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MUTUAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS: HERMAN BAVINCK AND DUMITRU STANILOAE IN DIALOGUE

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the criticisms of Protestantism articulated by Romanian Eastern Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae, highlighting over-generalizations in his assessments. Staniloae contends that Protestantism embodies dualism, anthropological pessimism, denigration of the sacraments, and indifference to sin, among other issues. This paper argues that some of these assertions reveal a lack of serious engagement and perhaps comprehension of the diverse range of the Protestant tradition. By scrutinizing Staniloae's contentions through conversing with neo-Calvinist theologian Herman Bavinck, this paper attempts to demonstrate possible misinterpretations in Staniloae's evaluations related to Protestant soteriology. In the reverse, the paper also evaluates some of Bavinck's claims related to Palamist thought. Ultimately, this examination confirms that many of Staniloae's criticisms of Protestantism are misinformed, just as Bavinck's criticisms of Palamist thought lack both nuance and depth. By engaging in theological dialogue between these two theologians, this paper hopes to promote a greater appreciation for both traditions and the potential for further dialogue.

KEY WORDS: Dumitru Staniloae, Herman Bavinck, Palamism, justification, sanctification

Introduction

The recent interest in Dutch neo-Calvinist theologian, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), has prompted a number of compelling conversations, but very few involve bringing this theological giant in conversation with the Eastern Orthodox tradition. The most notable of these works is Dmytro Bintsarovskyi's comparative study of both Bavinck and John Meyendorff's doctrine of God (Bintsarovskyi 2021). The lack of mutual engagement between Bavinck's thought and the Eastern Orthodox tradition is unsurprising given Bavinck's departure from prominence in theology in the Netherlands following World War II and the introduction of Karl Barth. It is only recently — and primarily outside the Netherlands — that Bavinck's life and theology has recovered from this dormancy and provoked sustained interest. Furthermore, Bavinck

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does not devote much sustained engagement with Eastern Orthodoxy in his works. For example, he does mention the Palamite understanding of the essence/energies distinction, but only in passing, and there he characterizes this distinction "as a kind of emanation theory" (Bavinck 2004: 125). Bintsarovskyi concludes that, 'Bavinck's brief remarks show that his interpretation of Palamas relies upon the views predominant among his Western contemporaries' (Bintsarovskyi 2021: 259).

In a similar vein, Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae (1903-1993) has also recently emerged from obscurity. Staniloae is recognized as one of the most influential Eastern Orthodox theologians of the 20th century. However, many of Staniloae's engagements with Protestantism are often guilty of over-generalizations and sweeping statements. For example, he routinely accuses Protestantism of being guilty of dualism, anthropological pessimism, and antinomianism. While Staniloae references and displays some familiarity with Protestant theologians, many of his accusations reflect a lack of sustained engagement with the broader Protestant tradition.

The purpose of this paper is not to settle any debates or disputes between the Reformed tradition and Eastern Orthodoxy. The goal of this paper is simply to examine the mutual misunderstandings between Bavinck and Staniloae and their respective traditions. Initially, I will examine Bavinck's dismissal of Palamism and attempt to use Staniloae to clear up some misconceptions Bavinck may have had regarding Palamist thought. Following this, I set Staniloae's criticisms of the Protestant doctrine of justification — which include claims of moral apathy and antinomianism — against Herman Bavinck's own articulation of the Protestant tradition and his theological understanding of justification and sanctification, which undergirds these historic claims. By doing this, I will show some of the surprising places where Staniloae and Bavinck converge and parallel each other. This conversation may also display the usefulness for further conversations between Eastern Orthodoxy and Bavinck studies.

Dumitru Staniloae: Life & Thought

Though Staniloae has received more attention over the past few decades — and will be a known figure in Romanian theology — he remains relatively unknown to many in the North Atlantic world. For that reason, it is helpful to outline his life and some of the main contours of his thought.

Staniloae has been characterized as a 'bridge-builder,' 'pan-Orthodox,' and 'ecumenical theologian' (Ware 1998: x). Andrew Louth argues that Staniloae is not "marginal" but occupies a central place in the 'most original movement in modern Orthodox thought' (Louth 1997: 256). Some have gone as far as to rank him among the 20th century's most significant theologians, a list which includes Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner (Miller 1999: 74) and notably in these pre-2000's lists Bavinck is

absent. Staniloae's influence was far reaching and even extended itself to the likes of Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Munteanu 2015: 26). However, today, names like Vladimir Lossky, George Florovsky, and Sergei Bulgakov are much more commonplace despite Staniloae's vast corpus which includes 210 theological articles, a three-volume dogmatics, and a number of articles written for popular consumption (Louth 1997: 258). Yet, due to much of his work still having gone untranslated, Staniloae has not enjoyed much recognition outside Eastern Orthodox circles until recently. Interest in Staniloae's theology is continuing to grow and has proven useful within contemporary theology as he is seen as one who stands at the crossroads between the 'East and the West' (Ware 1998: x).

