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## The World – Special Language of God’s Love for Man. Elements of Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s Cosmology

### Abstract

The world is the special gift that God has given to man; it is the space of the presence and of the action of the divine grace, but also an instrument of perfection for man and a means of communication with the Creator Himself. The world has been created out of God’s love and mercy, and in the act of the creation we can discover the work of all the persons of the All-Holy Trinity, the Trinitarian mark being major, indelible and obvious. Special language of God’s love for man, the world is the only possible and viable space of perfection and existence for man. For this reason, it ought to be managed as a gift, with



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respect and responsibility. The intrinsic rationality of the creation is the consequence of God's creative work, but also of the possibility of communication between man and creation and the means by which man can recognize the fingerprint of the Master of life in the work of His hands.

Creation has a beginning, just like man, but will not have an end, because it has been meant for eternization, spiritualization and deification; consequently, the degrading, reductionist, manipulative and altering visions on the cosmological eschatology, of sectarian nature and from Hollywoodian perspectives, do nothing else except to increase the confusion and to be a means of Christian countermission.

Father Stăniloae has genially succeeded in speaking to his contemporaries, offering them hope, light and faith thanks to the beauty of the doctrinal truth of the Scriptures and of the Holy Fathers, actually acculturing the present theological language, offering to it answers adequate to the expectations of the modern man, but also the accuracy of the divine revelation, unchangeable but forever redeeming.

## Keywords

creation, world, love, Creator, grace, cosmology, eschatology, language, gift

## 1 Introduction

The world we live in represents the reality of our existence, but, moreover, it is the only possible space of living for the human being. Although many scientists or science-fiction authors imagine human life as possible, sooner or later, elsewhere in the Cosmos, however, the serious science affirms that man could not live for long periods of time outside our planet. Man

forms with Terra a perfect symbiosis: from the elements necessary to life, which the Earth has been offering to man, up to the beneficial geomagnetic influences, everything is related to the space and time conditions from here.

This will lead us to a firm affirmation. It is good for man’s imagination to fly, there may be forms of life on other planets in the Cosmos as well, man may be able to travel on nearby planets, other than our natural satellite, the Moon, yet certainly he will not be able to live for long periods of time outside the conditions of existence of our own planet.

In other words, Terra is the specific gift and, after the gift of life itself, the greatest gift offered by the Creator to man, it is the instrument of human perfection and existence. If we were to make a comparison and think about the life led by animals in captivity, we could notice that it is much shorter and much more fragile than in the wild. Keeping the proportions, it is just the same with human life in other spatial conditions. Certainly, we do not have the intention of condemning science-fiction and the aspirations of the human imagination and fantasy, which have been good and useful in many cases; on the contrary, we ought to cultivate a Christian science-fiction literature, because isn’t the world of faith that world in which everything is possible, potentially?

Yet, getting back to our theological approach, the creation, the world represents both the most precious gift of the Creator for the created being, its unique optimal and favourable environment of existence, and the only viable stairway to heaven, and a special means of communication between God and us, but also a symbol of the Church, because the whole world has been meant for communion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. Radu, *Părintele Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae la 80 de ani* (Fr.Prof.Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae at 80), in *Studii Teologice* (Theological Studies), no. 9-10, 1983, București, p. 690.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae, one of the most important Romanian theologians of all the times, appreciated both in the East and in the West<sup>2</sup>, has insisted on this reality, using mainly the method of analogy<sup>3</sup>, to accentuate the role of the Christian cosmogony and eschatology for the life of faith and for the theological research, which is why this theologian affirmed at the middle of the past century that *“the role of tomorrow’s Orthodox theology will be to reconcile the vision on the cosmos of the Fathers. Theology needs to remain open to include both mankind, and the cosmos; it needs to take into account both the aspirations of the whole mankind and the results of modern science and technology”*<sup>4</sup>.

After Christ, the embodied Son of God, it is the creation that is the key to understanding our sense in the world and our relation with the Creator. By means of the creation, as in a Holy Communion, we are using God’s gift and reoffering it to him as our gift, impregnated by our creative effort on the creation – His gift for us.

