

THE RATIONALITY OF CREATION IN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

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Abstract

Orthodox theology sees the rational world or the world through which the Reason after which all were brought to existence emerges as an extension of the common being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. This does not in any way mean a form of pantheism, but rather the assertion of the world as rationality imprinted with the image of the Logos, the One that gathers and embodies the rationale of the whole existence. As the world is created by the Word through the word and man is the face of the Word, it results from here that the world is a means, a medium of dialogue between man and Word. By meditating and knowing the world and oneself in its rationality, man becomes acquainted with the Son, or in other words, he gets to know the world and oneself through the Son, and that is how man also reaches the Father, for he is made "after the image of" the Father; and everything is done through the Holy Spirit. Man is created by a special action of God following the counsel of the Divine Persons, which shows that man is created as a community hypostasis, as a dialogue hypostasis, a subject of communion, but following the pattern of the One who created him: man is imprinted with the community face of the Logos as perfect love. Man is created after the image of the Trinity and requires itself after the Trinity, this being shown both in the horizontal relationship of man with the fellow human beings and in the vertical one, in his permanent tension after the Personal Absolute. As the world is created by Word through the word, and man is the face of the Word, it results from here that the world is a means, a medium of the dialogue between man and Word.

The present study highlights the importance of teaching about the rationality of creation in Orthodox theology, with reference to the inter-human relations, as well as to the spiritual life of man.

Keywords: creation, rationality, Logos, hierarchy.

1. CREATION THROUGH THE SON OR LOGOS OF GOD

The world is the work of God created in time or at the beginning of time, out of nothing, by His will. Being created by the Word of God, or Divine Logos, it has a rational structure. "God is the Supreme Reason, the spring of the reasons of all things and of the reason within us"¹. The rationality of the world has its foundation or basis in the eternal reasons of the Logos, the world itself being a plasticizing rationality². The world and

¹ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (2005) *Sensul ascezei monahale*, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, p. 32-33

² "God the Word is praised by divine Scripture as reason not only because it is the proponent of reason, mind and wisdom, but also because He detains in Himself the causes of all, in a unitary way, and because He passes through all" St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *Despre numirile dumnezeiești*, VII, 4 in St. Dionysius the Areopagite (1996) *Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, Translation, introduction and notes by Pr. Dumitru Staniloae, Edition prepared by Constanța Costea, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 164

the things in it are the faces of the divine reasons that form a unity in the divine Logos³, without this creating a multiplicity in God. "The plasticizing reasons of the world are created out of nothing, but have as model and as support the eternal reason of the Logos"⁴. The fact that the world is created by a Person reveals on the one hand its intentionality and, on the other, the fact that it has a purpose. The world is not the product of hazard, it does not occur by chance, but it is rather connected with conscious existence; and this conscious existence thought before it created, and the thought turned into work. "Only if the beginning of the world is a free, interpersonal and almighty Word is the world the fruit of creation, or is that Word a creator at its beginnings and can always be a creator, bringing something truly new to it, and once it will make it completely new."⁵ Only in this sense can the world in its entirety have an explanation and a sense of existence; any other origin-explanation empties it of content and condemns it to an existence without substance, empty, inexplicable and unconscious. That is why the Fathers of the Church emphasized the creation of the world through the divine Logos: the world is created by the word through the word. The world is brought to life by the Logos or the Divine Word: it shows that the world has a rational structure, conforming in an intimate sense to the word of the Word through which it was called to existence. The basis of the world is rationality, not hazard or chance. The material world is based on a spiritual structure, or is made up after the spiritual ones, and is required by the spirit. That is why between spirit and matter there is no antagonism, no irreducible dualism, but both reunite in the divine Logos. Matter has a spiritual structure because through it the divine grace works, it is impregnated with grace from the moment of bringing it to life; through matter, the grace that intimately crosses it works.

Father Dumitru Staniloae was thus observing the theology of Saint Athanasius the Great who, following the word of Saint John the Evangelist, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John I, 3), "converted the dualist and pantheistic cosmology of the ancient world into a Christian cosmology in which the intelligible world and the sensible world make up a single world through the harmonious and rational order of creation which has its centre of gravity in the Father's Logos through which all were made"⁶: "Thus, the very almighty and all-holy Logos of the Father, dwelling and stretching His powers in all and everywhere, and enlightening everything that is seen and unseen, holds them in Himself and gathers them, leaving nothing empty of His power, but giving them life and keeping them together and each one individually ... Just like a singer, combining the low tones with the high ones and with those in the middle, reuniting them with others through His art, makes up a single melody, so the Wisdom of God as well, carrying the whole universe as a lira, and bringing those in the air together with those on the earth and those in the heavens with those in the air, and uniting the whole with the parts and driving them all by His command and will, makes up a single world and a single fine and harmonious ordinance for it, He himself remaining motionless, but moving all by creating and ordering them according to the Father's good will"⁷.

