

CHAPTER 23

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CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX CURRENTS ON THE TRINITY

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FOR contemporary Orthodox theology of the Trinity, the fourth century was clearly a definitive moment. It was then that Athanasius of Alexandria, more than any other theologian in the history of Christian thought up to that time, unequivocally declared the full divinity of the Son. The explicit declaration of the divinity of the Holy Spirit soon followed with the Cappadocian Fathers, especially Gregory of Nazianzus. Contemporary Orthodox theology stands within this tradition of thinking on God as Trinity in one significant way: It continues to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity as the Christian affirmation of a God whose being is love and freedom to be in communion with the not-God. The link between the doctrine of the Trinity and the affirmation of divine-human communion stands at the core of the three major trajectories in contemporary Orthodox theology: the sophiology of Sergii Bulgakov, the apophaticism of Vladimir Lossky, and the relational ontology of John Zizioulas.

SOPHIA! ORTHOI!

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The key to understanding Sergii Bulgakov's (1871–1945) Trinitarian theology is to decipher (literally) what he means by 'Sophia,' which has been the chief stumbling block to appreciating Bulgakov's work. The question that must be posed to Bulgakov is the following: Why is the concept of Sophia necessary for Trinitarian theology?

On the surface, Bulgakov's Trinitarian theology seems quite ordinary. First, he accepts the categories of *hypostasis* and *ousia* that were hammered out during the Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century. Second, he gives an Augustine-inspired interpretation of the Trinity as the Father's self-revelation in the Son, with the Holy Spirit being the love that unites the Father and the Son, and, as such, completes the self-revelation of the Father in the Son. The Cappadocians and Augustine made significant contributions

toward a theology of the Trinity, but they failed to elaborate further on the implications of the *homoousios*, which was necessary in order to account for conceptualizing the God-world relation in terms of communion. In both the Latin and the Greek forms of Trinitarian theology, the *homoousios* was interpreted in terms of the attributes common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and as that which constituted the unity of the Godhead. While Bulgakov does not necessarily dispute these understandings of the *homoousios*, they do not fully account for the God-world relation. It is, therefore, a particular understanding of the God-world relation in terms of communion that leads Bulgakov to claim that a further theological unpacking of the *homoousios* is needed (Bulgakov 1993: 25).

The key to understanding the link between *homoousios* and Sophia in Bulgakov lies in his notion of the self-revelation of God. The relation between the Father and the Son is the self-revelation of the Father in the Son. This self-revelation, however, is only complete in the Holy Spirit, who unites the Father and the Son. Bulgakov identifies the Father as ‘Divine Depth and Mystery, the Divine Subject of self-revelation’ (Bulgakov 2004: 359–93). If one were to bracket the self-revelation of God in the Son and in the Spirit, the Father is, then, the Absolute, which cannot even be called God, since the latter is a relative term. This Absolute is an unknowable, impenetrable mystery. It is in the self-revelation of the Father in the Son that the Father transcends this transcendence, or reveals his transcendence as immanence, and is immanent as revealed.

The Son, therefore, is the Image of the Father, the Word of the Father in which is contained all words; the ‘objective self-revelation’ (Bulgakov 1993: 43) of the Father, the Truth of the Father, and, as such, the divine content (Bulgakov 2008: 111). Bracketing now the person of the Holy Spirit, the Father knows the Son as the Image of the Father, and the Son knows the Father as that of which he is the perfect image. The relationship is one of mutual mirroring, but this mirroring is not yet the accomplished self-revelation of God.

Such a revelation is not a self-revelation unless it is actualized, and this actualization is accomplished in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is the love that unites the Father and the Son: The Father loves all that is revealed in the Son, and the Son returns this love kenotically as the hypostatic image of the Father (Bulgakov 2004: 63). According to Bulgakov, the self-revelation of the Father is not complete until the content that is revealed in the Son is actualized as life by the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the Holy Spirit, for Bulgakov, is the ‘spirit of truth’ and ‘represents the principle of reality. He transforms the world of ideas into a living and real essence’ (Bulgakov 1993: 48–9). The Trinity is thus the self-revelation of God to Godself, specifically, the self-revelation of the Father mediated through Godself, the revealing hypostases of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Word and the Glory of God, respectively. In what is a striking affinity with the Karl Barth of volume I, part I of the *Church Dogmatics*, Bulgakov identifies the Father as the revealing hypostasis, the Son as the revealed hypostasis, and the Holy Spirit as the revelation.

