

About the Unity and Unicity of the Christian Church

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Abstract:

This present article stressed the importance of unity and uniqueness of the Church founded by Christ. In orthodox doctrine the Church is a theantropic (theandric) community and institution. Church is a presence and extension of Christ the God-Man in history and humanity through supernatural divine Revelation, and wholeness of life of the Holy Spirit in humanity. In the theological Orthodox space, unity and communion is strictly related to the presence of the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ, which by the activity of the grace of the Holy Spirit creates and conveys to the members of the Church the state of unity emanating from the Father's will, and so the saving truth is known and appropriated. An essential role in sustaining and maintaining Christian unity lies in the unity and uniqueness of faith which together with the sacraments represent the strength and resistance of the Orthodox Church to the division, but also to the means of growth in time, as shown by its history starting from the communities in Jerusalem and stretches "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1,8). This study brings to the forefront the arguments of Dogmatic Theology that concern the unity of the faith and of the Church that is extremely necessary for Christian contemporary and ecumenical debate.

Keywords:

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Introduction

About the unity and uniqueness of the Church of the Holy Fathers, Christian writers and theologians have written throughout time highlighting its mysterious

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character. However, the subject will remain open for ever, because the mysterious, theandric body of Christ, namely the Church, cannot be included in rational concepts. For this reason we must understand that, without having an exhaustive definition of the Church, both the Church's parents and the theologians based on revelation have surprised the aspects of her life and mission in the world, identifying her ultimately with his social extension Jesus Christ in time and space. *"The mystery of the Church is not separated from the mystery of Christ, nor the mystery of Christ by the mystery of the Church ... These two Mysteries can be theoretically distinguished, but not in reality"*². Even if we cannot have a definition of the Church in the conceptual, synthetic dogmatic sense, ecclesiological teaching is embraced by the Pauline idea of the Mystical Body of Christ. *"Since the Church is the body of Christ, the proximal genre, if it were to be so, is the mystery of Christ "tes euseveias mysterion" (1 Timothy 3:16)"*³. The Church has a theandric, harsh, living and existential structure. In close connection with the Trinitarian and Christological dogma in patristic thinking, we find references to the Church's being, structure and attributes. The Church has a unique and unitary constitution that historically begins in Jerusalem in a catholic way and extends to the end of the ages. In order to express the uniqueness, unity, universality, communion and community of the Church, the terms of Greek and Latin *ecclesia* and *basilica*, respectively *basilica*, were used. Through the church it was understood both the place of worship and the communion and community achieved by joining with Christ those who believe in Him and are incorporated from baptism as members of the theandric sacramental body led by Him. From a lexical point of view, the Germanic people use for the Church the terms *kirche*, church, derived from the Greek *kiriaki*, a word that was used to designate the royal dwellings. Also in the French vocabulary (*église*), Italian (*chiesa*), Spanish (*iglesie*), the terms that define the Church come from Greek (ecclesiastical) and have the meaning of a church or a religious community. As Father Dumitru Stăniloae remarks to the Greeks and to the Romans, the word Church is defined in close connection with the day of the resurrection of the Dominican *kiriachi*. The same situation is also found in the Slavic peoples who use the term *vosresenie* – resurrection for the church. In the lexicon of the Romanian language, the term comes from the Latin word of the Basilica. Some philologists support an etymology specific to our language, the meaning of which is voiced by the archaic form, namely⁴.

² Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, IBMBOR, București 1997, p. 11

³ Pr. Conf. Dr. Nicolae MOȘOIU, *"Forma Bisericii"- perspectiva mistică a Părintelui Stăniloae asupra eclesiologiei*, in vol. "Repere exegetico-biblice în opera teologică a Părintelui Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae", Edit. Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2015, p. 115

⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, „*Biserica în sensul de locaș și de largă comuniune în Hristos*”, in: *Ortodoxia*, Nr. 3, Anul 1982, p. 336

In the dogmatic, biblical, patristic and synodal Theology, the Church is unique and united, theandric and sanctifying, catholic, apostolic and ecumenical. From the ecumenical perspective, the ecclesiological issue is of paramount importance. If we look confessional, we will notice that every Christian church (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Neoprotestant) claims to be the one and true Church. Taking into account these considerations, the present study will present the beings and attributes of the church. From the doctrinal point of view, according to the Pauline idea of the Christ body, the Church expresses existentialism in the unique and real sense, being in fact a communion of holiness inserted into the theandric community and institution of man's salvation and sanctification within the cultic place.

The connection of the Church with the Holy Trinity is fully realized through the Person and the Work of Christ. The Holy Trinity is present in the Church in the form of communion and community. Communion of the human with the divine begins in a theandric way through the Incarnation of Christ, and ends with the sacrifice of the Cross and His Resurrection from the dead. As a Christian community and theandric institution, communion, love and grace of God - the Holy Trinity with men, the Church enters history at Pentecost. These two aspects of communion and the divine-human community are essential to understanding its structure, being and attributes. Christ through the Church is unique and universal, that is, ontologically brings together all humanity, but at the same time remains the Way, the Truth and the Life in which man and creation are sanctified and acquire perfection.

On the grounds of divine revelation, the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 381) decided that the Church is: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic (Ninth). Its attributes, unity, holiness, sobornost and apostolicity are the consequence of its theandric constitution as the Body of Christ, extended over the ages, which presents it as the only divine-human institution founded for the salvation of man. These attributes are realities of pneumatological Christology manifested soteriologically.

1. The unity of the Church and the presence of Christ as a Pantocrator

The unity of the Church results from its quality of the sacramental body of Christ. The essence of unity is given by the presence of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit through which Christians are united to the sacramental relationship with Him, and form a community of holiness.

The unity of the Church, emanating from the love of the Holy Trinity (John 17:11), is poured out abundantly upon humanity in the Divine-Human Hypostasis of Christ, and by the Holy Spirit is permanently perpetuated by every Christian as well as by the entire ecclesial community (17,21). The unity of the Church reflects the communion of the Holy Trinity, based on its divine institution and the presence of Christ, who unites and consecrates the members of His body continuously. So, "if

there is one in Christ, it is a new creation" (II Corinthians 5:17) because he lives "in the tabernacle of God with men" (Revelation 21: 3).

