Dumitru Staniloae (1903–1993) was one of the most important Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century and the most prominent Romanian theologian of all time. And yet, his vast opus consisting of approximately twelve hundred titles is still largely unexplored and barely translated. In this context, it is particularly important to engage with his understanding of priesthood. Staniloae’s theology of natural priesthood and its fulfillment in universal priesthood, both being in communion with the ordained, represent a significant contribution to contemporary ecclesiology.

In the present article, after some brief considerations about the priesthood of Christ, I examine Staniloae’s three (rather than two) types of priesthood, namely natural, vis-à-vis creation; universal; and ordained, concluding with the communion between universal and ordained priesthood. Throughout the essay, I also emphasize Staniloae’s contribution to an Orthodox understanding of the church from an ecumenical perspective. If some of the questions facing the relationships among these three aspects of priesthood originate in the West, Staniloae’s answers are rooted primarily in the Eastern tradition, along with other Orthodox theologians exploring the same venues.

I. CHRIST AS THE PRIEST

Staniloae wrote that Christ is the priest par excellence and the church shares in his priesthood. In this sense, he affirmed that “Christ is the
universal High Priest and the source of priesthood because he sacrifices himself and because he is the source of everybody’s power of sacrifice. We become priests by acquiring Christ’s power of sacrifice, by personally acquiring his state of sacrifice. Through the Holy Spirit, there is a continuous dialogue between the church and its head, the priesthood of the church participating actively in Christ’s prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices. More specifically, Christ continues his priesthood through the entire church, the clergy and the people who collaborate with him.

Staniloae was critical of Orthodox manual theology that left the impression that the priesthood of the church replaces that of an absent Christ. He responded that Christ acts sacramentally from within the church, while not ceasing to be above the church as its head:

The extension of the new reality of Jesus Christ is realized especially through the sacraments. . . . Between the Church and the ascended Jesus there is no separation whatsoever. The place where he is and the heart of the Church coincide. . . . This is why it cannot be said that the grace of the sacraments, including Ordination, comes from Christ as if he were somewhere separated from the Church; rather, by coming from Christ, it comes from the deep of the Church.

Staniloae then added in a footnote:

The dogmatists say that the grace of the sacraments is “deposited” in the Church (Andrutos, Dogmaticns, 235), because it is “the kingdom of grace” (Macarius, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, vol. 2, 239). But grace cannot be thought of as an entity of energy that exists on its own, separated from Christ. Where the grace is, there Christ is, as its source. The Church deposits its grace as one that exists within Christ or has Christ as a deep foundation of its whole being and power.

Consequently, Staniloae defined the church as the “extension of the mystery of Christ” not in the sense of a replacement of Christ, but as an actualization of the potential for Christ’s work in the church that the Incarnation has initiated.

Thus, in a sense, there is only one priesthood in the church, namely that of Christ. This, however, does not mean that other kinds of priesthood are obsolete: natural, universal, and ordained priesthoods are concrete manifestations of Christ’s priesthood.

II. THE HUMAN BEING AS PRIEST OF CREATION

The priestly vocation of humankind toward creation is particularly relevant in contemporary ecological, ecumenical, and interreligious discussions. Staniloae repeatedly referred to the human being as priest of creation, a designation that was in turn rooted in the theology of creation of Maximus the Confessor and his commentators, Eastern and Western alike. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Lars Thunberg, and Alain Riou explain that, according to Maximus, the entire universe was created to celebrate a cosmic Liturgy and be transformed into a church through the priestly mediation of the human being. Instead of fulfilling this role, Adam corrupted the priestly capacity of humankind. Christ, especially at his ascension into the heavens, restored humankind’s mediating aptitude, enabling humans to share in his priesthood toward creation. According to Maximus, the purified human being is capable of contemplating creation spiritually, after which it offers the divine logos[: present in the visible world “as ‘gifts’ to the Lord.” This attitude toward creation is Eucharistic: humans lift up to God the logoi that already belong to him. Staniloae adopted these Maximian views and developed them in his account of

1. Dumitru Staniloae, Spiritualitate si comunie in Liturghia Ortodoxa [Spirituality and communion in the Orthodox Liturgy] (Craiova, Romania: Editura Mitropoliei Olteniene, 1986), 139.
4. Dumitru Staniloae, Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului [Jesus Christ or the restoration of humankind], 2nd ed. (Craiova, Romania: Editura Omniscop, 1990), 392-93.
6. Staniloae referred in Romanian to “preotia generala,” which literally means, “general priesthood,” or, closer to common English usage, “universal priesthood.” He also wrote about “preotia sluitorii,” translated literally as “serving priesthood” or “ministerial priesthood” (ministerial as a derivation of the noun “ministry”), but I prefer to render it in English as “ordained priesthood.”
9. Maximus understood the divine logoi as God’s original ideas or intentions for creation: the unifying, ordering, determinative, and defining principles in accordance with which God institutes created natures.
natural priesthood that includes an analysis of the prelapsarian state, the Fall, and the restoration of nature and humankind in Christ.\textsuperscript{11}

Staniloae considered that the world was created as a gift in which humans receive divine grace and thus salvation. In turn, Adam and Eve were supposed to exercise their natural priesthood by offering the world back to God in a “dialogue of the gift.”\textsuperscript{12} Summarizing Staniloae’s position, Charles Miller adds that

nature becomes the medium in which humanity grows spiritually when we comprehend, shape and bring to fruition its “unlimited potentiality.” For this reason Fr. Staniloae looks very positively on the contributions of modern science… Likewise, the application of those discoveries through technology is to be regarded as another dimension of the exercise of natural priesthood.\textsuperscript{13}

These optimistic considerations are toned down by the impoverishment of natural priesthood in the fallen state of humanity. Instead of looking at creation as something that reveals God and whose material nature must be transcended, Adam and Eve (and by extension all of humankind) looked for ways in which they could use creation to satisfy their senses. Consequently, Miller affirms that the natural priesthood was rendered ineffectual by the Fall.\textsuperscript{14} Based on my reading of both Maximus and Staniloae, I think that Miller’s claim needs to be qualified. On the one hand, because of the Fall, natural priesthood could not fully accomplish its original purpose, hence the need for its restoration in Christ. On the other hand, Staniloae affirmed that the image of God has only been corrupted and not destroyed by the Fall, so natural priesthood was not totally ineffectual between the event of the Fall and that of Christ, although it was greatly impoverished.\textsuperscript{15}

The restoration of natural priesthood represents an important aspect of Staniloae’s soteriology, where the human person shares in Christ’s priesthood from three perspectives. First, Staniloae considered that the Fall attributed to the world a false sense of ultimacy, when in fact God through his logos represents the spiritual fundament of the world. Instead of regarding creation as a gift from God, Adam (and fallen humankind) looked at it as an exclusive material reality to be possessed apart from God. Instead of moving in God and toward God, nature now moved away from God. However, God and the world became reunited again when the Son assumed a body interrelated with the material world, which thus became fully transparent to God. Furthermore, through his sacrifice on the cross, Christ restored both the dimension of a gift to the world and our natural priesthood as the capacity to offer creation back to God, especially in the Eucharist. Thus, the human being as priest of creation became able to fully see God’s presence in the world and, by having a Eucharistic attitude toward the universe, reestablish creation’s movement in God and toward God.\textsuperscript{16}

