

Theo-Phenomenology of Love in Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae's Thought

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Abstract

In reading Father Dumitru Stăniloae, it is obvious that love and divine-human communion have a prominent role in his theology. This text aims to approach this topic from a phenomenological point of view: it analyzes the implicit reductions working in Stăniloae's texts, the presence of the intentionality, the role of the ego and its limits, as well as the problem of the reciprocity of love (raised by Jean-Luc Marion). We will try to argue not only that there are phenomenological influences in Stăniloae's understanding of love, but also that such a topic requires a phenomenology that synthesizes the phenomenology of the world (Husserl and Heidegger) and the phenomenology of life (M. Henry). Because love, in its perfection, is a gift of the Holy Spirit, both types of phenomenology must be complemented with a dialogical and paradoxical one, a theo-phenomenology of love, where the Given can be invisible, living, eternally saturated, and never reducible to an object or to a concept.

Keywords: Dumitru Stăniloae, Jean-Luc Marion, love, erotic reduction, theological counter-reduction, reciprocity of love, spiritual life, phenomenology

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LOVE from the perspective of Father Dumitru Stăniloae should start with the assumption that Romanian theologians are familiar with this philosophical line of thought. Stăniloae understands, indeed, the terminology of phenomenology and was influenced by this philosophical line of thought – whether by Heidegger's existentialism or by Biswanger's phenomenological psychology, just to name a few examples. The emphasis he places on experience, on living the life of God – an emphasis that is “the very impetus of his thought”¹ – was, on the

¹ The opinion of Louth, “Review Essay: The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae,” *Modern Theology* 13/2 (April 1997), 261; *apud* Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *An ontology of love: Subject and Supreme Personal Reality in the theological thought of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Romanian], trans. Anca Dumitraşcu and Adrian Guiu (Iaşi: Polirom, 2001), 27.

one hand, a result of his dialogue with the Tradition of the Church and, on the other hand, a result of his permanent dialogue with certain existentialist concepts.² Therefore, the presence of phenomenological ideas and terms in his writings is not by accident.

Phenomenology is a philosophical method and, at the same time, a philosophy that aims to study the phenomena that take place in the intentional consciousness, as well as the way in which they appear and are formed. Father Stăniloae believes that the *phenomenological* question about love can be divided into three main directions, according to the structure of consciousness: the direction of the transcendental *ego*, of the one who asks; the direction of intentionality, that Husserl calls “noetic”; and the direction of the phenomenon that is actually present in the consciousness, one that Husserl calls “noematic.” To start with it due to its methodological importance, intentionality is, according to Husserl, the characteristic of consciousness of always being the consciousness of something, of always being oriented towards something. Intentionality gives the phenomenon as a result of certain phenomenological reductions; it is the noetic dimension of consciousness and an act that encompasses multiple attitudes: perception, recollection, anticipation, retention, protention, etc. The second direction, called noematic, refers to the contents of intentional consciousness – in our case, to the actual phenomenon of love. The appearance of love in consciousness is all the clearer that it applies transcendental-phenomenological reduction to obtain the object itself, “in flesh and bone,” the pure phenomenon, by eliminating all theoretical assumptions. Thirdly, love is not offered only as a phenomenon, but, also according to Husserl, as an “original impression”³ of the *ego*, which is affected by it as much as it is affected by suffering or by joy. After a distinction made by Michel Henry, who used this as a starting point to construct a phenomenology of life, the self-affection of love is now opposed to the exteriority of intentionality as a fundamental experience of life rather than of thought.⁴

Using the theology of Father Stăniloae as a starting point, we will try to answer questions such as: How does love appear to the consciousness of the faithful man? What is the relation between love and the intentionality of consciousness? What does it mean to experience love and to what extent does its affection and self-affection change the phenomenological understanding of Husserl’s transcendental *ego*? Which type of phenomenology is more suitable for a meaningful discussion about the phenomenon of Christian love? We will try to argue that love is present in all three phenomenological

² Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 121.

³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* [in Romanian], trans. Christian Ferencz-Flatz (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), 280-281.

⁴ See especially part I of Michel Henry, *Incarnation. A Philosophy of the Flesh* [in Romanian], trans. Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2003), §§ 3, 7–10.

dimensions: it is a noematic object, referred to by intentionality; it is intentionality itself; and it is also part of the definition of the *ego*, modifying it, affecting it, transforming it into a person who is now in communion with God and with his brethren.

