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“Open Sobornicity” in Dumitru Stăniloae’s Theology—Christian Orthodox Creeds in the Context of Contemporary Ecumenical Relationships

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Abstract: This study analyses several of the key principles of Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s conception of Orthodox ecumenical theology. It considers the foundations, the possibilities, and the type of ecumenical manifestation, specifically regarding the relationships between Orthodox Christians and Christians of different denominations and traditions. This is a necessity as the result of the profound actual theological crisis and the lack of clarity of principles of faith at the ecumenical level across the whole Christian world. This study fills this gap by seeking to identify the doctrinal principles that define Orthodox Christian life in an ecumenical context and the manner in which such theology can be practically applied.

Keywords: sobornicity; ecumenical relationship; unity; ecumenical winter; rebooting ecumenical action



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1. Introduction

This approach represents a response to what contemporary theologians refer to as the “ecumenical winter” (Ola Tjørhom 2008; Rauch 2017, pp. 88, 91), a cooling of inter-Christian, inter-religious, and even interpersonal relationships. It seems that the actual Christian world is going through a crisis of faith principles and action. In this sense, the present analysis aims to contribute to a general clarification of ecumenical Christian relationships by delineating the most important doctrinal foundations for ecumenical belief within Orthodox Christianity. This study also addresses various challenges of the Orthodox ecumenical model, and offers some practical directions for Orthodox ecumenical engagement in contemporary activities and relationships.

To achieve these goals, this text draws primarily (see for Stăniloae’s ecumenical conception: Stăniloae 1963, 1965, 1967b, 1969, 1970, 1971a, 1973) upon two articles by the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae: „Sobornicitate deschisă” (Stăniloae 1971b) and „Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox” (Stăniloae 1967a). In fact, the first part of this study is dedicated to a hermeneutical reading and systematization of the doctrinal principles of Stăniloae’s ecumenical thought. In the second part, we will attempt to provide brief responses to various challenges, objections, and questions related to the topic, proposing several practical ecumenical solutions. Such an attempt is necessary for two reasons. The first of these is that, within the Orthodox world, there is a general poverty of understanding regarding the authentic Orthodox theological grounds for ecumenical commitment. The second is that there is no precise definition for such an ecumenical commitment that is mutually assented to by all Christian traditions.

Stăniloae’s ecumenical perspective has been researched in recent years in numerous and significant studies (Sonea 2016; Jemna and Mănăstireanu 2023; Bordeianu 2013; Turcescu 2002; Mosoiu 2020; Coman 2016; Noble and Noble 2019; Bara 2022). Often, these studies have noted the specific expression “open sobornicity” as a phrase coined and utilized by the Romanian theologian in various studies, particularly in the paper with the same

title mentioned above. This expression refers to an entire and complex theological edifice with profound implications and consequences for the ecumenical–universal dimension of the Christian life. The main elements and structure of this edifice will be presented here, along with a contextualization and an update of the theme.

2. “Open Sobornicity” or Doctrinal Foundations for an Orthodox Ecumenical Model

According to Stăniloae’s theological thought, Christian life encompasses the entire divine, human, and cosmic reality within Jesus Christ. He views Christianity as the mystery par excellence of human and divine universality, a universality experienced and embraced in Jesus Christ and His Church through the Holy Spirit. This universality of Christianity is rendered by the syntagma open sobornicity. He argues that it is possible to participate in this mystery of open sobornicity within the One Church of Jesus Christ as a divine and human reality. Jesus Christ has already realized for humanity the mystery of open sobornicity as Catholicity, encompassing and perfecting the whole world and the full humanity in Himself. Catholicity, from the Greek *kath’olon*, means completeness/all-inclusiveness, and sobornicity, from *sobornuiu*, is the Slavic translation of *kath’olon* but with an emphasis on togetherness and fellowship (for a detailed definition of the terms see: Stăniloae 2012, pp. 79–80). Thus, the Catholicity/sobornicity of the Church constitute the foundation, calling, and the ultimate goal of all people. Through the Holy Mysteries, Christians receive the power to become Catholic/sobornic beings in Jesus Christ. Hence, the vocation and need for Orthodox Christians to be open to all people created in the image of God.

2.1. “Open Sobornicity” or the Extension in the World of the Unity of the Divine Trinity

As can be inferred from Stăniloae’s theology, open sobornicity is a reality that is ultimately founded on the model of the unity and tri-hypostatic being of the Holy Trinity. Open sobornicity, as Catholicity of the Church, is grounded in the simultaneous distinction and identity of the Essence and Persons of/within the Holy Trinity. The Three Persons are the ultimate divine foundation of, and the Ones working to imprint/communicate, the mystery of the unity and sobornicity of the Church (Stăniloae 1967c, pp. 44–45). The Church teaches both the Unity/Unicity of the divine Essence and the Trinity of the divine Persons, even though these two aspects may appear contradictory. The sobornicity of the Church is determined by the simple yet complex reality of the divine Essence, through which various theological aspects—complementary and/or paradoxical—can be held in a unified conceptual framework. These antinomies ensure a balanced understanding of the unity and being of the Holy Trinity; though, as Stăniloae points out, this equilibrium retains the character of a mystery, as it encompasses contradictory aspects (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 167). Therefore, *open sobornicity* is determined by the unity of the Essence of the Holy Trinity or, in other words, by the unity of the Three hypostatic mysterious divine realities. In other words, the Unity of the Trinity is enveloped in a trinitarian apophatic mystery. Stăniloae considers the apophatic mystery of the Holy Trinity as a fundamental theological reality, as it translates/transfers the Catholic state to a personal level. He understands God, through the apophatic mystery, as being the Creator of the human person, both in body and soul, and as the origin of his both Catholic consciousness and action. This is explained as the result of the divine unity of the Holy Trinity which is the source of the infinite and the unbroken sobornicity of all creation. The Christian can have and should acquire, through a relationship of love with God—the Triune Divine Being—a Catholic, read universal/total wholeness, existence.

