressed their strong opposition towards the secular homogenisation. On the other side, there were the partisans of
social rejuvenation, who defended the need to adapt the traditional *rites de passages* to the new conditions of life, marked by economic transactions across different symbolic borders.

**The National Ideal and the Orthodox Ecclesiology**

Along this partly legitimised nostalgia for the mythological realities of the peasant life, Stâniloae defended the dignity of the concept of “nation-State” as somebody who, in his childhood, experienced the political union of Great Romania. At the age of 15, Dumitru Stâniloae witnessed this thrilling, which was publicly celebrated in Alba-Iulia on 1st December 1918 in the presence of a great number of Church officials, as well.

Stâniloae was an offspring of an ordinary Transylvanian family, religiously engaged and remarkable only for its unmistakable sober ethos. Pundits in psychohistory may help with some arguments, which could explain the difference between the Transylvanians and their Romanian fellows living in the already constituted Kingdom (proclaimed by 1881, under the rule of King Carol I). Modest and honest, so the story went, the Romanians from Transylvania knew better than anybody how to work for their survival under foreign occupation. Toiling always with a long-term plan in his mind, the ordinary Transylvanians adopted very quickly the administrative and economic skills developed first by the Austrians, the Germans and the Hungarians. This can explain the better response to modernisation that is to be found in Transylvania after 1918.

The Wallachians, on the other hand, managed to appropriate the more stagnant ethos of the Balkans, which could not make great economic progress, or contribute to political freedom. Seen as less talkative than the Wallachians and perhaps less creative than the Moldavians, the ideal Transylvanian citizen understood better the historical mission surrounding the “national ideal.” Resentment and frustration must have almost inevitably fuelled the rhetoric of young Transylvanians, such as Dumitru Stâniloae, at the sight of the “compromising deals” between the government from Bucharest and the Vatican administration. The Orthodox Transylvanians defended their patriotic rights against “the foreign” and “heretic” influence in counter-reaction to Vatican’s attempts from 1927 to establish a concordat with the Romanian state. More than anybody else, the Orthodox from Transylvania remembered the acts of injustice
perpetrated during the Austro-Hungarian occupation (1867–1918) and, beforehand, under the rule of the Habsburgs (1526-1867).\textsuperscript{88} The role of the recent memory, unhealed by historical distance and participatory hermeneutics, was thus crucial for the later developments of Stăniloae’s polemical stance.\textsuperscript{89}

To these considerations one should add Stăniloae’s strong convictions about the Orthodox ecclesiology, contrasted by the Roman-Catholic dogma of universal jurisdiction. Instead of the papal authority, Stăniloae saw the bishop as the one who

“[o]verses the keeping of the faith in his diocese, having the charge to keep it the same as the other dioceses of the whole Church. This is why he is ordained by two or three other bishops, as they ask him to confess his faith as precondition, and that it be the same as that of the bishops who ordain him. The bishop is thus also the structure of the link of his diocese with other dioceses and with the universal Church in matters of faith. This is why he must be in uninterrupted communion with other bishops.”\textsuperscript{90}

Stăniloae was suspicious of the potentially totalitarian tendencies hidden by the office of St Peter’s vicar, under the appearance of a missionary umbrella.

“Both the principle of communion and the transcendent origin of sanctifying action in the Church are concentrated in Episcopal synodality. Synodality shows that sanctification and perfection do not exist outside communion. But sanctification as power of raising up to higher communion is distinct from general communion, because it comes from above. Since nothing higher than Episcopal synodality exists, the sanctification of transcendent origin in the Episcopal order can only come through the highest sanctifying organ, which is Episcopal communion or synodality itself.”\textsuperscript{91}

Not only does the Roman-Catholic Church give more power to the pope than to his collegial bishops, but she also tends to water down the natural differences between the nations of the globe. The true ethnic plurality and cultural diversity, Stăniloae thought, was celebrated in Orthodoxy as a divine gift.\textsuperscript{92} He opposed what he took to be the canonical Roman-Catholic view (which has radically changed since Vatican II) with an organicist understanding of the “nation” and a conciliary vision about the Church. One nation, claimed Stăniloae, cannot be reduced to
a simple gathering of people sharing the same language, history and culture. Despite the transitory character of the ethnical entities, Stănîloae could not regard the nations as being “like chaff driven by the desert wind,” or put “on fire” (Isaiah 47, 14).