Where does Sophia fit into all this? In the end, Sophia is identified in Bulgakov’s system with the *ousia* of God hypostatized in the tri-hypostatic self-revelation of God; but, as such, it is no longer simply *ousia*. Bracketing the self-revelation of the Father in the

Son and the Spirit, Bulgakov argues that the Father remains ‘in himself undisclosed’; as undisclosed, he adds that ‘Sophia so far as the hypostasis of the Father is concerned, connotes predominantly Ousia—prior to its own revelation as Sophia’ (Bulgakov 1993: 41). It is only in the self-revelation of God in the Son and the Holy Spirit that all that God *is* is revealed, only in this self-revelation that all that God *is is*; there is an identification in Bulgakov between the self-revelation of God and the fullness of God’s existence. In this fullness of God’s existence, *ousia* is no longer an apophatic concept indicative of impenetrable mystery and transcendence of the Absolute; *ousia* is Sophia. Sophia, then, for Bulgakov, is God’s being as the self-revelation of the Father in the Son and the Holy Spirit. As Bulgakov states, ‘Sophia is Ousia as revealed’ (Bulgakov 1993: 54), or ‘Sophia is the revelation of the Son and the Holy Spirit, without separation and without confusion’ (Bulgakov 2004: 189), or ‘Divine Sophia is God’s *exhaustive* self-revelation, the fullness of divinity, and therefore has absolute content’ (Bulgakov 2002: 39).

As the very being of God it must necessarily, Bulgakov argues, refer to God’s relation to the world, and not simply to the intra-Trinitarian relations, because, for Bulgakov, the self-revelation of God in the Logos and the Holy Spirit is the revelation of all that God *is*, and included in all that God *is is* God’s relation to creation and humanity. Bulgakov is not arguing for the eternity of a creation that is restricted by time and space. If, however, all theology is grounded in the premise that God has revealed Godself as Creator and Redeemer, it is impossible for Bulgakov to conceive the thinking of God that does not include God existing as eternally relating to creation in some way. Accordingly, God’s self-revelation as the revelation of all that God *is is* also God’s being as love, and thus, as freedom to create and redeem what is not God, and, thus, as eternally relating to creation. It is for this reason that Bulgakov identifies Sophia with ‘the divine world’ and links Sophia with that famous Russian theological term *sobornost*; Sophia is the ‘cosmic *sobornost* of concrete all-unity in divine love’ (Bulgakov 2008: 103–4).

As the all-unity, Sophia is also identified with another famous Russian theological term, *bogochelovechestvo*, which is untranslatable, but has been rendered as Godmanhood, the humanity of God, or divine-humanity. The term originates with Vladimir Sergeevich Solov’ev (1853–1900), considered the father of Russian sophiology, whose influence on Bulgakov is without dispute (Valliere 2000). *Bogochelovechestvo* signifies in a more concrete way that God’s being as Trinitarian is always-already an eternal communion with humanity; and this always-already eternal communion with humanity becomes the foundation for God’s creation of the *anthropos* as the image of God, and of the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus. Creation in time and space is essentially a repetition of the being of God, which includes the self-revelation of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit. Bulgakov distinguishes between the divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia, with the divine Sophia being the foundation for the becoming of the world in time and space. As the soul of the world in time and space, it is the creaturely Sophia, the power of the world in its becoming toward union with the divine Sophia, which is divinization for Bulgakov—the unity of the divine and creaturely Sophia. Even though Sophia is about God’s relation to the world, it is identified with *bogochelovechestvo* for Bulgakov, because it is in and through humanity that world is divinizable (Bulgakov 1993: 14).