I. Intentionality and reduction

Infinite intentionality as love and counter-intentionality

Husserl defines intentionality as a “peculiarity that consciousness has of being consciousness of something, of carrying in its qualities of *cogito*, its *cogitatum* within itself”.⁵ Stăniloae keeps the intentional structure of consciousness and uses it to define man as a person, understood both as a substantial self and as an orientation towards others, as intentionality:

One might argue that the person lives simultaneously on two levels: in itself and in relation, or in its relations with others. [...] But a subject enclosed in total singularity is inconceivable. The subject must refer to something. This paradox is specific to him: he is an irrepressible self and he refers to something.⁶

This phenomenological definition refers to human in a rather existential manner, with Heideggerian influences, placing man as a person within certain inter-personal relations. Intentionality is a “fundamental structure”⁷ of man, a sort of *existential* (in Heidegger’s terms). In line with his mystical anthropology, Stăniloae extends the meaning of the concept of intentionality with a new attribute: infinity. Thus, in *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology I*, he provides a similar definition of man, a definition that also lists, apart from rationality, “the infinite intentionality oriented towards the other,” “unlimited love” and “boundless freedom.”⁸

What is the relationship between love and this infinite intentionality? More than a phenomenon offered by intentionality, love is to Stăniloae intentionality itself, through which it seeks communion with the other, which may be God or man. As Stăniloae puts it, “intentionality by communion is

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian meditations* [in Romanian], trans. Aurelian Crăiuțu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 64, § 14.

⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, “God is love,” *Orthodoxia* XXIII/3 (1997), 366–402; *apud* Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 98.

⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or Man’s Restoration* [in Romanian], second edition (Craiova: Omniscope, 1993), 76. Calinic Berger describes it as an “existential experience,” in Calinic Berger, *Towards a theological gnoseology: The Synthesis of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Romanian], trans. Nectarie Dărăban (Sibiu: Deisis, 2014), 417.

⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. I, second ed. (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1996), 356.

love,"⁹ because man has an innate "intentionality towards communion"¹⁰ as the meaning of his existence, which is at the same time "a characteristic of the state of love"¹¹ that manifests itself in spite of the ancestral sin. We must keep in mind, therefore, this synonymy between intentionality and love, which is present in the definition of man.

Viewing man as a person who is fundamentally in communion with others, Stăniloae highlights the intersubjective character of the intentionality of love, which can no longer be analysed only unilaterally, from one person to another, but also vice versa. The reciprocity of love, a subject that we will tackle later on, forces us to understand intentionality in both of its meanings: the person who loves is also affected by the love or by the refusal of the other. Therefore, the infinite intentionality of love is supported by a "counter-intentionality"¹² that man experiences within the communion of love.

While he does not use the term "counter-intentionality," Stăniloae nevertheless understands intentionality towards communion in the same way, being closer to the phenomenology of Marion than to that of Husserl. Love not only refers to the other, to represent him as a noematic object of the intentional consciousness and to conclude, through analogy and empathy, that he is also a human being who has the same intentional acts; love as intentionality experiences the counter-intentionality of the other, as a response or as a refusal, as a fulfilment of communion or as failure to do so.

Erotic reduction and theological counter-reduction

Through transcendental-phenomenological reduction, Husserl brackets the existence of the phenomenon that offers itself to intentional consciousness to have access to the pure phenomenon, devoid of any presupposition, exactly as it offers itself, starting from itself, "in flesh and bone."¹³ "Back to the things themselves," one of the principles of phenomenology, insists on this very aspect. As long as it remains solely a pure act of consciousness, one might analyse the modes in which the phenomenon appears and develops itself, according to its noematic content on the one hand, and to the noetic acts through which consciousness relates to it – perception, recollection, anticipation etc. – on the other. At this point, the phenomenological attitude dissociates itself from common perception, which takes the existence of all phenomena for granted: common perception is not capable of seeing phenomena in their transcendental purity within intentional consciousness.

⁹ Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or Man's Restoration*, 125.

¹⁰ Stăniloae, 122.

¹¹ Stăniloae, 76.

¹² The term "counter-intentionality" is present in Henry, *Incarnation*, 157, § 18.

¹³ See Husserl, *Cartesian meditations*, 50–51, § 8.