The creation is a stairway to the Creator, as it talks about Him, but, at the same time, it is also a space of manifestation of our creativity, originality and virtues; it is a space in which God’s presence meets man’s presence, the Master’s work meets the work of the created being, so that the world is a space of convergence, communion, dialogue and manifestation of love and sacrificialness.

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<sup>2</sup> Gh. Petraru, *Repere ale gândirii și operei Părintelui Academician Dumitru Stăniloae* (Landmarks in the Thinking and Work of Father Academician Dumitru Stăniloae), in *Teologie și Viață* (Theology and Life), no. 712, Ed. Trinitas, Iași, 2002, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> I. Bria, *Metoda “teologică” a Părintelui Stăniloae* (Father Stăniloae’s “Theological” Method), in: *Ortodoxia* (The Orthodoxy), no. 3-4, 2003, București, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> M. Bielawski, *Părintele Stăniloae, o viziune filocalică despre lume* (Father Stăniloae, a Philocalical Vision of the World), Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 9.

The world is a gift of God for us and the only adequate environment for our life, yet it also becomes our gift to Him, when we manifest our humanity, with its spirit of communion, collaboration, love and creativity.

The creation makes God manifest, the One Who did not hesitate to come into it, inside it, for man’s salvation and the world’s perfection. For this reason, Father Stăniloae sees Christ as true God and true man, yet also as a means or a summit of the centuries, the Master of time, because time is, together with space, a second dimension of the creation, setting boundaries to our life.

As a means of the times, the Embodied Lord lifts the whole creation to the Father, so that He is the absolute center of human and universal history. But, at the same time, He is also the beginning and the end of time or of the centuries. This happens because, as beginning, He is the hand of the Father, the One by Whom everything has been made, and as end, He is the One by Whom all things are restored, saved, glorified perfectly and brought before the Father as sacrifice and gift.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, Christian cosmology can be understood only through the lens of Christology, anthropology and eschatology. Without Christ and without man, the world would have had no full sense and no possibility of fullness of life. Categorically, the world has been created for man and this truth triggers many practical responsibilities for man. Doctrinally, this lays the bases of ecotheology or Christian ecology.

## **2 The Creation – a special act of God’s will and love**

Entirely biblical and patristic, Father Stăniloae’s theology has aimed to go deeper into the supernatural divine revelation for

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<sup>5</sup> D. Popescu, *Centralitatea lui Hristos* (Christ’s Centrality), in: *Glasul Bisericii* (The Voice of the Church), București, 2002, p. 75.

his contemporaries; in other words, he wanted to explain and acculturate, using the newest acquisitions of the theological, philosophical and scientific thinking, the classical Christian cosmological paradigm.<sup>6</sup>

The creation, the world has been created by God according to the creative plan that the heavenly Master has wrought since eternity, yet the world has a beginning, it is not since eternity and it will also have an end, which must not be mistaken for its destruction, but must be understood as a qualitative transformation and its stepping into a new state of existence. Certainly, this father did not have in view any conception of the type of the stages existing in the Eastern, newer or older, religions, but sees the world as belonging to God's creative plan since eternity. Yet, the world must not be mistaken for the divine being; it belongs to the divine will.<sup>7</sup>

The creation is an act of divine will, the outcome of God's great love, an eruption, in a willingly manner, of the grace and force of the community of love of the Most Holy Trinity. The Trinitarian community of love is at the origin of the world's existence, the active engine of its transformations for the better and the catalyst of the creation's final perfection.

The Creation could not have existed since eternity because only God has His existence since eternity; the creation appears in time at His calling, according to an eternal plan, with a well-defined finality and sense.

The creation carries the Creator's fingerprint, not just because it is His direct work, but also because, inevitably, everything in the creation speaks without words about Him Who has brought it into existence. In other words, God's fingerprints in the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *Teologie și Spiritualitate* (Theology and Spirituality), Basilica, București, 2010, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), EIBMBOR, București, 1987, Vol. I, p. 7.

creation have naturally sprung out of Him, reflect Him, talk to us about Him and are means of His presence and work.

The fingerprint of the Master of life in the creation refers not just to the type of the creation, to its shape and the aim of its existence, but especially to the reasons of the creation, to the uncreated energies of the Creator - which exist in the universe, down to the smallest particle -, Who keeps everything into existence and without Whom everything would return into the nothingness they have come out of, by God’s will and love.