The notion of self-revelation of God is integral to Bulgakov's Trinitarian theology, and it is here that one sees the influence of German Idealism, although it should be made clear that Bulgakov was critical of Fichte, Shelling, and Hegel, especially what he saw as making creation constitutive of the being of God. The self-revelation of God gives an account of why three in God. He faults both Latin and Greek Christian thinkers for not engaging in a 'theological deduction of the Trinitarian dogma,' which means that '[t]he ontological necessity of precisely three, as a trinity, is not shown and not proved' (Bulgakov 2004: 33). Bulgakov adds that 'the trinity in Divinity in unity, as well as in the distinction of the three concrete hypostases, must be shown not only as a divinely revealed *fact*, valid by virtue of its facticity, but also as a *principle* owing to which Divinity is not a dyad, tetrad, etc., in general not a pagan Olympus, but precisely a trinity, exhausting itself in its fullness and self-enclosedness' (Bulgakov 2004: 7).

The proper way for thought to fathom this revealed fact is to begin with the assumption that God is Spirit; and it is here that one sees the more positive appropriation of German Idealism by Bulgakov. According to Bulgakov, '[i]t is proper to spirit to have a personal consciousness, a hypostasis, and a nature as its self-revelation, and the life of spirit consists in the living out of this personal self-revelation in its nature. In spirit are given: I, as personal self-consciousness; nature, as the source of its self-revelation; and revelation itself as the life of the spirit in its nature' (Bulgakov 2004: 61). If the logic of this phenomenology of spirit as personal self-consciousness is self-evident in the created realm, then it must also apply to God, who is Absolute Spirit. Since there are no limits or givens in God, there is no I in opposition to the not-I, as with created spirit; God is for Godself 'simultaneously I, thou, he, and therefore we and you' (Bulgakov 2004: 54). God's Trinitarian being as self-revelation is a perfect communion of persons who, in their three distinct subjectivities, are one subject. In the notion of the dynamism of the 'I' toward the other, Bulgakov was clearly influenced by Pavel Florensky, whose stamp is also evident in the Trinitarian theology of the well known Romanian theologian, Dumitru Staniloae (Florensky 1997; Staniloae 1998). The communion of persons of the Trinity is thus the self-revelation of the Absolute, which is the Father, and this communion/self-revelation is a kenotic event in so far as it is constituted by the mutual *kenosis* of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Bulgakov 2004: 179–80, 384).

Although it is no doubt questionable whether German Idealist notions of the self can be appropriated in Trinitarian theology, especially given postmodern criticism and modifications of idealist notions of the self, the problems with Bulgakov's so-called 'Trinitarian deduction' do not necessarily lead to the jettisoning of his sophiology. What Bulgakov saw most clearly was that the Christian conceptualization of God as Trinity was motivated not simply by a particular understanding of salvation, but was ultimately an attempt to account for how God *is* in such a way so as to be in communion with what is not-God, which is the real point of the Trinity. Bulgakov also saw clearly that, although much important work was done by Greek and Latin Christian thinkers, the categories of *ousia* and *hypostasis* could not, by themselves, do the work of conceptualizing God's being as one of communion with the not-God. Bulgakov introduces a third term, 'Sophia,' which he considers an amplification of *homoousios*, to

account for God's Trinitarian being as communion with the not-God, but he does so in a way that avoids the pitfalls of social Trinitarianism. One could argue that Bulgakov's Sophia has affinities with the Thomistic notion of *esse*. Bulgakov might argue, however, that *esse*, because arrived at philosophically, can only ground an analogy of being that makes a certain kind of knowledge possible, but not knowledge as communion. In terms of the analogy of being, Bulgakov is closer to Balthasar in attempting to conceptualize a Trinitarian understanding of being that would allow for communion. The real relevance and challenge of Bulgakov's notion of Sophia consists in how to think of the immanent Trinity in such a way that accounts for God's being as communion with the world, but does so without falling into the inevitable problems of social Trinitarianism. Bulgakov's single, retrievable insight is that a third term is needed, and this third term has something to do with Sophia.

AN APOPHATIC TRINITY

Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958) was also a Russian émigré to Paris, but his theology was self-consciously developed in opposition to that of Bulgakov. Their differences notwithstanding, both theologians saw the doctrine of the Trinity as rooted in the Orthodox axiom of divine-human communion. While Bulgakov understood theology's task as developing the ontological implications of the Orthodox affirmation of divine-human union in Christ, Lossky would argue, beginning with his early work on Dionysius the Areopagite, that the affirmation of divine-human communion demanded an apophatic approach to theology. In addition to Bulgakov, Lossky's other sparring partner, which he shared with the Catholic *nouvelle théologie* movement, was neo-scholasticism, which was not reticent in criticizing Gregory Palamas's understanding of the essence/energies distinction.