In other words, the Orthodox ecclesiology does not see the notion of Christian identity as free-floating, being defined by some rather exact forms of territorial belonging. Ideally, the bishop is master over not an abstract flock, but the close friend of those gathered together to worship in one given place, which makes the body of the local church. It was this theological sense of being able to justify the local and the particular in the light of the traditional Christian teaching that allowed Stănîloae to make harsh statements about the allegedly power-driven structures of Roman-Catholic universalism. On the ideal map of Orthodox ecclesiology, the individual call of each nation seemed to fit together, better than anywhere else. While making these claims, Stănîloae overlooked the complex interaction, if not conflicts between modern nationalist rhetoric, and the pastoral mission of the Orthodox churches in their diasporas.

More than once, the Christian communities living outside the traditional Orthodox borders perceived with great pain the lack of unity in the actions pursued by different ecclesiastical centres (from Moscow and Constantinople, to Bucharest and Belgrade). In other words, Stănîloae did not challenge the shortcomings of Orthodox ecclesiology revealed by the very dynamics of modern life, when the traditional notion of territorial identity and the imperial authorisation of ecumenical debates do not have the same weight.

**Narcissism in Historiography**

Along with the bucolic nostalgia intensified by the trauma of secularisation, and his Transylvanian sensitivity, together with his deep theological convictions about the truth of Orthodox ecclesiology, Dumitru Stănîloae embraced the nationalist agenda for reasons that have to do with historical scholarship. While attacking the Uniates, Stănîloae tried to legitimise the Orthodox contribution to the formation of the Romanian nation. One of his articles bore the eloquent title: “The Contribution of Orthodoxy to the Formation and the Maintenance of Romanian People and National Unity,” where the common vulgate of nationalist historiography was directly implemented. According to Stănîloae,
Orthodoxy was the original form of Christianity, which landed on the proto-Romanian territories. Following the conquest of Dacia by the Romans (II-III century), a Romanian nation was born, tout court, Christian. The natural conclusion of this logic, which loses sight of all the historical discontinuities recorded by the archaeologists, suggests that birth of the Romanian people emerges as a providential miracle in history.\(^9\) A betrayal of the Orthodox faith is, thus, an act of treason with regards to the Romanian identity as well.

It mattered very little for Dumitru Stăniloae that the factual history of early Christianity in the territories of Romania antiqua was rather poorly documented, lending itself only to mere conjectures. What to a foreign historian it looked like an unconvincing picture, to a Romanian traditionalist was absolutely obvious: “the Romanians were born Christians.”\(^9\) That the birth of the nation coincided with the birth of Christianity on the Romanian land was an undisputed matter among the Orthodox hierarchs, this claim being also reflected in the Constitution from 1923 (which called the Orthodox Church the “national Church”). The triumphal emancipation of the Romanian nation from the crude oppressors, says the Church official vulgate, is paralleled by the equally brave story of Christianisation – in Orthodox terms, only – of this young nation. To quote one epitomising myth that troubles this ethno-theological discourse of the Church official – embraced, at least in part, by Stăniloae too – is that related to the story of St Andrew, the brother of apostle Peter. This first-called among the apostles is regarded as the seal of the Orthodox tradition, which was planted from the very beginning in the soil of the Romanian nation. All the other missionary actions taken on the territories of Romania antiqua are to be seen in the glowing shadow of St Andrew, whose feast in the Orthodox calendar (30 November) has been recently equated with the eve of the National Day (1 December).

