

IULIU-MARIUS MORARIU

BETWEEN MYSTIQUE AND THEORY. ETHICS OF THE RELIGIOUS
THINKING IN DUMITRU STĂNILOAE'S WORK

Iuliu-Marius Morariu

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: iuliumariusmorariu@gmail.com

Abstract: Review of Sandu Frunză, *Experiența religioasă în gândirea lui Dumitru Stăniloae. O etică relațională* (The religious experience in the thinking of Dumitru Stăniloae. A relational ethics). 2nd edition, București: Eikon, 2016, 262 pag.

Key Words: love, Holy Trinity, religious experience, Orthodox mystique, theology, Lucian Blaga, Dumitru Stăniloae, Sandu Frunză.

Sandu Frunză is one of the few philosophers capable of a deep understanding of theology. He is specialized particularly in the thinking of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, one of the greatest and most celebrated Christian Orthodox theologians of the 20th century. Amongst the books testifying Sandu Frunză's knowledge of Stăniloae's theology is the one titled: *Experiența religioasă în gândirea lui Dumitru Stăniloae. O etică relațională* [*The religious experience in the thinking of Dumitru Stăniloae. A relational ethics*]. Published for the first time with Dacia Press, Cluj-Napoca, in 2001, it is now reprinted in a new, revamped and enriched edition (București: Editura Eikon, 2016).

In spite of constituting his most important research so far dedicated to the aforementioned theologian (being based on his doctoral thesis, coordinated by Professor Aurel Codoban from the Faculty of Philosophy of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca), one must specify that this book is not Frunză's only one referring to Dumitru Stăniloae, but it is accompanied by other books, studies and articles dedicated to his thinking or to his work (see, for example, Frunză 1996). In fact, the author is well-known and appreciated for his other contributions in contemporary ethics, philosophy, communication or advertising. His books and articles referring to Father Stăniloae are often quoted and reviewed by scholars in philosophical, theological or communication studies, who always highlight the importance and value of Frunză's writings (see for example: Medveschi and Gori 2017, 77-81; Chirilă 2017, 186-188), the same as his inter-religious or philosophical-religious approaches (see, for example: Medveschi 2016, 5; Mărcuț 2015, 271-274; Jones 2004, 47-49; Morariu 2015, 81-100; Herscovici 2011, 205-206), underlining the interdisciplinary character of his approaches and the capacity of the author to go deep into sophisticated topics, like the ones analysed by the aforementioned theologian.

Segmented in three parts and divided into several chapters, the book highlights the landmarks of Father Stăniloae's theology. After presenting his main biographical references and a few generalities about his publications in the foreword of the book (Frunză 2016, 11-15), Sandu Frunză chooses the Christian religious experience (Frunză 2016, 17-49) as the first main topic of his analysis. He recommends reading Dumitru Stăniloae's work from the point of view of the religious experience, because „the specific way Dumitru Stăniloae understands the religious experience puts his mark on his theological system” (Frunză 2016, 19). Therefore, using methodological aspects from philosophical hermeneutics, the author creates a bridge between the two domains, in an attempt to clearly understand the analysed topic.

From the very beginning, the author highlights the difference between ethics and morals (Frunză 2016, 22-23), and shows that the keyword *relational ethics* is deeply linked to the idea of love, seen as a Christian virtue (Frunză 2016, 23). In a sophisticated and at the same time specific

manner, he indicates that love represents the basis of all moral human action and writes about the link between relational ethics and the ethics of generalized communication (Frunză 2016, 24), advancing the idea that this very term is “the background fabric of Dumitru Stăniloae's whole thought” (Frunză 2016, 24; cf. Stăniloae, 2005). Refined thinker and fine observer of detailed aspects, the writer emphasizes the influence of Saint Grigore Palama (Frunză 2016, 24-25) on Father Stăniloae's thinking, and also the bi-dimensionality of the Divine life (one for himself, one for the others, for the Creation), according to his conception (Frunză 2016, 25).

Subsequent to this preliminary part, he speaks about Stăniloae's Orthodox perception about revelation and holiness (Frunză 2016, 35-40), about the divine attributes (p. 41-42), about the experience of faith and its transmissibility (Frunză 2016, 43-50). Then, the second chapter of this unit is dedicated to a particular aspect, namely, the contextual dimension of his ideas, the influence on the theologian and his debate with philosopher Lucian Blaga (Frunză 2016, 51-85). Using this event as a pretext, Sandu Frunză points out some aspects about incarnation, the definition of religion and its philosophical aspects. Throughout the third chapter (Frunză 2016, 86-118), the incarnation is detailed and presented in a trinitarian context.