The unity of the Church is the economic form of the presence of the Holy Trinity in the world, of the triumphal relationships and of the divine love that is at the basis of life through the merciful love of Christ⁵. That is why "*wherever Christ, there's unity, wherever is Christ, there is love that wants to embrace all in themselves and present them to the Father.*"⁶ The presence of Christ and the union with all believers in the same communion is developed by His threefold ministry by which he teaches, sanctifies and leads to salvation the Christian community. Pointing out the centrality of Christ in the Church, the Holy Apostle Paul asks rhetorically the Corinthians who were living in disunity, some saying, "Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1: 12-13).

The unity of the Church means keeping faith revealed as an expression of Christ's presence and plenary work in the world. Orthodox dogmatic faith is loyal to the teaching revealed and fulfilled by Christ (Matth. 5:17). The teaching of faith and the totality of the sacraments are the central elements of ecclesial unity and community (Ephesians 4: 4-6).

Orthodox faith, kept unchanged under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is continually deepened in the ecclesial dimension. Right faith implies the unity of the Church through the connection with Christ, living and personal, of every member of her made by the Holy Mysteries in general and the Holy Eucharist in particular. This relationship is mediated by the sacramental priesthood, holy, apostolic succession. Transmitted from generation to generation and unaltered, the teaching of faith was formulated, thoroughly and formally synthesized through the ecumenical and local synods, through the work of the sacramental priesthood of apostolic succession and the participation of the whole Church.

The church hierarchy, through charismatic investment and the divine origin that begins with Christ and the Holy Apostles, has the mission of transmitting, defending and preserving the righteous faith. Schism, breaking the episcopate of the apostolic college and of Christ or Christians by the ecclesial community means a loss of salvific gifts and graces⁷. The presence and work of the priesthood of Christ in every

⁵ Alain RIOU, *Le Monde et l'Eglise selon Maxime le Confesseur*, Beauchesne, Paris 1973, pp. 141;146

⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, Ed. cit., p. 121

⁷ Sfântul CIPRIAN, *De unitate ecclesia – despre unitatea Bisericii*, V,VI,VII, trad. de Prof. N. Chițescu, in col P.S.B., nr. 3, Ed. IBMBOR, București, pp. 437- 439

community, integrates the local church into the universal one, a theologically defined reality by the phrase: unity in diversity. The unity of the Church, the sacramental body of Christ, is accomplished by the unity of the Orthodox universal faith and the faithful tradition of the apostolic tradition, of the canonical hierarchy that administers the sacraments as works of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

2. Church Holiness - soteriological sacramental implications

The holiness of the Church springs from its divine constitution because it is the mysterious Body of Christ, its head and its fullness (1 Cor. 12: 27; Ephes. 1: 22-23, 4: 4-6, 1.10). Christ sacrifices grace to the members of the Church the holiness of His humanity sacrificed, raised and exalted on the right hand of the Father⁸. Thus, salvation cannot be gained by Christians without participating in the sanctifying icon of Christ. The state of holiness is achieved by the gracious life occasioned by the Holy Mysteries, which are the works and means in which the grace of the Holy Spirit unceasingly unites man with God. Holiness has a dynamic character; therefore, in the life of the Church there is an ongoing process of sanctification of believers and creation. Holiness is the natural state of the life of the Church; it is the fullness of its activity in the world, but also its reality and its purpose. Consequently, we cannot speak of the church without sanctity and without the saints, but only of religious assemblies as we actually find them among cults that claim to be called church. *„Husbands, have love for your wives, even as Christ had love for the church, and gave himself for it; So that he might make it holy, having made it clean with the washing of water by the word, And might take it for himself, a church full of glory, not having one mark or fold or any such thing; but that it might be holy and complete.”*(Ephesians 5: 25-27).

*„The sanctification of the Church, made through the blood of Christ, has been fulfilled by the Holy Spirit ... The Church is the house of God, just as our bodies are churches in which the Holy Spirit resides ... Life in the Church is a superior reality to which we participate and, through which we sanctify. Holiness is the essence of the spirit of the Church”*⁹. The Church is holy because in it the Holy Spirit dwells and works until the end of the age, pouring out divine grace through the Holy Mysteries and hierarchs. The mission of the Church in the world is to sanctify believers and all creation. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon says: *„Where the Church, there is the Holy Spirit and where is the Holy Spirit, there is the Church and all Grace”*¹⁰. Holiness is not only the purpose of the church but also the means necessary to achieve the goal. In this sense, the Church is totally infallible-holy and without blame. *“The holiness of the*

⁸Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru RADU, *Îndrumări misionare*, Ed. IBMBOR, București 1986, p. 348.

⁹Sergiu BULGAKOF, *Ortodoxia*, trad. de Nicolae Grosu, Sibiu, 1933, p. 120-121

¹⁰St. IRAENEUS, *Contra ereziilor*, Migne, PG, VII, col. 966

Church and its members derives from union with the body sanctified by obedience and sacrifice of the Lord. The holiness of the Church and its members is the form in which they show their close union with Christ, who has been sanctified by His sacrifice for us, being without sin already on the basis of the hypostatic union"¹¹.

As a form of the unity of the Church, holiness is regarded exclusively by graceful participation in the ongoing work of salvation by Christ for the faithful who form with Him a body, a community. Holiness is the reality and fruit of life in Christ: "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15: 5-6).

Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, is holy forever as the Son of God (Isaiah 6: 3). Holiness in the hypostasis of the Son of God is an attribute of the Divine Being, in which the human nature assumed in its entirety from incarnation and ontologically deified participates. The apostle of holiness is Christ, the God-Man (Luke 1: 35) "He whom the Father hath sanctified and sent him into the world" (John 10: 36) as the Savior, who through His union with humanity, in His body, the resurrection has filled humanity with holiness (Acts 4:24). In the transcendent plan of triumphal relations, holiness encompasses the entire Divine Being, without distinction or reference to the Person of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, because: „*The Son sees the Father not only as the one who gives birth to Him, but also as the One who proceeds to another, that is, the Spirit. But in His connection with That Other, or in the procession of Himself, the Father does not forget the Son as the Son, but by cursing Him has through him all the full wealth of His connection with the Son. By the Spirit, the Father lives in all riches, or perfection, His loving bond with the Son*"¹². In the immanent plan, in ad extra manifestation, the iconic third pours holiness through Christ into the Holy Spirit, man and creation through grace. The process of subjective transfiguration of believers through direct participation in the life of Christ has as a result the acquisition of the state of holiness or deification.

The quality of Christ as the sole ruler of the Church, the Eternal Archbishop, results from the fact that His deified humanity is the incandescent environment through which the grace of Pentecost spreads. Christ is fullness or everything in everything (Colos 2: 9, Ephes 1: 23). The usual way of acquiring holiness is that of church space. Christians are sanctified by union with Christ in the Holy Spirit because

¹¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, ed. cit. p. 127

¹² Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Purcederea Sfantului Duh de la Tatăl și relația Lui cu Fiul ca temei al îndumnezeirii și înfierii noastre*, in „Ortodoxia”, An. XXXI, Nr. 2, (1979), p. 591

they are in communion with God and share the fruits of his sacrifice¹³. This is the state of fulfillment of man, who as God's image (Gen. 1: 26-27) tends to reach the state of holiness or the resemblance to his prototype, Christ. Christian teaching, "although it affirms that holiness comes from God, that where holiness is God, yet acknowledged in our being an aspiration to holiness or communication between our subject and the divine subject in purity and capacity for it, an inward exhortation toward communion in purity and delicacy with the Absolute Subject; this access has been opened to us by the incarnation of the Son of God as a man, and by His dwelling in all that He wills to receive"¹⁴. Receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit involves personal union with God the Father through the Son, Christ. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the environment and circuit of love that descends from God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit so that the man through the Holy Spirit in union with the Son can bring the gift of love with the whole ecclesial community to God the Father. This is emphasized by the Apostle Paul, saying, "For God is the One who works in you, and that you desire and do according to His good will" (Philippians 2: 13). The sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit sent from the Father of Christ is also present and working through the sacraments of the Church for the faithful man who receives the deliverance of sins and advances on the path of holiness to the attainment of deification (John 3: 5; Acts 8: 16-17, 1 John 2: 20,27).

St. Basil the Great indicates that the Holy Spirit is a source of holiness and truth¹⁵, which is amplified as it advances in union with Christ within the church. The Holy Spirit descends divine grace over Christians who are worthy, proportionate to the faith and intensity of their participation in the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ updated in the Church. "The Holy Spirit is truly the place of the saints. And the saints are the right place for the Spirit, because they are offered as dwelling to God and become His temple"¹⁶. In the Church, Christians constantly share divine grace by participating in the saving work of Christ in progress until the end of the ages. "The cult of the saints in Orthodoxy is founded on two points of faith: a) on the belief that man, receiving the Sacraments of the Church, receives grace as the uncreated energy of God, and by this energy or work his human work itself can advance in a purified life of passions; and b) on the faith in the continuation of such a life in the eternal future existence"¹⁷. The incorporation of man into the Church preceded by the

¹³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ioan BRIA, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă*, București, 1994, p. 344.

¹⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. I, Ed. IBMBOR, București 1996, p.180

¹⁵ St. VASILE CEL MARE, *Despre St. Duh*, XIX, , trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin Cornițescu, și Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, in col. P.S.B., nr.12, Ed. IBMBOR, București 1988, p.62

¹⁶ St. VASILE CEL MARE, *Despre St. Duh*, XXVI, ed. cit., p. 77

¹⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Sfințenia în Ortodoxie*, in: *Ortodoxia*, Nr. 1, (1980), p. 33

confession of righteous faith, through Baptism, Mirror, and Eucharist, is the first form of personal reception of holiness. In the Church, holiness has a dynamic, living and personal character. Holiness as an active state means true union with Christ by grace, the realization of the likeness and the sight of the glory of God. This has universal implications, so the Christian synaxarion honors the saints from across the Church, from all over the world. Thus, local Christian communities, with their peculiarities, are included in the community of holiness of the universal Church.

The Church through the true presence of Christ in its cadres and in all the faithful is Holy and Sanctifying. But how is the presence of sinners in the Church explained? The most important role of the Church concerns precisely their correction. "There is no need for the sound doctor, but for the sick" (Matt 9:12). In parables, the Church is likened by Christ the Savior with the wheat field containing wheat and tares (Matthew 13: 24-30: 36-43), the net containing good and evil fish (Matt 13: 47-50), with the son's wedding the emperor to which guests are invited and those who do not have wedding clothes. Saint Paul the Apostle shows that the Church is like a house in which there are pots of honor and vessels of dishonesty (II Timothy 2:20). By its universal nature, the Church has the mission to sanctify man and the world, is the place of salvation, the bath of cleansing of sins, the laboratory of holiness that encompasses both the holy and the sinful. The presence of sinners in the Church does not affect its holiness sparked by Christ. In the Church, the sinful man is in a continuous tension that raises him from the state of sin through the Holy Mysteries in communion with God (1 John 1, 9). In this respect, Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae makes "*a distinction between the Church and its members, though, on the other hand, it encompasses them: it is made up of those who transcend and of what is achieved through transcendence. She is in her deep being, the holy spring for her members, having the holy Christ printed therein*"¹⁸. The Church's role is to sanctify all people, its members, freeing them from sins through the means available to them, namely, the sacraments and hierarchs. The Church is holy, not through the status of its members, but through its theandric constitution, through its sanctifying power and mission, and especially through its means established by Christ, the Holy Sacraments, with which man sanctifies, and man thus becomes the saint of creation.