Here is the divine Logos as the Pantocrator of all creation in the sense that St. Athanasius the Great shows, namely that He holds them all in himself; the world is not a simple and uniformalising entity in itself, but a diversity in unity and unity in diversity. And He who realizes this is the One through whom the world was created out of nothing, the Divine Logos. It is in Him that all the diversity of the world finds its unity; he combines unity with multiplicity⁸.

The rationality of the world has its foundation in the Creator Logos, but it addresses another rationality, namely a personal rationality. St. Maximus the Confessor states, "I believe that the first (natural law, *our*

³ Pr. prof. PhD D. Staniloae (1977) *Dinamica creației în Biserică* in *Ortodoxia*, Year XXIX, No. 3-4, July-December, p. 282

⁴ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1996) *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, Second edition, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, p. 231-232

⁵ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1991) *Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor*, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, Year XLIII, no. 1, p. 7

⁶ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Popescu (2005) *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, p. 140

⁷ Saint Athanasius the Great, *Cuvânt împotriva elinilor*, XLII in Saint Athanasius the Great (1987) *Scrieri*, Partea I, *Cuvânt împotriva elinilor*, *Cuvânt despre întruparea Cuvântului*, *Trei cuvinte împotriva arienilor*, in the collection P.S.B. no 15, Translation from Greek, introduction and notes by Pr. prof. PhD D. Staniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, p. 79

⁸ "For He gathers them together (all created things, our note) unmistakably and keeps them together in an inseparable manner" – Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *Despre numirile dumnezeiești*, XI, 2 in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (1996) *Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 172; "He who united and brought into harmony with Himself the whole Universe, unites through Himself the different natures of things, bringing them to one voice and good understanding" – St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Marele cuvânt catehetic*, XXXII in St. Gregory of Nyssa (1998) *Marele cuvânt catehetic*, translation from Greek by Grigorie Teodorescu, Sophia Publishing House, Bucharest, p.107

note), always conforming - as much as possible - to reason, portrays (in its natural aspects) the harmonious fabric of the universe as a book that has, as letters and syllables, the bodies that are special and thickened by the encounter of many qualities, which are the first and closest to us; and as words, the general qualities that are farther and thinner. From these, by their reading, the Word (Reason), which shapes them and is shaped in them in a manner that cannot be spoken of, stands wisely out. These only give us the knowledge that it is, and not what it is, and by the faithful combination of the various faces raises us to a unique idea of the truth that is offered to us to be conceived, on a level with them, by the ones seen, as the Creator"⁹.

Because the world does not have its beginning in itself, its purpose cannot be in itself. The world, having a rational structure, must have a conscious rationality beyond it that can be addressed and that can make use of the rationality of the world. Thus, Father Staniloae shows, the rationality of the world is for man and culminates in man¹⁰: "In a particular way, the Logos is present in man as a rational subject. While things are created images of the Logos, the human subject is the image of the Logos"¹¹.

Man was given the word so that, through the word, he could always bring something new in the creation, after the Creator's model, but on another level of existence, because man also creates, yet not out of nothing, but rather from the creation of the Logos, and according to the rationality of the world and to his own rationality: "Without the Word as a divine Person and without human beings as words, the world would remain in the monotonous repetition of laws, or in the limitation of what it shows us as susceptible of being updated from the limitation of its possibilities"¹². Through words, man expresses the reason of things, and through this expression he sees the harmony of things in the world, and advances more and more to his incorporation into the divine Logos, the One who created it as a word of existence. Being created as a being who can speak, man is a social, communitarian being who needs communication, and by this he is united from the beginning with his Creator, even though he is not always aware of it.

The Word or the Divine Logos has existed since eternity, so before everything that has a beginning. It exists as a Person among other Persons, because one can never conceive the word without the person and the person without the word, and so there can be no word without the existence of a certain *you* as the person whom it can be addressed to. The word is therefore personal and as such is expressed by person, but only in relation to another person¹³.

Father Staniloae dwells on this rationality-word-communion connection as follows: "Through this rationality, I feel the other. Through his word, through his presence, the other is in me. But not only is he in me. The one to whom I say 'you' and which I thus bear in me is also in connection with the other, with the others. I come into communion with a being who is itself in communion with a person. In you there is the other one; you are in him, and through him you are in me. When I talk to you, I'm thinking about the other one you are in touch with. And he works in me: he is present in me via my responsibility to him"¹⁴.