Second, just as the human soul imprints its spirituality onto the body, so the human being is called to spiritualize material creation, which in turn is connected with the human body. Creation thus becomes spiritual, being transparent to God’s presence in it and functioning as a sacrament.\textsuperscript{17} In this case, Staniloae refers to the sacramentality of creation in the sense of visible sign and instrument through which grace is communicated.\textsuperscript{18} On this side of the eschaton, nature is not a sacrament proper. The process of spiritualization, however, will be fulfilled in the eschaton, where creation will become fully a sacrament or, in Staniloae’s estimation, the only sacrament, the milieu in which God and humankind will be in communion.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, the vocation of humankind as priest of creation is to make the universe transparent to God’s presence in it, spiritualizing it and turning it fully into a sacrament.


\textsuperscript{12} Staniloae, The Experience of God, 2:222.


\textsuperscript{15} Staniloae explicitly argued against the idea that natural priesthood is ineffectual in Dumitru Staniloae, "Crearea ca dar si Tainele Bisericii" [The creation as gift and the sacraments of the church], Ortodoxia 28, no. 1 (1976): 19.

\textsuperscript{16} Staniloae, "Creation as Gift," 11–16. Staniloae did not necessarily mean that all human beings are automatically acting fully as priests of creation in the sense outlined above, but that humans have the potential to be fully aware of God’s presence in the world and reestablish the right relationship between God and creation eucharistically.

\textsuperscript{17} The first sacrament is the world, created to make God transparent in it, or to manifest God’s presence in it. Hence, the world has sacramental-liturgical and revelatory functions. The second sacrament is Christ, who is fully God’s presence, and through whom the Trinity is revealed and acts toward the world. As a consequence of the second sacrament or as an “extension of the mystery of Christ,” arises the third sacrament, namely the church, “in which God the Word re-establishes and raises to a more accentuated degree his unity with the world, [a unity] established through the act of creation and weakened by the sin of humankind.” Staniloae, Dogmatics, 3:10–13. Dumitru Staniloae, The Experience of God: Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God, trans. Ioan Ionița and Robert Barringer, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 67. Staniloae, The Experience of God, 2:45. Dumitru Staniloae, Isus Hristos, lumina lumii si indumnezitorul omului [Jesus Christ, the light of the world and the One who defiles humankind], Colectia Dogmatica (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1993), 31.

\textsuperscript{18} For Schmemann’s account of the sacramentality inherent in all creation and the human responsibility to recognize it as such, see Alexander Schmemann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 222.

\textsuperscript{19} Staniloae, "Creation as Gift," 28.
Third, as a consequence of the sacramentality of the universe, Staniloae emphasized the sociological-missionary ramifications of the Liturgy as the means to achieve communion not only within the church, but also in the world: "The force of attraction of the Trinity is experienced perfectly in the Divine Liturgy and this experience extends in the life of the Christians as ecclesiastical community, meant to extend the attraction force of the Trinity to the entire human society, to perfect it as communion." In other words, the ecclesial communion realized in the Liturgy needs to be taken outside the church, to the rest of humankind, so that the church may transform human society into the image of Trinitarian communion. One could even say that the church acts as a sacrament of the Trinity in the world in the sense that, through the church, the world is healed, harmonized, and lifted up in communion with the Trinity. The church is thus missionary by its very nature, by virtue of the presence of the Trinity in it, since it is called to extend intratrinitarian communion to the entire creation. Staniloae closed the circle this way: God manifested his love outside the Trinity by creating the world in order to bring the world into communion with him, which God accomplishes through the church and its Liturgy.

It is important to note that natural priesthood encompasses all human beings. And yet, Christians who share in the sacramental life of the church partake fully of the sacramentality of creation, while non-Christians enjoy it to a lesser degree, since they cannot see the connection between the material world and its salvation in Christ. This distinction in degree, however, does not deny the natural priesthood of non-Christians. Thus, Staniloae’s theology of natural priesthood is relevant for both ecological concerns and interreligious dialogue, since it calls for a common, priestly, and Eucharistic attitude toward creation, an attitude that can, and urgently needs to, be shared among all people, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Furthermore, Staniloae’s category of natural priesthood and its interaction with the sacramentality of the cosmos represents a challenge to regard priesthood as directed beyond the community of the baptized in particular and human society in general. Humankind and especially baptized Christians minister to creation, while the sacramentality of the world contributes to humankind’s relationship to God. It also adds a remarkable contribution to the understanding of priesthood outside the sacrament of Orders.

---

21. Cf. Staniloae, Spirituality and Communion, 379. See also Dumitru Staniloae, “The Mystery of the Church,” in Church, Kingdom, World (Conference Papers, Faith and Order Commission, Chantilly, France, January 1985), Faith and Order Paper 130, ed. Gennadios Limouris (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 50–57. In this article, it is significant to note that Staniloae structures his description of the church beginning with the sacramentality of creation, to which he adds a discussion of the priesthood of Christ and that of the church.
24. Hans Küng, The Church (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1976), 492–94. Although I concur with Küng’s reservations toward the term “laity,” I disagree with his avoidance of the word “clergy.” The term kleros is used in Orthodox liturgies, even though in a sense different from the Bible, where it primarily means share and lot.
priesthood as an intermediate (in the sense of mediating) state between natural and ordained priesthood, which has a very important role: to transcend the separation between sacred and profane. Christ manifests his priesthood towards creation through the church, thus strengthening the communion between all aspects of ministry, which are interconnected: “The sacraments of Chrismation and Ordination... strengthen natural priesthood with the divine power of... Christ’s priesthood.”

For the same purpose of transcending the separation between sacred and profane, Staniloae emphasized the communion among natural, universal, and ordained priesthoods. Far from ascribing the capacity to sanctify only to the ordained, Staniloae affirmed the role of all humankind in the sanctification of life through both natural and universal priesthood. Thus, he saw a gradual passing from the natural order to the sacramental, denying a clear separation between them and adding that “the fact that the faithful belong to Christ through Baptism and through previous receptions of Communion gives them the power to bring their gifts... to Christ up to a certain point. This offering is perfected through the priest.”

Thus, based on the interdependence between natural, universal, and ordained priesthood, Staniloae emphasized the artificial character of the separation between the sacred and profane.