In this sense, Orthodox Christians are called to participate in the *open sobornicity* of the Church by working towards the transparency and continuous transcendence of their spiritual state. In order to achieve this transparency, they are called to be one with all humanity as God is One. Thus, they have to embrace, based on the fullness of divine revelation, the theological pluralism of perceptions of God in the context of various Christian confessions. The Romanian theologian explains this by stating that the divine mystery of

God's unity is so profound that any approach to it, even by the humblest soul, constitutes an act of theology (Stăniloae 1971b, pp. 178–79). Through participation in the mystery of God and, implicitly, in the *open sobornicity* of the Church, every Orthodox Christian is called to encompass and assume these multiple, complex, and pluralistic realities of the religious phenomenon of their own growth. This involves showing openness to all those who do not fully know God (Stăniloae 1971b, pp. 178–79). This is because the Holy Trinity continues to work “beyond” the sacramental–canonical realm of Jesus Christ's Church (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 528). In fact, God acts as the Creator of the world and does not “transgress” the “boundaries” of the Church, but works, insofar as it is possible, for Church activation in the entire world. That is like a mysterious and free action of God that allows Orthodox Christians to transcend the limitations of forms, rituals, words, and ecclesiastical institutions (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 175). *Open sobornicity* is not only a possibility, but also a *de facto* condition of the Church. It depends on the members of the Church, following Jesus Christ's example, to be open to all people without demanding a response. This is about recognizing in all people the traces of God's work, even if they do not wish to be in communion with Him and the Church. This theological perspective about humanity and the world, based on the unconditional divine work, makes the Church alive, infallible, and certain in terms of salvation and sanctification of the faithful. This perspective also prevents Orthodox Christianity from becoming rigid within narrow and legalistic confines (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 175). Guided by this principle of the Orthodox faith, rituals, church practices, acts of worship, and words, etc., can and should become transparent to God. They should be opportunities for a living transcendence towards God, a vibrant experience of connection with Him (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 175).

Understandably, this is possible because Orthodoxy, as *open sobornicity*, surpasses any religious protocol of manifesting faith. It is not about the forms of religious worship, it is rather about the divine life of God as shared, communicated, and present in all humankind. Thus, the Orthodox Christians are called to live this life in communion with God and with the entire world as a life in Christ, and not to focus exclusively on rituals and forms of venerating God.

Open sobornicity, as highlighted by Stăniloae, protects us from absolutizing an idea, concept, or a form concerning God and His work in the world, as might be found predominantly or exclusively in the various Christian confessional spaces. For instance, there is a significant emphasis in the Evangelical Christian tradition of Scripture and in the Roman Catholic tradition on ecclesiastical unity. Going beyond the Protestant or Catholic experience, Orthodox Christians can actualize and give a greater importance to the fullness of revelation expressed in the Church by the Scripture. Through the unity of the Church and its administration from a historical perspective, Orthodox theology allows for this holistic approach without making exclusive the various expressions of the faithful. In this sense, Stăniloae states that: “it might be considered that God Himself guides us toward this framing of everything that other Christian communities have experienced in such a sobornicity” (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 175).

For the Romanian theologian, the Catholicity of the Church, as well as its unity and holiness, are understood as being grounded and sourced in God, in Jesus Christ, who resides in and works through the Holy Spirit (Stăniloae 2012, p. 80). In other words, the unity of the Trinity of Persons is extended as an action of salvation through Jesus Christ within the Church. Through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity imparts to the Church and the faithful of every age the fullness of the holiness and unity of the Holy Trinity. God reveals, in a way beyond comprehension, all the mysteries *in* and *beyond* the Church and throughout all of creation. As a result, the *open sobornicity* of the Church is paradoxically conditioned by the various ways in which God works in the world beyond or activates in all of creation the sacramental–canonical space of the Church. The fact that the divine work of the Holy Trinity is carried out throughout all of creation, and that this work is personally perceived and uniquely received by the members of the human community, *opens up* and activates the sobornicity of the Church at a pan-human level. Moreover, as

Stăniloae observes, the modes, acts, and forms of the divine revelation should not be seen as ultimate realities, but rather as transparencies of God, modes through which acts of God's Existence and *oikonomia* (the work of salvation) are revealed and communicated (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 173). We must acknowledge that, beyond the fullness of the divine work and revelation, "the ways Christians have expressed God up until now have a value, but also a certain awareness of incompleteness" (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 173). It is not the work and presence of God that is incomplete, but rather the level of perception, assumption, and expression of the divine mysteries shared with humanity in general and with Orthodox Christians within the Church more specifically. It is not that the Church or the revelation of God within the Church are incomplete, but rather that the forms of revelation are limited due to the human condition of the Church's members.

2.2. The Christ–Cosmological Dimension of Oikonomic Work and the "Open Sobornicity" of the Orthodox Mission in the World

The fundamental oikonomic basis (from *oikonomia* or the salvific work of Jesus Christ) of *open sobornicity* is none other than the divine and human Person of Jesus Christ. For Stăniloae, the interconnectedness of people and God's work within and beyond the Church arises from the fact that "all things and all persons are held in the unified network of rational principles (λογοὶ τῶν ὄντων) radiating like threads from the divine Logos, and all are gathered, as they work and develop in accordance with those principles, into the unity of the Logos, with all their amplified richness" (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 528).

Expanding and applying the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor about the eternal reasons/principles of creation (λογοὶ τῶν ὄντων) to the present context, Stăniloae emphasizes the inter-relationship of all humans with creation in the unity of the Divine Logos from Whom these reasons/principles spring. This means that, within the existential substrate of humans, there is an array of uncreated reasons (λογοὶ τῶν ὄντων) that are activated in their diversity and unity simultaneously when a person is connected to the incarnate divine Logos, Jesus Christ. The Romanian theologian underscores the universal dimension of cosmic reasons (λογοὶ) and general cosmic rationality as the foundations for the spiritual and existential development of man as a rationality in himself and within the broader reality of creation (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 530). This development occurs in connection with Jesus Christ, the new Adam who fulfils the universal vocation of humanity to become divine by grace and action. Thus, open sobornicity originates from the fact that Jesus Christ, as the incarnate Logos, "came unto his own" (John 1:11), which is to say that He assumed and perfected all things in Himself so that we "might receive the abundance of His grace" (John 1:16). In other words, through a mystery beyond understanding, Jesus Christ is fully present in creation and humanity, enlightening every person entering the world (John 1:9). Open sobornicity aims at this "light within people", that Jesus Christ is present latently in every human being, whether they have chosen to unite with Him or not.

