

Unio mystica in Dumitru Stăniloae's and Jean Calvin's Theological Thinking

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This study compares the mystical theological approach specific to the Eastern Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae with the more speculative theological approach of the Reformed theologian John Calvin, in order to find a common ground for dialogue in the doctrine of unio mystica applied to Christology. The main outcome of this comparison comes from the combination of juridical theological elements of the Reformed approach with the participative elements, more commonly present in the Eastern Orthodox theology. In fact, the participative flavour dominates both theological discourses. The reason is found in the conviction that the believer's union with Christ is accomplished not only in His divinity, but also in His humanity; more precisely in the benefits of Christ's righteousness. Cautiously, both theologians believe that unio mystica implies participatio substantia. As such, this comparative study concludes how close the two theological perspectives are in seeing justification and sanctification as inseparable in applied soteriology.

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Historical records do not attest to direct contacts between Jean Calvin (1509–1564) and the Eastern Church. However, he was doubtlessly familiar with the Patristic roots of the Eastern tradition. Calvin frequently used the writings of the Greek Fathers, and encouraged the translation of Patristic writings. For Calvin, the Greek Fathers were no strangers, rather, they were part of the same Christian community, particularly in their support for a rigorous Christian life and for the fundamental doctrines¹. Nonetheless, some of the most important themes in the thinking of the Greek Fathers, such as spirituality, monasticism, asceticism, allegory, are absent from Calvin's own writings. When it comes to preaching the Word, though, Calvin seeks inspiration and motivation in John Chrysostom, who was the most frequently referenced of all Greek Fathers cited in Calvin's works². Whilst living

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¹ For example, in *Institutio* (I.13.17) Calvin references Gregory of Nazianzus, *De baptisate, Oratio* 40.41, to explain the relationship with the Trinity.

² The citations in Calvin, though not translated from the Greek originals, are from Origen, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus. Calvin rarely referenced arguments from the Church Fathers from before the Council of Nicea. See Irene Backus, "Calvin and the Greek Fathers", in: Robert J. Bast and Andrew C. Gow, *Continuity and Change: The Harvest of Late Medieval and Reformation History*, Brill 2000, pp. 253-276; Anthony N.S. Lane, *John Calvin, Student of the Church Fathers*, Edinburgh 1999.