Father Stăniloae has taken over, has developed and has gone deeper into some elements of the theology of certain Holy Fathers, such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Maxim the Confessor or Gregory Palamas - who talk about the uncreated energies and about the reasons of the creation -, bringing his own contribution to the Christian cosmology, highlighting the value of this revealed doctrine for man’s concrete life, but also the relation between the human reason and the rationality of the creation, and the creation’s role in the relation between man and God via these specific *logoi*, as the reasons of creation are called in Eastern patristic language.<sup>8</sup>

The special merit of the Romanian theologian also consists in the fact that he went deeper into the relation between the two aspects of the revelation, the natural and the supernatural one, the fact that they are two aspects of the same reality, expressing the Creator’s love by different means, but also the fact that he has highlighted the rationality of the creation, the fact that the supreme Logos, God, is reflected in a gradual and specific manner in each part of the creation, which shows that the estrangement from God or the running away from God, specific features of the contemporary secularization process, are historical and volitional accidents pertaining to man, abnormal, useless and creating suffering, not wanted by God and useless

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<sup>8</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. I, EIBMBOR, București, 1997, p. 10.

to man. Or, maybe, their usefulness is the same as that of the prodigal son's temporary estrangement: a better appreciation of the Father's joy, love and generosity.<sup>9</sup>

The reason that exists even in the smallest particle shows to us what it is like for everything to be good and beautiful, useful, uplifting but at the same time transfiguring, in the world. The possibilities of perfection of man and the cosmos have existed even since their creation. The rationality of the creation offers to us the key to understanding the way God intervenes in the world from inside the creation without losing His transcendence. For this reason, we talk about immanent transcendence or transcendent immanence, certainly each of these expressions having its own specific connotations and uses.<sup>46</sup>

God's presence in the world is intrinsically related to the act of creation and His quality of Creator; God's uncreated grace springing from His Being, by means of the action of the Holy Spirit, is what has brought everything into existence, what holds everything into existence and guides to perfection and unity.<sup>10</sup>

In the smallest particle that exists there is the unseen grace of God, manifesting His presence and action, a fact not at all foreign to the latest intuitions of today's science, as it is said that the smallest particle known is a form of concentrated energy, which can manifest itself both as wave and light. Thus, the biblical statement concerning the fact that in the beginning was the Word that created everything, and that the creation has appeared according to God's commandment: "Let there be light!" has, today, profound scientific foundations.

In the domain of creation, of its research, theology and science meet in numerous places, as they both use reason as well, which ultimately relies on God, the Supreme Reason, All Wise, All Knowing and especially All Good and Loving, Who has

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.



edified everything as a “*harmonious entirety, thus supported by a unitary rationality, uniting in it the reasons of all the parts that compose it*”<sup>11</sup>.

### **3 The creation, an ineffable gift from God to man**

The creation carries in it the reflection of God’s image, which is unity in diversity, Trinity of Persons, yet one being, love, solidarity, generosity and sense. The creation speaks indirectly about the Creator, and for this reason theology speaks about the way of the natural revelation in the knowledge of God.

Certainly, the world, the creation being filled by the presence of God by grace, we can find out many things about Him; yet, useful to our knowledge unto salvation and completing the natural revelation is the supernatural revelation, founded on the explicit will of God of letting man know what the latter needs for his life and salvation. For this reason, Kalistos Ware evokes “*The infinity of the perfect existence and the infinity of a Father giving Himself since eternity and for eternity to a Son, with His joy of giving Himself, and the Son’s joy of receiving Him; but also with the communion of joy (as existence) of a Third, able to know by His own and equal experience all the generosity of the Father accompanied by joy and all the receiving of it accompanied by joy to the Son*”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (God’s Immortal Image), Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1987, p. 258.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Sfânta Treime Creatoarea și Mântuitoarea și țința veșnică a tuturor credincioșilor* (The Holy Trinity, Creator and Redeemer and Eternal Aim of All the Believers), in *Ortodoxia* (The Orthodoxy), no. 2, 1986, p. 16.

The creationism of Father Stăniloae is a Trinitarian one, as he says that “*the Holy Trinity is the creator, the redeemer, and the eternal aim of all the believers*”<sup>13</sup>.