From the Pauline theology, which the Romanian theologian employs to support the concept of open sobornicity, it emerges that God desires through His unique oikonomic plan to share with all people the inexhaustible wealth of His divine life (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 173). Therefore, His Son was sent into the world as the Savior of the entire cosmos (Σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου/ John 4:42) as and through the divine human reality of the Church. Jesus Christ died for all people so that all may be sanctified through Him. Jesus Christ, as a Man, calls all people brethren and is not ashamed to do so (Hebrews 2:11).

On the other hand, the Orthodox Christian mission does not involve preaching a gospel message "to every creature under heaven" (Colossians 1:23) in the sense of mere religious information about the Person of Jesus Christ. Instead, it implies an *open sobornicity* through which we discover Jesus Christ in one another and in all of creation. This is because the Church and creation are full of Jesus Christ. He is active sacramentally through the Holy Spirit throughout the ages in the Church, and He is also active in all of humanity through the *open sobornicity* of the Church. In this sense, we understand how the human

aspect of the Church is built (Ephesians 4:12). It requires building because not all humans have activated within themselves the gifts of Jesus Christ's saving oikonomia.

Hence, those entrusted with the mission of the Orthodox Church do not preach a Christ of their own, but they strive to identify His work in the world and in all people in order to reveal His full presence in His Church. This Missionary dimension of the Church prevents Orthodoxy from proselytism and from adopting a superior attitude towards other Christians or other people. Non-Orthodox fellow persons may sometimes be recipients of a less-than-perfect religious system of assistance, but they are nevertheless mysteries of the work and presence of Jesus Christ. In other words, I, as an Orthodox Christian, need the other so that Jesus Christ can fully work within me. In the context of the Orthodox mission, Stăniloae believes that *open sobornicity* can be experienced and manifested even in human creations of a cultural, technological, scientific, etc., nature. These creations can be a challenge but also a platform for expressing and actualizing the sobornicity of the Church. In this regard, the Romanian theologian affirms:

“It has become evident that deepening the higher meanings of the Gospel gains much today through the enrichment of the human spirit, due to modern progress that appreciably brings to life latent human potentials that were previously dormant. On the other hand, this enrichment and actualisation do not occur in human groups confined within narrow boundaries, but rather in a very extensive circulation of ideas, modes of approaching nature, and life's problems [. . .]. This means that the Church itself must maintain a vibrant connection with all humanity, which, especially in the new era, enriches itself astonishingly through its experience within the universal horizon” (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 530).

2.3. The Need for “Open Sobornicity” Stemming from the Apostolicity of the Church

Another theological characteristic of *open sobornicity*, as elucidated by Stăniloae, is its Apostolic foundation. Catholicity, in the fullest sense of the word, is the active realization in all Christians, in complete communion, of the entire treasure of truth and life, brought into the world and in the Church by Jesus Christ on the foundation of the Apostles. Catholicity or sobornicity is the perfect Christian unity in confessing and living the Apostolic heritage of all Christians. For the Romanian theologian, the One Church, toward which every ecumenical endeavor aspires, is the Apostolic and Catholic Church. Without Apostolicity, he argues, sobornicity loses its significance. On the other hand, without sobornicity, Apostolicity or the divine revelation in Jesus Christ cannot be fully known and actualized. It cannot fulfil its purpose, develop all human dimensions, and fully perfect any believer (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 516). The Orthodox Church considers the unity of Christians from different Christian traditions achievable in the unity of faith and in the integral content of the teaching of faith or divine revelation preached by the Apostles (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 524). Apostolicity is not merely a judge/evaluator across time to the faith of the Church and its conciliar work, but it is also the connecting point for all Catholic manifestations throughout history. It is the basis of unity and the foundational stone of the Church. “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18) refers to the faith and confession of faith in Jesus Christ, the God–Man crucified and resurrected on the third day from the tomb. *Open sobornicity* is not a relativization of the Orthodox Christian faith in the infinite realm of ideas and religious beliefs. It is not an assimilation of Orthodoxy within the general space of religious creeds, but an identification of the revealed foundations of Orthodox faith, taking into account the various Christian and religious contexts and placing them on the rock of Apostolic faith.

What Stăniloae asserts is that sobornicity cannot exist without Apostolicity, and vice versa. This reality implies that any ecclesial gathering and conciliar work must be established on an in Apostolic foundation and place, respectively, on a basis and in a house of faith, which is primarily that of the Holy Apostles. This House (which is the human perspective of the Church) has grown and risen in many aspects, yet on the foundation of the faith and the life of the Apostles.

Conversely, Apostolicity without the conciliar openness toward the world would remain an enclave of peculiar people who witnessed a Man risen from the dead, keeping this secret to themselves in order not to be deprived of the gifts due to the first participants in such miracles. Such a stance would seriously call into question the reality of the mystery of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The message and content of the resurrection mystery must be shared with the entire world from all times, grounded in the Apostles, and this is achieved as the *open sobornicity* of the Church of Jesus Christ.

2.4. *The Providential and Oikonomic Catholic Work of God: The “Latent Church”*

What constituted a topic of debate for many theologians (see Florovsky 1989, p. 34) of the past century is the possibility that God works in the entire world through the Church, including beyond the Church and through the Church in the whole of humanity and creation. For the Romanian theologian, it is evident that God’s work transcends the “boundaries” of the Church and Christianity (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 527). He even speaks of a “Latent Church” hidden within each human person, waiting to be activated through the work of Jesus Christ, and even through the activity of the members of the One Church upon the world and humanity in general.