3. Catholicity of the Church or communion in love through Christ

The church is a living, sovereign and community body. The presence of Christ in the Church and communion with all local churches is the basis of unity and sobornost. Through Christ's sovereignty, Christ extends with all salvific and sanctified gifts to each local Church and to every believer, which implies union with Him, by faith, by

¹⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. II, *ed.cit.*, p. 133

the holy priesthood of apostolic succession and by the Holy Mysteries. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15, 1-5). By sobornost is meant the universal Church, which includes all believers from all places, from all local and national churches. Thus, the Church is spread all over the earth but remains one in Christ as His Body. In Western theology, by the appropriation of the Church's Catholicity, it is understood in particular the geographical, spatial meaning of its spreading throughout the world. The sign of unity is the direct connection with the Pope, the vicar of Christ and the ruler of the Church. Because of this sense, in the theology of the Roman Catholic Church, the whole world is understood as a good that must be claimed because it belongs to the divorce, even if de facto it does not belong to it. The Orthodox Church, through sobornost or catholicity, first understands unity in diversity, catholicity and ecumenicity. The Romanian Orthodoxy, in order to define this appropriation of the Church, used from the beginning in the symbol of faith the term of Slavic origin "sobornia (țercov)", a word derived from the verb *sobirati* = to gather, reunite, form unit, assembly, or community¹⁹. "This term has a closer meaning to the meaning of the Catholic word. It expresses the synodal way of preserving the teaching of the Church at the episcopal level, but also the general communitarian way of practicing the doctrine. The whole Church is a permanent synod, a communion, convergence and permanent co-operation of all its members. For in this state only her spiritual assets are preserved and capitalized"²⁰.

In the same sense, Alexei S. Homiakov (1804-1860), translates the word *κατολική* through the clerical slave, highlighting the nature and role of synod and synodality. A. Homiakov defines the Church from its assembly or from the community of bishops, priests and the people as a whole. In this sense, he stands up against an ecclesiology (Roman Catholic) that divides the Church into: the teacher (the clergy) and the other obedient (the believers). In Greek terminology, the sobornost of the Church is generally defined by the term *oicumeniki* which expresses the universal character of the world's incarnation within its frameworks (Mark 15:15, Colossians 1:

¹⁹ See I. RĂMUREANU, *Sinodul al II-lea Ecumenic de la Constantinopol 381*, in *Studii Teologice*, nr. 5-6, 1969, pp. 327-341

²⁰Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. II, ed. cit., p. 133

23)²¹. "The Orthodox Church practiced from the beginning the assembly of bishops in synods (in Greek: *syn* = together, *send* = path, thus a common approach), expressing a common position in relation to the debated issues. The Synodal organization of the Church is also based on a spiritual reason, so that none of the people may consider themselves greater than others, even holy life if they have it (Matt. 20: 26-28)"²².

Father Ioan I. Ică, professor at the „Andrei Șaguna” Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu, in the introduction to the Orthodox Canon 1, shows that „the Greek adjective for word **catholic** cannot be adequately rendered either by the Latin **universalis**, or even by the Slavonic **synodal** derived from a radical meaning gathering. Catholic means the whole.... This **whole** has two simultaneous and complementary meanings: intensive, qualitative and extensive, quantitative, geographic. According to the first sense, the Church is **catholic** because it holds in it the totality of revelation and salvation, the fullness of grace and truth, and in this sense the Church is **catholic** the true Orthodox Church, opposed to heterodox, heretical communities, which are constituted on partial selections of the truth and his totality. According to the second meaning, the Church is **catholic** either the *Church all over the world*, or a local Church in communion with this Church ... For the Christian Church of the first millennium, **catholicity** and **orthodoxy** are identical and equally defining; as such, they should neither be hypostasized nor substantiated (in Orthodoxy or Catholicism) nor confessionalism, as happened in the second millennium when Orthodoxy was to exist only in the East, and Catholicism only in the West. True **orthodox** Christians are also **catholics**, and true **catholics** are obligatory **orthodox** too, because the Church is one, holy, Catholic-Orthodox, and apostolic. The transcription with «**th**» adopted here have the role of pointing out that it is the original meaning of the term, not the confessional one for which the catholic form is maintained here"²³. This doctrinal understanding we will find clearly stated in the teaching of the Church in the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, where the Orthodox Church through the indestructible connection with Christ present in its frames is the full **and unique form of the Church**, of the love of the Holy Trinity, possibly due to its theandric and sacramental structure.

In the soberness of the Church, we must see both the harsh life of all Christians in Christ and its mission to the world, as Saint Cyril of Jerusalem shows: "*The church is called the catholic because it is in all the world, from the edge of the earth to the*

²¹ To be seen Ioan G. COMAN, *Sinoadele ecumenice, expresie a universalității Bisericii*, in: *Studii Teologice*, nr. 1-2, (1967), pp. 3-5.

²² *Despre St. și Marele sinod Din Creta, 16-26 iunie 2016, Întrebarea 3*, Ed. Bazilica, București 2017, p. 8

²³ Arhid. Dr. Ioan I. ICĂ jr. *Introducere la Canonul Ortodoxiei, 1 Canonul apostolic al primelor secole*, vol. I, Edit. Deisis, Sibiu 2008, p. 6.

other: for it teaches in courage and without error all the dogmas, which must reach men's knowledge of things seen and unseen; because it brings to the human race true spirituality, leaders and leaders, learned and unlearned; because he heals every one of all kinds of sins committed by soul and body; finally because it has all the virtues anyway would be called in deeds, in words or in charismatic gifts"²⁴. The Orthodox Church does not understand the sobornost through uniformity resulting from obedience to administrative authority, but as a symphonic unity of communion that promotes the specificity of each Christian community. Therefore, the Orthodox Church is not alienated from the people and society and does not create antagonism between the Church and the State. In Orthodoxy, the connection of every church with the state, with the nation, is the force of resistance in history, through which the ecclesial place is integrated into the universe of the Body of Christ in the one Church. The authority of integrating each national church into Orthodoxy (Greek, Russian, Romanian, and Bulgarian) is that of Christ, and not the centralizing and administrative force exerted by a world ruler.