These considerations will become especially relevant in section V, where I discuss Afanassieff and Schmemann’s contention that Orthodox manual theology and contemporary liturgical practices introduce a separation between the clergy (who alone are sacred and can sanctify) and the people (who are profane spectators passively observing the sanctification accomplished by the priest). This newer approach contradicts both the core of Eastern liturgical life and the communion manifested in the early church, when all the baptized had the consciousness of belonging to the universal priesthood of the church.

Within the universal priesthood of all the baptized, there are different charisms that function in communion with each other. Ordained priesthood is such a charism. Consequently, Staniloae wrote,

Episcopal communion or synodality is included as a specific difference within the larger communion of the Church. It is as a small circle within the larger circle... It must contribute to the development of general communion. It is as a lung within the body of the Church, necessary to

---

29. Miller, The Gift of the World, 96–97. Miller considers that the Romanian word for layperson, mirean, means anointed one, probably because of Romanian word mir means “myrrh,” and indicates in part the priestly consecration of the baptized. Schmemann, however, affirmed that the Slavonic mîriane means “worldly ones” (Schmemann, The Eucharist, 232).
31. In the exercise of their natural priesthood, the distinction (not separation) between the clergy and the people is maintained given the differentiated liturgical roles that they have when creation is sanctified in the blessing of the water or in the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Dumitru Staniloae, “Dumnezeu Cuvintul cel Intrupat a fost de-a doua data in tatarii intuneco a sa si a omului si in special a preotului” [The Incarnate Word of God sanctifies creation through the human words and actions of himself and of the human being, especially the priest; Mitropolia Olteniei 43, no. 4 (1991): 14.
32. Staniloae, “Creation as Gift,” 27.
the body, but sustained by it. ... The general communion of the Church, sustained by the Spirit of Christ, fills with its life-giving breath all the constitutive organs of the Church, including the hierarchy. ... And the communion of the hierarchy extends its spirit in the entire communion of the Church. 34

Hence, because the clergy are not above the church, but within it, hierarchy and communion do not stand in tension. Staniloae’s analogy of the two circles suggests that ordained priesthood is part of the priesthood of the church, while the distinction between these is maintained, so that they can interact and enrich each other in communion. Later in the article, Staniloae stated explicitly that “the members of the hierarchy are a part of the general communion of the Church not only through this special complementarity with the non-ordained people of the Church, but also through the fact that they are members of the Church in need of salvation, who make efforts for their sanctification and perfection.” 35 Moreover, starting from the fact that the minor orders are not properly part of the clergy but are consecrated for specific liturgical tasks, Staniloae affirmed that the distinction between the clergy and the people is not abrupt but gradual, and there is certainly no separation between the two. 36 For Staniloae, there is only one common work of the church, since there is one Spirit present in it. But the Spirit imparts different charisms to different members, and ordained priesthood is one of these gifts or charisms—such a significant statement! In Staniloae’s words,

In this unity of the gifts and ministries in the Church, explained by the unity of organism of the Church and by the unity of the Spirit in it, are included also the ministries and gifts of the hierarchy. But only in part. That is because, on the one hand, they do not remain exterior to the other ministries and cannot be exercised without their fulfillment through the activation of all the gifts in the Church. But, on the other hand, the ministries and gifts of the hierarchy are different from all other gifts and ministries, because they represent the basis of the transcendent origin of all the other gifts and ministries, generating and activating them. 37

Again, Staniloae’s statement that priesthood is a charism among the other gifts of the Spirit is very significant. At the same time, the hierarchy represents the means through which the faithful are entrusted with different charisms in the sense that ordained ministers baptize and chrismate people


38. This is one of Andrew Louth’s reasons to affirm that Staniloae’s departure from manual theology was incomplete. He writes, “Fr. Dumitru declares that it is.pistic (without any references), but it was only with Calvin’s Institutes that the notion of Christ’s threefold office assumed the structural significance with which he invests it. There is nothing wrong with an Orthodox borrowing from Calvin, though it would be gracious to admit it: Fr. Dumitru, however, was probably borrowing from Orthodox Dogmatics.” Andrew Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae,” in Dumitru Staniloae: Tradition and Modernity in Theology, ed. Lucian Turcescu (Iasi, Romania, and Palm Beach, FL: Center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 62. In response to Louth, I argue that Staniloae’s use of the three offices is rather an instance of “open sobornicity,” understood as the acceptance of any valid theological insight in other theologies without running the risk of doctrinal relativism. Dumitru Staniloae, “Sobornicitatea deschisă” [Open sobornicity], Ortodoxia, 23, no. 2 (1971): 171, 178.


40. Here are two examples in this sense: first, Macarius affirmed: “Spiritual men, who are anointed with the heavenly unction, become Christ’s according to grace, so that they too are kings, priests, and prophets of heavenly mysteries.” (Homilies 27, 4, PG 34:296BC, Homily 17.1, PG 34:624BC, quoted in Paul Evdokimov, The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition, trans. Anthony P. Cythiel and Victoria Steadman [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985], 88.) Second, in Calvin’s above-mentioned chapter, the third footnote makes reference to Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae IIIa q. 22, art. 1, rp 3, which reads: “Wherefore, as to others, one is a lawyer [i.e., prophet]; another is a priest; another is king; but all these concurs in Christ as the fount of all grace.”
Commenting on Rev 5:9–10, Staniloae affirmed that, through his sacrifice, Christ became king and priest in his humanity. In Christ, we also become kings and priests, liberated from the dominion of death and corruption, so we manifest our kingship through dominion over passions, thus sharing in Christ’s priesthood. Moreover, Staniloae noted that the elders in the book of Revelation manifest their priesthood through the use of incense, which symbolizes the prayers of all the faithful, meaning that all the faithful are priests and pray, but their prayers are gathered in unity by the ordained priest, to be lifted up as a unitary wave, pure and well-pleasing to God. . . . Saint Apostle Peter unites the believers’ quality of priests and that of kings into one: “royal priesthood” [cf. 1 Pet 2:5–9]. The faithful have this double quality as a result of Christ’s sacrifice, their spiritual sacrifices representing the fruits of Christ’s power of sacrifice. Through [their spiritual sacrifices, the faithful] on the one hand serve God as priests, and on the other hand, liberate themselves from passions and death, as kings. Thus, those who liberate themselves from passions through sacrifices, make up a royal priesthood, or a tightly knit community that advances in the bosom of the Holy Trinity.

Implied here is Staniloae’s understanding that Christ brings as a sacrifice not only his personal body, but also his body understood as church, which is sacrificed in the Liturgy, so all the faithful are sacrificed and purified, being united with Christ in the Eucharist. Similar to Christ who is both the sacrifice and the priest who brings the sacrifice, the faithful become not only sacrifices, but also priests of their own sacrifice, thus exercising their universal priesthood by sharing in Christ’s priesthood. Staniloae captured both our identification with Christ’s sacrificed state and the contents of our sacrifice when he affirmed that on the one hand, Christ the High Priest brings us as sacrifices together with his sacrifice. On the other hand, we surrender ourselves to him as sacrifice, so that Christ would bring us as sacrifices to God the Father. . . . Our sacrifice consists in a pure life, in prayer, and in other gifts for our neighbors in need, as well as for the support of the Church’s work for salvation. Our sacrifice consists essentially in our self-renunciation, in order to enter in a loving relationship with God.