Born in 1903 in rural Transylvania, Staniloae was surrounded by the beauty of the natural world which occupies a central place in his theology. From an early age Staniloae desired to be a priest. He began studying theology at Cernauti Seminary in Northern Bukovina from 1922-1927 (Noble 2007: 186). Staniloae would go on to study in Athens, Munich, Berlin and Paris all while engaging with the patristic tradition as well as reading Kant, Hegel, Barth, and most importantly Gregory Palamas. In the post-war period, Stalin's totalitarianism began to increasingly suffocate the Church. Staniloae would eventually move to Bucharest to teach theology and was eventually imprisoned from 1958-1962 under the communist regime. His daughter, writing about this period, states: 'He remained firm in his convictions, never for a moment losing his hope in God. He passed through that hell with a luminous smile on his lips, and with confidence that God gives us hardships to purify us so that we might obtain the future life, a reality that presupposes effort and a powerful will' (Staniloae 2002: 21). Eventually, Staniloae was released from prison and would return to teaching in 1963 until his retirement in 1973. His "retirement" would involve a plethora of activities such as finishing the translation of the *Philokalia* from Greek into Romanian as well as publishing his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, which sought to respond to the 'urgent challenges posed to all Christians, indeed to all men and women living in the modern industrialized society' (Miller 1999: 21). Both he and his wife Maria passed away in 1993.

Yet, for all Staniloae's successes, one seriously troubling aspect of his life and thought centers around his tenure as the editor of the *Telegraful Roman* (The Romanian Telegraph) from 1934-1945. The *Telegraph Roman* was deeply antisemitic, and Staniloae was no exception here. As Gabriel Andreescu notes, 'From 1934 on, once Dumitru Staniloae became editor-in-chief, no more positive texts on Jews were published' (Andreescu 2011-2016: 137). This is somewhat surprising given Staniloae's reputation as a "theologian of love." It is worth noting a small anecdote provided by Staniloae's daughter regarding a rabbi who was a cellmate of Staniloae during his

time in prison. She writes, 'For a while they put a rabbi with him in his cell. "I have never met anyone before who prayed so hard. He was direct and obstinate," father recounted. He was very impressed. "It was a true struggle with an angel, like in the Old Testament. Rarely have I seen such powerful convictions, such a fervent faith. It was extraordinary!"' (Staniloae 2002: 21). While this does not erase Staniloae's antisemitic agenda from the *Romanian Telegraph*, it does beg the question if Staniloae's convictions regarding the Jewish community changed. It is also worth noting that many English publications regarding Staniloae often omit, or only briefly describe his antisemitic attitude. This may be attributed to the lack of English translations of the *Romanian Telegraph* during the years Staniloae spent as editor of the publication.

As with Bavinck, Staniloae is becoming increasingly recognized in the English-speaking world. Bavinck and Staniloae have greatly benefited from sustained anglophone translation endeavors, which has facilitated renewed interest; like two erupting volcanos they are no longer dormant. In a world grappling with the many unintended consequences of modernity, Staniloae's theology has become appealing to many. In this next section I will attempt to sketch some of the broader contours of Staniloae's thought for context as many may remain unfamiliar with him.

Dumitru Staniloae and Theosis

The most fitting place to begin is with Staniloae's understanding of *theosis*. *Theosis* is the central concept from which all of Staniloae's theology revolves. Because *theosis* has become fashionable of late in contemporary theology it is important to understand precisely what is meant by the term. Andrew Louth summarizes this well:

> One way of putting this is to think in terms of an arch stretching from creation to deification, representing what is and remains God's intention: the creation of the cosmos that, through humankind, is destined to share in the divine life, to be deified. Progress along this arch has been frustrated by humankind, in Adam, failing to work with God's purposes, leading to the Fall, which needs to be put right by redemption. There is, then, what one might think of as a lesser arch, leading from the Fall to redemption, the purpose of which is to restore the function of the greater arch, from creation to deification. The loss of the notion of deification leads to a lack of awareness of the greater arch from creation to deification, and thereby to concentration of the lower arch, from Fall to redemption; it is, I think, not unfair to suggest that such a concentration on the lesser arch at the expense of the great arch has been characteristic of much Western theology. The consequences are evident: a loss of the sense of the cosmic dimension of theology, a tendency to see the created order as little more than a background for the great drama of redemption, with the result that the Incarnation is seen simply as a means of redemption…(Louth 2008: 35).