The Word of God speaks from eternity to another person like Him; and this speech expressing the love of One to the Other presupposes the existence of a third person, because speaking in two is a monotonous dialogue that is exhausted without exploiting to the utmost the dimension of the dialogue opened by the

⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, II, 27 in St. Maximus the Confessor (2006) *Ambigua*, translation from old Greek, introduction and notes by Pr. Prof. Dumitru Staniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, p. 190-191

¹⁰ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 241; M.C. Steenbers, speaking of Saint Irinaeus, sees a connection between his teaching that places man at the center of creation, and Father Staniloae's theology: "Humanity is the thrust by which and towards which all the movement of creation is driven, and the figure of this person stands in a real way at the centre of Irinaeus' cosmological universe. Dumitru was not far from the thought of Irinaeus when he wrote, two millenia later" – M.C. Steenberg, *Irinaeus on Creation. The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* în J. den Boeft, J. van Oort, B.D. Ehrman, D.T. Runia, C. Scholten, J.C.M. van Winden (editors) (2008), *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae. Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language*, volume 91, Brill Academic Publishers, Boston, p. 6

¹¹ "D'une manière particulière le Logos est présent dans l'homme comme sujet raisonnable. Tandis que les choses sont les images créées des raisons du Logos, le sujet humain est l'image du Logos" – Père-Professeur Dumitru Staniloae (1975) *La centralité du Christ dans la théologie, dans la spiritualité et dans la mission orthodoxe* în *Contacts. Revue orthodoxe de spiritualité et de théologie*, No. 92, p. 448

¹² Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1991) *Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor*, p. 8

¹³ "The word is the main and indispensable means of communication between people. The word always involves two people. It is dialogue even when a person is silent, because by silence it drives, supports the other person's word" – D. Staniloae (1941) *Temeiurile eterne ale mântuirii în Gândirea*, Year XX, no 8, October, p. 402; "The word is a living person's relationship to me" – D. Staniloae (1938) *Cuvântul și mistica iubirii în Gândirea*, Year XVII, no 4, April, p. 195

¹⁴ Priest Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard, Priest Dumitru Staniloae (2007) *Mică dogmatică vorbită. Dialoguri la Cernica*, IIIrd edition, translation by Maria-Cornelia Ică jr., Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, p. 73

existence of another Person. According to their Creator's model, human beings speak, without beginning and end, because they are the face of the Word. And their word opens them to each other and to God, and this opening of them in fact means love between them and God. For Father Staniloae, love and rationality are linked to each other. Thus, "as the human word encompasses a communion between three people, two of whom speak, and the third is present in their common thought, the Trinity of Divine Persons is imitated. The Divine Trinity binds, keeps each man in a relationship. But only by speaking well, with love of the third, do we live fully in the responsibility of the Holy Trinity. Only in this case does man look like a perfect man, having the Trinity, which is perfect, within himself"¹⁵.

The creation of the world and of man as the counsel of the Persons shows the work of God as a trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: "There was no unreasonable chaos or unconscious reason at the beginning. Although at the beginning of the Old Testament God is said to first have made heaven and earth, it is added that the earth was a deep and unseen darkness, thus not thought by somebody, and that the Spirit of God was floating above water, covering the earth with darkness and through the undone Spirit imprinted the rationality of God in this deep, unorganized, reckless darkness. This does not mean that there was a succession: that God first made an irrational chaos, then imprinted His reason on it. Rather a description is made between what was done and what it was. There was reason when the world was made. For it is added immediately: « And God said ». Therefore, the Word was not related only to God the Father, but also to the Spirit as a Person. For the Word is bound to two other Persons as a condition of perfect love. The word thus implies three Persons. The Person of the Word involves the Father and the Spirit as two other Persons"¹⁶. Man is created by a special action of God, following the counsel of the Divine Persons, which shows that he is created as a community hypostasis, as a dialogue hypostasis, a subject of communion¹⁷, but according to the pattern of He who created him: in man is depicted the communal image of the Logos as perfect love. Man is created in the image of the Trinity and required himself to be after the Trinity, this being shown both in the horizontal relationship of man with the fellow men and vertically, in his permanent tension after the Personal Absolute¹⁸. "Man is imprinted with the interpersonal relationship of the Holy Trinity. The human person can only be in a I-You relation to one another and both are strengthened in their unity by a third one they cannot help thinking of. This shows that man is the work of counsel between the Father and the Son, perfectly united in the Holy Spirit." Father Staniloae concludes that "the human cannot be achieved directly, in a continuous growth, in isolation, but rather in communion, in solidarity"¹⁹.