The chivalry, universality, or Catholicity of the Church is of an extensive nature, in which all people, namely those who united and unite with Christ through the Holy Mysteries, in opposition to the Jewish synagogue, restricted to the Jewish people, are embraced. The Apostle Paul points out that in the Church all believers participate indiscriminately in the same harsh life: "*where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.* (Col. 3:11). Thus, *catholicity* (or *sobornost*) is the appropriation of the Church from all places and always, which opposes the individuality practiced by the confessional historical churches broken by heresy by the Church of Christ. These communities have a local and transient existence, because they do not keep the revealed teaching of Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition, which is the basis of union with Christ. The *catholicity* or *sobornost* also has an intensive character emphasized by the Orthodox Church, in which the local, autocephalous churches as organic parts of the Body of Christ are in the same unity by joining with Christ by participating in the soteriological work of the ongoing Christ. "*In Orthodoxy, the sobornost was interpreted by solidarity, symphony, synthesis. Homiacov told him unanimously in freedom. It is, therefore, of very special religious ties between Christians who aspire to the full development of all the natural and supernatural gifts of the members of the Church in a union so close to each other that they form a single organic life - cleansing and sanctifying the minds and hearts of the Holy Spirit*"²⁵. The synodality of

²⁴ St. CHIRIL AL IERUSALIMULUI, *Cateheza* 18, 23, Migne, P. G. XXXIII, col. 1044

²⁵ Prof. N. CHIȚESCU, *Sobornicitatea Bisericii*, in *Sudii Teologice*, Nr. 3-4, An VII, 1955, p. 162

the Orthodox Church is in fact a concrete expression of it in the world; it is the work of just serving and leading the world to salvation.

In accordance with divine revelation, the Church is organized and led together. The highest forums are the holy synods, made up of bishops like the Apostolic Synod. For the entire Church, in its universality and its fullness, doctrinal, canonical and cultic judgments are formulated through ecumenical sessions, and for autocephalous churches, by local councils. *"The synod is the reflection and manifestation of the synodal nature of the Church"*²⁶.

The presence of Christ in the Church, through synodal authority, expresses his dignity as a leader and transmits through the Holy Spirit the truths of faith and the power of holiness. Catholicity is based on the teaching of faith formulated by the respective ecumenical councils, and exposed by dogmatic, canonical and cultic norms. In this sense, *"the Church is a multi-personal symphony in which each person as a note (musical) is linked to the other, because of the person of Christ who traverses them, co-ordinates them, unites them and gives them the direction just like a leitmotiv, and they contribute to the realization and revelation of this leitmotiv and the mutual valorization"*²⁷. Jesus Christ "The Way, Truth and Life" (John 14: 6) entrusted the transmission of the saving truth to the holy apostles and their descendants (John 20: 21-23, John 15,26). The Apostles have synodally organized the Church through the authority of divine grace, as the formula says, *" For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to put on you nothing more than these necessary things"* (Acts 15: 28). The Apostolic Synod of the year 49 is proof of the form of organization and leadership of the Orthodox Church. The authority of the Apostolic Synod is exerted for all Christendom, and therefore the judgments apply to all churches. Thus, synodality expresses a church in its universality (consensus ecclesiae), which presupposes both the clergy and the believers. In the Orthodox Church, synodal judgments not accepted by the whole ecclesial body remain ineffective and become null.

4. Apostolicity of the Church

Apostolicity is the attribute that shows that the Church has preserved the entire teaching of Christ as the Holy Apostles have communicated through the sacramental hierarchy of apostolic succession. Apostolicity contains two aspects: apostolic succession and apostolic Tradition. The special priesthood invested by Christ with the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit is one that keeps alive and unchanged the

²⁶ Bp. MAXIMOS AGHIORGOUSSIS, *Theological and historical aspects of conciliarity: some propositions for discussion*, in: *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, no. 24, 1979, p. 5

²⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Autoritatea Bisericii*, in *Studii Teologice*, an XVI, nr. 3-4 (1964), p. 186

doctrine of faith which is the guarantee of the unity and uniqueness of the Church (John 20: 21-23)²⁸. Through the uninterrupted succession of the sacramental power of the priesthood, Christ is present in the Church by the Holy Apostles and their descendants, bishops, priests and deacons (John 20: 21-23, Acts 20:28, 6: 1 Timothy 5:22, 3 , 8-12; James 5:14). *"The apostles were the first group of people who believed in Christ and testified of the Resurrection and therefore of His divinity. But they were also that group through which Christ made himself known to all generations that followed and follow, as it was, as God incarnate crucified and risen for our salvation and deification"*²⁹. The Apostle Paul points out that the Church "is built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, the corner stone being Christ" (Ephesians 2:20). The sacred grace of the priesthood received the Apostles directly from the Savior, the High Priest and the High Priest at the time of the breath of the Holy Spirit immediately after His resurrection from the dead (John 20: 21-22). St. Cyril Alexandrine, explaining the moment of consecration of the holy apostles, says: *"By immediately giving them His Spirit through the visible breath, the Lord sanctified them and consecrated the apostles as shepherds and teachers of the world, but also as icon-makers of the divine gods to believe utterly that the Holy Spirit (breathed by Him) is not alien to the Son, but is incompetent with Him, and He proceeds from the Father"*³⁰. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles, not to invest them in the stage of the priesthood of Christ, because it took place on the day of resurrection, but to give them the power of resurrection in order to update the saving work of Christ. Starting with Pentecost, the divine grace of the priesthood is a worker for the first community of the Church. Thus, by *"the filling of the Holy Spirit-at Pentecost-means that they were enlightened by the Spirit that kindled the charisma"*³¹. Apostolic charismata, as uncreated energies, in the theological definition, encompass the whole essence of divine grace, but it is not confused with the sanctifying and enlightening or the grace of redemption sent by Christ on the day of the fiftieth first Christians. Through the ordinances made by the Holy Apostles and their successors, the bishops, the hierarchical powers, defined in general by charisma, were transmitted. Some are received today by the priesthood of the church in the harvest succession. To this, the personal merit of the recipient generates in and for the ecclesial community the special or charismatic works necessary for the strengthening in the faith and the spiritual advancement. Charismata fortify the resistance and work of the Church in the

²⁸ Pr. Prof. Istodor TODORAN, *Apostoliceitatea Bisericii*, in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, an VII, (1962), nr. 3-6, p. 315.

²⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol. II, ed. cit. p.137

³⁰ St. CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEI, *Comentariu la Evanghelia după Ioan*, P.G. LXXIV, 709

³¹ St. IOAN HRISOSTOM, *Omilia XIII, Comentariu la Fapte*, P.G., LX, 116

world for a certain period. Hence, among the charisma, some are impersonal and are transmissible, equating with the hierarchical powers received through the harvest succession of priesthood members. Others, as extraordinary, supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, have a personal, non-transportable and temporary character, activated by the worship of certain persons (clergy and believers) to strengthen the faith and the Church of their time. The presence of the harps, especially in the Church of the first Christian century, is consistent with the needs of that time. Charismas were absolutely necessary for the strengthening and building of the Church. In the early period of Christianity, we encounter different charismas and gifts of the Holy Spirit that were of an extraordinary character, being non-transmissible and transient, for example, glossolalia (Acts 2), prophecy, miraculous work (Mark 16:17 , Matthew 10,20, Romans 12,6, I Timothy 4:14)³².

By performing the sacrament of the priesthood, the Apostles consecrated the 72 disciples and the bishops and priests ordained by them (Acts 2:42) in the Church. *“Apostolic succession and apostolic tradition are the two essential aspects of the Church's apostolic work. Both of them are involved by the apostolic succession or «signum» of the apostolic succession. By this, the dogmatic and canonical ecclesial episcopate and the ordained ministry in general are emphasized”*³³. With the graceful succession of the special priesthood, the teaching of faith received from Christ by the Apostles is kept, kept unaltered and preached by the sacramental hierarchy³⁴. *“Apostolicity means the bonding of generations to the whole tradition that comes from the Apostles, because it is the whole Revelation, but also in the grace and spirituality that comes unceasingly from the Spirit of Christ through them”*³⁵. Through the graceful succession in the mystery of the priesthood, the Church is the unique source of charismatic life and continues a Pentecost in the world of the Holy Spirit sent by Christ as Comforter and Savior.

5. The teaching about the Church in the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae

Father Professor and Academician Dumitru Stăniloae, the greatest Romanian theologian, uses the term church in particular when it refers to the only Church, namely the Orthodox. Of course, in an ecumenical spirit and in respect of other

³²To be seen: *Didahia XI-XIII*, in PSB. Nr. 1, pp. 30-31; Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru RADU, *Caracterul ecleziologic al Sfintelor Taine*, in *Ortodoxia*, an XXX, Nr. 1-2, (1979), pp. 331-338, Pr. Lect. Gheorghe Pufu, *Harismele în viața Bisericii primare*, in: *Glasul Bisericii*, LV, Nr. 1-4, (1999), pp. 94-102

³³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru RADU, *Caracterul ecleziologic...*, ed. cit., p. 331

³⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru RADU, *Caracterul ecleziologic...*, ed. cit., p. 335

³⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol.II, ed. cit. p.141

Christian confessions, they also call them churches considering them as “one-legged”, in the sense of Christian assemblies. These ideas, taken out of the studies of Father Stăniloae, and fragmentary understood some Christian thinkers to aversion to the theology of our great theologian, and especially to the ecumenical reality specific to the Orthodox Church.

The teaching about the Church in the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is included in: *Dogmatic Theology*, volumes I-III, EIBM., Bucharest 1996, 1997 (volume II part of ecclesiology); but also in *Ascetics and mysticism*; in the *Immortal Face of God*, vol. I, Publishing House of the Metropolitan of Oltenia, Craiova 1987; *The Holy Trinity or Origin was Love*, the Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1993; and especially in some studies, among which:

Sinteză eclesiologică, în: *Studii Teologice*, An. VII, 1955, nr. 5-6,

Legătura interioară între moartea și învierea Domnului, în: *Studii Teologice*, An. VIII, 1956, nr. 5-6;

Unitate și diversitate în tradiția ortodoxă, în: *Ortodoxia*, an. XXII, 1970, nr. 3,

Dumnezeiasca Euharistie în cele trei confesiuni, în: *Ortodoxia*, An V, Nr.1, (1953),

Biserica în sensul de lăcaș și de largă comuniune în Hristos, în: *Ortodoxia*, An. XXXIV, 1982, nr. 3,

Sobornicitate deschisă, în: *Ortodoxia*, nr.2, 1971

În problema intercomuniunii, în: *Ortodoxia*, an. XXIII, 1971, nr. 4,

Iconomia în Biserica Ortodoxă, în: *Ortodoxia*, an XV(1963), nr. 2,

Sfântul Duh în revelație și în Biserică, în: *Ortodoxia*, an. XXVI, 1974, nr. 2,

Sfințenia în Ortodoxie, în rev. *Ortodoxia*, Nr. 1, (1980),

Ființa Tainelor în cele trei confesiuni, în: *Ortodoxia*, an. VIII, 1956, nr. 1,

Comunitate prin iubire, în rev. „*Ortodoxia*, Nr. 1. (1963),

Transparența Bisericii în viața sacramentală, în: *Ortodoxia*, An. XXII, Nr. 4. (1970),

Mărturisirea păcatelor și pocăința în trecutul Bisericii, în: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, nr. 3 (1955),

Din aspectul sacramental al Bisericii, în: *Studii Teologice*, an. XVIII, 1966, nr. 9-10,