But what do the historians say about this narcissistic narrative about divine election, continuity and triumph? To begin with, in his Church History (iii. 1) Eusebius of Caesarea describes Andrew as the “apostle of Scythia.” This geographic appellation used to denote in the past the region lying north of the Caspian and of the Black Sea. This explains why the Russians claimed later to have St Andrew as their patron saint. The majority of scholars are inclined to think that Eusebius refers to Scythia Minor (today Dobruja, which extends from the western banks of the lower Danube to the eastern shores of Black Sea). In 46 AD Scythia Minor was incorporated to the Roman Empire as part of the Moesia Inferior region,
becoming later a Byzantine province. Hereby, the Greek emissaries sent from Constantinople gradually Christianised Dobruja. Most of the historical records, which demonstrate a Christian presence in Scythia Minor, date from the fourth century. Around 300 AD, the persecution of the Church initiated by Diocletian reached the territories of Dobruja, and countless of Christians saw their death in places such as Niviodunum (today Isaccea) Axiopolis (today Cernavodă), or Tomis (today Constanţa). Starting with the fourth century, the ecclesiastical structure of Dobruja began to be fortified. Mark, a bishop of Tomis, attended the gatherings of the first ecumenical council from Nicaea 325. The same Dobruja can boast with famous monk John the Cassian, bishop Teotim I (a defender of Origen, and a friend of St John Chryostom), and Dionysius Exiguus (“the Small One”) who calculated first the date of birth of Christ, were originally from the same Dobruja. On the map, Dobruja represents, however, only a small fraction of the contemporary Romania.

The successful conversion of this Pontic region to orthodox Christianity, coming to pass first under the influence of the Roman colonists and later under direct supervision from Constantinople, cannot account for the Church history in Transylvania, Moldavia and Walachia. These provinces, which make almost complete the present borders of the country, eschewed the Byzantine influence. Significant archaeological evidence (consisting of religious objects, inscriptions on stones, and remnants of churches) proves the existence of early Christian communities, going back to the early fourth century. For centuries, the proto-Romanians must have experienced a semi-nomadic life in the hilly regions on all sides of the Carpathians, where they could be out of sight for the invaders (e.g., Goths, Huns, Slavs). They lacked the opportunities available to all those Christian communities living in the proximity of the urban centres of the Mediterranean. This inevitably resulted into lack of literary culture, which makes almost impossible today the identification of the very source of Christianisation in Walachia, Moldova and Transylvania. In Walachia and Moldova, which for two century largely formed “the free Dacia” (a buffering zone between the Roman Empire and the terra incognita of the barbarians), the rather slow and discontinuous process of religious conversion took place from the second century AD (following the invasion of Dacia by Emperor Trajan, between 101-106) up to the early fourteen-century. At that point, the sense of religious belonging to the Byzantine commonwealth is well testified among the Romanian princes. Transylvania represents a special case. It is probably safe to say that, to
the extant it embraced Christianity, the Latin-speaking population of Transylvania maintained its allegiance to the creed and the liturgical languages (Greek and Slavonic) of the Eastern Orthodox Church until very late, towards the dawn of the 18th century.99

Historians find it very difficult to prove the necessary connection between the appearance of Christianity in the ancient Romanian territories and the birth of the Romanian nation in the first millennium. The early Christian communities of Romania antiqua were extremely diverse: they included Orthodox and Arian, as well as Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking churches. Before the sixth century, it is very likely that religious syncretism was characteristic for the inland territories of ancient Romania (Dobruja being probably the only exception). As many pieces of Romanian folklore show, the process of Christianisation of the rural population continued until very late. Magic, superstition and pagan rites were never completely uprooted from the cultural soil of the Romanian peasantry, despite the great efforts paid by the Church.100 The official historiography, however, found it very difficult to come to terms with this aching truth.