The relation between triadology and cosmology is characteristic of the Eastern theology, because the creation is never seen as independent from the Creator, and the uncreated energies impregnate in a unique and indelible manner everything that exists in the world.

Consequently, by no means could cosmology be unrelated to Triadology, the Creator reflecting Himself in the immanence without losing anything from His transcendence. For Father Stăniloae, the Holy Trinity is not a doctrine, an idea or a theory, but the expression of the perfect way of living, which communicates the essential truth for the life of each one of us and offers us the perfect paradigm of life.

Thus, in Father Stăniloae’s theology “*The Holy Trinity is the creator, the redeemer, and the eternal aim of all the believers*”<sup>25</sup>. This statement aims to express the fundamental character of the teaching of faith for the Christian life.

Dogmas have a fundamental existential role: they do not express some theological speculation, or a thought of Christian philosophy, but are the fruit of God’s revealed love, of the love of the Creator, Who, being a good Father, has wanted to share to us something about His way of being and existence. This hermeneutical key is applicable to the whole doctrinal body, dogmas are realities of life, expressing the unlimited via the limited human language, and the apparent contradictions are only triggered by the form of expression, not by what the dogmas express.

The Christian doctrine is not the fruit of human thinking and wisdom. It is the fruit of the living and active grace of the Holy

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<sup>13</sup> K. Ware, *Experiența lui Dumnezeu în “Teologia Dogmatică” a Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae* (The Experience of God in the “Dogmatic Theology” of Father Dumitru Stăniloae), in: rev. *Ortodoxia* (The Orthodoxy), no. 3-4, 2003, București, p. 42.

Spirit, and Father Stăniloae has intuited this fact correctly. This is why his theology is deeply anchored in reality, existential, attractive, and able to offer man instruments to find out and go deeper into the purpose of his life.

The creation carries in it the fingerprints of God’s love, as expression of the acts of His hands; the creation bears in itself, engraved even up to its smallest particle, the Creator’s fingerprint, everything in the creation reflecting Him, glorifying Him without words, testifying about His greatness, beauty and love. The creation has, therefore, indirectly, a missionary character, powerfully speaking about the One Who has created everything, heaven and earth, the whole universe. It confesses the harmony, solidarity and subsidiarity present in the creation and which ought to be found so much more in man’s world, as he is the most precious being of the creation.

The unseen aspects of the world reveal to us a God Who loves His creation madly and Who has not hesitated to get into the human darkness, weakness and misery to give us again the greatness of the dignity of beings created in His image and meant for an endless likeness with Him.

While man may often forget about the greatness of life and of the immense gift that the Creator has given to him, the creation is an eternal, indirect and ineffable testimony of this reality, giving to us signs of hope on the way of life and lighting our certainties petrified in isolation and self-sufficiency.

#### **4 The creation – stairway to heaven and carrier of the Creator’s fingerprint**

Structure of the supreme love and communion, the All Holy Trinity is the One Who has created everything, according to the patristic statement, *from the Father by the Son in the Holy Spirit*, shaping the creation according to the Trinitarian image; although only man has been created according to the image of the Triune God, the Trinitarian fingerprint can be found, more

diffuse, yet definitely in the whole creation: “*in the structure of the supreme interpersonal love of the Trinity is given not just the unique possibility of creating another form of existence in favor of other conscious, free and loving persons, but also the unique possibility for these persons to be saved when they, making a bad use of their freedom, get out of the relation with the plenary existence and diminish and change their existence in a tormenting manner.*”<sup>14</sup>

In the alarmist and apocalyptic globalist context in which we are living, Father Stăniloae’s statement that “*according to the Christian faith, the world and man have a beginning and will also have an end*”<sup>15</sup> is a giver of sense and hope. The world has not existed since eternity; it has appeared in time and will have an end. But the end of the world does not mean that it will be destroyed by one or several cataclysms, as if the creator, very sadistically, would be waiting, with criminal pleasure, for the fruit of His love and mercy to be destroyed.

Certainly, these superficial Hollywoodian scripts, promoted so ardently by the contemporary media and Neo-Protestant, newer or older, confessions express a precarious spiritual life, a lack of deep faith and a lack of knowledge of the Scripture, or, better said, an altered, childish interpretation, alien to the patristic spirit and the Revealer’s will.