IV. ORDAINED PRIESTHOOD

Since the topic of ordained priesthood encompasses more facets than can be treated here, I concentrate on the following question: Does the priest act in persona Christi and/or in nomine Christi and/or in persona ecclesiae? I use in persona to mean that Christ and the church act through the priest and in nomine to indicate that it is the priest who acts, although being commissioned by Christ and the church to do so through Ordination.

Even though the understanding that the clergy and the people share together in Christ’s priesthood has been a longstanding Eastern tradition, Orthodox theologians at the beginning of the twentieth century did not write extensively on this subject. It was only at the middle of the twentieth century that they displayed a more sustained interest in this topic. There were two reasons for the shift: internally, Orthodox theologians engaged with Aphanassieff, whose thought on the relationship between the ordained and the people (sadly, less popular than his Eucharistic ecclesiology) sparked an important discussion; and externally, Orthodox theologians conversed with Catholic thinkers such as Yves Congar who had already begun studying this subject. From that point onward, Orthodox and Catholic theologies have continued to inform each other, growing together in their understanding of the communion between the clergy and the people. Thus, a brief analysis of

41. The twenty-four elders sing the following hymn, dedicated to the Lamb: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth” (Rev 5:9–10).
42. Staniloae, Dogmatics, 2:153. Similarly, the desert father, Joseph of Panephos exclaimed: “I am a king today because I rule over the passions” (10/PG 65.251).
43. Staniloae, Spirituality and Communion, 140–41.
45. Staniloae, Dogmatics, 2:153–54. Alexander Schmemann wrote along the same lines: “The ‘priesthood’ of the laity does not consist in their being some sort of priests of a second order in the Church—for the ministers are distinct and must never be confused—but in that being the faithful, i.e., the members of the Church, they are ordained into the ministry of Christ to the world, and they realize this, above all, through participation in the offering of Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of the world.” Schmemann, The Eucharist, 93.
46. For the purpose of this discussion I use texts that refer to either priest or bishop, and I simply refer in both cases to the role of the priest.
47. This influence can be seen especially in the works of Paul Evdokimov. Moreover, Olivier Rousseau writes that Aphanassieff was quoted at Vatican II and the participating bishops were asked to read some of his works. His influence can be seen especially in the sections on the local church and on the laity of Lumen Gentium. Olivier Rousseau, preface in Nicolas Aphanassieff, L’Eglise du Saint-Esprit, trans. Marianne Drobot, Cogitatio Fidei 83 (Paris: Cerf, 1975), 8–9. Rousseau’s affirmation, of course, is not meant to diminish Congar’s influence on the council in these respects.
Congar’s position on the relationship between Christ, the church, and the priest is in place.

Early on, when Congar’s perspective was more Christological than Pneumatological, he considered that the priest acts in persona Christi, to the detriment of the understanding of the ministerial work in persona ecclesiae, and affirmed the ontological and temporal precedence of ordained ministers over the faithful. However, 1969 was the year when, as a result of his increased interest in Pneumatology due to his encounter with Orthodox theologians, Congar started to emphasize that “the Church is built up by a multitude of ministries, some ordained and some lay.” If Congar’s interest in Pneumatology was encouraged by his encounter with the East, it was now Orthodoxy’s turn to benefit from him. Given the constant dialogue between Catholic (such as Congar) and Orthodox theologians at that time, Eastern theology became preoccupied with a question of Western origin, namely whether the priest acts in persona Christi and/or in nomine Christi and/or in persona ecclesiae, a question that was hitherto marginal at best.

Paul Evdokimov considered that the priest acts in persona ecclesiae and in nomine Christi. Even though the priest is a vehicle of Christ’s work, the priest does not act in persona Christi because Christ’s priesthood is manifested through the entire church, since at the epiclesis the Holy Spirit comes upon the entire community, not only upon the priest. Moreover, Evdokimov interpreted the prayer during the Cherubic Hymn and the fact that the priest does not say for himself during the anamnesis “this is my body,” to mean that the priest does not act in persona Christi, but in nomine Christi. I consider that Evdokimov’s negation that the priest acts in persona Christi is inconsistent with his claim that Christ manifests his priesthood through the entire church, which includes the priest.

Most other contemporary Orthodox theologians agree with Evdokimov’s assertion that the priest acts in persona ecclesiae et in nomine Christi, adding that the priest also acts in persona Christi. To show that the bishop acts in persona ecclesiae, they quote frequently Tertullian’s principle that “the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop” and Ignatius of Antioch who considered that the bishop is an image of Christ at the Last Supper. Moreover, the priest acts in nomine Christi by virtue of his ordination and in persona Christi because, as John Chrysostom wrote, “the priest merely lends his tongue and provides his hand” to Christ, the ultimate celebrant of all sacraments. Based on these patristic writings, Ware, Afanasieff, and Schnemann affirm that the priest acts in nomine Christi, in persona Christi, and in persona ecclesiae. A closer look at the latter two theologians, followed by Florovsky, Zizioulas, and Nissiotis, is necessary.

At times, Afanasieff might give the impression that he minimizes the role of the bishop in the Eucharistic assembly; Zizioulas criticized him rather harshly in this regard, as I will show soon. But Staniloae was satisfied with Afanasieff’s portrayal of the relationship between the bishop and the church. In his attempt to define the limits of the church according to the Eucharistic assembly that includes the bishop, and not exclusively according to the bishop (as, allegedly, Cyprian of Carthage did), Afanasieff affirmed:

The actual limits of the Church are determined by the limits of the eucharistic assembly. In affirming that the eucharistic assembly is the principle of the unity of the Church, the thesis that the bishop is the distinctive empirical sign of the local church is not excluded, because the bishop is included in the very concept of the Eucharist. According to its very nature, the eucharistic assembly could not exist without its president or, according to the terminology established by usage, without the bishop. The foundation of the ministry of the bishop is the eucharistic assembly.

In line with the inseparability of the bishop from the Eucharistic assembly, Afanasieff developed a topological understanding of the role of the presider: the place of Christ at the Last Supper was taken by the apostles at the Liturgy; in turn, the apostles have transmitted the presidency at the assembly to their successors: “receiving from the apostles their ministry of presidency, bishops were not the successors of their apostolic ministry but rather merely of their place in the eucharistic assembly.” Afanasieff then balanced these statements concerning the bishop’s ministry in persona Christi with the understanding that all sacraments are celebrated by the entire church, “without separation or division” between clergy and the people. The entire people of God is priestly by virtue of Baptism, while the bishop represents the image (hypo) of Christ at the Eucharistic assembly.