Heidegger will later understand this reduction as a reduction to being, questioning himself about the being of the entity that appears in the phenomenological attitude¹⁴, whereas Marion will propose a third reduction, the reduction to givenness, which, in his opinion, precedes phenomenalization, adding a principle that sheds light on reduction itself: "As much reduction, as much givenness."¹⁵ This means that, inasmuch as the phenomenological attitude of bracketing phenomena is more coherent and more radical, the phenomenological perspective can better observe the appearing phenomena, as well as their mode of appearing. The advantage of Marion's reduction lies within the emphasis placed on the possibility of perceiving phenomena offered without intuition, phenomena that are not necessarily objects (as in Husserl's case), or entities (as in Heidegger's case); this is where we can classify religious phenomena, phenomena such as events, and what interests us in particular, the phenomenon of love¹⁶.

In discussing the phenomenon of love, Marion would propose an "erotic reduction," meant to point out the primordially of love compared to the metaphysical perspective on being and to emphasize "a love without being."¹⁷ Where Descartes used to prove, through methodic doubt, the certainty of the ego's existence by using the famous formula *Cogito, ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am," Marion replied by highlighting its lack of existential relevance, inspired by the book of Ecclesiastes: the certainty of one's own existence cannot answer the question: "What good is it?" In other words, mere existence, even validated by a rational effort, cannot pass the test of futility. Only love can pass this test, only love knows how to protect existence against nothingness.¹⁸

What kind of reduction does Father Stăniloae use when he tackles the subject of love? We will try to prove that (1) he is in agreement with Marion's erotic reduction, in which love plays a crucial role compared to mere existence, because only love can give meaning to existence¹⁹; and that (2) he practices a *theological counter-reduction*, without eliminating from his reasoning a certain kind of metaphysics which had already been adopted in Orthodox theology ever since the Patristic Period. This does not involve annihilating the primordially of love compared to being or overturning

¹⁴ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and time* [in Romanian], trans. Gabriel Liiceanu and Cătălin Cioabă (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), §§ 1–4.

¹⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *De surcroît: études sur les phénomènes saturés* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), 20; Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 24.

¹⁶ Marion made a phenomenological analysis of love in Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique* (Paris: Grasset, 2003). A theological analysis of the Marion's thought can be found in Nicolae Turcan, *Apology after the end of metaphysics: Theology and phenomenology in Jean-Luc Marion* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Eikon, 2016).

¹⁷ Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 16.

¹⁸ Marion, 51.

¹⁹ See especially Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. I, 190–194; cf. Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 87.

Marion's erotic reduction; on the contrary, it involves taking upon oneself a form of intentionality which can give access to the phenomenon of religious love: more specifically, the intentionality of faith. Stăniloae understands faith and love as being unseparated: "Faith in Christ is love for Christ."²⁰

Firstly, the reduction to love, practiced by Stăniloae, appears, as in the case of Marion, in the context of the discussion about Descartes' *cogito*, having the same meaning as for the French phenomenologist. To the apodictic certainty of the existence of the thinking *ego*, Stăniloae opposes the certification of love, using the formula *Amo, ergo sum*, "I love, therefore I am."²¹ According to a commentator²², this adage has the advantage of encompassing the Cartesian one as well, extending mere existence to a relational ontology, without which one cannot understand love.

Secondly, we stated that Stăniloae practices a theological counter-reduction, which poses problems from a strictly phenomenological point of view. If we take into account that the purpose of Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological reduction was to eliminate any theoretical assumption, to get to the pure phenomenon, to the object itself, then wouldn't counter-reduction imply not respecting this principle and insidiously introducing a fundamental assumption, even if it were the assumption of faith? To ensure phenomenological rigor, Husserl asked for all statements that had not been obtained by way of the phenomenological method to be removed.²³ Naturally, faith was targeted by phenomenological reduction and this led to a form of methodological atheism, as was the case with Heidegger's reduction to entity. For Marion, faith could be discussed as a phenomenon with its own ways of appearing, because the third reduction, his reduction to givenness, made the appearance of these religious phenomena possible. Phenomenology, however, still had its limits, because it could only pretend to describe the Revelation as a possibility, not as an actuality.²⁴

Given that Father Stăniloae does not make a rigorous distinction between the two disciplines, phenomenology and theology, we should ask ourselves: in his thought, is the presence of faith an assumption that must be eliminated or rather a condition of possibility so that the phenomenon of Christian love can appear as correctly as possible? In the context of a discussion about transcendence, Stăniloae mentions the need for the "aprioric element of faith,"²⁵ which leads to the idea that, in the case of religious phenomena, as in the

²⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. II, second edition (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997), 242.