God has not created the world to destroy, later on, absolutely everything. What the Creator loves does not die and we need to have the certainty that everything He has created will have no end, although it has a beginning. All except sin and evil are part of this logic; and this is so because sin and evil have not been created by Him and so they will disappear, at a certain moment, once and for all.

Thus, the world will not be destroyed, passed through fire or other forms of eschatological torture, but will be transformed, spiritualized, deified. This is its destiny. And this process began

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<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică* (Dogmatic Theology), p. 226.

since the creation itself, culminating with the Embodiment of God’s Son and the Descent of the Holy Spirit. The authentic Christian and Orthodox vision is that of the world as ineffable gift of God for man, as unique way of existence, whose aim is to accompany man in the existence: “according to the Christian faith, the world has been created by God as a gift for men”.<sup>16</sup>

Father Stăniloae expressed this in detail in the chapter dedicated to eschatology from his *Dogmatic Theology*, showing the sense of the world, its vector, the direction towards which the world is going, and man’s role in this process. The Creator’s explicit and perfectly adequate gift for all of us, *the world*, is meant for “a progressive dialogue in love with us. Yet, for this, we also need to make a gift to God. Yet, man has nothing to give to God from himself. God is glad to see man giving up on some of the gifts received, giving them back to God [...] By this, he will show that he has them all from God as a gift and that they belong to Him. The world shows in its character of gift from God that it is not the ultimate and absolute reality.”<sup>17</sup>

The cosmology of Father Stăniloae is a doxological one, as is his whole theology, and constitutes a help for an accurate understanding of reality for the one who believes and even more for the theologians: it represents an extraordinary instrument of knowledge and in-depth understanding, as it has in it the vigor and brilliance of the patristic demonstration, as well as the beauty of the biblical truth.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> I. Ioniță, *Teologia ca experiență a misterului divin* (Theology as an Experience of the Divine Mystery), in: *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae în conștiința contemporanilor. Mărturii, evocări, amintiri* (Father Dumitru Stăniloae in His Contemporaries’ Conscience. Testimonies, Evocations, Memories), Ed. Trinitas, Iași, 2003, p. 226.

## 5 Conclusions

One of the greatest theologians of the Orthodox East, a perfect theologian of the eternal life and an eminent labourer of the theological science<sup>19</sup>, Father Stăniloae has left to us the heritage of an ample and complex theological thinking, in which cosmology offers to us, together with Christology, an adequate key for understanding anthropology.

The world is the most precious gift offered by God to man but also man's only favorable place for living, as it has in it the grace of God holding everything into existence. Yet, the world is also a stairway to heaven, to the Creator, an instrument of knowledge and a means of understanding deeper one's own purpose of life. By means of the uncreated energies of the grace of the Holy Spirit, God is present in the world without losing his transcendence, and by means of the rationalities of the creation, man can know and have a deeper relation with the Master of life.

In the whole creation, God addresses man: the world has been created as a preparation for man; this is why man has been created the last, after all the things meant to support his existence had been ready. By means of the world, God speaks about Himself: in God's works, man can read, see and understand God's message.

The world is rational, *materialized reason*; this is why man, being rational, can understand this rationality of the world. Rationality needs to be understood as a sort of language by which man can understand the message addressed by God to him; this rationality has sense only as a mystery, as a vehicle: *God has given to men ... the possibility of thinking and of*

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel, Metropolitan of Moldova and Bukovine, *Teologia-știința a mântuirii și a vieții veșnice în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae* (Theology, the Science of Redemption and Eternal Life in the Thinking of Father Stăniloae), in *Teologie și Viață* (Theology and Life), no. 7-12, Ed. Trinitas, Iași, 2002, p. 23.

*speaking, by the fact that He has wrought their reasons and gave them to men, first creating a suggestive coating on their level. In their reason to be, all things find their meaning.*<sup>20</sup>

The aim of the world, as dialogue of God with us, is to receive an answer. Thus, the world is also a way of ours of communicating with God, nature mediating our answer addressed to Him. God is communicating with us, by the rational structure of the world, and we are reading and understanding His message *by working as much as possible in the material creation, by which God communicates Himself.*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> M. Bielavski, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 286.

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