---

51. “For you, Christ our God, are the Offerer and the Offered, the One who receives and is distributed.”
53. Tertullian, Letter xvi, 8. Quoted in Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, The Orthodox Church, new ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 251. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, 6 (PG 5, 649–650A), Ignatius wrote that “we should look upon the bishop even as we would look upon the Lord himself, standing, as he does, before the Lord,” that is, in the Liturgy.
54. John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, ixxviii, 4, translated in Ware, The Orthodox Church, 277.
Afanassieff’s student at St. Serge, Schmemann, followed and further developed these arguments. All the baptized are ordained into the universal priesthood of the church, which is the priesthood of Christ. The entire assembly has a priestly function in the Liturgy (i.e., “the work of the people”), while the bishop is the main celebrant at the assembly. Writing on the “indissoluble bond of bishop, eucharist, and the Church,” Schmemann insisted that the bishop is both “one of the gathered but also as the image of the Lord, vested in his power and authority.”

Though Florovsky contended that ministers act primarily in persona Christi, being “representatives” of Christ, he added immediately that the priest also acts in persona ecclesiae, which results in several practices, such as the forbiddance of abstract ordinations (bishops ordained for no specific diocese) and of a retired bishop ordaining other bishops, as he does not represent a community.

Zizioulas follows Florovsky—his Doktoralter—by affirming the relationship between the bishop and the church in the context of the Eucharist and thus, implicitly, that the celebrant acts in persona ecclesiae. At the heart of his early account of communion ecclesiology (in Eucharist, Bishop, Church), he identifies the bishop with both Christ and the entire local church. In response to Afanassieff’s Eucharistic ecclesiology, Zizioulas concludes that the unity of the church is not simply Eucharistic, but also hierarchical:

The Church is the body of Christ because the body of Christ is the historical Christ Himself and the historical Christ is the flesh of the Divine Eucharist. . . . The Divine Eucharist is closely bound up with the bishop as he is in turn with “the whole Church.” These elements are so deeply bound up with one another that they are not clearly distinguished in Ignatius’s thought. . . . The Bishop is identified with the entire local Church. Thus, we reach the classic passage “where the Bishop is, there is the multitude.” The Bishop forms a “type” and icon of Christ or of the Father Himself, an icon and type not in a symbolic but in a real sense. . . . The unity of the Church is not simply eucharistic, but because of the relation of the Bishop to the Eucharist it becomes hierarchical as well. . . . The community cannot even be called a church without the clergy, i.e., the Bishop, presbyters and deacons.

Zizioulas’s communion ecclesiology will later focus on the relationship between person and nature, especially as manifested in the context of the Eucharist. Fast forwarding to his most recent book, Communion and Otherness, he affirms that “the Eucharist is communion, and this means that otherness is experienced as relational. The Eucharistic ethos, therefore, precludes any exclusiveness in otherness. The only exclusion that is permissible—even imperative—is of exclusiveness itself,” that is, when churches that live in schism do not share in the Eucharist. Thus, Zizioulas constantly affirms the intrinsic relationship between the celebrant and the community in the Eucharist, whether within his earlier historical analysis or within his later theology of personhood.

Nikos Nissiotis affirmed the same inseparability between the clergy and the people in Christ when he referred to the qualitative equality of all the members of the body of Christ, while the Holy Spirit makes a hierarchical distinction between them. They all participate in the royal priesthood of Jesus through Baptism, so “the distinction between clergy and laity as between ‘general’ and ‘special’ priesthood is theologically, or rather ecclesiologically and better still charismatically, a recent invention.”

Thus, most contemporary Orthodox theologians analyzed here consider that the priest acts in nomine Christi, in persona Christi et in persona ecclesiae. Despite significant variations that some of their ecclesiologies have suffered over time, the aforementioned theologians are consistent concerning the relationship between Christ, the church, and the priest. Next, I address Staniloae’s position on this subject. Without insisting on the priest’s commission to serve in nomine Christi, he argued that the priest acts both in persona Christi and in persona ecclesiae: the priest represents (being an image of) both Christ and the community. Moreover, priests are simultaneously mediators of Christ and part of certain communities, without being above the community. The mediation of the priest should be understood as providing the occasion for Christ to act, and not as if this power would belong to the priest, separate from the community. The power of Christ manifested in the actions of the priest belongs to the whole church, which means, as previously stated, that Ordination is a ministry within the priesthood of the church. Still, the responsibility to exercise it has been entrusted to the ordained minister, hence Staniloae agreed with Gregory Nazianzen that the priest is concelebrant with Christ.


63. Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 91–92.
66. The term “power” runs the risk of bearing clericalist connotations. However, I chose to keep Staniloae’s terminology that implies the energy, grace, and spiritual strength that Christ imparts through the church.
The priest celebrating the Liturgy when the faithful are not present, since the act in persona ecclesiae is essential to his priestly ministry, including when he consecrates the gifts. Concerning the priest’s ministry in persona Christi, Staniloae added that the ordained priest is the visible instrument that makes visible the invisible ministry of Christ, the High Priest. Because we are not merely souls, but also bodies, we need visible signs of God’s presence in the church. Consequently, as Christ made himself visible in his body before his ascension and mediated his divine power (i.e., energy or operation) through his body, so now also he makes himself visible through the priests as mediating visible instruments. But the ordained do not have this power in themselves; they receive it from the Son of God. Ultimately, it is Christ who offers himself under the gifts of bread and wine. The priest acknowledges this principle in the prayer during the Cherubic Hymn: “make me, Your sinful and unworthy servant, worthy to offer to You these gifts. For You, Christ our God, are the Offerer (the One who offers himself) and the Offered, the One who receives and is distributed.”

Furthermore, Staniloae added that Ordination does not come from the community or from individuals (here I interpret Staniloae to mean bishops in themselves, without reference to Christ), but it belongs to the deepest subject of the church, who is Christ. It is Christ who chooses and ordains a certain group—the clergy—to preach the gospel and manifest his work visibly. This is why the clergy do not take from themselves this power of subjects fully awakened to the responsibility of preaching the Revelation, and neither do the other members of the Church give it to them, because they do not have it in themselves. [This power] can only come from [the subject] of the Church, that is, from Christ. . . . This is why it cannot be said that the grace of the sacraments, including Ordination, comes from Christ as if he were somewhere separated from the Church; rather, by coming from Christ, it comes from the deep of the Church.