²¹ See the study "Man and God," [in Romanian], in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology Studies* [in Romanian] (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 1990), 157–307.

²² Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 245.

²³ See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations* [in Romanian], vol 2, part 1, trans. Bogdan Olaru and Christian Ferencz-Flatz (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009), 34, § 7.

²⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné*, 372–373.

²⁵ Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or Man's restoration*, 57.

case of liturgical life, speaking in the absence of faith does not mean seeing better, but rather seeing nothing. Methodological atheism can be justified for a non-religious phenomenology, but it remains blind to the phenomena available in Christian life. Consequently, a theological counter-reduction is more than necessary to be able to discuss, even phenomenologically, about the appearance of religious phenomena²⁶ – in our case, about the phenomenon of love. For Stăniloae, the reduction of love, similar to that of Marion, and theological counter-reduction are complementary, similar to the way in which love and faith are inseparable.

II. The phenomenon of love

From intra-Trinitarian love to deification (theosis)

The phenomenon of love in the thought of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is of particular interest in this context due to its phenomenological relevance. Intra-Trinitarian love, the love that God has for people and the love they have for God, as well as the love that people have for each other are the baselines of an analysis that has already been performed.²⁷ Due to a lack of space, we will only focus on what might be of interest to phenomenology, but, once again, with the following precaution: Can we still be talking about phenomenology in all these cases? Isn't it rather a blasphemy to talk about the love in the Holy Trinity in phenomenological terms, for instance?

When describing the perfect love of the Holy Trinity, Father Stăniloae surprisingly uses the term *consciousness*. The perfect and infinite I-Thou love between the Father and the Son is amplified by the love of the Holy Spirit, who brings “a new kind of love,” which amplifies the first. As Stăniloae emphasizes, the joy of love is a product of the consciousness of the Other's infinity, not of an empty infinity.

The joy of love is given not by infinity itself, but rather by its representation in another person than oneself. Where there is no consciousness, there is no joy. But real joy is received from another consciousness that pays attention to it.²⁸

²⁶ For an extended discussion on theological counter-reduction, see Nicolae Turcan, “How does the truth appear? From phenomenological reduction to theological counter-reduction,” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa* 63, no. 2 (2018), doi: 10.24193/subbto.2018.2.09, 146–149.

²⁷ See Berger, *Towards a theological gnoseology*; Jürgen Henkel, *Godmanhood and the Ethics of Love in Father Dumitru Stăniloae's book Orthodox spirituality. Ascetics and mystics* [in Romanian], trans. Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2003); Sandu Frunză, *The religious experience in Dumitru Stăniloae's thought: A relational ethics* [in Romanian], second ed. (Bucharest: Eikon, 2016).

²⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity: In the beginning there was love* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1993), 64.

We can notice here what Michel Henry would call an “arch-phenomenology” of the Holy Trinity, in which the “appearance” of the Persons is life, love, and infinite joy, not just noematic content destined for an objectifying phenomenology. The presence of the consciousness of love is crucial, but it is an analogous description, which starts from human love: “Love is based on the consciousness of another person.”²⁹ Love is conditioned, according to Stăniloae, by its own consciousness, and “it sees my love in my consciousness.”³⁰ In this example, consciousness loses its quality of constituting pole, exposing itself to visibility. It reveals the love that it has for the other and the other can see it. In other words, *the loving consciousness becomes a phenomenon for my consciousness as well*, a fact that is impossible within the paradigm of Husserl’s phenomenology.

At this level, however, any attempt of arch-phenomenology ends fairly quickly with *perichoresis*. Even though the term *consciousness* alludes to some sort of interiority, within the Holy Trinity, interiority is a complete mutual co-interiority, a perichoresis of each consciousness.