This is the framework Staniloae is largely working within. Louth accuses much of Western theological thinking as being too concerned with the "smaller arc" within the narrative of salvation. This concentration on the smaller arc has allegedly meant that Western theology loses its cosmic scope and sees non-human creation as little more than a backdrop. However, both Cory G. Brock and Nathaniel Sutanto have recently argued that, 'In brief neo-Calvinism accents an essential theological commitment: that the *goal* of salvation is not an entirely new idea, even post fall, because the goal of re-creation is the end of creation, yet by different means. Re-creation's end is creation's original end: that God would make his dwelling place with humankind, Immanuel, God with us' (Brock and Sutanto 2022: 184). Staniloae makes a similar claim when he states that the 'plan for edifying creation and the human being are not thwarted by the introduction of sin into the world, but that the effect of sin has even been that providence takes the conditions of mankind's sinful state into account, while the plan for deification also includes within it the redemption of mankind' (Staniloae 2000: 191). While the assumptions behind both these statements are obviously different, they do reflect an initial parallel that exists between Bavinck and Staniloae. Namely, that communion with God has always been God's intention for creation whether the Fall had occurred or not. Staniloae sees *theosis* as the means for communion with God and what lies beneath his understanding of *theosis* is the Palamite distinction between the essence/energies of God. A brief summary of what Palamism is will facilitate the more fully-orbed discussion later in the article.

Palamism was born out of controversy and has remained contentious to this day. St. Gregory Palamas was a monk who lived at the Holy Mountain of Mount Athos. He was involved in the spiritual practice of hesychasm which is a kind of prayer that seeks to experience the uncreated divine light of God. This practice came under fierce opposition from Barlaam, a monk from the "West" who accused the hesychasts of heresy. Palamas would go on to defend himself against these accusations, and his theology would be confirmed at the councils of Constantinople in 1341, 1347, and 1351. Palamas argued that the essence of God is part of the hypostases of the Trinity, but is transcendent and cannot be known. This facilitated both the preservation of the transcendence and mystery of God while also allowing creatures to participate in God without *becoming* God. The participation of creatures in God is not in God's essence, but rather his energies. These energies are God's 'single, eternal, creative Act' (Bradshaw 2007: 238). They are unified with some being described as contingent, necessary, temporal, eternal, realities, activities, operations, and attributes of God. These are all acts of self-manifestation. Bradshaw, speaking generally, summarizes what the Eastern tradition is trying to emphasize: 'The East has no concept of God. It views God not as an essence to be grasped intellectually, but as a personal reality to be

known through His acts, and above all by oneself sharing in those acts' (Bradshaw 2007: 275). He goes onto claim that the biggest difference marker between East and West is the emphasis on synergism within the Eastern tradition. Within Staniloae's theology, the Palamite distinction is necessary as he seeks to find a way to argue for the deification of creation while maintaining the distinction between Creator and creature as well as balancing both God's transcendence and immanence. As we will see, this is one of Staniloae's most profound issues with the Protestant notion of justification.

As stated above, Staniloae understands deification to be the *telos* of creation regardless of humanity's fall. Emil Bartos argues, 'deification is seen as the reason and purpose of creation, the world and man stay in an interdependence and reciprocity…'(Bartos 1999: 11). Deification is the central axiom of Staniloae's thought and his whole theology revolves around it. To communicate this, Staniloae creatively develops his concept of the "World as a Gift" which is a central theme throughout his thought where reciprocity and interdependence operate as the central motifs within his framework (Simpson 2023: 96).[1] Bartos identifies three core relationships that exist within Staniloae's thought: God-creation, world-humanity, and humanity-God. Each of these relationships possesses its own type of "gift-exchange" where reciprocity is fundamental to these relationships functioning properly.

What does Staniloae mean by "the world?" According to Ivana Noble, Staniloae understands the world to be, 'both cosmic nature and humanity. According to him it is impossible to separate the two. Both are designed for divine glory. But each can contribute something specific…' (Noble 2007: 192). But the gift of the world is not just something to be merely donated. It is something to be acknowledged, received, and reciprocated. The purpose of the gift of the world is to draw all of creation to Himself. Staniloae writes:

> In essence, through the gift of the world God desires to make himself known to man in love. Therefore, man must rise above the gifts he has received to God who gave them. The gift, understood as a sign of the love of one person for another, is by its very nature destined to be transcended in favor of the one who has given it. In a way, the gift is the thing which the person who has given it renounces out of love for the person to whom he gives it (Staniloae 2000: 24).

1 It is worth noting that Staniloae's paradigm of the "World as Gift" pre-dates many of the more contemporary conversations surrounding "gift" and "gift-giving" in theology and biblical studies.

The gift of the world is given so that humanity may look beyond the gift to see that it has been given by God. This requires humanity to acknowledge the world and its character as a gift, and is then obligated to give back to God.