The world being created by the Word through the word, and man being a face of the Word, it therefore results that the world is a means of the dialogue between man and the Word: "The Logos in man seeks the logos in nature as the reflex of the eternal Logos"²⁰. On the other hand, via creation, the Divine Word did not lay the reasons of things in the world after a law that was internal to it, but in connection with Him: "The world was created through God the Word, imprinted by a rationality to the extent of man's rationality, out of love for men, for them to be able to grow by sensing it to the consciousness of His love. He put into it their reason in the form of His reasoning at the level of man's reason as His face, in order to see through them His reason as it is in Him, and through reason, to unite with Him as the supreme Reason. The reason put in things and in man thus stand in the service of man's growth in the love of God the Word, in the service of seeing His love shown through them"²¹.

Thus, Orthodox theology sees the rational world or the world through which Reason has been showed as the

¹⁵ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1991), Atragerea ierarhică a lumii spre Sfânta Treime prin Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu făcut om, în *Mitropolia Olteniei*, New series, Year XLIII, no 2, March-April, p. 26-27

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 25

¹⁷ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1970) Temeiurile teologice ale ierarhiei și ale sinodalității ei in *Studii Teologice*, IInd series, Year XXII, no 3-4, March-April, p. 166

¹⁸ Father Staniloae takes over the dialogical dyad "I-You" (M. Buber) in the community triad "I-you-he"; Myk Habets sees the same idea (of ontological orientation of man to God due to creation through the divine Logos) in the thought of Protestant theologian Thomas Torrance (1913-2007) as well, but he also finds the fundamental distinction between the two theologians: "An interesting parallel is found in Staniloae's theology of the *Logos*, whereby the human person is created with an inherent orientation toward the ontological pursuit of 'ultimate transcendence'. This ultimate transcendence is made known supremely in the person of Jesus Christ the *Logos* and it is here that *theosis* takes place. Staniloae goes beyond Torrance, however, when he makes this movement one of necessity rather than of grace" – Myk Habets (2009) *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, Ashgate Publishing Group, Abingdon, p. 41, nota 114

¹⁹ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1963) Comunitate prin iubire în *Ortodoxia*, Year XV, no 1, January-March, p. 61

²⁰ Pr. prof. D. Staniloae (1957) Simbolul ca anticipare și teme al posibilității icoanei in *Studii Teologice*, IInd series, Year VII, no 7-8, September-October, p. 435

²¹ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1991) Atragerea ierarhică a lumii spre Sfânta Treime prin Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu făcut om, p. 29-30

image after which all were brought to life as an extension of the common being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. This does not in any way mean a form of pantheism, but the assertion of the world as rationality imprinted on the image of the Logos, the One who gathers and embodies the rationale of the whole existence.

By meditating and knowing the world and oneself in its rationality, man becomes acquainted with the Son, or in other words he gets to know oneself and the world through the Son, and through this he reaches the Father, for he is shaped “after the image” of the Father; and everything is done by the Holy Spirit. Man knows himself and the world as a gift from the Father because they are “the image of the divine being received by the Son as a gift”²², and thereby discovers himself and the world as a gift of love. That is why we can speak of the apophatic character of the human person because its origin, meaning and purpose are not within itself but beyond it, yet, this “beyond”, in Staniloae’s thinking, does not mean a spatio-temporal distance, nor the outer sense, but in fact its own interiority, the image of the Logos. In the same sense, the world has the same apophatic character that is “the seal of the apophatic character of God”²³.

“When we assert the possibility of an apophatic knowledge of the cosmos through the reason of things, we actually show the Christocentric character of creation. This must be understood in two ways: the centrality of the pre-incarnational Logos for the creation brought to existence through Him, by the Holy Trinity, and the greater and more evident centrality of the incarnate divine Logos when recognizing Him as Pantocrator and Saviour”²⁴.

God, the one who cannot be rendered in words, reveals Himself through the Word, through which He creates the creatures so that in turn they speak to us about God. Although the world itself is silent, the creeds of the creatures are words about God the Word. Although in its essence, creation is different from God, it is at the same time a revealing Logos of the personal alterity of God, which reveals and communicates both by nature and Scripture. Creation, which is the work of the will of God, is not coeternal with Him, for what is created cannot at the same time be eternal, being distinct from the Creator, for what is being built and created does not come from the being of the one who builds and creates, but is totally distinct from Him. Though absolutely transcendent to the world, God is immanent, by grace, in His building: “One God and the Father of All; Which is above all and by all and in all” (Ephesians IV, 6). And no creature can exist, without the will of its Creator, radically independent from Him, because they all owe their existence to Him (Acts of the Apostles XVII, 28) and “are made by Him and for Him” (Colossians I, 16).