74. Vatican II’s Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests—Presbyterorum Ordinis 13 makes reference to the priest acting in the person of Christ even when he celebrates daily Mass without the presence of the faithful.
76. Staniloae, Spirituality and Communion, 147.
77. Staniloae, Dogmatics, 2:165.
78. “Christ himself prays in the priest for the faithful, addresses them, gathers the prayers and the gifts of the people, uniting them with his gifts. Through the priest, Christ teaches in the Gospel, changes the gifts of the faithful into his Body and Blood, unites the faithful with himself in Holy Communion to present them to the Father as children filled of the Holy Spirit.” Staniloae, Spirituality and Communion, 7.
79. Staniloae, Spirituality and Communion, 227. Staniloae actually made the clarification between parentheses inserted into the text of the Liturgy to show more clearly that the priest acknowledges in the prayer that Christ offers himself in the Eucharist.
80. Staniloae, Jesse Christ or the Restoration of Humankind, 391–93.
In conclusion, Staniloae did not accept a separation between in persona Christi and in persona ecclesiae, even though he distinguished between the two expressions, thus avoiding the tension that Evdokimov put between them. That is because ordained priesthood is a ministry within the priesthood of the church, through which Christ manifests his priesthood. The priest acts in nomine Christi, in persona Christi et in persona ecclesiae because the priesthood of Christ can be separated neither from the universal priesthood of the church nor from the priesthood of the ordained. In a sense, actually, these three coincide.

**V. COMMUNION BETWEEN THE CLERGY AND THE PEOPLE**

In this section I concentrate on the communion between the clergy and the people manifested in the exercise of their priestly, kingly, and prophetic vocation.

**Priestly Office**

The communion between the clergy and the people is first expressed in the Liturgy. Christ imparts his blessings upon the people through the blessing of the priest, initiating a prayerful dialogue between the celebrant who blesses the community with the words "Peace be with you" or other similar variations, and the faithful who respond, "And with your spirit." Moreover, to show how ordained priesthood contributes to the prayers of the people, Staniloae affirmed repeatedly that the priest gathers the prayers of the liturgical assembly, offering them to God together with his own prayers. This is why the people need the priest to be—as Nicholas Cabasilas wrote—their herald and leader without, however, being separated from the people. Simultaneously, universal priesthood contributes to the prayers of the ordained. Given the use of plural in the prayers of the Liturgy, Staniloae concluded that the priest cannot celebrate the Divine Liturgy without the presence of the community. Moreover, the work of the ordained needs the "active contribution of the people" who "fulfill with their offices" the work of the hierarchy in the celebration of the sacraments. The two key expressions that Staniloae used here—"active contribution" and "fulfill"—in the sense of making whole—reflect the important role that he ascribes to universal priesthood in relationship to ordained priesthood.

These considerations show that, according to Staniloae, the Liturgy expresses the communion and complementarity between the clergy and the people. Other Orthodox theologians support this idea. In his book, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, Afanasieff made a thorough analysis of the similarities between the rites of Baptism-Chrismation as performed in the early church and the rite of Ordination. Here, he offered what I consider to be the best instance of Orthodox ecclesiology in general, and of universal priesthood in particular. It is by no means a faultless ecclesiology and has attracted vehement criticism especially from Zizioulas and Staniloae concerning the relationship between the local and universal aspects of the church. And yet, its portrayal of universal priesthood and ordination, as well as of the Eucharistic nature of the church (with the limitations inherent in such a pioneering work), give Afanasieff a prominent place among Orthodox ecclesiologists.

Analyzing the liturgical life of the early church, he wrote that the catechumen used to be received in the church through the imposition of the hands, anointing (as in the case of kings and prophets in the Jewish tradition), receiving vestments (the white robe of Baptism) and a miter, being tonsured, being taken three times around the altar table, and having the word "to serve" mentioned, all of these demonstrating that the early church regarded the rite of initiation as ordination to the royal priesthood. Moreover, since sacerdotal acts are accomplished only by the entire people of God—clergy and faithful together—the people have a sacerdotal function. Afanasieff concluded that priesthood belongs to all because it belongs to the church.

Some of these liturgical elements gradually disappeared from the rite of initiation, and Afanasieff noted a gradual separation between clergy and people, the latter being considered profane. This separation was even more accentuated when certain liturgical practices were introduced: the iconostasis, the forbiddance of the faithful to enter inside the altar, and the different ways for the clergy and the people to receive communion. However, Afanasieff continued, the core of the Liturgy could not be changed,

83. The only exception to this rule of using the plural is the prayer during the Cherubic Hymn, in which the priest prays to be rendered worthy to serve the Liturgy.
84. Staniloae, "Ecclesial Ministries and Their Attributions," 467.
87. Afanasieff, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, 24–30. Staniloae wrote in similar terms about Baptism as consecration into universal priesthood, which is why the people can baptize in case of emergency. Moreover, Staniloae referred to Nicholas Cabasilas who related the anointing of the altar during the consecration of a church with the sacrament of Chrismation, when those who are anointed become altars at which they serve God as priests. Staniloae, *Ecclesial Ministries and Their Attributions*, 468.
so the priestly function of the people is still reflected in elements such as the plural used in Eucharistic prayers and the “Amen” of the faithful during the epiclesis.  

Schmemann is probably the only Orthodox author who, based on the history of the Liturgy, wrote about the “clericalization” of the Orthodox Church in the sense of the “great distancing of the clergy and laity from each other,” adding, “Entry to the altar, approach to the sanctuary came to be forbidden to the laity, and their presence at the Eucharist became passive. It is accomplished on behalf of them, for them, but they do not take part in its accomplishment. If earlier the line separating the Church from ‘this world’ embraced the laity, it now excluded them.”

This distancing between clergy and the people is based on the “pre-Christian, clergy-versus-laity dichotomy, whose main emphasis is precisely on the non-priestly nature of those called laity.” It results in “a false dilemma: either the institutional priesthood excludes from the Church any idea of the ‘priestly’ character of all Christians as such, or then the priestly character of the laity and indeed of the entire Church (defined by the Apostle [1 Pet 2:9] as ‘royal priesthood’) ought to exclude the institutional priesthood.” Such view is an impoverishment of the early church’s understanding of the entire people of God as celebrating the Eucharist in communion, as they all share in the priesthood of Christ.

Based on the theologians analyzed in section IV, I disagree with Schmemann and Afanassieff in regard to the existence in Orthodoxy of a mentality according to which the clergy pertain to the holy, while the people pertain to the worldly. I actually see a distinction between the church (clergy and faithful alike) and the world, but not between clergy and the world, the latter including the people. Moreover, the presence of the people at the Eucharist is not as passive as Schmemann suggests, although he is right that it is considerably less active than in the first centuries. I also dispute Schmemann’s charge of clericalism, given that this term is understood in the West as the cloistered attitude of the clergy who are responsible only to themselves and exercise their power (as opposed to spiritual authority) in matters that do not pertain to the church; in virtue of their ordination, they claim to be first-class citizens in their religious community, above the people who have the duty to follow them. The situation in the East is significantly different, especially in Staniloae’s circumstances where, under Communist persecution, both clergy and the people suffered at the hand of a common oppressor. Staniloae experienced the communion between the clergy and the people not only in the Liturgy (that Christians attended at great risk), but also in his five years of Communist incarceration, where both clergy and the people suffered together and, if they were treated differently, the clergy certainly did not enjoy first-class status. Quite the opposite.