Conclusions

"Theology and nationalism" remains a topic of paramount importance for the intellectual history of modern Romania, and of the Balkans in general.101 Many historians of modern Romania have studied the cultural and political trajectory of the “national idea” up until 1918. Very few scholars failed to underline the instrumental role played by the Eastern Orthodoxy during the agonising birth of the Romanian self-consciousness, especially during the 19th century.102

The political rapport between the Orthodox Church and the national state of Romania is rather well documented, while the study of the “dangerous liaisons” between secular nationalist discourse and the works of different Christian theologians still need pioneering research. This study aims to be an introduction to Dumitru Stăniloae’s ethno-theology. A systematic examination of the nationalistic themes present in the writings of the greatest Romanian theologian, Fr Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) has not as yet been carried out, despite the fact that his views still capture the imagination of many leaders of Romanian Orthodoxy. The great influence exercised by his reflections on the nation and the Church

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explains why the enquiry into the roots of Ţăniloae’s ethno-theology cannot be postponed for too long.

This present study, written in the form of an introduction, aimed at presenting the theological tensions at work in the writings of Dumitru Ţăniloae. There, one finds a passionate involvement in history, seen as the domain of the “many”, which is paralleled by the vertical contemplation of the ineffable “One,” that is beyond any fragmentation. In literary terms, one could call the first type of discourse, as the “prophetic” trope, while the latter, and the most important one, would be “the sapiential.” I have identified four major causes, which hold Ţăniloae responsible for his defence of a sui-generis ethno-theology: a) the genuine bucolic nostalgia, rooted in his personal memoirs; b) the severe trauma of secularisation, which was perceived with intensity by the Transylvanians; c) the sincere belief in the rightfulness of the Orthodox ecclesiology (based on the notion of local authority, exercised by the bishop, and territorial identity, protected by the parish), against the Roman-Catholic claims to universal jurisdiction made by the papal office; d) the gullible captivity in the narcissist discourse of a neo-Romantic historiography, adopted by the Orthodox Church officials during the 20th century (both in Romania, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe).

However, in the pan-Orthodox circles, the lasting memory of Ţăniloae’s life-long activities stems not from his nationalistic agenda, but from a truly inspired and creative reading of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. For more than fifty years and under the most austere circumstances, the Romanian theologian worked indefatigably for the construction of a “neo-Patristic synthesis.” In his case, the attempt to refresh the theological thinking of the Orthodox Church, caught up in a long cultural and religious captivity under Ottoman Rule, and the unilateral impact of the Western Aufklärung, was rather successful. Ţăniloae, along with other Orthodox theologians, such as Vladimir Lossky or Fr Justin Popovitsch, tried to answer the challenges of modern culture and to surpass the barren “theology of repetition,” in which even the greater minds of the post-Byzantine tradition were hopelessly stuck. This return to the biblical and patristic sources of Christian theology, in which he saw the only possible bedrock for the ecumenical dialogue among the Christian communities, was paralleled by a genuine interest in the Continental philosophy of the 20th century. Between Ţăniloae’s struggle for the Gospel and his early nationalist temptations, the universality of his theological commitments prevailed.
NOTES


8 In 1938, D. Stănileoa endorses Crainic’s views on ethnocracy, as it appears from his articles included in *Națiune și creștinism*, edited and prefaced by C. Schifirmeț (Bucharest: Elion Press, 2003), p. 62. Stănileoa also mounted a critique (op. cit., 33-35) of the ”Sămănătorism Movement” (labelled as “cheaply Romantic”), paralleled by an appraisal of “Gândirea Movement.”


There is always a hint to be found to the scriptural verse from the book of Revelation 21, 24. See D. Stâniloae, *Națiune și creștinism*, p. 119.