From Stăniloae’s perspective, the Church is a cosmic mystery that surpasses or/and activates the sacramental–canonical reality tied to a specific space and time. It is connected to the sacramental eternal presence of the Holy Trinity throughout the whole cosmos. Thus, the Church is called to be open to the world and to the presence of God within it. The Romanian theologian emphasizes that God works in the world not only through the Church, but also through all and diverse people. He works in the world and in the Church through human persons who may or may not be canonical members of the Orthodox Church. For this reason, through the *open sobornicity* of the Church, He envisions the universal redemptive and sanctifying oikonomia or the will of God that operates in all mankind, in His Church, and throughout creation:

“The Church must always be open to the world and its movement, in order to understand God’s work within it, to testify to the world about God’s consent to its movement, and to wholeheartedly support it. Christ sent His disciples as trusting lambs into the midst of the world, not to halt the world’s development, but to testify to God’s love for the world. The Church is made up of people who confess Christ in the midst of the world, upholder of everything that occurs in the world (Pantocrator)[. . .]. God works not only through the Church upon human persons but also through human persons—within or beyond the Church—upon the Church. Therefore, it (the Church) needs to be open to God’s will, both when it is sent to work upon human persons and when asked to listen and see His work within human persons” (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 531).

The theological principle on which Stăniloae bases his conception that God works through the Church in His world and beyond the Church’s “boundaries” (which is not a restrictive or non-inclusive perspective, but refers to the work of Jesus Christ to activate His Church in the whole of humanity grounded on the free will of every human person to be in communion with Him) is that the Son of God became incarnate, assuming “a human nature that was not yet the Church” (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 528). This means that all of human persons from all times, regardless of their respective social, cultural, or religious contexts, are recapitulated in His human nature and in His unique Hypostasis, and are assumed through *enhypossthasis*. That is to say that all humanity is Hyposthasized in His Hypostasis, which is before ages and without beginning.

On the other hand, he points out that the New Testament presents cases where God works directly upon particular persons without the mediation of the Apostles’ preaching—that is, without the mediation of the Church (the centurion in the Gospels, Saul, Cornelius, etc.). The most notable case is that of the Holy Apostle Paul (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 528). He received the revelation and the entire Church experience “outside” the Church. Additionally, Stăniloae argues that general experience confirms that God applies His judgment upon

those who are not part of the Church, as they have not fulfilled His will written in their hearts (Romans 1:18–22; 2:14) (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 528). Based on this foundation, Stăniloae speaks of a “Latent Church” of those who fulfil God’s will outside the ecclesiastical organizations (Stăniloae 1967a, p. 530). By this, he does not refer to the Protestant idea of the invisible Church, but to the real presence of Jesus Christ in various Christian or non-Christian believers who follow the “law of nature” (Romans 2:14). The “Latent Church” implies that God is present potentially through Jesus Christ within the souls of all human persons, and this latency is activated when the person in question seeks and encounters the “Living Church” in Jesus Christ. This can be accomplished as *open sobornicity*, aiming at the depths of every human person’s soul and the oikonomic presence and work of God within them.

The “Latent Church” signifies that, from a human perspective, the Church of Jesus Christ, though perfected in Jesus Christ, continues to be activated over time and in human persons as God is sought by them. This means they do not convert as an act of joining the Church but rather discover and activate the Church within themselves through the pursuit of God’s will and its fulfilment in their own lives. They discover the “Latent Church” within their own souls. It is more an act of actualization than one of conversion. Conversion, rather, involves aligning one’s life with the life of the Church or of Jesus Christ.

2.5. Divine Revelation Is Contextually Activated as “Open Sobornicity”

For Orthodox theology, the realities of faith are not inventions or discoveries made by any human person regarding the mystery of the Absolute Being. Orthodox Christianity is the revelation that God Himself made and makes to humanity about Himself through the sending of Jesus Christ into the world. Revelation constitutes the main pillar of the righteous faith, a faith that is not verified “scientifically,” but rather through faith itself. God has historically revealed Himself to all humanity and continues to reveal Himself sacramentally to all human persons after His Ascension to heaven, assuring us that “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

Stăniloae establishes his thesis about *open sobornicity* in this work of achieved revelation, historically concluded through the Ascension of the Lord Christ, but still open concerning its actualization in Christians of every era. Thus, *open sobornicity* is understood as both a theological mystery, and the action of assuming and actualizing divine revelation in the Church. This is understood from the perspective of general Christianity and the universality of all people, beyond their confessional, religious, and social contexts.

In this regard, Stăniloae affirms:

“Sobornicity cannot be a theory but a practice. Sobornicity must actually be a living communion of faith; it is the Christian universality in the form of communion. It is not only the universal unity of Christians in the form of communion but also the all-encompassing unity of the Christian teaching lived by the universal and free community of Christians. It is equivalent to the universality of the aspects of divine revelation, perceived by all human perspectives and made for the common good of the universal human community. It must be the council of the whole world, in which all Christians bring their understanding of the entire revealed divine reality and the entire human reality seen in the light of integral revelation, to share it with all and for everyone to partake in the understanding of all” (Stăniloae 1971b, pp. 171–72).

In other words, from the human perspective, *open sobornicity* is the work of actualizing the fullness of revelation in the Orthodox Church in relation to Christians of various Christian denominations. As argued by Father Stăniloae, at the level of each Orthodox Christian *open sobornicity* must be developed and be grown in accordance with the *spiritual values* that other Christians have actualized through their faith in Jesus Christ. The fact that they have emphasized certain aspects of faith allows these aspects to be further explored, which can provide Orthodox believers with the opportunity to activate their faith with already elaborated elements. For instance, Catholics have worked extensively on the

aspect of the Church's unity, sometimes to the detriment of this unity (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 171). This point of faith can be useful and critically embraced for the actualization of the faith of the Christian Orthodox faithful. The unity of the Church in the human realm is also discussed in the Orthodox Church, and can draw from what Roman Catholics have accomplished. Therefore, the predominant development of certain elements of revelation in the expression and manifestation of faith in different Christian denominations is not just a discordant and different note from Orthodoxy but mainly an opportunity for the Orthodox Christian to activate some aspects of faith that have already been worked on. For sure, this must be done with full accuracy in accord with the fullness of revelation.