In the perfect unity of the Trinity, in the consciousness of each subject, the consciousness of the two other subjects must be perfectly encompassed and transparent, along with the subjects themselves.³¹

We might assume that, if each of the three Persons has its own consciousness, then there are also three modes of appearing towards the others. However, we should think of such a hypothesis antinomically, together with its opposite. Within this arch-phenomenology, each consciousness is “perfectly encompassed and transparent,”³² along with the Persons to which they belong.³³ To paraphrase Hegel, “arch-phenomenology” does not pass, but has already passed into theology, because this has already become about the perfect communion of being and love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As far as God’s love for man is concerned, it has a phenomenological structure that seems easier to accept: God is manifested outside of Himself through His uncreated energies, which originate in His being, but which are transmitted voluntarily by the Persons of the Trinity. The distinction made by Saint Gregory Palamas between the unknowable being and the energies that are transmitted to man is a distinction that we may call phenomenological, as the phenomenon, namely that which appears, is represented by the uncreated energies and makes present the unapparent and the invisible of the divine being. Love is one of God’s uncreated energies and man responds to it.³⁴

²⁹ Stăniloae, 66.

³⁰ Stăniloae, 66.

³¹ Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, 294.

³² Stăniloae, 294.

³³ Stăniloae, 300.

³⁴ Cf. Henkel, *Godmanhood and the Ethics of Love*, 175.

Man's response is deification, a theandric process in which man cooperates with the grace of God to attain the likeness of God, which reaches the ultimate peaks of love, uniting with Him and seeing the uncreated light. What makes this entire apophatic ascent possible is the cooperation between man's will, which possesses, as we have seen, an "intentionality towards love," an infinite intentionality³⁵, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Grace is present in each step, intensifying as man becomes free of his passions and ascends towards the vision of the uncreated light.

In phenomenological terms, we might say that love knows here a new mode of appearing, namely *appearing through the grace of the Holy Spirit*. What appears in this spiritual endeavour, for example the vision of the uncreated light, no longer has to do with mundane life, which is why the conditions of possibility of this appearance are not natural; rather, they belong to the Holy Spirit. In philosophical terms, the transcendental, which ensures conditions of possibility for knowledge, becomes the same as the transcendent, uniting with man unequivocally.

From a phenomenological point of view, the phenomenon of love is unified: the mode of appearing in the world (love as a phenomenon, albeit saturated) and the mode of appearing of life (love as an experience that affects the person) are united through the work of the Holy Spirit in an ecstatic and self-sacrificing love, both for God and for our brethren.

Divine reciprocity

Is reciprocity a condition of love? Marion argued that it is not. The phenomenon of *eros* is highlighted in Marion's works by the "advance," which is the decision of the one who loves to love regardless or not he will be loved back.³⁶ Within such a decision, reciprocity is certainly not a condition. Marion eliminates reciprocity because, as in the case of the gift, if it were a condition for love, then love – as the gift – would become a simple economic exchange, based on the quantities given and received.

To Stăniloae, reciprocity is an important trait of love and he mentions it often in his writings. Certainly, there is also the possibility of non-love, as far as people are concerned, which is due to their limited nature, bodies and freedom.³⁷ Love manifests itself to freedom, to a person who is fundamentally free. Therefore, the declaration of love is a risk, as the other can choose to refuse love. Reciprocity is not a condition of love for Stăniloae either, but it certainly is its *fulfilment*. Unrequited love is still love, but a kind of love in which self-sacrifice becomes permanent, leaving no room for joy.

Nevertheless, there is one kind of love whose reciprocity is guaranteed: the love of God – both the one within the Holy Trinity, which exudes rec-

³⁵ Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, 356 (emphasis added).

³⁶ Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 125.

³⁷ Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 48.

iprocity, and the one He has for man. It appears that the absence of reciprocity is man's privilege: only he, based on his freedom, can refuse love, regardless of whether it is divine or human.

Marion gave an example from the Gospel, namely love for one's enemies, to emphasize the absence of the condition of reciprocity in love. Not only will enemies not respond with love, but they might even respond with hatred, possibly until the end. Although, from a phenomenological point of view, his response increases the purity of the phenomenon of love, whose visibility and givenness become as clear as ever – similar to the way in which the Lord forgave those who crucified Him –, it is no less true that he who loves his enemies will still enjoy a kind of reciprocity – divine reciprocity. Stăniloae's early Christology emphasized the I-Thou character, theorized by Martin Buber, but his late Christology contains a ternary scheme, I-Thou-He. What is important is that this ternary scheme justifies the urge to a form of reciprocity which cannot be conceived only horizontally.³⁸