See Metropolitan Nestor Vornicescu, *Desăvârșirea unității noastre naționale – fundament al unității Bisericii străbune* (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei Press, 1988). In order to refute this parasitic view on national history, Lucian Boia authored the best-seller *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, ET by James Christian Brown (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001). Boia should be, however, read only in the light of the sound criticism provided by Sorin Antohi and Ioan-Aurel Pop, the latter being also critically reviewed by Ovidiu Pecican.

Nae Ionescu should not be confused with Eugen Ionescu (later Eugène Ionesco), who particular inter-war position is analysed in Jeanine Teodorescu, “Nu, Nu, and Nu. Ionesco’s ‘No!’ to Romanian politics and culture,” *Journal Of European Studies*, vol. 34 (2004), no. 3, p. 267-287.

On the Iron Guard, one of the best available monograph belongs to Armin Heinen, *Die Legion ‘Erzengel Michael’ in Rumänien: soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation* (Munich, 1986).

The most relevant articles on this topic have been gathered in Nae Ionescu, *Teologia. Integrala publicisticii religioase* (Sibiu: Deisis Press, 2003); an alternative journal to Crainic’s populist magazine *Gândirea* was the short-lived *Predania* (editor-in-chief: Gh. Racoveanu), reprinted in 2001 with a preface by Ioan I. Ică Jr. (Sibiu: Deisis Press, 2001); the best biography of Nae Ionescu is available only in Romanian: D. Mezdrea, *Nae Ionescu. Biografie*, vol. I-IV (Bucharest: Universul Dalsi Publishers, 2002-2005); for the nationalist proclivities of yet another influential disciple of Nae Ionescu, see Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: the Romanian Roots 1907-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). For a recent study of yet

18 M. Vulcănescu, *Dimensiunea românească a existenței* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Română, 19431, 19912).


20 For an excellent genealogy of the Romanian ethnic ontologies, see S. Antohi, “Romania and the Balkans: From geocultural bovarism to ethnic ontology,” *Tr@nsit-Virtuelles Forum*, vol. 21 (2002).


22 Ioan Ică Jr. and Gheorghe F. Anghelescu have collected the best bibliography of Dumitru Stănioae in the posthumous *Festschrift* entitled *Persoană și comuniune* (Sibiu: Diecezana Press, 1993), p. 16-67. The English reader could find the following volumes available in translation: *Theology and the Church*, foreword by John Meyendorff (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980); *The Experience of God*, vol. I, 1st part, foreword by Kallistos Ware (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994); *The World, Creation and Deification*, vol. I, 2nd part (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000); *Orthodox Spirituality* (St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002). The Community of Sisters of the Love of God (Fairacres, Oxford) published three pamphlets on *Eternity and Time; The Victory of the Cross and on Prayer and Holiness (The Icon of Man Renewed in God)*. For an excellent introductory study into Stănioae’s dogmatic theology, see A. Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Stănioae,” *Modern Theology*, vol. 13 (1997) no. 2, p. 253-267, with the hackneyed remark at page 259: “it was only with Calvin’s *Institutes* that the notion of Christ’s threefold office assumed the structural significance with which he invests it.” A detailed study of Stănioae’s ecclesiology is available in Ronald C. Robertson, *Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Ecclesiology. The Contribution of Dumitru Stănioae and Younger Colleagues* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1988), along with Stefan Lupu, *La sinodalità e/o conciliarità espresione dell’ unità della catolicità della Chiesa in Dumitru Stănioae* (1903-1993) (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1999); and Lucian Turcescu (ed.), *Dumitru Stănioae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology* (Jassy: Center for Romanian Studies, 2002). For


With his sensational genius and awareness of historical details, Henry Chadwick has described the theological ironies comprised by this historically cemented opposition. See H. Chadwick, East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church. From Apostolic Times until the Council of Florence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

For a philosophical defence of this Roman (and Catholic) identity, see R. Brague, Eccentric Culture: a Theory of Western Civilisation, ET by Samuel Lester (South Bend Indiana: St Augustine’s Press, 2002).