Creation itself is, therefore, a revelation or manifestation of God, a silent word by means of which God communicates with man, the highest creature of all creatures, microcosm or macrocosm, as the Fathers of the Church have it. The world has imprinted within it a rationality that cannot be irrational or absurd, a rationality that gives it the capacity to be a means of dialogue between the supreme rational Person – God - and man who is endowed by God with reason. This imprint of the rationality that man also carries, not only as an object of knowledge, but also as a knowing, subjective reason, makes man capable of entering into dialogue through the creations of God, with God himself. This human capacity of dialogue also gives the world a sense because the world enters into a dialogue with God in the Trinity through the world. Father Staniloae says that “man is a dialogic being”²⁵.

The world is destined to the knowledge of man who enriches himself by sharing its illuminated rationality and, through it, man can know the infinitely bright Reason of the Word and thus can advance in the knowledge of God from His creatures while at the same time perfecting himself in this dialogue. “As a being created by reference to the Archetype, man manifests himself in a continuous intentional relationship with the horizontal plane of humanity and with the vertical plane of transcendence, in order to find his own personal identity that participates in the founding Archetype”²⁶. As a rational being aware of the reason or words of the creatures by which God reveals Himself to us, man acts as a creative creature among the other creatures that have not been offered this power.

²² Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1995) *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, volume II, edition prepared by Camil Marius Dădărlat, Cristal Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 51-52

²³ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1990) *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, p. 166

²⁴ Pr. conf. dr. Ștefan Buchiu (2002) *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea Părintelui Staniloae*, Libra® Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 107

²⁵ Pr. prof. D. Staniloae (1977) *Natura sinodicității* in *Studii Teologice*, IInd series, Year XXIX, no 9-10, November-December, pg. 605

²⁶ Sandu Frunză (1999) *Iubirea și transcendența. O introducere la problema spațiului median al experienței religioase în Iudaism și Creștinismul Răsăritean*, Preface by Prof. dr. Kallós Nicolae, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, p. 121

Revelation teaches that the world is a work designed and accomplished by the Creator, that through it God reveals Himself in all His beauty, wisdom and glory. Everything was created by the Word, the Logos, the great Divine Reason, for man to know God and to enter into dialogue with Him. Saint Dionysius the Areopagite states that none of what exists is deprived of any power, and the gifts of this unshakable power, which are shared by God, penetrate into beings, plants, into the whole nature of the universe. From these gifts of divine power, the human creation receives new powers, which it can enhance by preserving the powers received, and thus can return His gifts to God. This work belongs to the man. He is the being to whom God has offered the gift of perfecting creation and of deifying himself by divine grace. Revelation reveals and envelops the mystery of the Trinity. The process of revelation takes place in a gradual form according to the spiritual capacity to receive the divine message. The revelation of God in nature, in man and in Scripture is God's word to man, whom He calls to a lively and dynamic dialogue. In this dialogue God reveals Himself and invites man to freely and consciously respond with love to the infinite love of God that is the essence of divine revelation.

1.1 The World As the Rational Work of The Logos Created for Man As A Rational Being After The Image of The Logos

The world is created for man, being ontologically inferior to the human person. It is useful to man in his dialogue with God, the spiritual enrichment of man, and greater communion among human beings; but man does not achieve communion with the world, and the world does not exceed itself, it does not spiritually increase from this connection with man. The world does not have the consciousness of its existence. It is by this that man ascends, through the knowledge of the world, of his reason, to God. For if he were to remain in the world, he would have no profit; man cannot remain in the world because the world cannot offer him the communion, love he longs to for by virtue of his personal character as a community image.

Orthodox theology shows that this rationality of the world has a purpose and a meaning found out of it, not in itself, because it addresses another rationality, rather a personal, conscious and superior rationality, and it is created, but after the image of the Logos, in order to discover through it the meanings embodied in it. Thus, "the rationality of the world is to the extent of man's rationality"²⁷. By advancing in the knowledge of the world's reason and meanings that the Word has placed in it, man uses, on the one hand, the materiality of the world according to his reason, and, on the other hand, he increases and becomes spiritually enriched by discovering the deeper meanings of human existence. "Man and the world have a relational character by virtue of a rational existence. The rational meaning of the existence of the world relates to the unity of all the world's thoughts, unity that finds its source in transcendence"²⁸. At the same time, "apophatic knowledge shows the "logical" and "super-logical" unity of creation in Christ, or rather, the centrality of the Logos in the complexity of the world"²⁹.