Thus, as highlighted by Stăniloae, the fullness of revelation in the Orthodox Church requires sobornicity to be activated at the human level of Orthodox Christians. A true Catholicity/sobornicity is the integrity of divine revelation of the Orthodox Church, fully and continually actualized by the Christian Orthodox community in full communion with the entire community of fellow human persons (Stăniloae 1967a, pp. 517–18). *Open sobornicity* shields the Orthodox Faithful from attachment to a single aspect of revelation or even to a select few of them. The Church of Christ practices an *open sobornicity*; that is to say, a transparency to any concept or system, surpassing the narrow and unilateral level of simple ideas of faith:

“She (Orthodoxy) is shielded from the absolutisation of an idea or form, through the richness of her forms. Therefore, she has an easier possibility of achieving a transcendence toward God, through all the ways in which He revealed Himself and which the Orthodoxy applies in her worship and devout life. At the same time, she has an easier possibility of incorporating among these modes, even those modes retained or unilaterally emphasized in Protestantism or Catholicism, while liberating them, of course, from the exclusive emphasis placed on them in those confessions” (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 175).

Open sobornicity makes sense not only from an Orthodox perspective but also from the perspective of the Christian world and of creation in general. Divine revelation discloses to all Christians, to all humans, and even to creation in general, the significance accorded to them by God Himself. This fact can be realized as *open sobornicity* and the full activation of divine revelation of the member of the Church in Orthodoxy:

“In this open sobornicity or universality and in a continuous movement in a vertical and horizontal sense, not only the types and forms in the Church or in the Christian world receive importance, but all aspects of the world. The words, acts, and images used in revelation highlight the purpose of all types, forms, thoughts, and words of creation in interpreting the divine reality; the human person appears in the light of revelation in all its breadth, in a continuous movement of actualization and transcendence, as an expressive image of God” (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 179).

As *open sobornicity*, according to the Romanian theologian, Orthodoxy shows itself through its members to be free from any unilateral attachment to one single aspect of faith. All external aspects of expressing faith, the symbolic nature of the teachings of faith, the acts of worship, and the general forms of expressing faith are transcended and become transparent to God. These are opportunities for living transcendence toward God through the practice of *open sobornicity* (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 175).

Everything that people generally, and Christians of different confessions more specifically, perceive and produce as spiritual meanings and senses of the divine are premises for the continuous advancement of Orthodox Christians in the mystery of faith under the operation of an *open sobornicity* toward all people: “Christians can make use of all human acts and words in continuous progress to know God better” (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 180). Embracing all modes of revealing and expressing God in the world would, in Stăniloae's view, lead Christians to an ongoing advancement toward the infinite spiritual richness of God (Stăniloae 1971b, p. 178). Therefore, all Christians must strive to embrace all aspects

of revelation and thus reach their unity in God, alongside all Christians who seek and see God beyond the forms of His revelation. This refers to individual Christians, not to the Church which encompasses and holds within it the fulness of divine revelation and all the possibilities of expressing God.

3. Open Sobornicity: Current Diagnoses, Challenges, and Responses—The Possibility of an Ecumenical Theological Project

It seems that, based on the above, we could gain an understanding not only of the possibility of ecumenical action and relations from an Orthodox perspective but more importantly, of the theological need for such an endeavor (Yeftici 1972; Sauca 2004). However, this possibility remains sensitive and a challenge to Christians. An important challenge in particular is to fulfil one of the most central Gospel commandments: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31). In Christ’s Evangelical meaning, the neighbor is “the other”, beyond their social, cultural, or religious condition. Yet, this commandment and task has been subject to numerous interpretations and implementations, involving continuous struggles leading to confusion, misunderstandings, and crises.

3.1. Ecumenical Relations at a Standstill? Current Diagnoses

Since the 1970s, ecumenical relations have faced challenges and crises, many of which persist to this day. In one of his studies, Stăniloae commented on observations made by Cardinal Jan Willebrands regarding ecumenical Christian themes. The latter pointed out three sources of these ecumenical crises: *the problem of contesting official Church structures, the problem of hermeneutics, and the problem of secularization* (Stăniloae 1970, p. 296). Stăniloae argued—at least at the time he wrote his reflections—that these three challenges were not as prevalent within Orthodoxy and that Orthodoxy could offer solutions to overcome the ecclesial contestation within Roman Catholicism, the hermeneutical issues of Scripture in Protestantism, and the secularization present especially in the Western world (Stăniloae 1970, pp. 298–99).

Although these three issues used to be primarily identified in the Western context, they have now significantly affected Orthodox spaces as well. Additionally, contemporary challenges propagated by the “new world” include the destabilization of moral, ecclesiastical, and social principles, virtual “reality”, transhumanist anthropological drifts, artificial intelligence, and others. All these challenges pose threats to humanity in general, particularly concerning the fulfilment of human nature as a communitarian reality in a relationship of faith with others.

The ecumenical crisis continues, therefore, both within the frameworks of the different Christian confessions, but also in terms of the bilateral and multilateral relations of Christians. This is because human societies face assaults not only on their communitarian identities but also on their personal identities. Multiple factors contribute to the confusion of human persons who struggle to attain real fulfilment.

Within the broader context of Christian life, the desire for an ecumenical Christian identity, unity, consciousness, and action has often been fragmented and interrupted by the societal scourge of individualism and by the religious shallowness and complacency of various Christians. In the collective Christian world, the awareness of the need for Christian unity has been treated in widely diverse manners. Sometimes, it has been marginalized and overshadowed by confessional and personal individualistic expressions and enclaves. Other times, the desire for faith unity has been intentionally transferred or restricted to ecclesiastical hierarchical factors, actions, and decisions, approached administratively by ecclesial authorities. The desire for faith unity has not represented a constant in understanding, living, and practicing Christianity, as Stăniloae emphasized.

This process has involved numerous emotions and predominantly human aspirations after centuries of separation and conflict. The underlying issue of the ecumenical reality, its foundations, challenges, and goals, have rarely been understood by many. For example, in the early decades of the last century, the desire for unity and Eucharistic intercommunion

was often quickly pursued under the banner of “love” (Stăniloae 1973, p. 169), sometimes exclusively. However, as Stăniloae pointed out, “the contemporary impasse of ecumenism comes from separating love from the knowledge of God, from the knowledge of the truth” (Stăniloae 1967b, p. 290). Unity built on love devoid of truth is destined to fail. Thus, Stăniloae somewhat prophetically stated nearly half a century ago:

“Contemporary ecumenism places a more serious task upon theologians and representatives of the Churches, and all Christians, than that of academic discussions, very general diplomatic formulas, or sentimental declarations of love that do not translate into actions. It requires abandoning the pride of imposing a truth without love or the pride of refusing a truth or coddling it in the name of love” (Stăniloae 1967b, p. 290).