Through faith in God, the absence of reciprocity from the other can be substituted with divine reciprocity, by the ever-present response of His endless love. God is a continuous reciprocity of love, whereas non-reciprocity only has to do with man's freedom. God finds joy in man's response. His dialogue with man takes place through the rationality of creation, but also through the Holy Spirit, through whom God's love is given unto us, which man fulfills through reciprocity, answering to divine love with love, whose "effect is the eternal deification of man, in the Kingdom of Heaven."³⁹ He who taught us to love those who hate us strengthens us with His love, helps us with His grace. He is true reciprocity in any form of love. Therefore, the erotic phenomenon read through the eyes of Stăniloae's theology still knows reciprocity among its conditions, even though it is only a divine reciprocity.

III. The ego and the auto-affection of love. Intersubjectivity and interpersonality

In the fifth meditation of his *Cartesian meditations*⁴⁰, Husserl failed to understand intersubjectivity due to the pole of the constituting ego, which is incapable of seeing the other in his otherness. His attempt to resort to analogy and empathy keeps the other – noematic content in the field of my intentional consciousness – to a certain distance that is never truly overcome. The other would always be reduced to *ego cogito*, an inheritance of Descartes' subject that Husserl never really overcame.

³⁸ Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 201.

³⁹ Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 95.

⁴⁰ Husserl, *Cartesian meditations*.

There is a phenomenological genealogy of the Cartesian subject, in which one may observe the attempts to overcome it, along with overcoming onto-theological metaphysics: Husserl transforms it into transcendental *ego*, Heidegger into *Dasein*, Levinas into *ethical alterity*, and Marion into *l'adonné* (the gifted one). *L'adonné* is the one who receives himself from the other, who does not possess him, a movement that can be observed in the phenomenology of love. Marion overturns phenomenological intentionality into counter-intentionality and experience into counter-experience.⁴¹ It is probable that Marion's theologically inspired *adonné* comes close to the way in which Stăniloae understands the person.

Stăniloae uses the term of divine "intersubjectivity" or divine "interpersonality"⁴² when analysing the relations between the Persons of the Holy Trinity⁴³, though with an original meaning: there is no object in front of the divine Subjects/Persons, because none of them is objectified in their relation of communion, remaining a Subject/a Person. Just as Stăniloae sees a balance between person and nature, he also extends it to the relation between person and communion: the person never appears outside of communion.

The fundamental trait of the person who loves is the renunciation of the egotistical self in order to give himself to the other. Through the love that unites without confounding, each person is more concerned with the other than with himself⁴⁴, in a kenotic attitude⁴⁵, in which he is leaving aside his egotistical self and focusing towards the loved one. Self-renunciation takes the form of renunciation to egotistical passions, man's only adequate response to the love of God, who chose to die to save mankind⁴⁶. The Passion and the Crucifixion of the Son make God's great love for us visible, along with His great power that lies within this love. To Christ's kenotic descent, out of love, man responds with the kenosis of self-renunciation⁴⁷, attempting to obey the loving will of the Father as Christ did. Sacrifice is a condition of possibility for communion, taking the form of self-renunciation for the other, of "self-abandonment out of love for the other."⁴⁸ Kenosis fulfills the relationality of the person.

Such a renunciation and self-donation must not be perceived as self-diminution, but rather as a form of enrichment. Self-donation out of love leads

⁴¹ Marion, *Étant donné*, 426–430, 521–522.

⁴² Jean-Yves Lacoste also proposes the term "interpersonality" as a response to the impasse of Husserl's intersubjectivity. Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Time: A Theological Phenomenology* [in Romanian], trans. Maria Cornelia Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2005), 65.

⁴³ Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 45.

⁴⁴ See Stăniloae, 51.

⁴⁵ For more information about the kenosis of love in the thought of Father Stăniloae, see Maciej Bielawski, *The Philokalic Vision of the World in the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Romanian], translation and foreword by Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 1998), 188–194.

⁴⁶ Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 51.

⁴⁷ Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, 118.