Natură și har în teologia bizantină, în: *Ortodoxia*, nr. 3/1974,

Relațiile treimice și viața Bisericii, în: *Ortodoxia*, an. XVI, 1964, nr.4,

Teologia Euharistiei, în: *Ortodoxia*, nr. 3, an. XXI(1969),

Biserica universală și sobornicească, în: *Ortodoxia*, nr. 2, An. XVIII, București 1966,

Sfântul Duh și sobornicitatea Bisericii, în: *Ortodoxia*, nr. 1, an. XIX, 1967,

Criteriile prezenței Sfântului Duh, în: *Studii Teologice*, An XIX, Nr. 3-4, (1976),

Sfânta Treime, structura supremei iubiri, în: *Studii Teologice*, An. XXII, Nr. 5-6, 1970,

Temeiurile teologice ale ierarhiei și ale sinodalității ei, în: *Studii Teologice*, an XXII, Nr. 3-4, 1970,

Mișcarea ecumenică și unitatea creștină în stadiul ei actual, în: *Ortodoxia*, Nr. 3-4, (1963)

To these are added other studies that contain aspects of ecclesiology presented in close connection with Christology, Pneumatology and Soteriology. In the theology of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the Church is understood to be the Body of Christ and the only body of the salvation of that man and of the sanctification of creation. There is a living bond between Christ, the Priesthood and the Church.

Father Stăniloae emphasizes the teaching of the extension of Christ's salvation only through the ecclesial framework or in the Church structure, which theandric has a unique and unitary structure, as follows: "(...) *the work of salvation, whose foundation was put in the human nature of Christ is accomplished in the form of the Church, which is our union with God and between us*"³⁶, or "*The Church is Christ as Full Revelation in Continuing His Efficiency. From Him He continues to enlighten and heat through the Holy Spirit in full not only to the end of time but in eternity, in and through the Church on earth and from heaven, in His body as a form of communication with Him and among them, of those who believe*"³⁷.

The church is the storehouse of divine revelation. Plenary revelation in Christ is not only a sum of teachings or truths, but also includes a new order of living grace in Christ, i.e., the fullness of the Christian truths and salvific graces present as a continuous permanence of Christ in the Church over all times and spaces. "*The church is founded by Christ, in which the revelation of acts and words culminated and focused. But Revelation continues to complement itself, in its part, about the form in which it can crystallize as a union of believers with Christ, that is, in the form of its essential, organically related structures to the content of Revelation, as its most appropriate application. After that, the Church remains the environment in which the Revelation is applied until the end of the world, and through which the saving power of Christ is given by the Holy Spirit as an environment in which some people ask and receive Christ and grow up in Him and conform to Him as a*"³⁸.

According to Rev. Professor Nicolae Moșoiu, from his study: "*The Form of the Church*" - *Father Stăniloae's mystical perspective on ecclesiology*, shows that «Christ Pascal» is present in human life in the form of the Church: "*the form of the Church is not biblical, but in the New Testament, morfi Teou* "What is the beginning in the form

³⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol. II, ed. cit. p.206

³⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol. I, ed. cit., p.51

³⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol. I, ed. cit., p.68

[of the form, ontological condition] (*morphe, broad form*) of God" (Philippians 2.6) The verb *morphoo* is once encountered in the New Testament: "Oh, my children, for whom I suffer again the pain of birth until Christ takes form, ontological condition, in you (*tekna mou, ous palin odino mehris ou morphothe Hristos en hymin*)" (Gal. 4: 19). For Christ to become possible in Christ, Christ must take form in man." That is why, naturally, the Church is the icon and image of God, the Holy Trinity which through Christ present within it shares to all Christians a single form and divine appointment (*thean morphen kai prosegrian*), that is, the existence and name of Christ³⁹.

The Church is one, unique and united. These attributes refer only to the Orthodox Church, which has a theandric structure through the community character because it represents the union of the Holy Trinity with the baptized people who form the community of Christians. "There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God, Father of all" (Ephesians 4: 6). The Orthodox Church, through its indestructible connection with Christ, is a real and total Church⁴⁰ compared to other Churches and denominations. For analytical correctness, we quote from Father Stăniloae's work in this regard, after which we will punctually point out the doctrinal ideas as we find them exhibited in various studies. "But then the question is: What are the other Christian denominations that do not confess such an intimate and working union of Christ integrated into them? We believe that they are non-clever churches, some closer to fullness, others farther apart. Contrary to Metropolitan Plato, who considers that all denominations are divides that have formed equal parts of the same Church, the spirit of Orthodox teaching and tradition requires us to consider that unorthodox confessions are divides that have formed in a certain relationship with Him, but do not share the light and the full power of the sun. In a way, therefore, the Church includes all the confessions separated from her because they could not completely separate from the Tradition present in her. In fact, the Church in the full sense of the word is only the Orthodox.... In a way, the whole creation is objectively framed within the rays of the same Pre-Carnal Logos, so in the phase of the pre-Christ Church, called to become the Church of Christ. Objectively and subjectively, all mankind of different beliefs know to some extent the Pre-Carnal Logos.... A certain church subsists today, apart from Christianity, since there are still ontological ties between the human forces between them and the divine Logos"⁴¹. In this key of Orthodox theology, Father Dumitru Stăniloae speaks about the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the

³⁹ Pr. Conf. Dr. Nicolae MOȘOIU, "Forma Bisericii" - perspectiva mistică a Părintelui Stăniloae asupra eclesiologiei, ed.cit., p. 115 și urm.

⁴⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Câteva trăsături caracteristice ale Ortodoxiei*, in: *Mitropolia Olteniei*, Nr. 7-8, Craiova, 1970 p. 730-742

⁴¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol. II, ed. cit., p.126

Anglican Church, the Old Catholic Churches, the Non-Chalcedonian, the Oriental, the Coptic, the Ethiopian, the Syrian Malabar, the Protestant Churches, the Greek Catholic Church Christian confessions⁴².