In the second part, the discussion is shifted from the personal sphere to space. Starting from the interpretation of the first chapters of the *Genesis* book, the author speaks about the ontological rupture (Frunză 2016, 119-139), the relation between space and time, the meeting as a space of joy (Frunză 2016, 134-139), but also about the transcendental aspects of the Christian experience (Frunză 2016, 140-199). Then, in the third part, the analysis is focused on the concept of generalized communication (Frunză 2016, 203-232), seen as a form of implementing love into the life of the faithful - following the Divine example.

By comparing Father Stăniloae's ideas with those of Martin Heidegger (Frunză 2016, 215-223), Sandu Frunză demonstrates that while one will find philosophical ideas with the first, there are theological accents with the latter. Therefore, one is offered an interesting example of interdisciplinarity.

Profound and nevertheless interesting by proposing an incursion into the thinking of this great Romanian Orthodox theologian of the 20th century, Frunză's approach leads the reader to a logical conclusion that can be synthesized in the title of the last chapter: *the relational being* (Frunză 2016, 224-231). According to Father Stăniloae, but also to the entire Orthodox Theology, the Christian existence can be only a relational one, founded on the example offered by the Holy Trinity. And the author marks that explicitly, in spite of using the philosophical hermeneutical approach and not the theological one.

Written in an attractive manner, the book titled: *The religious experience in the thinking of Dumitru Stăniloae. A relational ethics* of Sandu

Frunză is both an interesting approach to Father Dumitru Stăniloae's theology, and a useful instrument for understanding the philosophical landmarks of his thinking. This is the reason why it is addressed to theologians, but also to philosophers, philologists and historians, challenging each of them to meditate on the relevance of this Orthodox thinker and to understand aspects of everyday existence and interdisciplinarity.

References:

Chirilă, Ioan. 2017. „Sandu Frunză, „Experiența religioasă în gândirea lui Dumitru Stăniloae””. *Sinteza. Revistă de Cultură și Gândire Strategică* vol. 4 Issue 37: 186-188.

Frunză, Sandu. 2016. *Experiența religioasă în gândirea lui Dumitru Stăniloae. O etică relațională (The religious experience in the thinking of Dumitru Stăniloae. A relational ethics)*. 2nd edition, București: Eikon.

Frunză, Sandu. 1996. *O antropologie mistică. Introducere în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae, (A Mystical Anthropology. Introduction into the thinking of Father Dumitru Stăniloae)*, Craiova: Omniscope.

Herscovici, Lucian-Zeev. 2011. “Sandu Frunză, Dumnezeu si Holocaustul la Elie Wiesel: o etica a responsabilității (Dieu et le Holocauste: une éthique de la responsabilité).” *Essachess – Journal for Communication Studies* Vol. 4 Issue 8: 205-206.

Jones, Michael. 2002. „Sandu Frunză, editor, Filosofie și Religie: O Abordare Multidisciplinară (Philosophy and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Approach)”. *Religion in Eastern Europe* Vol. XXIV Issue 5: 47-49.

Mărcuț, Mirela. 2015. “Religious Fundamentalism and the New Conflict of Religions.” *Analele Universității din Oradea. Relații Internationale și Studii Europene (RISE)* Issue VII: 271-274.

Medveschi, Iulia, Nicolai Gori. 2017. “Towards An Anthropology Of Communion.” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* Vol. 16 Issue 46: 77-81.

Medveschi, Iulia. 2016. „Fundamentalismele religioase și „alterarea” sferei comunicării politice.” *Tribuna New series*, Vol. XV Issue 329: 5.

Maxim (Iuliu-Marius), Morariu. 2015. „Mântuirea adusă de Hristos prin întreita Sa slujire de Învățător - Prooroc, Arhiereu (jertfă supremă) și Împărat, în teologia părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae.” *Symposium* Vol. 22, Issue 1: 81-100.

Stăniloae, Dumitru. 2005. *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea (Holy Trinity or, in the beginning it was the love)*, București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române.