⁴⁸ Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, 91–92.

to the enrichment of the self, the spiritual growth of each person inasmuch as he unites with God.⁴⁹

In the case of Marion's *adonné* no *a priori* of the autarkic metaphysical subject was active anymore.⁵⁰ *L'adonné* was a recipient of saturated phenomena (which astonish, which overflow concepts) and was himself a saturated phenomenon, who received himself from the relation, as in anti-essentialist existentialism. Stăniloae's understanding of the person is much more balanced, because the person is always in a relation of communion, but without separating from his own being. In addition, compared to an *adonné* who is inflexible towards anything *a priori*, the person has an attitude which is active not only hermeneutically and not only at the level of receptivity, even though, on the highest stage of mystical vision it is only receptive. Governed by a theological counter-reduction to faith and love – which is also its transcendental, together with (paradoxically) the gift of the Holy Spirit – the ascetic involvement of the person is required. Even if grace is a free gift of God and the grace of love in deification is no exception, the human person cooperates ceaselessly with God's will, through his fight against passions and through striving for virtues. Self-sacrifice, kenosis, *askesis*, *orthodoxy* etc. become conditions of possibility for the unification with God, which, paradoxically, does not annihilate the free character of the gift of the Holy Spirit, nor the importance of His work.

While it is true that love is also intentionality, it cannot be resumed to this: the counter-intentionality of the other is opposed to my intentionality. Even more so than intentionality, love is self-affection, life, an experience of self-enrichment and deification through the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, love unites the phenomenology of the world with the phenomenology of life.

Closing remarks: theo-phenomenology or the mode of appearing “through the Holy Spirit”

“How does love *appear*, therefore?” is the phenomenological question. For Father Dumitru Stăniloae, it appears as the ultimate meaning and fulfilment of creation, as an ascent of man, through deification, to the likeness of God. Love is a phenomenon, a form of intentionality and renewal of the person or, according to the terminology of phenomenology, noematic content, noetic intentionality and transcendental and living ego, called towards deification. We may consider the phenomenon of love a saturated phenomenon, which exceeds any preliminary or constituted concept of the

⁴⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 3, second edition (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997), 125.

⁵⁰ Marion, *Étant donné*, 521–522.

intellect, responding to an infinite interior search, because man was created in the image of God. The endless intentionality of love determines a participative gnoseology, which involves the person in a spiritual life, in an ascent towards deification. In the light of assumed love, the transcendental ego of phenomenology becomes a renewed person, a deified man. The grace of the Holy Spirit changes his transcendental structures to lift him up to the communion of love of the Holy Trinity, a basis and final goal of any form of love. Man remains active and receptive, striving to the best of his ability to respond to God's love with self-sacrificing love. Reciprocity, though not a condition of love, is nonetheless its fulfilment, the response expected by God and by our brethren. For Stăniloae, no form of love is truly fulfilled outside of the communion with God.

As inadequate as phenomenology may seem in discussing a theologian of experience such as Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the subject of love forces it to overcome itself. From a methodologically atheist phenomenology, open towards the world (Husserl and Heidegger), to a phenomenology of love, understood as a phenomenology of the fulfilment of life and of the meaning of man – the phenomenology of love reveals itself as a synthesis of two major phenomenological directions, similar to the two fundamental modes of appearing that Michel Henry talked about: the one of the world and the one of life. Love appears in both ways and, even more so, makes a connection between them, accomplishing a synthesis that gives meaning. A third mode of appearing might surprise us: the one “through the Holy Spirit,” which opens up phenomenology towards theology. This new mode of appearing, which can be seen in Stăniloae's works when he refers to love as a gift of the Spirit, does not revoke the appearances of the phenomenology of the world or the gifts of the phenomenology of life, but gives them the unity and the meaning that they were missing, transfigures them, and opens them up towards the ecstasy of eschatological future. The phenomenology of theological love unifies phenomenology into a *theo-phenomenology*. For this, the givenness of love by the grace of God has to do with invisibility, with life, and cannot be reduced to an object, to a phenomenon, or to a concept. From the arch-phenomenology of the intra-Trinitarian love – which was at the same time an arch-ontology and arch-metaphysics – to the phenomenology of the kenotic sacrifice of the transcendental ego who became a person, the path is long. But love is one of those experiences who can still navigate it, either by resorting to concepts, in its cataphatic attitude, or by overcoming conceptual knowledge, in the apophatic experience of uniting with God. Stăniloae teaches us that the boundaries between disciplines are limited and that through all of them we can hear God's calling to dialogue, to sacrifice, to a communion of love, and, therefore, to deification.

Translated by Paul Cenușe

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