89. Schmemann, The Eucharist, 232.
91. Schmemann, Of Water and the Spirit, 94.

In general, Schmemann tends to fall in the extreme of being overly critical of the present “separation” between the clergy and the people, idealizing the past. At the other extreme, Staniloae tends to be insufficiently critical of the present state of Orthodox liturgical life, concentrating exclusively on the unchanged core of the Liturgy, still marked by communion between clergy and the people. I believe that, despite Afanassieff’s association between the people and the world described above, he presented a more balanced position, between Staniloae and Schmemann. And yet they all share the idea that the core of the Liturgy expresses the communion between the clergy and the people, both sharing in Christ’s priestly office.

Kingly Office

As presented above, Staniloae considered that all the members of the church manifest communally their kingly office by striving to have dominion over passions. Next, one would expect a thorough treatment of the clergy and people’s shared role in the leadership and administration of the church. However, such considerations are not prominent in Staniloae. I argue that this omission was determined by the Communist persecution of the Orthodox Church during his time. To substantiate this claim, it is important to remember that the role of the people was drastically limited compared to the pre-Communist era because the official ideology of the time claimed that Orthodoxy (and religion in general) should have no place in the public sphere. Religiosity was considered a superstition, inferior to the “scientific socialism” that was imposed on Romanian citizens, so religiosity was limited as much as possible, primarily to the clergy and (grudgingly) to the elderly who were considered “indoctrinated” during the pre-Communist era. In this situation, the faithful did not play a prominent role in the administration of the Romanian Orthodox Church during Communism, and this is probably why Staniloae was not able to develop satisfactorily this aspect of the kingly office of the people.

However, there are some notable exceptions that suggest that, had he lived in a different context, Staniloae would have emphasized this subject further. For example, he wrote that while the clergy are responsible for church administration and social-charitable projects, they need to fulfill these tasks together with the representatives of the people who thus acquire an important role in parish councils or other aspects of ecclesial life.

92. During the publication process of Staniloae’s Dogmatics, the Communist censure asked him to replace all references to the religiosity of human beings with the faithfulness of Christians, thus limiting religiosity to a specific group, rather than considering it something intrinsic to human nature, as Staniloae initially did.
93. Staniloae, “Ecclesial Ministries and Their Attributes,” 468-69. It is also important to mention here the words of Cyprian of Carthage [Epistle 5/Oxford 14:4]: “I made this a rule, from the beginning of my episcopate, not to decide anything without your [presbyters] council and without the approval of the people.”
Furthermore, he affirmed that “in many Orthodox churches . . . the priests are chosen by the people and then ordained by the bishop, and the bishops are elected before being ordained by an electoral committee, in which the bishops are not the only members, but also the representatives of the priests and of the people.” He also noted the involvement of the faithful in the leadership of the church at national levels in several Orthodox churches, especially in Romania and Serbia. These affirmations, unfortunately, are sporadic in Staniloae’s work because their application was significantly limited by Communism. The reality was that parish councils were functionally nonexistent, parishes did not formally elect their priests, and the nonordained representatives serving on electoral committees were not as free as they should have been. Thus, the involvement of the faithful in the leadership of the church at local and national levels was rather nominal. These principles were actually applied in the Romanian Orthodox Church before Communism and especially after its fall in 1989. Thus, the National Ecclesiastical Assembly—the central representative body responsible for all economic and administrative matters—is currently composed of three representatives of each diocese, one ordained and two nonordained. The National Ecclesiastical Council—the supreme administrative body for the affairs of the entire Romanian Orthodox Church and the executive body of the Holy Synod and of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly—is composed of nine members, three ordained and six nonordained, one of its attributes being the election of new hierarchs. Moreover, many of the faithful today are involved in charities, youth organizations, or professional associations. If one adds to these remarks the prominent role of the people in the administration of Orthodox churches in America, there are certainly many ways in which the clergy and the people share together in the kingly office of Christ.

94. Staniloae, “The Theological Foundations of Hierarchy and Synodality,” 174. Similarly, Ware mentions that “in the early Church the bishop was often elected by the people of the diocese, clergy and laymen together. In Orthodoxy today it is usually the Governing Synod in each autocephalous Church which appoints bishops to vacant sees; but in some Churches—Antioch, for example, and Cyprus—a modified system of popular election still exists. The Moscow Council of 1917–1918 laid down that henceforward bishops in the Russian Church should be elected by the clergy and laity of the diocese; this ruling is followed by the Paris group of Russians and by the Orthodox Church in America, but in the Soviet Union under Communism such election was for obvious reasons impossible.” Ware, The Orthodox Church, 292.


96. See www.patriarhia.ro/ro/structura_bor, official website of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

97. Even though Orthodox churches in the United States are making significant efforts to express the communion between the clergy and the people, in some communities there is an overemphasis on the administrative role of the faithful, which sometimes results in businesslike attitudes toward church life. A more liturgical and catechetical approach would compensate for this shortcomings, pointing to the spiritual character of all the ministries in the church. At the same time, there is a need for a correct understanding of the role of the clergy and the significance of Ordination in the context of a communal church life.

98. The famous Encyclical Letter of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church to the Orthodox Christians of All Lands states that hierarchy and the people collaborate in the preservation of the truth, which is “entrusted to the whole people of the Church.” Quoted in Schmemann, The Eucharist, 79.

In conclusion, the content of the kingly office as shared by the ordained and non ordained is twofold. On the one hand, they strive together to have dominion over their passions and overcome social injustice, manifested for example in Communist persecution or in poverty. On the other hand, they participate in the administrative life of the church and elect new hierarchs communally. Again, given the limitations of his context, Staniloae did not emphasize significantly these elements, concentrating on the kingly office as mastery over passions. However, he provided important insights into the relationship between the clergy and the people in regard to the prophetic function of the church, which I discuss next.

Prophetic Office

History shows that ordained ministers of the highest rank can sometimes uphold heretical positions. For example, Pope Honorius I (624–638) was formally anathematized at the sixth ecumenical council (Constantinople, 680–681) for his monothelist position, this anathema being ratified by Leo II, while Nestorius of Constantinople (428–431) was condemned at the third ecumenical council (Ephesus 431) for his dyoprosopist views. Moreover, the councils of Lyons II (1274) and Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445) had the approval of most participating bishops, but they are not considered ecumenical in the East because the Orthodox faithful did not agree with their decisions. This is why not only the hierarchy but the entire church has to agree on a certain teaching in order for it to be accepted as normative. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church recognizes a certain teaching as its own, as being in communion with the way in which the Christian community has lived its faith (especially in its liturgical life), and as having the consensus of all the faithful, through reception.

Staniloae addressed the subject of reception on several occasions. He affirmed that the councils are extensions of Christ. It is Christ who works infallibly through the communion between the bishops who bring to the council the faith of their communities, on the one hand, and the communities that receive the decisions of the bishops after the council, on the other hand:

The Church in its totality, as the Body of Christ, is infallible because Christ is infallible and he exercises his threefold office in it as one whole. The Church partakes of his infallibility because it partakes of his three offices. The episcopacy takes doctrinal decisions infallibly because it takes them in the name of the Church, in inner connection with it and by taking into account the mind of the Church related to its life in Christ. The episcopacy can do this because it decides in communion. Their communion insures not only every bishop, but
also all of them together, against dictatorial tendencies in the Church. Each one and all of them together are limited in exercising the right to decide in matters of faith by their mutual inter-relatedness and because they seek together the accord among themselves and with the tradition of the Church.99

Several elements stand out in this quote. First, infallibility is an attribute of the church because Christ extends his infallibility to his body, the church. Second, infallibility is not expressed through the bishops gathered in a council separate from the faithful. On the contrary, the bishops decide infallibly because they base their affirmations on the faith and the sacramental life of their communities. Moreover, the bishops bring the decisions of the council back to their churches. Only those decisions which are accepted and incorporated in the liturgical life of the church ("its life in Christ") are considered infallible and, as Staniloae would add later, confirmed as coming from the Holy Spirit100 because they reflect "the faith and the sacramental life of the Church inherited through tradition."101 Third, Staniloae implied (and shortly thereafter stated clearly) that, gathered in eumcumenical councils, the bishops extend their authority beyond their local church, to the entire church.102 Thus, infallibility belongs to the whole church, as the body of Christ partaking of the infallibility of its head, manifested concretely through councils and their reception as eumcumenical and inspired by the Holy Spirit.103 Staniloae reiterated these principles when he observed that, in the ancient church, the bishops were not the only participants at the councils, but also

101. Staniloae, Dogmatics, 2:164, 248–50. Since in the beginning of this section, the councils of Lyons and Ferrara–Florence were brought up as evidence for the necessity of reception, it is important to nuance the affirmation that only those teachings that reflect the life of the church are received. By considering these councils general, rather than eumcumenical, more recent Catholic theology underscores the validity of their decisions for the West, while acknowledging the lack of their reception in the East. Frans Bouwen, "Eumcumenical Councils," in Dictionary of the Eumcumenical Movement, ed. Nicholas Luskiy et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1991), 338. Orthodox theologians, on their part, have a more ironic approach toward the issues discussed at these councils, primarily the Filioque. See "The Filioque: A Church-Dividing Issue? An Agreed Statement of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation," U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Saint Paul's College, Washington, DC, October 25, 2003, www.usccb.org/seia/dialogues.htm (2003): sections II and IV.
102. Staniloae, Dogmatics, 2:165.
103. These affirmations should be read in light of Staniloae's balanced understanding of the presence of Christ and the Spirit in the church: "The Church infallibly understand[s] the meaning of revelation, because she herself is the work of revelation, of the Holy Spirit, and because she moves within revelation as one who is organically united with it. The Holy Spirit who, together with Christ, is the author of revelation, the one who brought the Church into existence and the one who inspires Scriptures—this same Spirit is at work within the Church, helping her to understand and to appropriate, in an authentic and practical way, the content of revelation, that is, Christ in the fullness of his gifts." Staniloae, The Experience of God, 1:58.

the representatives of the clergy, of the monastics, and of the people, their opinion being asked before the adoption of conciliar definitions. Moreover, each bishop signed these definitions only after being convinced that they correspond to the faith of his Church, which included its clergy and people and was in line with its apostolic Tradition. The definitive adoption of conciliar decisions by the entire Church was made through the so-called reception.104

Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, the episcopacy had the role of formulating the faith of the church, but the verification of these formulas was done, again under the inspiration of the Spirit, by the entire church through reception. In line with other Orthodox theologians such as Afanassiieff, Lossky, Evdokimov, Florovsky, and Ware, Staniloae affirmed that, even though the entire church is entrusted with the transmission of the faith, the differences between ministries is not erased, since the bishop is still the articulator of the faith of his community.105 As Stefan Lupu commented on Staniloae's theology,

the common responsibility to preserve the faith does not erase the difference between ministries in the Church: the ordained ministries have the mission to observe, prepare, and propose the faith to the faithful, especially when celebrating the sacraments. The faithful have the role to guard the faith of the Church and to contribute, together with the ordained ministers, to the understanding of the discovery of the most fitted formulas for the expression of the truth of faith.106

These considerations refer to two categories involved in reception: bishops and the people. It is important to emphasize as included in these categories the role of professional theologians and of parish priests who, besides participating in the church's sense of the faith, have several gifts and opportunities that allow them to contribute to the process of reception. First, because of their education and because they have the opportunity to teach, professional theologians have an important role in the discernment and dissemination of the faith, provided that they are in touch with the reality of the church by being active in their faith communities.107 Second, parish priests have the advantage of being theologically

107. Theologians who are not active in faith communities can still have an impact on the faith of the church, though indirectly.
educated, so they are able to analyze the teachings that are proposed to their attention in the process of reception. Furthermore, parish priests are very close to the people and have a realistic sense of the way people react to a certain teaching. Common exercise of the prophetic office shared by the clergy and the people is most visible at this level.

There are, however, several difficulties concerning reception. First, it does not happen immediately after the proclamation of a certain teaching; reception can actually take many centuries. Second, and related to the first difficulty, it is not always clear when reception can be considered as completed. For example, most theologians thought the reception of the first and fourth ecumenical councils to be over, only to realize in the twentieth century that Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches profess the same faith, despite their different and even contradictory theological terminology. Third, reception is complicated by the divided state of Christianity. Staniloae considered that reception is the task of the church in its broadest understanding, not only of the Orthodox Church. The church gathered in ecumenical councils, the church that cannot err, is the church that represents the entire Christian world. Fourth, reception is sometimes vague, resulting in the need to re-actualize the list of the canons by discerning which ones were never received or have become outdated, so that they would not be indiscriminately enforced today. These four difficulties do not diminish the importance of reception but rather represent obstacles that can be overcome by strengthening the communion between the clergy and the people through the common exercise of their calling as prophets, kings, and priests. This communion extends outside the boundaries of a certain local church, to all Christian communities.

CONCLUSION

Whether knowingly or not, intentionally or by accident, Staniloae has engaged with other Orthodox and Catholic theologies of priesthood.

108. See, for example, the “Agreed Statement: Third Unofficial Conversation between Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Church, 1970,” in The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices, by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 147–49.

109. Staniloae quoted Nissiotis who wrote that Vatican II was not ecumenical because it did not convoke the whole Christian world and because non-Catholic observers did not enjoy a position equal to that of the representatives of the Catholic Church. Staniloae, Theology and the Church, 46. Moreover, Zizioulas writes that today reception is more complicated because of the divided state of Christianity. John D. Zizioulas, “The Theological Problem of Reception,” One in Christ 21, no. 3 (1985): 188.