The world also retains a pedagogical role in the deification of humanity. Potentiality is a key characteristic of Staniloae's thought. For example, the world has the potential to lead humanity to the Giver or lead humanity away. Humanity has the potential to recognize the Giver and his gifts or refuse them (Staniloae/Clark 2012: 7-8). This reflects why the underlying role of synergism is so important to Staniloae's thought and why reciprocity is so central for him. This emphasis on synergism is reflected in what Staniloae calls the "complete dialogue of the gift." This involves three parts: 1) giving; 2) receiving; 3) returning. As stated above, God gives humanity the world, and it is humanity's responsibility to properly acknowledge the world as a gift and not an ultimate end in itself. Subsequently, it is humanity's responsibility to cooperate with God and offer up the world back to God. Staniloae imagines this in a cosmic frame where the natural world is bound up with humanity's salvation. Noble writes that for Staniloae, 'the human being cannot exist apart from his relationship with nature. The three together make an inseparable whole: *I-Thou-Nature*…The human being can experience God both in himself and in relation to nature' (Noble 2007: 193). Staniloae is adamant that one cannot bracket off nature when speaking of our relationship with God as we always experience God in and through the world. The natural, 'must come into all our relationships, it is a gift to us and we are bound to it reciprocally. We cannot become God's partners without nature' (Noble 2007: 194). While God's plan of salvation is primarily directed towards humanity (the macrocosm of all creation), this can never be a humanity that is spoken of as abstracted from nature which Staniloae accuses some strands of Western Christianity of doing (Staniloae 1998: 1).

By briefly exploring some of the main contours of Staniloae's thought, I have laid the initial foundation for his criticisms against the Protestant doctrine of justification. The themes of interdependence, potentiality, and cooperation assist Staniloae in presenting a picture of humanity's relationship with God that is dynamic and ever-evolving. In this next section I am going to draw upon Staniloae to make transparent Bavinck's misunderstandings regarding Palamism. Furthermore, I will provide context to Staniloae's claims to solidify our understanding of his framework.

Bavinck and Palamism

As stated at the beginning of this essay Bavinck is dismissive of the Palamite tradition. Bintsarovskyi notes that Bavinck's perceptions of Eastern Orthodoxy were 'typical for a Western theologian of his time' (Bintsarovskyi 2021: 258-259). Bavinck was

critical of any differentiation between 'God's essence and attributes' (Bintsarovskyi 2021: 256). He rejected the Palamite Council of Constantinople and believed it as having 'approved the doctrine of an uncreated divine light that is distinct from the divine being' (Bavinck 2004: 253). According to Bintsarovskyi, Bavinck believes that the Cappodocian argument that there exists no name to communicate God's essence but that 'there are named and properties through which we receive a certain likeness of God…immediately begged the question of what belongs to the essence and what to the attributes' and that this is a departure from 'sound theology' (Bintsarovskyi 2021: 256). It is reasonable to assume that Bavinck is echoing the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* which states:

> Furthermore, although this essence applies to God in an absolute way so that there is not one thing and another thing in God, but all what He is, is his essence, we nevertheless rightly assign to Him various properties or attributes…suggesting that there is a difference between essence and properties and between the properties themselves. Yet this is not a real distinction, but a relationship or rational distinction… (Velde and Famer 2015-2016: 164-165).[2]

This is perhaps why the Palamite distinction is unpalatable to Bavinck, and might partially explain his belief that Palamism is a kind of "emanation theory" which compromises the simplicity of God and humanity's ability to know God. Bavinck is not alone in this assessment. More recently, Rowan Williams argues that this distinction creates two eternal realities in God: 1) God *in se* (God as he is in himself); 2) God as participated in by creatures. Williams argues that this is an obvious affront to the doctrine of divine simplicity and Williams does not see any way to unify these two realities (Williams 1977: 27-44).

For Bavinck, akin to Williams, it appears that his core objection is the perceived affront to divine simplicity and that these energies distinct from the divine essence imply "inferior deities" emanating from God (Bavinck 2004: 125). Furthermore, there is an epistemological issue at stake here of if the energies allow creatures to *know* God. But does Palamism understand the energies of God to be something other than God? Others such as Adonis Vidu, are more congenial toward the Palamite tradition's attempt to preserve divine simplicity through relegating 'to an ineffable domain.' Contra Williams, Vidu identifies the core of the problem not in divine simplicity, but in the Eastern refusal to trace the missions of the divine persons to the eternal processions (Vidu 2020: 73).

2 Gregory Parker makes this assertion given Bavinck's editorial work on the Leiden Synopsis at the beginning of his theological career (see H van den Belt and M de Vries-van Uden (2017) Herman Bavinck's Preface to the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*. *The Bavinck Review* 8:101-114, 105-106).