On the other hand, it has been challenging to recognize the truth that Eucharistic *intercommunion* arises from a shared and identical faith rooted in the Church of all times. *Intercommunion* can only be established and founded upon the unity of faith. As the goal of ecumenical actions, the unity of faith has been a more or less well-founded concern based on the theology of the Church Fathers as the Romanian theologian and notable Stăniloae hermeneut Anca Manolache underlines: “The origin of the Church’s unity lies in the One God in Trinity of Persons, in the incarnation of the Only-Begotten Son, and then in the source and symbol of unity, the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist” (Manolache 1969, p. 576).

Frequently, there has been a premature and superficial transition to dialogues that have often hindered and blocked the inner search for unity in Christ Himself. Ecumenical relations have been confined to concerns more related to the societal comprehension of faith or the phenomenology of faith. As Stăniloae observed many years ago, ecumenical relations have been marked by facile enthusiasm and a predominantly diplomatic spirit, leading to the creation of numerous ecumenical institutions and structures, but more importantly, to confusion:

“The ecumenical movement has the undeniable merit of bringing heightened concern for unity in the lives of the Churches and encouraging them to engage in dialogue for this purpose. However, among the many ideas and expressions it has sparked, there are some that can produce confusion and sometimes relativize certainties of faith, even the most fundamental ones. The will for unity has sometimes given rise to facile enthusiasm, which believes that it can easily soften and shape realities through its sentimental warmth, or sometimes to a transactional diplomatic spirit, which believes that it can reconcile certain positions or realities through compromise that keeps the Churches divided” (Stăniloae 1971a, p. 561).

The conception presented by Stăniloae and systematized in the above pages could propose a predominantly “non-institutional” and un-orchestrated Christian ecumenical action, which should animate all those who believe in Jesus Christ based on the existence and vocation of their Catholic/sobornic nature and faith. Every Christian should delve into the divine oikonomia of Jesus Christ and then attempt to identify it in others, under the banner of an “open sobornicity”. This perspective, which is rarely encountered in contemporary theology, can lay the groundwork for an organic ecumenical action rooted in Jesus Christ and be embraced and followed by all who believe in Him and follow Him. It is not merely an emotional openness but a theological–spiritual process regarding the Church. Only the Church, in its extension and the ongoing human actualization of its Catholic quality in Jesus Christ, can encompass all within itself. However, not all perspectives mentioned above might be positively received and interpreted by all Christians. At least two criticisms could be raised against Stăniloae’s vision: Orthodox-centrism and correlative ecclesiology/interconfessional relativism.

3.2. “Open Sobornicity” or Orthodox-Centrism?

The first criticism that could be raised against Stăniloae’s theological–ecumenical vision might come from all non-Orthodox Christian traditions. The *open sobornicity* is,

unequivocally, an *open sobornicity* of the members of the Orthodox Church toward other Christians. According to Stăniloae, the consciousness of Orthodox believers is that the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ throughout all times (Stăniloae 2012, p. 66).

However, this belief and witness about the Church is practiced by almost all the various Christian denominations in their own respective traditions. This raises a series of questions: Can *open sobornicity* be practiced within other Christians ecclesiologies? What is ultimately the One Holy Church? What would be the contribution of such a vision since it can only be founded on Orthodox theology? How can ecumenical relations between Christians be re-established, revitalized, and developed based on the *open sobornicity* of the Orthodox Church?

The theological debates aimed at identifying the One Church have already taken place and will continue to unfold. These debates have arisen either from the desire to impose a particular denomination's belief about the One Church on the entire Christian world or from the sincere desire to discover the true One Church. The Orthodox response is that the Church of Jesus Christ cannot be discerned and identified except through the complete reference of all Christians throughout all times to the fullness of the revelation and the salvific *oikonomia* of Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly, whoever embarks on the quest for the One Church in relation to Jesus Christ will find it.

Regarding the practice of *open sobornicity* by each Christian denomination in relation to their ecclesiology, this can be both a challenge and a significant point of convergence. If all Christians were to practice *open sobornicity* in the sense proposed by Stăniloae, then each Christian, regardless of denomination, would relate to the presence of God in the other. Until all Christians universally assent to the Catholic Church, the One Church, and until all agree how *open sobornicity* can be theologically applied considering the multitude of ecclesiological concepts, all Christians will be able to identify, for Christ's sake, the divine mystery of God's love for humanity in each other. This sincere pursuit could contribute to the unity of faith—a unity not based on different confessional notions, but on Jesus Christ Himself. As Stăniloae would argue, any denomination, and specifically any Christian of different traditions entering into dialogue and ecumenical relationships with others, should primarily aim to see God's work in them and in their traditions. Therefore, beyond identifying the One Church, every Christian living and acting in the spirit of *open sobornicity* will seek Jesus Christ and His presence in the other. Each Christian is called to do this while considering Jesus Christ in the fullness of His salvific and sanctifying work within His Church, all people, and the world. *Open sobornicity* does not promote a platform for exchanging ideas and beliefs between each Christian tradition or religion; rather, it seeks, from a human perspective, to activate in each Christian through their relationship with other Christians, the One Church with all the gifts and teachings that Jesus Christ shared within humanity.

In conclusion, the Church is and will remain One, belonging to and being one with Jesus Christ. Orthodox theology firmly professes the Orthodox Church as the One Holy Church. Nevertheless, based on the foundation of *open sobornicity* proposed by Stăniloae, all Christians, beyond their beliefs and those of their respective denomination, should seek signs of the presence and work of Jesus Christ in each other. This convergence, which emphasizes "the other", ultimately places the emphasis on Jesus Christ Himself, the only One who can lead Christians to the unity of faith and to His Church. Through the mystery of His *oikonomical* action, the "other" is in fact Christ Himself (Mt. 25, 45). Thus, as St. Maximus affirms, to be Christian is to be "Christ". Therefore, for being Christian we have

"to make ourselves partakers of God in His fulness, and to become, through Grace, gods in our own fulness, such that we may be considered to be Him in every sense, without an identification with Him in essence" (Maximus 1865b, coll. 376B).