The rationality of the world is directed exclusively at the rationality of man as the only creature capable of using this rationality in its usefulness, its spiritual growth and its fulfilment³⁰. And this rationality of the world, united and unitary in the divine Logos, which addresses human rationality, shows that the world is the work of wise thinking, which is also omnipotent at the same time. But the world, as the work of the Logos Pantocrator, does not have a static or opaque rationality, because its rationality, having its source, reason, and foundation in the Divine Logos, is oriented towards Him from the beginning. Thus, although contingent in itself, the world has a malleable structure in the sense of multiple virtues. Father Staniloae shows that "The rationality of the world reveals its meaning by completing it with the rationality of the human subject, who is also conscious of an inexhaustible wealth that is not a monotonous repetition. It is a rationality that discovers, chooses, and pursues ever higher targets, to which it advances using nature itself, but not in a monotonous repetition, but with a constantly new understanding of things, and by the free choice of other and other modes, more and more known, through new applications of natural laws, pursuing more and more

²⁷ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Popescu (1993) Raționalitatea creației și implicațiile ei in *Ortodoxia (Preot acad. Prof. dr. Dumitru Staniloae (1903-1993). O teologie pentru lumea contemporană*), year XLV no 3-4 July-December, p. 33

²⁸ Sandu Frunză, *Experiența religioasă în opera lui Dumitru Staniloae: o etică relațională*, p. 62

²⁹ "Dans la connaissance apophatique apparait l'unite «logique» et «supralogique» de la création dans le Christ ou, pour mieux dire, la centralité du Verbe dans la complexité du monde" – Père Ion Bria (1979) *Hommage au Père Dumitru Staniloae a l'occasion de son soixante-quinzième anniversaire in Contacts. Revue orthodoxe de spiritualité et de théologie*, XXXI^e Année, No. 108, 1^{er} trimestre, p. 69

³⁰ "We are elevated, as far as possible, to divine views through sensible faces" – Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *Despre ierarhia bisericască, I, 2* in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (1996), *Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 72

useful results”³¹.

Orthodox theology distinguishes between, on the one hand, the reason of things and their knowledge through human reason, and, on the other hand, between their meanings and their understanding, but at the same time it sees the connection between them, given in the first case by analytical reason, and the second, the right judgment. This is because the analytical reason investigates and discovers the meanings or partial meanings of things; but in every sense or reason there is a beyond, an ever-higher sense that cannot be discovered by analytical reason: it is intuited, but it cannot be known and defined. Man discovers the meanings of all units or components of the world, analyses them, knows them, and defines them through his analytical reason. But the higher sense he infers, lying beyond the unity of the world, the common sense of these components, which also unites them beyond the world, though they are in the world, is the Divine Logos. In Him, the meanings of all things are united, all leading to Him as their source, creator and supporter, because it is only in Him that they find their full explanation, and man discovers the meaning of his existence. It is a two-way causal link between analytical reason and intuitive reason, for “the analytical reason convinces itself by its results on each step that it has not reached the final and total explanation of reality, and intuitive reason, or the understanding that infers ever-higher meanings on every step, urges it to further inquiry and at the same time gives him the consciousness that the supreme or full sense of any unit of inquiry is a mystery related to the mystery of all reality and supreme reality, which he will never fully know”³².

For Orthodox theology, the world and the things in it are addressed to human rationality due to the fact that He first thought of them as eternal reasons, and then created them, giving them a content and a covering adapted to human reason, through their thinking and speaking, that man should increase in their relations with others, and thus reach a dialogue with Him as Creator and Supporter of all. Man begins to discover the meanings of things by using them initially for his biological, material use, in order to seek and discover new meanings that go beyond this purely material sense. But this means that man should not allow himself to be dominated by material things, but always see in them means of enhancing interpersonal communication, the transparency of the person. “Things reveal their meaning, because their rationality is seen by man as having their unitary source in God the personal, because they are seen as a means of God’s love, so of God’s dialogue with us and of the dialogue between us, a dialogue through which God leads us to a deeper knowledge of His thought and love and to an increase in our own thought and love in the relationship between us and God. The dialogue with God through things contributes to our development as they are seen as images or symbols or as transparent faces of God’s purposes, of the meanings pursued by their creation, the ways in which He wishes to lead us more and more towards our Self and our own development, provided that we discover and realize them”³³.

The rationality of the world is addressed to man as a free person, so that man’s progress and development are the fruit of will and personal effort. Man does not have a passive character, like the world in relation to man, but active in his existence. His freedom meets with God’s freedom - says Father Staniloae - but this encounter does not mean a clash, but in co-operation, when man directs himself according to his external nature and his own nature. Human freedom also carries out its responsibility both to nature and to itself and to its peers. The eternal love that exists between the persons of the Holy Trinity supposes and implies absolute liberty, because love can only be between free persons, otherwise it is only a determination and a union through confusion. And this freedom in the sense of self-determination is given by God to his most important creature, man. Through this freedom man can turn against his Creator, even against his love, but yet he cannot completely abolish the bonds between him and the world and between him and his Creator.

1.2 The Hierarchical Structure of Creation. The Divine Logos – Source, Reason and Target of The Hierarchy

Following the theology of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, Orthodox theology sees the world as a unitary and hierarchical structure at the same time. This unitary structure begins and ends in the divine Logos, in which, and through which all were created; the fact that the world has a unitary structure does not mean its capping, because it also implies diversity; and its diversity shows that the world has a hierarchical community structure.

³¹ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1996) *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 238

³² *Ibidem*, p. 240

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 245

The Holy Fathers saw a hierarchical order of creation even as it was brought to life³⁴, in the organization of the creation on days³⁵, as well as in the constituent units of creation in themselves.

Dionysius the Areopagite says: "The lowest step in the unitary hierarchy of the world is made up of its inorganic layer, which has nothing but existence deprived of feeling and conscious thought. Above it there are the plants, which, besides existence, have the property of springing, growing and ending successively as individualities. Above the plants there are the animals, which have, in addition to their mere existence, birth and growth and, in sequence, their end, as individuals with an unconscious feeling. And above them there are the people, who, additionally, have a consciousness of their feeling and a conscious reason by means of which they know the insubstantial reasoning of things and the unconscious senses and reason of the animals"³⁶.

The unseen, spiritual world or the world of angels is also organised in a hierarchy that originates in the Divine Logos.

Man can come to the knowledge of this unseen or angelic world through his own constitution; because they are not only flesh as the plasticization of a reason, but also the soul, which is the breath of God, His image in man.

The existence of the hierarchical structure of the world also shows the possibility of progressing in the direction of ascending from the lower to the higher; but at the same time, this climb is not only a progress in itself, limited and meaningless, but finds its meaning in union with God in grace. And this climb is performed in everyone's communion in the sense that man, the superior being, is aware of the inferiority of the world to him, but at the same time he needs it for his progress; In the same sense, the world needs man for its progress. Thus, the higher ones do not progress only by themselves, but rather use the lower ones, and the lower ones progress through their superior ones. "The whole universe is thus in a reciprocal intercondition", says Father Staniloae³⁷.

Unlike Saint Dionysius the Areopagite who sees only the attraction of the inferior steps to the higher ones, Father Dumitru Staniloae points out the benefit of the lower ones in the progress of the higher ones, showing by this the unity of all, superior and inferior alike. Ascent or progress is thus accomplished in a symphonic unity: "The lower ones are spiritualized by the higher ones, and the higher ones are enriched with a concrete content from the lower ones"³⁸.

There is a connection between the unseen and the seen world, because the angels are in an ontological connection with the world: "Angels communicate to people an insensible experience of God, and people communicate to angels a more sensible experience of God, that is, the revelation of God through "spiritual aesthetics"³⁹. Angels serve the plan of salvation of men⁴⁰, but that is not the purpose of their existence, but that of being happy in communion with God. Even if they are beings superior to men, the angels serve them, which shows its sense and purpose, for "the hierarchy accomplishes through the most divine ministry, in accord with it, harmoniously, the image of those who participate in the things committed"⁴¹; and "the goal of the hierarchy is to resemble and unite with God as far as possible by having Him as a guide in holy science

³⁴ "This matter was taken up by the Creator, and He, with His wisdom, gave it shape, put it in order, and so, with this matter, brought the seen ones into being" – St. Basil the Great, Homilies at Hexaemeron, II, 2 in St. Basil the Great (2004) Omilii la Hexaemeron, Translation and notes by Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Sofia Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 37-38

³⁵ "Therefore, God made heaven and earth at first, as an all-encompassing matter, and having the power to bear all the building, wholly contradicting those who wrongly thought that matter itself existed beforehand. Then, as He worked in a magnificent manner and adorned the world, he arranged in six days his own settlement and the proper order of each of His own, and filled the world, separating each one by His command only, and, as if he had taken them out of hidden treasures, brought to light the covert ones, separating them and gathering them all together, in a harmonious and highly wakefulness manner, each in the sight of everyone and all in the sight of each" – St. Gregory Palamas, Omilia VI, 7 în Sfântul Grigorie Palama (2000) Omilii, volume I, with an introduction by Father Galeriu, translation from Greek by Dr. Constantin Daniel, revised by Laura Pătrașcu and restyle by Răzvan Codrescu, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, p. 85-86

³⁶ apud Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1991) Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor, p. 9

³⁷ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1991) Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor, p. 12

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 12

³⁹ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1996) Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă, vol. 1, p. 289

⁴⁰ "Before us and for us he made the angels to be sent [for service], as Paul says, to inherit salvation for those who would come" - St. Gregory Palamas, Omilia III, 5 in St. Gregory Palamas (2000) Omilii, volume I, p. 31

⁴¹ Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, Despre ierarhia cerească, III, 1 in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (1996) Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul, p. 19

and ministry"⁴². In this it is shown that the true hierarchy is the one that has God as the beginning, the reason and the support: "God leads with His work the work of the hierarchy, which has the purpose to increase the union with God"⁴³.

Although he speaks of the superiority of angels over men, Father Staniloae shows, on the other hand, a certain superiority of men to angels. This is because man has the creative gift that angels do not have, and on the other hand, man has the mission to transfigure the world (matter), and "if beauty consists in the manifestation of spirit through matter, the greatest beauty is the irradiation of the living spirit through the living body"⁴⁴. Another argument that Father Staniloae uses, according to the word of Saint Paul the Apostle⁴⁵, is that the Son of God has incarnated by taking human nature which, through all His salvific activity, deified to the utmost, and, after elevation, the human nature of Christ reaches the maximum closeness to God. In the same sense, man has the quality of control over matter, while the angel is just a servant.

Following the interpretations of St. Dionysius the Areopagite⁴⁶ and of St. Gregory Palamas⁴⁷, Father Staniloae speaks of a mutual transmission of angelic and human knowledge; so that angels assist people in understanding the revelation because "all human knowledge of God has a certain symbolic character"⁴⁸. Man receives the help of angels in sensing the spiritual senses of the sensible forms through which God is revealed, but this help is not permanent, because by advancing in spiritual life, man will be able to sense them without the help of angels.

The work of the Logos in creation is performed both by angels on men and by men on the world, but without this excluding the possibility of the direct work of the Logos on the world and man. Father Staniloae shows that this work of the Logos cannot be divided or distinguished because the Logos works fundamentally without mediation, but also through the creatures at the same time. Thus, the hierarchy of creation does not stop the work of the Logos, but the work of the Logos cannot cancel the hierarchy either because "the hierarchy does not mean a direct replacement of God, but the solidarity of creation in Him"⁴⁹.

Father Staniloae shows that the hierarchy is not only about mastery or leadership, but also about responsibility and solidarity. And this superior responsibility to the lower ones comes from the desire of the Creator to gather them all into an unmistakable and communal unity⁵⁰. The hierarchy implies a bidirectional and bilateral movement in the sense of a reciprocal voluntary encounter between the bottom and ascending ones that descend to the bottom ones. God is the One who descends to the bottom to ascend to Himself in a movement that shows both transcendence and His immanence active in all. This movement is also found in the hierarchical order of the world: "The more a person descends, the more it enriches itself or rises more with those to whom it descends. Thus, it can be said that the hierarchical organization of creation is a way of its pursuit towards God, but it involves a lowering of the above steps to the below, in order to climb together to the highest of all creation.

Although the things that are in the world possess their own rationality, they are to be found in a common rationality of creation, which originates in supreme and personal Reason.

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⁴² Ibidem, III, 2 in Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul (1996) *Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 19

⁴³ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae, *Note la Ierarhia cerească II*, 5 in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (1996) *Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 63

⁴⁴ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1996) *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, pg. 293

⁴⁵ "For verily he did not take the angels, but he took the seed of Abraham (Hebrews, II 16)

⁴⁶ "That is why they were all more than honoured by the names of angels, because the divine enlightenment first came to them, and through them we have also been given the revelations above us. For as the Scripture says, the law was given to us by angels (cf. Gal. 3, 19). And our Fathers, heralded before the law and after the law, the angels have raised them to God (cf. Fapt. 7, 53) or they taught them what to do, and moved them from errancy and unholy life to the right path, showing them and explaining to them holy ordinances or hidden views of the mysteries above the world, or some of the annunciations beforehand" – Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, *Despre ierarhia cerească*, IV, 2 in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (1996) *Opere complete și scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, p. 21

⁴⁷ Quoted in Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1996) *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 298

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 297

⁴⁹ Pr. prof. PhD Dumitru Staniloae (1991) *Cuvântul creator și mântuitor și veșnic înnoitor*, p. 14

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