As we have seen, one reason why Palamism is seen by Staniloae to be integral to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* is that to participate in God's essence would blur the distinction between Creator and creature. Staniloae understands that the 'divine energies are nothing but the rays of the divine essence, shining from the three divine Persons' (Staniloae 2002: 374). As Ian McFarland states, 'while creatures cannot share in the divine *nature* (since if they were to do so, they would, by definition, become divine), they can participate in the divine *energies* without ceasing to be creatures' (McFarland 2019: 91). Contrary to many critics, this does *not* 'render the persons unknowable' (Butner 2016: 20). Furthermore, the essence can never be separated from the energies. The energies of God are enhypostatic and they do not possess a hypostasis of their own, nor are they subsistent or personal in themselves but only in their inseparability from the Father, Son, and Spirit (Butner 2016: 37). As Butner concludes: 'Simply put there is no essence apart from the energies, and thus the energies relate both to what God is *in se* and *pro nobis*. Consequently, when the deified know God in energy, they know God *in se* and *pro nobis*' (Butner 2016: 43). Staniloae would concur with Butner on these points. God can be known through his energies. He writes:

> Nevertheless, while speaking on the variety of the divine works, we can sometimes forget to observe that, through each of these operations, *it is the God*, who is one in being, who is at work…The operations, therefore, are nothing other than the attributes of God in motion — or God himself, the simple One…God himself in each of these operations or energies, simultaneously whole, active, and beyond operation or movement (Staniloae 1998: 125).

While Staniloae would maintain that we really can come to know God in his energies, he still argues that they are not completely 'identical with his being itself' (Staniloae 1998: 127). For Staniloae, this distinction is the best way to preserve God's transcendence and freedom while at the same time maintaining his immanence and personal involvement among creatures. It is important to note that Staniloae understands this to be a *real* distinction and not just a conceptual tool. He writes:

> Deification is the passing of man from created things to the uncreated, to the level of divine energies. Man partakes of these, not of the divine essence. So it is understood how man assimilates more and more of the divine energies, without this assimilation ever ending, since he will never assimilate their source itself (Staniloae 2002: 373).

The deified will participate in God forever, never exhausting in their communion with God. Staniloae provides a helpful way of understanding this is through the apophatic element in his theological anthropology. He argues that we can know a

person by their energies — that is, by their actions. But we can never know a person in their totality, i.e. their essence (Staniloae/Clark 2012: 2, 10). He writes that the 'human subject is also apophatic and is not exhausted by its acts, for its acts (or its energies) are not one with its essence, as is true in the case of objects' (Staniloae 1998: 101). In other words, there is a sense in which we can know, engage, and participate in one another, but we can never know a person in their totality. He continues to say that this is 'supremely true for God, for not only does He transcend all things as Source of them all, but is also above all the powers He manifests or wishes to manifest' (Staniloae 1998: 101).

The purpose of this section is not to settle this ongoing debate, however, from this small exploration we can see that Palamism cannot be simply dismissed as an "emanation theory" nor does it seek to posit "inferior deities." Much of this controversy may come down to a difference in genre as suggested by Kallistos Ware. According to Ware, the Greek Fathers are not attempting to expound a rational theology, much like in the West, but rather holding to the tradition of expanding upon their own experiences with the Divine and Holy Scripture (Ware 1975: 125-136).

This section has sought to display why Staniloae holds closely to the Palamite distinction. It allows him to paint a picture of the creature's relationship with God that is dynamic, cooperative, and deeply personal. Furthermore, it enables us to further comprehend why Staniloae strongly critiques Protestant soteriology in the following section, enhancing our understanding of the rationale behind his assertions. It also identified, alongside of Bintsarovskyi, a shortcoming in Bavinck's grasp of Eastern Orthodox theology in his fundamental misunderstanding of the doctrine.

Staniloae: Some Misunderstandings

Too often, Staniloae makes broad, sweeping generalizations against Western theology that show a lack of serious engagement and understanding. For this article, we will restrict our considerations to Protestantism. Kallistos Ware notes Staniloae's '*critique* of Roman Catholic, Protestant or radical theology may at times appear sweeping and schematic, behind his strictures there is a positive intent' (Ware 1998: xxiv). Andrew Louth writes in his essay on Staniloae that there exists 'little real engagement with Western theology in Fr. Dumitru's dogmatics, although there is a readiness to point out its deficiencies' (Louth 1997: 261). A short example of this lack of understanding is noted by Danut Manastireanu where Staniloae 'concludes syllogistically and in a catastrophic manner that a denial of sacramental priesthood would lead Protestant believers to weaken the visible dimension of the Church and even to deny the incarnation of Christ.'[3] It is worth noting that Staniloae's target is often opaque

3 Manastireanu D 2012: 289. The passage he is referring to comes from Staniloae's *Orthodox Spirituality*: "Because Protestantism has not kept this image alive and active by the use of

when he is criticizing Protestantism. Alternatively, he often collapses all of Protestantism into a singular figure. For example, Staniloae repeatedly takes sharp aim at the theology of Rudolph Bultmann but then conflates this with the broader Protestant tradition. He states that, 'The Protestant rationalist theology, have no knowledge of this spiritual arena, declares Christ's miracles as mythological imaginations' (Staniloae 2011: 125). We may conclude from these brief examples that Staniloae's criticisms of Protestantism were often narrow and unfair.[4] In the following sections I would like to highlight some of Staniloae's disapprovals of the Protestant doctrine of justification against the historic and theological throught of Bavinck.

As we have seen, Staniloae's theology revolves around the idea of *theosis*. Staniloae believes deification to be a processual, cooperative process whereby the human person comes to infinitely participate in the divine energies of God. This cooperation and reciprocation is foundational for Staniloae's understanding of the divine-human relationship. Staniloae takes issue with the Protestant doctrine of justification because he believes at its core, it requires no cooperation on the part of the human subject whereby the human subject is rendered nothing more than a passive "log" (Staniloae x2013: 88-89). For example, Staniloae accuses Protestantism to effect no real change in the human sinner:

> …in Protestantism justification has no consequence in the human person's life. He knows that he is justified — that is, forgiven — on account of the atonement that Christ offered on his behalf, but he continues to be as he formerly was: a sinner entirely unchanged (Staniloae 2012: 121).

Here Staniloae is accusing the Protestant tradition of a kind of antinomianism where because one is justified and forgiven, there exists to real change in the sinner. Staniloae characterizes Protestant salvation as external, juridical, and static whereby 'man is forgiven without being transformed' (Staniloae 2011: 71). This, as Staniloae argues, is because 'The human person's salvation is no longer considered to have been effected through his continuous relationship with Christ but through a value paid through a past act against the people's continuous sins' (Staniloae 2012: 123). Staniloae even goes so far as to connect the veneration of the saints to the effectual nature of justification:

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icons and the imitation of its various stages in the sacraments, and has thereby retained only the word cut off from the practical activity of the image, it comes as no surprise that some Protestant theologians have even espoused the idea of replacing the fundamental image itself, because they consider the incarnation of the Son of God to be a pure myth." (139)

4 Radu Bordeianu argues that while Staniloae's tone towards the Western Church was often "polemical" at times, he gradually became more open towards the Western Church as evidenced by his adoption of the three offices of Christ (Bordeianu 2013: 241-242; 253).

> The fact that they do not like for us to venerate and honor them does not mean we should not do this. We honor them in order to praise Christ, whose work has proved its efficacy through its fruitfulness in them; we honor them by honoring the criterion to which we too are supposed to act. By refusing to honor the saints, the Protestant world manifests a total disbelief that the human person is able to make Christ's work fruitful and visible, a disbelief that it is everyone's duty to cooperate with Christ so that His work may bear fruit in them (Staniloae 2013: 88).

Staniloae identifies that the anthropological pessimism of Protestantism does not allow for the transformation of the human believer. He then argues that this anthropological pessimism also calls into question Christ's efficacy (Staniloae 2013: 88-89). This leads him to conclude that within Protestantism, 'human salvation is not achieved without an active encounter between God and man, through an act of power from God upon man as an object, as a "log" either in this life or the life to come. It is impossible that the total devaluation of the human person, as God's creature does not reflect on God as well' (Staniloae 2013: 88-89). In fact, Staniloae sees the root cause being an equivocal notion of freedom whereby human free-will and divine grace meet and one must conquer the other. He writes, 'In the case when freedom conquers, this is decided by freedom for the good; in the case when grace conquers, freedom somehow led to the good by force (predestination). In either case true cooperation is not achieved…' (Staniloae 2012: 109). Staniloae characterizes predestination as reducing 'salvation to the level of manipulating human beings as if they were objects' (Staniloae 2012: 106). Staniloae sees Protestantism as possessing a lack of value of the human person. In rendering human persons unable to cooperate with God in any meaningful way, God is treating humans as objects. For Staniloae this means there can be no active communion in this unilateral relationship.

Staniloae sees Protestantism as promoting a kind of antinomianism and anthropological pessimism. The core issue Staniloae appears to have is the inability for humanity to cooperate with God due to the destructive forces sin has wrought on humanity according to Protestantism. To address Staniloae's core concerns, we would do well to explore Bavinck's understanding of the relation between morality and faith in Protestant theology and the intimate relation between justification and sanctification. Just as Bavinck misunderstood a key component of Eastern Orthodox theology, this will help us to see a mutual misunderstanding by Staniloae.

Notably, Bavinck perceives his own Reformed theology to be neither antinomian nor devolving into anthropological pessimism. Bavinck opposes both of these tenants in his 1892 speech "The Influence of the Protestant Reformation" at the fifth general council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches in Toronto, Canada (Bavinck 1892:

1-19).[5] Therein Bavinck claims the reformation (and therefore by proxy Reformed theology) undoubtedly elevated the religious and moral education of the nations and this rests for him on the presupposition that the Reformation was a 'religio-ethical movement' (Bavinck 1892: 3,5). As such, Protestants on account of their theology were "impelled" to a "radical change" in which individuals partake in salvation "by a personal faith" (Bavinck 1892: 6-7). Bavinck contrasts his account with Rome which proves elucidating for his understanding of Protestant theology, he writes:

> [For Rome] Religion is a personal relation of man to God. Therefore of course all meritorious service or wage service is removed from religion. There are no good works and no penances, which merit salvation. The relations between religion and morality are essentially changed and inverted. With Rome a certain measure of morality of holiness and good works precedes communion with God. The certainty of salvation is here always undecided, it is guessed at, but never known, there is no room for the triumphant praise and thanksgiving of faith. But among Protestants religion is no longer the observance of ecclesiastical commandments and ceremonies, but a disposition, or better still an objective relation to God; which though not separable from is yet independent from the moral condition of the heart, and can therefore exist before the latter. And the certainty of salvation is therefore given, a priori, in and with faith, fixed and reliable, not originating in good works, but itself the cause and origin of a holy life… He possesses [salvation] perfectly and surely in his Savior and Lord. And from the relation to God, restored in Christ, he receives the desire and the power to do good works (Bavinck 1892: 7).

A singular point immediately stands out from Bavinck's narrative – that is, resting on faith he believes Protestant theology compels people toward a holy works and indeed good deeds rather than moral apathy. Bavinck goes on, in this same speech, that such a holy life is built on the one "organic" law with the 'entire moral life under the discipline of the law' (Bavinck 1892: 8, 17).

In case, one presumes Bavinck to staking his claim on Lutheran rather than Calvinist soil, it must be added that he believed the religious and ethical influence of the Reformation was felt 'most powerfully and purely observable… among Calvinistic' nations (Bavinck 1892: 14). Bavinck rattles off several reasons why this is so: (1) The Calvinist 'no peace, before it found the eternal, in and behind the temporal'; (2) The Calvinist worldview 'sees everything "*sub specie aeternitatis*" broad and wide and far'; in line with this, (3) the Calvinist perceives all things — but especially the religious life — as under the sovereignty of God; and finally, the Calvinist 'recognizes

5 I am indebted to Gregory Parker Jr. for his personal transcription of Bavinck's speech.

in himself and in all creatures nothing but instruments, in the Divine hand' (Bavinck 1892: 14-16). In summation, Bavinck writes:

> The Calvinist, therefore, is not satisfied when he is personally reconciled with God and assured of His salvation; his work begins then in dead earnest, and he becomes a co-worker with God. For the Word of God is not only the fountain of the truth of salvation, [17] but but also the norm of the whole life; not only glad tidings of salvation for the soul, but also for the body and for the entire world. The Reformed believer continues therefore "*ad extra*" that reformation, began with himself and in his own heart. The conversion of his soul is not aim and end, but the beginning and starting point of his new life. He is therefore active and aggressive, and hates all false conservatism. The family and the school, the Church and Church government, the State and society, art and science, all are fields which he has to work and to develop for the glory of God. The Swiss Reformation bore thus not only a religious, but also an ethical social and political character (Bavinck 1892: 16-17).

From the preceding it is hard to gather a vision of Protestant theology as antinomian and anthropological pessimistic as characterized by Staniloae. Nonetheless, we might further clarify Bavinck's position by turning to the theology that undergirds these historical claims, in this case by elucidating the relationship between justification and sanctification.

Bavinck argues that while distinct, justification and sanctification are 'inseparably linked' (Bavinck 2022: 148). As James Eglinton notes, 'Bavinck positions himself against both antinomianism and perfectionism' (Eglinton 2014: 180). Eglinton argues that Bavinck's "schema" sees the Christian life as caught between both an objective justification and a subjective sanctification (Eglinton 2014: 181). Eglinton writes, 'Sanctification, as such, concerns dual realities — one known and declared by God, the other incrementally discovered by the Christian' (Eglinton 2014: 181). According to Bavinck, justification frees the Christian from his guilt, while sanctification frees the Christian from the 'stain of sin' (Bavinck 2022: 153). In justification the human's consciousness is transformed and in sanctification 'his being is changed' (Bavinck, 2022, 152). As we have seen, Staniloae understands the Protestant schema of salvation to be one where no real transformation occurs in the Christian. Contra Staniloae, Bavinck would argue that the holiness conferred on the believer comes with a 'costly obligation' (Bavinck 2022: 154). Bavinck argues that the work of sanctification is only possible because of God.