In other words, the principle that has been outlined concerning Orthodox Christians could be applied by all Christians who believe in Jesus Christ and believe that they are

inheritors of the One Church, whether this holds true for all or not. Only Jesus Christ guarantees the sobornicity of the Church and its quality of being One, as well as guaranteeing the full participation of the Christian in His Church. In this sense, it should be noted that Orthodox believers, although affirming the fullness of the Orthodox faith, should not confess or present Christian doctrine as a possession of their Orthodoxy. They are not possessors of the truth; rather, they participate in Orthodoxy to the extent that they follow Jesus Christ in His salvific and sanctifying work within His Church, all people, and the world. This sensitivity to the presence of Jesus Christ in the other and in the world, even if it is perceived to varying degrees and not fully realized in all, can lead to an ecumenical relationship in which partners are more than just Christians among the other religious beliefs, as has been attempted in theological dialogues.

Rather, they are to be understood as Christians in a relationship with each other that they establish through or in Jesus Christ Himself. It is a theological relationship in three, with Jesus Christ as the Head. This is not a human understanding among Christians based on their faith (which will never happen), but an ecumenical relationship in Jesus Christ, with each person seeking Jesus Christ in the other and allowing themselves to be led by Jesus Christ to the other. By maintaining and following the same principle of participation rather than the adherence or ownership of the Mystery of the Church, all Christians can meet, discern, edify, and grow in the *open sobornicity* of the salvific work of Jesus Christ and the One Church.

Certainly, this perspective is not to diminish the heresy or the unrevealed elements of one Christian tradition or another. But, if we focus on heresy it is quite difficult to move beyond it, and furthermore we can only be healed by Jesus Christ, the Savior. That is why an authentic ecumenical relationship could be realized when all Christians seek to find the Face of Jesus Christ in the other. The shortcomings and heresies of others will be addressed by the One who alone can say: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). This does not mean that heresies and schisms will cease, or that they will not need to be identified as such, but in relationships between people in general and between Christians in particular, they should be motivated by the love they have for God and the quest to become more like Him in the way He loves. For Christians, this *Love* is not merely a sentiment, but carries the name of Jesus Christ. Orthodox Christians, even though they testify that the Orthodox Church is the One Holy Church, do not constitute the Church by adhering to it; rather, the Church makes them Orthodox Christians through sacramental participation in God's *oikonomia* and love for humanity, in the Mysterious Body of Jesus Christ—the Church. Therefore, the quality of the Church is not determined by its members but by her Head—Jesus Christ. They participate in the Body of Jesus, but do not determine or possess the Church of Jesus Christ.

Thus, as it is seen by Stăniloae from the Orthodox perspective regarding the personal quality of each Christian, it is unknown who participates more in Jesus Christ's mystery and work, the Orthodox or the non-Orthodox. This is understood from the fact that Saul was outside of the community of the Church when he saw and spoke with Jesus Christ in Light on the way to Damascus. This is not to say that the Orthodox Church is a transconfessional or unhinged reality; rather, it is about every faithful individual living in relation with Jesus Christ. As Saint Maximus the Confessor writes, by imitating that One in all things as Master and Lord, you have made yourself another Him/ἄλλον ἑκεῖνον (Maximus 1865a, coll. 624D). Yet, the personal quality of one's relation and participation in Christ is not equal to the quality of the presence of Christ in His Church. Nevertheless, there is a difference in the presence of Jesus Christ in Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians because of the Sacrament of Baptism grounded in the One Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church. It was after the great vision of Jesus Christ that Saul was baptized and received the Holy Spirit in the One Church of Christ (Act 9: 17–18).

On the other hand, to be Orthodox, as Stăniloae mentioned, one must see God in "the other". The experience of Christ's contemporaries has proven that even those who were waiting for Jesus Christ ended up missing Him. In the Christian context, an Orthodox

Christian is “better” than a non-Orthodox Christian only when they can follow Jesus Christ to the Cross, to death, and can die for sinners or heretics, just as Jesus Christ did. This Evangelical principle applies to every Christian of any Christian tradition. If this Evangelical (John 15:13) and Pauline (Romans 5:8) principle is followed by all Christians, it can lead to convergence precisely because it leads to Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we were to conventionally label these relationships “ecumenism”, then an ecumenism of the relationship of each individual with Jesus Christ and of each Christian with the Orthodox Christians could be established; an ecumenism of seeking Jesus Christ that could unite us and bestow upon us the mystery of true faith’s unity. Until then, practically, we are all called to *metanoia* and transformation: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17), and to follow Jesus Christ “wherever He goes” (Luke 9:57). This is the primary disposition; the forms of these relationships will emerge through the search, pursuit, and common deepening into the mystery of Christ: “Christ, who is your life” (Colossians 3:4).

3.3. Open Sobornicity or Correlative Ecclesiology/Interconfessional Relativism?

Another criticism that could be raised regarding Stăniloae’s perspective on *open sobornicity*, this time by some Orthodox believers, is the potential for a vague or correlative ecclesiology. It might be inferred from what Stăniloae stated that, through the theology of „open sobornicity”, he supports a syncretic, globalist, collective–impersonal ecclesiology. Some could compare his principles to the ecclesiological theory of branches within Protestantism (Cunningham 2009, p. 8). In other words, the Romanian theologian might be seen as suggesting that parts of the Church form the Church through association—a kind of “federative” Church.

For some Orthodox believers, the fact that Stăniloae perceives God’s work as also being carried out outside the Orthodox Church, along with his insistence that we should be receptive and participate in this outside divine work, could suggest a relative constitution of the Church and Orthodoxy. It might seem that Orthodox believers need others to identify and present themselves as members of the Church. This could be termed *correlative ecclesiology*, which defines itself in relation to the various Christian denominations that also call themselves churches. This Orthodox sensitivity is ancient and tied to the canonical character of Orthodox ecclesiology. In fact, God’s action is not outside the Church. It is the dynamic activation of His Church in different people from the perspective of communion with the Holy Trinity which leads them to a full participation in Jesus Christ’s Church. The Church is governed by canons, but especially by the foundations of faith or dogmas. The Christological dogma of Chalcedon speaks about the *homoousios* of Jesus Christ with human persons, but also about the *homoousios* of human persons with Jesus Christ (Stăniloae 1974, p. 574), without specifying that this *homoousios* concerns only the “inside” canonical limits of the Church. According to the perspective of the Romanian theologian, this *homoousios* can be activated within the Church through the practice of *open sobornicity*.