For this history of this notion in the Romanian literature, see Dionisie Petcu, *Conceptul de etnic* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980); and Adolf Ambruster, *Romanitatea românilor. Istoria unei idei* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1993).

This is also the argument of Costion Nicolescu, *Teologul în cetate: Părintele Stâniloae și arie politicii* (Bucharest: Editura Christiana, 2003).

D. Stâniloae, *Iisus Hristos și restaurarea omului* (Sibiu: Diecezana Press, 1943). In 1993, a second edition of this books was reprinted at Craiova (Omniscop Publishers). Unfortunately, this volume is littered with spelling mistakes in Greek and German.


44 A thorough exposition of the cultural and historical shock brought about by the early communist occupation is provided by Dennis Deletant, Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghie Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State (1948-1965) (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999). I did not have access to A. Johansens, Theological Study in the Rumanian Orthodox Church under Communist Rule (London, 1961).


47 D. Stăniloae, “Întoarcerea fraților,” Glasul Bisericii, vol. VII (1948) no. 10, p. 64-68; “Restaurarea unității Bisericii străbune,” Glasul Bisericii, vol. VIII (1949), no. 5-6, p. 15-26; “Reîntregirea Bisericii strămoșești,” Glasul Bisericii, vol. IX (1950) no. 6, p. 27-33. After he left the prison, Stăniloae wrote the highly polemical tract on “Uniatismul: opera unei întreite silnicii,” Biserica Ortodoxă Română, vol. 87 (1969), p. 355-390. It should be noted here the insistent reference to “the Church of our ancestors” (or “the Church of our forefathers”), instead of, simply, the more adequate theological designation in use (“The Orthodox Patriarchate of Church”). Like in the Communist Russia or China, “the popular Church” was a phrase coined by the party officials, who could easily dictated the rules of speech for the Christian

In 1948, the official number of Greek-Catholic Christians in Romania was around 1,560,000 souls.


On this important figure of the 18th century Romanian intelligentsia, D. Stăniloae wrote with respect and resignation in his study “Lupta și drama lui Inocheție Micu Clain,” Biserica Ortodoxă Română 86 (1968), p. 1137-1185.


Nicolas Stebbing, Bearers of the Spirit: Spiritual Fatherhood in Romanian Orthodoxy (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 2003). Archimandrite Teofil Părăianu (b. 1928) once said that Fr Stăniloae had told him that he considered the publication of “The Philokalia” to be his greatest achievement (oral report).

Elder Cleopa of Romania, The Truth of Our Faith: A Discourse from Holy Scripture on the Teachings of True Christianity (Greece: Uncut Mountain Press, 2000); for a hagiographical piece on Fr Cleopa, see Ioanitchie Bălan, Shepherd of Souls, Elder Cleopa the New Hesychast of Romania (Platina, Alaska: St Herman Brotherhood Press, 2000).

For an impressionistic description of Fr Paisie’s personality, see H.-R. Patapievici, Flying against the Arrow: an Intellectual in Ceausescu’s Romania, ET by M. Adâscăliței (Budapest: Central European University, 2003), p. 106-118.
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Lidia Stăniloae, op. cit., passim.


See the interviews carried out by Lidia Vianu, *Censorship in Romania* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998).


St. Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.11 (“more inward than my most inward”).

This history of the intellectual life in Romania during the 1980s still needs to be written. Glimpses of it can be found in the large number of diaries, interviews, essays or chronicles, which emerged in the wake of the “Revolution” (December 1989). Notwithstanding, these personal testimonies would deserve a systematic exposition and subsequent interpetation.