The Church has kept the revealed truth unchanged. Orthodox faith was the foundation of Christian life. The criterion that makes a church a true one is the reference to Christ, who remains present in her cadres. Faith revealed and transmitted unchanged, the hierarchical hierarchy of apostolic succession, and the work of Christ in the Holy Mysteries are the concrete sign that the Church is the depository of truth in its fullness. This theological doctrine was reaffirmed in June 16-26, 2016, at the Holy and Great Synod of Orthodox Churches in Crete: "*The Orthodox Church has the deep awareness that it is the Church of Christ, as they have understood, they confessed it and have lived with their profound faith the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers of the seven Ecumenical Councils, from the other synods of universal authority and all the Holy Fathers to our day. That is why the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church has greatly insisted on expressing the conviction that, on the basis of Orthodox faith alone, it is possible to restore Christian unity by returning the heterodox to the Orthodox Church*"⁴³.

Without neglecting the harsh reality and soteriological implications of the confessional historical Christian churches, Father Dumitru Stăniloae presents the Orthodox teaching by the comparative method, but does not enter into doctrinal speculations and does not deviate from Orthodox dogmatic thought, does not relativize Scriptural and patristic ecclesiological truth for the sake of dialogue ecumenical, but not against ecumenism. On the contrary, he participated in various ecumenical conferences and dialogues as a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church, factually allowing him to theologially express the doctrinal, canonical and cultic truth in this respect. "*The Ecumenical Movement has undoubted merit that it has brought into the lives of the Churches a deep concern for the issue of their unity and urged them to enter into dialogue for this purpose. But in the many ideas and expressions it has caused, they are somehow confusing and relativizing certainty of faith, sometimes from the most fundamental*"⁴⁴.

The Church is a living organism but also the harsh, sacramental and continual reality of God in history that goes through time to eternity. The Church is a continuous fifty through Christ and by the grace of the Holy Spirit present in her life and in union

⁴² Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Sinteză eclesiologicală*, in: *Studii Teologice*, Anul 1955, Nr. 5-6, p. 231-232

⁴³ *Despre St. și Marele sinod Din Creta, 16-26 iunie 2016, Întrebarea 36*, Edit. Bazilica, București 2017, pp. 30-31, To be seen *Întrebarea 38, 38*, pp. 36-39

⁴⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *În problema inter-comuniunii*, in: *Ortodoxia*, Anul 1971, Nr. 4, p. 561

with all Christians who through the sacraments share the saving and sanctified sacrifice of Christ⁴⁵.

Conclusions

In the Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, the Church is the theandric body that has the power of holiness through the presence and work of Christ in the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Church comprises and unites all that exists, that is, God the Holy Trinity, the holy angels, the saints, and all the Christians who are in communion with Christ through the Sacrament of Saint Baptism.

The church is a divine-human settlement contained in the eternal plan of God, which historically begins at fifty. Established by God, the Church has the attribute of being unique, unrepeatable, full, and eternal. Its foundation has been achieved gradually and through the work of Christ. Therefore, as the existential reality and unity of the human being with the divine in the aspect of communion, the Church begins with the Incarnation of Christ and continues with the Sacrifice, Resurrection and Ascension to Heaven, actions through which all the human wires assumed by Christ were freed from sin and passions, sanctified and deified. Pentecost or the descent of the Holy Spirit is the time when the Holy Apostles baptized the first men, and thus the first Christian community was created. From a historical point of view, the Church founded at fifty has spread all over the world, but it did not mean a division of it, because essentially it remained the single and unitary Body of Christ. According to Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, the criteria by which we define and identify the true Church are:

1. The teaching of one faith - the unity in the same faith;
2. The presence and work of the apostolic succession priesthood founded by Christ-
Unity in the same priesthood;
3. The presence and sacramental work of Christ-unity in the same Holy Mysteries.

All these criteria show that the Church is one and consequently unique. The ecclesial unity has an inner aspect made by Christ with every believer through the holy priesthood of apostolic succession, by faith and worship, by the Holy Mysteries and all the horns committed. The ecclesiastical unity also has an external aspect that includes the union of all churches and Christian communities spread all over the world.

The Unity of Faith of the priesthood and of the Holy Mysteries forms the tools and means by which the Christian community becomes a member of the Mysterious Body of Christ, and at the same time Christ remains present in it. In fact, ultimately,

⁴⁵ To be seen Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Criteriile prezenței Sfântului Duh*, in: *Studii Teologice*, An. XIX, 1967, nr. 3-4, pp. 103-127

the distinctive criterion of the true Church is the presence of Christ in communion with those who, through baptism, have acquired the quality of members of His Mystical Body and have been called Christians. For these reasons, we clearly understand that all people, communities, or historical churches that have not kept the unity of faith, priesthood, and sacraments are not part of the true Church. Heretics, schismatic, apostates have freely broken from the Church of Christ, and the Church has officially taken notice of this fact by excommunicating and anathematizing or defiling them.

The relationship between Christ, the Priesthood, the Holy Mysteries, and the believers is proof of the presence and work of the Church in the world. This presence is complete only in the Orthodox Church, which remained One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. So the attributes of the Church: unity, holiness, sobornost and apostolicity are correlative and cannot be understood separately because they express concretely in the world the Church of Christ identical in history through being and work with the Orthodox Church.

The Church is one and unitary through the true presence of Christ that gives it the divine quality and authority in matters of faith and leadership. The Church is holy and sanctifying because Christ in its frames pours the grace of the saving and sanctified Holy Spirit as the updating and personalization of his soteriological work.

The Church is catholic, ecumenical, or synodal in the historical form of the unity of all local, national churches of all times and places that preserve the same unity of Christ. This reality is understood by sobornost or synodality as the appropriation of the Church ever and everywhere.

The church is apostolic. The apostolicity of the Church is the identification of the church in the society of every time with the apostolic church and the only Church founded by Christ through time to eternity where truly the Body of Christ remains, through the unbroken historical bond of history.