Sensitivities related to the canonical boundaries of the Church have recently been highlighted, especially following the Pan-Orthodox Synod in Crete (Marcu 2023, p. 8). The reference alone to certain “Christian” traditions during the Crete Synod, to non-orthodox Christian traditions—without explicitly naming them as churches—has led to numerous debates, conflicts, and even schisms. The major accusation against the Synod, which interchangeably uses the term “church” with the Orthodox Church and with the different churches and Christian traditions, led to the interpretation that this practice diminishes the quality of the Orthodox Church as *Una Sancta Ecclesiae*. This approach could be seen to argue for a relativistic ecclesiology of synthesis and reciprocity.

In the broader Christian world, most denominations claim to be churches. Similarly, most people believe that everyone should unite in one Church, which some identify with their own church, while others suggest a confederative church. Clearly, this cannot happen. It would lead to interconfessional relativism and the absence of an Evangelical and theologically sound ecclesiology. The Church is One because it is identical to the

Body of the resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ, built on the faith and foundation of the Apostles. This criticism can be addressed by noting that Stăniloae does not consider the Church of Christ to be an open reality in the sense of ecclesiological pluralism, but rather a manifestation of the *homousios* character and sobornicity/Catholicity of Jesus Christ in relation to the world and humanity. His perspective does not imply the existence of multiple churches or that the Orthodox Church will find its identity in relation to various denominations and Christian traditions. *Open sobornicity* is the mysterious identification of the Church with the “latent Church” or the cosmic–universal ecclesial reality that St. Maximus the Confessor speaks of in his *Mystagogy* (Maxim, ch. II–IV). In other words, after completing and perfecting the *oikonomia*, Jesus Christ transferred the gifts of His work to the Church and, through the Church, to the whole of created reality. From a human and contextual perspective, these gifts, which are like potentialities shared with all human persons, are activated through Baptism and ongoing participation in the sacramental life of the Church. For every Orthodox Christian, activating the gifts received at Baptism means following Jesus Christ and having the potential to sacrifice oneself for all people and God. This following of Christ also entails assuming and living all of humanity, just as Jesus Christ did. This theological principle and its ascetic–mystical implications were extensively discussed by Saint Sophrony of Essex, following in the footsteps of Saint Silouan of Mount Athos (St. Sophrony 1977, pp. 87–90).

Therefore, the *open sobornicity* presented by the Romanian theologian implies several crucial doctrinal precepts:

1. It presents Orthodox ecclesiology in a balanced manner, emphasizing both its static doctrinal foundation as the *Una Sancta* Orthodox Church and its spiritual and human dynamics manifested as *open sobornicity*;
2. It highlights the authentic and applied Catholic character of Orthodox ecclesiology;
3. It emphasizes the obligatory significance of “the other” for practicing Orthodox Christians and the ecumenical vocation of Orthodoxy;
4. It actualizes itself through all the positive and constructive experiences of non-Orthodox Christians gained through revelation.

Thus, Orthodox ecclesiology, as seen by Stăniloae, is far from approaching ecumenical realities superficially; it presupposes and implements them through active Christians in all services and forms. The most comprehensive ecumenical ethos and works are accomplished by the Saints. For instance, the contemporary Saint Silouan of Mount Athos, through his prayers for “all Adam” (St. Sophrony 1991, p. 222) and his participation in the human tragedy following the Fall, significantly resembles Jesus Christ as the bearer and sufferer on behalf of all humanity. In general, the Saints practiced *open sobornicity* similarly to how Jesus Christ practiced it, not merely for the sake of partaking in the divine work with everyone but also for giving each person their due place and importance within the plan of redemptive *oikonomia*. Therefore, Orthodox ecclesiology does not exclude human persons; it only excludes a lack of divine truth that should be based on revelation. It does not differentiate between human beings in terms of quality, nor between Orthodox believers and Christians of different confessions. The only difference is made by Christians who earnestly follow Jesus Christ.

4. Conclusions

This study has aimed to provide a contribution to the understanding of Orthodox theological thought regarding the ecumenical vocation of Christians in the world. It attempts to bring valuable insights regarding the process of embracing and living ecumenically with “the other”, which is to say, with all of humanity in general.

To conclude, several doctrinal principles defining the concept of *open sobornicity* can be identified in Dumitru Stăniloae’s thinking:

1. The Holy Trinity created humanity and the world, governing, foreseeing, and fulfilling them on the basis of absolute divine unity;
2. Jesus Christ is the guarantee and source of divine and human unity;

3. The unity of the Church is activated in Jesus Christ through the assumption of “the other” in the mystery of *open sobornicity*;

4. The ecumenical nature of the Church and the world originates in the mystery of humanity recapitulated and assumed in the unique Person of Jesus Christ;

5. The “mystery of the brother” opens the path for the Orthodox Christian to assume and live Jesus Christ’s universal work in the world.

Therefore, *open sobornicity* is the foundation of and invitation for Orthodox Christians to hold in their consciousness and soul the entire world, and all of humanity and creation (see on this point the Orthodox Liturgy and its prayers for the whole cosmos/τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου (*Μικρόν Ἱερατικόν* 2023, p. 86).

This recapitulates and affirms the Christian purpose and dynamic through which the entire world is called to be gathered in a council and a synaxis of God the Father, Who will be “all in all” at the second coming of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:28). *Open sobornicity* has a solid Orthodox theological foundation and should be one of the most important aspects of the Orthodox Christian creed. *Open sobornicity*, although referring to Orthodox believers and their action of embracing both non-Orthodox Christians and the world, can be practiced by all Christians. This can be accomplished on the condition that everybody understands that “the other” is a gift from God necessary for activating their Evangelical–universal Christian consciousness and identity. It is important to understand that “the neighbour” possesses divine gifts that pertain to oneself and are embraced by oneself through the *open sobornicity* advocated by Father Dumitru Stăniloae. This is also one of the practical ways to advance along the path of Christian ecumenical unity.

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