This is not unlike Staniloae when he states that 'the basis for the possibility of our cooperation is arranged on high; it is the grace of Christ' (Staniloae 2002: 61). For Bavinck, 'grace does not destroy nature but restores it' (Bavinck 2022: 155). This

enables Christians to cooperate with God. Bavinck explains that 'God does not compel them but acts with man in a reasonable manner. He does not make them passive in a false sense; but through his promises and exhortations, he stirs them to walk in the good deeds he has prepared for them' (Bavinck 2022: 160; see also Bavinck 2021: 14). This certainly does not seem like a theology that denigrates the human person to the point of an inability to cooperate with God. Importantly, for Bavinck this cooperation is not meritorious, but one entirely gifted and guided by the Triune God. Through Bavinck's emphasis on both passive and active sanctification, this also makes it hard to see how Staniloae's claim of a lack of transformation in Protestantism holds up. The human is both passive (receives all things from God) and active (enlivened by the Spirit lives unto God). Indeed, 'faith is not only a receiving organ, but also an active force. The faith which justifies and saves is not a dead faith, but a living one' (Bavinck 1956: 484).

This is also reflected in Bavinck's understanding of the nature of theology. Gregory Parker argues that Bavinck primarily understands the relationship between dogmatics and ethics through the lens of Romans 11:36.[6] Parker argues that for Bavinck, 'Dogmatics, *theological* thinking, reflects on God's descent towards man. All things are "from" God. Both dogmatics and ethics conspire in acknowledging that all regenerate activity occurs "through" God. Ethics, *theological* loving, ascends back "to" God' (Parker 2022: 193). We see this idea echoed in Bavinck's articulation of Calvinist theology in his 1892 speech, where he summarizes the Christian worldview through Romans 11:36 (Bavinck 1892: 15).

However, Staniloae's main point of critique is that predestination and the notion of irresistible grace render the human person in the schema of salvation to that of an object. He writes contra Protestantism, 'Being offered to all in the Church, the working of the Spirit or the grace of Christ, because Christ dwells in her with His body, does not force the human person's freedom; that is, it does not work irresistibly, forcing the human person to receive it and to be saved against his will, with or without his cooperation' (Staniloae 2012: 105). This may be where both Staniloae and Bavinck come to a conversational impasse due to their differences along traditional theological lines.

However, Staniloae's charge against Protestantism that it promotes a kind of antinomianism and does not afford any place for the human believer to work with God does not hold weight in Bavinck's understanding of justification and sanctification or his historical understanding of the Protestant, we might even say Calvinist reformation. Especially given Bavinck's repeated denouncements elsewhere against antinomianism (see for example, Bavinck 1956: 484-494). As we have seen, Bavinck affords

6 'For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen' (Romans 11:36 NRSV).

a high place for human responsibility which allows him to state clearly that "Sanctification is a work of God, but it is intended to become a work in which the believers themselves work together in the power of God" (Bavinck 2022: 154). For Bavinck, it is because of the love shown to the Christian that they are obligated and indeed called to live a life of holiness and continual transformation.

Conclusion

Many of Staniloae's objections to Protestantism are no doubt often polemic and misguided. However, by using Staniloae to respond to some of Bavinck's objections to Palamism, I was able to bring into focus some of the rationales behind Staniloae's criticisms. Staniloae holds deeply to Palamism because it allows him to expound a deeply personal, dynamic, and ever-evolving relationship between the human and the Divine where synergy, or cooperation lie at the heart of this relationship. For him, the essence/energies distinction is essential to upholding this.

In Staniloae's eyes, "Protestantism" promotes an understanding of the Divine-human relationship that is strictly unilateral whereby the human subject is made an object to be acted upon at will by God. Staniloae believes the human subject within the Protestant framework is unable to cooperate with God and thus no real transformation is possible. But in our exploration of Bavinck's conceptions of both justification and sanctification it becomes quickly apparent that Staniloae's accusations do not hold weight. A nuanced understanding of at least one sub-genre within Protestant theology identifies that Bavinck is not a great target for Staniloae's critiques. Bavinck is deeply concerned with the responsibility and obligations of the Christian believer.

As I have noted, due to theological differences, there will exist certain impasses where Bavinck and Staniloae cannot agree due to their metaphysical assumptions and starting points. However, parallels do exist between Bavinck and Staniloae. Namely, that communion with God has always been God's intention for creation whether the Fall had occurred or not.

We might echo Kallistos Ware that many of these impasses come down to a "difference in genre" when it comes to theological inquiry. Alongside, Bintsarovskyi, this articles opens the conversation to further dialogue between neo-Calvinism and Eastern Orthodox theology. Future explorations of parallels between Staniloae and Bavinck might seek to apply Staniloae's "complete dialogue of the gift" framework towards future ecumenical dialogue. We might see different theological traditions offering up their own "theological gifts" to be received and reciprocated by others in mutual dialogue.

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