On the intrinsic theological ambiguities that pertain to this issue, as it is made clear in Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and


70 Cf. S. Dumitrescu, *op. cit.*, 34.

71 For time in the archaic ontology of the Romanian peasant, see M. Eliade, *Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God: Comparative Studies in the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); on how these stable rhythms of life have been disturbed by the aberrant economical policies of communism, see P. Ronnas, “Turning the Romanian Peasant into a New Socialist Man: An Assessment of the Rural Development Policy in Romania,” *Soviet Studies*, vol. 41 (1989), no. 4, p. 543-559. Horia Bernea (1938-2001), painter and curator, has offered in the galleries of of the famous “Museum of the Romanian Peasant” from Bucharest (www.mtr.ro). This is an impressive reconstruction of the symbolic world of the traditional Romanians taken directly from the countryside.


73 This practice would go back to the practices of the early monks of the Egyptian desert, who used the sign of the Cross in order to chase out the evil spirits. See Athanasius the Great, *Vita Antonii* 74-75; and in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (collectio alphabetica), see Abba Ammonas 8, Abba Poemen 8, etc.


See also Ion Agârbiceanu, Preotul și familia preoțească. Rostul lor etnic în satul românesc, Ed. Subsecției Eugenie și Biopolitice a Astrei și a Institutului de Igienă și Biopolitică al Universității Cluj-Sibiui, Sibiu, 1942.


For an anthropological study of the Transylvanian ethos in the 19th century, see Sorin Mitu, National Identity of Romanians from Transylvania (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001).

For a better understanding of this point, see the well-balanced considerations of the Romanian historian Sorin Mitu, Transilvania mea (Jassy: Polirom Publishers, 2006).

Ștefan Lemny, Originea și cristalizarea ideii de patrie în culturu românească (Bucharest: Minerva, 1986).

The actions carried out against the contemplative monasteries (both Orthodox and Roman-Catholic) by General Bukow are an almost constant reference in Stăniloae’s polemical prose (which forgets to mention he suffers to which the Roman-Catholic faithful had been subjected during the long periods of tyranny).

The voice of another Transylvanian was particularly acute in the 1930s. See Emil Cioran, Schimbarea la față a României (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishers, 1990), passim.


Stâniloae, Ortodoxie și Românism, p. 13.


In this, Stâniloae follows the rhetoric legitimised by professional historians, such as G. I. Brătianu, O enigmă și un miracol: poporul român [1942] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1988). The phrase in the title belongs to Ferdinand Lot (‘une énigme et un miracle historique’). Andrei Brezianu once noticed that the Romanian historiography lacks a contribution similar to F. Braudel’s monograph on L’identité de la France. See A. Brezianu, “ieri și azi. Schiță de tablou moral pentru o societate în tranziție,” Idei în dialog vol. 10 (iulie 2005), p. 13.

This blunt statement belongs to Fr Ioan Iovan from the “Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God” (Recea, Târgu Mureş), interviewed by Victoria Clark, Why the Angels Fall. A Portrait of Orthodox Europe from Byzantium to Kosovo? (Oxford: MacMillan, 2000), p. 211: “we are Christians grown, like grass which has never been cut.” This was the view shared by the members of Gândirea movement, and it is currently still endorsed by the Church historian Mircea Pâcurariu in his first volume of the Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (București: Editura Institutului Biblic, 1980-1981), 3 vols.


This is a huge topic, but I refer the reader to A. Madgearu, Rolul creștinismului în formarea poporului român (Bucharest: All, 2001); for an English equivalent, see Alexandru Madgearu, “The Spreading of the Christianity in the Rural Areas of Post-Roman Dacia (4th-7th centuries),” Archaeus, vol. VIII (2004), no. 1-4, pp. 41-59. On Christianity as ‘folk religion,’ see the challenging studies of N. Zugravu, Geneza creștinismului popular al românilor (Bucharest: 1997).


For one famous example of Shamanic practices discovered by Christian missionaries in the Carpathian Mountains during the 17th century, see V. A. Ureche, Codex Bandinus: Memoriu asupra scrierii lui Bandinus dela 1646 (Bucharest: Analele Academiei Române, 1895), p. 154, commented by Mircea Eliade, Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God, ET by W. R. Trask (Chicago: