

Dumitru STANILOAE, *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*. Translated from the Romanian by **Archimandrite Jerome (Newville)** and **Otilia Kloos** (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002). ISBN 1-878997-66-1. Pp. 397.

Orthodox Spirituality continues the series of English translations of Dumitru Staniloae's works, following after *Theology and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press) and the first two volumes of *The Experience of God* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press). The book under review was initially a course on Asceticism and Mysticism that Staniloae – considered by many as the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20th century – taught at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest, Romania, between 1946-1947. *Orthodox Spirituality* was first published in 1981, significantly revised and with an up to date bibliography. Staniloae argues that the goal of Orthodox spirituality is the union with God and the deification of the human person. He engages with modern theologians and philosophers, supporting his arguments with passages from the Desert Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas, just to mention a few of his sources. Because of the limited availability of patristic texts in Romanian, Staniloae provides his own translations in unusually lengthy and abundant quotations.

Orthodox Spirituality presents interest for the study of the spiritual ascent and its theoretical basis in Christology, Pneumatology, cosmology, ecclesiology, and anthropology. Regarding to the book's audience, the subtitle added by the translators is both helpful and misleading. *Orthodox Spirituality* has a practical character in the sense that it does not separate between theoretic and experiential knowledge of God. Its elevated level of theological discourse, however, makes it less accessible as a "guide for the faithful." Furthermore, the book is a resource for the scholar although, given Staniloae's understanding of the nature of the theology, one cannot write theology with a "definitive" character.

Staniloae organizes *Orthodox Spirituality* according to Dionysius the Areopagite's threefold division of spiritual life into purification, illumination and perfection. In the stage of purification, with divine assistance, the believer elevates his/her nature from its slavery to passions, to the higher steps of virtues. The peak of all these efforts is dispassion (*apatheia*), a state of perfection according to human powers, though the progress in union with God is endless.

Specific to Eastern theology, Staniloae considers illumination a necessary step in the spiritual ascent. He includes under the category of illumination a) positive contemplation of creation and Scripture; b) negative theology as the consciousness of the intellectual impotence of knowing God; c) intermediate apophatism, as a middle step that is not intellectual, like negative theology, but does not involve the receiving of the holy light, either, as in apophatic knowledge; and d) apophatic theology as the loving experience of God beyond concepts. Thus, Staniloae adds an intermediate step, c), to Lossky's account of apophatism. Moreover, the author is more appreciative of rational endeavors than Lossky: "negative theology needs positive terms to negate; ... far from forever insisting on the renunciation of rational concepts, it longs for their growth." (246)

Perfection is the state in which, united with God in love and with the mind empty of any concept, the believer contemplates God. Filled with divine energy, the human person “is as God, yes even god, but not God ... is a ‘god by participation.’” (373) Staniloae persuasively argues that even in this stage, the Christian partakes of Christ within the Church and as revealed by the Church’s hierarchy and sacraments: “Man’s ascent to God begins in the Church and ends there.” (353)

Sadly, instead of highlighting the other numerous strengths of *Orthodox Spirituality*, the remaining paragraphs will have to explain why the translation sometimes betrays the original text. There are instances where the translation is contrary to the Romanian version: “Here we will talk about ... and notably” (169) should be “Here we will not talk about ... but notably;” “effably” (275) – a non-existent word – should be “ineffably;” or on p. 315 “reaches up” should be “reaches down,” and “which isn’t connected” should be “which is not disconnected.” Furthermore, there are many mistranslations. For example, “His [Christ’s] work is the infinity of emptiness” (160) should be “Opposite to Him is the infinity of emptiness;” “prepare to give” (315) should be “hesitate to give;” “which He now seeks” (334) should be “which now seeks Him.”

The translators have omitted important parts from the Romanian original. The sentence, “But these too are a repetition or a variety in the same plane.” was dropped from the end of the first paragraph on p. 253. Chapter 22 should end with, “Dispassion means first the re-establishment of the nature from its state of illness in which the passions have lowered it, then its raising above nature.” Moreover, one of the Romanian variants of *Orthodox Spirituality* contains one more chapter after this sentence, namely, “The Failure, Shame, Despair that Result from Passions, as Preparation for Purification,” which the translators could have mentioned in a footnote or even translated here. This would have been more justified than the inclusion of a fragment from another work by Staniloae, on p. 41.

Throughout the book, the translators have inserted their own words between brackets, although they use the same notation for S.’s parenthetical comments, and so the reader cannot differentiate the author of such a passage. Some of these inserted words change the meaning of the sentence, as on p. 342, where “knowledge [caused by] a divine energy” should simply be “knowledge of a divine energy.” Other times they are even semantically unfit for the context: the translation contrasts what “would seem, at first glance” to be “[the lack of] humility” to “true humility.” (315) Staniloae, however, contrasted apparent humility to true humility, which is more meaningful.

The footnotes as presented in the translation are also problematic. For example, footnotes 205 and 206 on pp.290-291 are just one footnote in Romanian, the paragraph rendered as footnote 206 preceding the one translated as 205; “Anyone who goes up as high as possible ...” (351) is a reference to Gregory of Nyssa’s *The Life of Moses*, but the footnote is missing in English; “Madame Lot-Borodine comments...” (365-366) is a footnote in Romanian, but it was inserted in the body of the English text. Moreover, the longer fragments that Staniloae quotes are inconsistently marked with either indentations or quotation marks.

The translators characterize the author's style of exposition as "informal, conversational," and promise to preserve this style by using contractions. Staniloae's writing, however, is hardly "conversational," but rather deeply theological and linguistically complicated. In reality, this "informal" style is the preference of the translators, who impose it on Staniloae and the authors he quotes, including Brunner, Blondel, or Hegel. In order to make Staniloae seem "conversational," the translators have also chosen informal expressions such as, "you see then why" (46) instead of Staniloae's more academic, "this is why," or they have inserted sentences that are not appropriate in a scholarly setting: "But let's listen to St. Gregory Palamas himself." (341) All the above-mentioned practices – and the list could be expanded – make a second revised translation necessary.

Though in a poor English translation, *Orthodox Spirituality* contributes to the familiarization of the English-speaking theological world with Dumitru Staniloae's thought. It is a thorough account on the ascent towards deification, and an excellent illustration of the way in which orthodoxy and spiritual life inform each other.

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