For Lossky, the Christian belief in God as Trinity is a fact revealed in the Incarnation of Christ, in whose person the divine and human natures are unified. In so far as this divine-human communion is a paradoxical union of two distinct ontological realities, the uncreated and the created, the uniting of Godself to humanity in the person of Jesus is a truth that reason is unable to prove or understand once given as a fact of revelation. The Incarnation is an antinomic truth, by which Lossky means the simultaneous affirmation of statements that are opposite or contradictory, the 'non-opposition of opposites', the opposition 'of contrary but equally true propositions'. Given his emphasis on antinomy, it is not quite accurate to accuse Lossky, as Michel René Barnes does, of appropriating uncritically Theodore de Régnon's interpretation that 'Latin philosophy envisages first the nature in itself and then proceeds to the expression; Greek philosophy envisages first the expression and then penetrates it to find the nature' (Lossky 1974: 26, 51; for a fuller response to Barnes, see Papanikolaou 2006: 181). In revealing the truth of God and the God-world relation as antinomic, the Incarnation demands an apophatic approach to theology. As Lossky puts it, '[t]he existence of an apophatic attitude... is

implied in the paradox of the Christian revelation' (Lossky 1974: 15). Apophaticism, for Lossky, is in one sense an understanding of the truth of God as lying beyond human reason. As we shall see more clearly below, it is not simply a necessary negation of positive statements about God en route to a more analogical naming of God. Apophaticism is equivalent to an ascetical exercise that is necessary if one wants to ascend to a true knowledge of God—the mystical knowledge of unknowing.

Another antinomy revealed in the Incarnation is God's being as Trinity. In approaching the Christian belief in God as Trinity, theology's task is to find the appropriate categories that would preserve the antinomy of God's unity-in-distinction. There is a strict divide, according to Lossky, between *oikonomia* and *theologia*, between the economic and the immanent Trinity, and although we can assert that God is Trinity based on God's economy, we cannot engage in further speculation on God's being *in se*. In fact, in order to affirm God's Trinitarian being as unity-in-distinction, it is necessary for theology to engage in an apophatic negation of the properties attributed to the persons of the Trinity manifested in the economy. According to Lossky, 'what will subsist beyond all negating or positing, is the notion of the absolute hypostatic difference and of the equally absolute essential identity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (Lossky 1974: 16). The antinomic categories used to express the doctrine of the Trinity were nature (*ousia*) and person (*hypostasis/prosopon*). Once deconceptualized, *ousia* indicates what is common in God, while *hypostasis* indicates the irreducibility of the three persons. The genius of the Fathers lay in using synonymous words to express the Trinitarian antinomy, thus allowing for the one side of the antinomy, God's unity, always to refer to the irreducibility of the hypostases, and vice versa (Lossky 1976: 51).

Lossky, however, transgresses his own apophatic restrictions on the categories of *ousia* and *hypostasis* in his development of a more positive theology of personhood that is grounded in the theology of the Trinity. Personhood entails two constitutive aspects, for Lossky: irreducibility (*hypostasis*) and freedom (*ekstasis*). A person is irreducible in the sense of not being identified with the common nature, by being irrevocably particular and irreplaceable. A person is free not in the sense of freedom of choice; *ekstatic* freedom, for Lossky, is freedom from the necessity of nature. Human personhood is an *ekstatic* freedom from the limitations and finitude inherent in created nature that can only be given in mystical union with the uncreated. Lossky grounds this notion of *ekstasis* in the patristic notion of the monarchy of the Father. He argues that the monarchy of the Father is necessary for the doctrine of the Trinity in order to maintain the antinomy of the unity-in-distinction, since it 'maintains the perfect equilibrium between the nature and the persons, without coming down too heavily on either side... The one nature and the three hypostases are presented simultaneously to our understanding, with neither prior to the other' (Lossky 1974: 81). The monarchy of the Father also indicates, for Lossky, that the hypostasis of the Father cannot be reduced to God's nature, and this irreducibility is the Father's freedom to 'cause' the Son and the Spirit, to give the divine *ousia* to the Son and the Spirit (Lossky 1978: 46–7).

The monarchy of the Father also guards against the *Filioque*, the assertion that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. Lossky was (in)famous for his virulent

critique of the *Filioque*, claiming that ‘by the dogma of the *Filioque*, the God of the philosophers and savants is introduced into the heart of the Living God’ (Lossky 1974: 88). Although this statement sounds excessive, Lossky viewed the *Filioque* as the result of a neo-scholastic method that he viewed as itself excessively rationalistic. In its understanding of truth as propositional, from which the *Filioque* ultimately derives its justification, Lossky saw neo-scholasticism as undermining the apophatic notion of knowledge of God as mystical union, and thus the Christian affirmation of divine-human communion in Christ. There was, consequently, a practical concern driving Lossky’s rejection of the *Filioque*, together with the theological method from which it resulted. For Lossky, theology is necessarily apophatic, and hence, antinomic, so that the human person could never rest complacent in her ascetic ascent toward God. One could say that theology as antinomy exists as an ascetical exercise, allowing for the proper expression of dogma to guide the human ascent toward God, and not allowing anyone to think that this movement toward knowledge of God is ever complete.

As the most widely read Orthodox theologian in the latter half of the twentieth century among Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, Lossky was responsible for popularizing the essence/energies distinction, which became almost synonymous with Orthodox theology. The essence/energies distinction is an antinomic expression for God’s transcendence and immanence. God’s essence is unknowable; creation is deified through participation in God’s energies. In response to neo-scholastic criticism of this distinction, Lossky asserted that the distinction is a necessary antinomy for affirming participation in the uncreated life of God. The neo-scholastic, rationalistic notion of *esse* only yields created grace, which contradicts the logic of divine-human communion. There exists, however, a tension between Lossky’s affirmation of participation in the uncreated energies of God and his Trinitarian theology, as it leads to the inevitable question: If participation is in the divine energies, why is it necessary to affirm God as Trinity? To say that each of the persons of the Trinity conveys the divine energies in a distinctive manner is simply to beg the question. The contrast with Bulgakov here is telling: Whereas, for Bulgakov, it is God’s being as Trinity, and hence, as Sophia, which is the ground for the participation of the created in the life of God, in the Son and by the Holy Spirit, for Lossky, the ground of creation’s participation in God is the essence/energies distinction, which leaves one wondering how God’s being as Trinity matters for conceptualizing the God-world relation in terms of communion. Lossky’s own theology of personhood indicates that it does matter, but it does not easily coexist with his non-negotiable affirmation of the essence/energies antinomy for expressing divine-human communion.

THE ONTOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

In the recent revival of Trinitarian theology, the influence of John Zizioulas (b. 1931) is indisputable, especially his theology of personhood. Both Lossky and Zizioulas considered themselves part of a movement in contemporary Orthodox theology that was

engaging in a ‘neo-patristic synthesis,’ a phrase coined by Georges Florovsky in opposition to Bulgakovian sophiology. Though self-identified as part of the neo-patristic trajectory, Zizioulas distanced himself from two important elements that were common to the neo-patristic theologians: apophaticism and the essence/energies distinction. The Christian affirmation of divine-human communion implied a Trinitarian ontology that revolutionized Greek ontological monism, and which located the experience of God not in God’s energies, but in the *hypostasis* of Christ.

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is, according to Zizioulas, the inevitable result of the Christian experience of God in the Eucharist. Christians from the beginning understood the Eucharist as an event of communion with the Body of Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is this experience that grounds the Christian affirmation of the full divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and hence, the doctrine of the Trinity (Zizioulas 1985: 80–3).

The Eucharistic experience of divine-human communion in Christ constitutes the basis for what Zizioulas labels as the two ‘leavenings’ of Greek ontology by Christian theology (Zizioulas 1985: 39). The first is the affirmation of creation *ex nihilo*, which grounds the uncreated and created distinction, and which is demanded if the communion between the two is to be one of freedom and love, and not of necessity. This creation out of nothing indicates positively that creation’s only hope for existence is a free and loving communion with the uncreated; negatively, it indicates that creation itself is inherently finite and, by itself, tends toward its own annihilation. Creation itself exhibits a longing to be free from the necessity of finitude inherent in its own nature. This longing is especially evident in the human creation of art (Zizioulas 2006: 206–49), in erotic relations (Zizioulas 1985: 49–53), and in the phenomenological analysis of the question, ‘Who am I?’ (Zizioulas 2006: 99–112), all of which indicate a human drive for particularity and otherness that is ultimately thwarted by finitude and death. This thwarted longing renders human existence ultimately tragic, since the conditions for its fulfillment do not exist within created nature, but only in communion with the uncreated.

The experience of communion in the Eucharist, and thus, of particularity and otherness, reveals that the being of God exists such as to be free to commune with what is not-God. The fact that this communion is realized in Christ by the Holy Spirit reveals that God’s being is itself a communion between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is important, however, for Zizioulas that theology not conceptualize this communion in the being of God in terms of necessity. His logic is as follows: Since creation itself longs for a freedom from the annihilation that is necessarily inherent to created nature, for God to gift this freedom from necessity, God’s very being must exist as this freedom from the necessity of nature (Zizioulas 1985: 43). Divine freedom, for Zizioulas, is already revealed in the communion with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Theology must find the proper categories to give expression to the Trinitarian being of God as communion.

In order to express faithfully God’s being as communion revealed in the Eucharistic experience of God in Christ, the Cappadocian Fathers, according to Zizioulas, made two crucial moves: First, they insisted on the monarchy of the Father, which consisted of the second ‘leavening’ of Greek ontology. The monarchy of the Father affirms that the ‘cause’ of God’s Trinitarian being is the person of the Father. In grounding the being of

God, and thus all being, in the person of the Father, the Cappadocian Fathers affirm that God's Trinitarian being does not result from the necessity of God's nature identified as love, or the diffusive good, or the One, but is an event of freedom. As Zizioulas puts it,

[i]n a more analytical way this means that God, as Father and not as substance, perpetually confirms through "being" His *free* will to exist. And it is precisely His Trinitarian existence that constitutes this confirmation: the Father out of love—that is, freely—begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit. If God exists, He exists because the Father exists, that is, He who out of love freely begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit. Thus God as person—as the hypostasis of the Father—makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God (Zizioulas 1985: 41).

Such an affirmation is an ontological revolution, because for the first time in the history of philosophy, ontology is not associated with sameness and necessity, but with freedom, particularity, otherness, and personhood.

The second crucial move orchestrated by the Cappadocian Fathers was to link the philosophical categories of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* in order to give an adequate account of the Trinitarian being of God (Zizioulas 1985: 27–49). *Hypostasis* by itself would lead to tri-theism, while *prosopon* smacks of Sabellianism. Uniting the categories allows for the affirmation of the irreducibility of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, while simultaneously asserting that this hypostatic existence is a relational event. In terms of the monarchy of the Father, the person of the Father is Father as 'cause' of the Son and the Spirit; thus, the person of the Father is constituted as such only in relation to the Son and the Spirit. For Zizioulas, then, personhood, both human and divine, is an event of freedom (*ekstasis*) in a communion that constitutes one as irreducibly particular and irreplaceable (*hypostatic*).

One cannot fail to recognize the general lines of Lossky's theology of personhood, even if Zizioulas never explicitly credits him for these insights (Papanikolaou 2008). Zizioulas' own emphasis on ontology, however, is a clear break with Losskian apophaticism, especially when Zizioulas affirms that the experience of God in the Eucharist is one of the immanent Trinity, which then forms the basis of a Christian Trinitarian ontology. In conceptualizing divine-human communion, Zizioulas also makes central the category of *hypostasis*, specifically the *hypostasis* of Christ, rather than the divine energies.

Zizioulas' interpretation of the Cappadocian Fathers' reworking of the philosophical categories of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* has recently come under attack, especially by patristic scholars (Behr 2004; Ayres 2004). Although there may be some merit to the claim that the Cappadocian Fathers did not explicitly set out to revolutionize ontology, Zizioulas' understanding of personhood as a relational event of freedom and uniqueness is logically implied in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, especially if this doctrine is governed by the grammar of divine-human communion. If the reworking of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* emerges against the background of a grammar of divine-human communion, then *hypostasis* and *prosopon* are appropriated so as to allow for distinctions within God that would allow for communion with the 'true' God in the person of Son; the language of *ousia* simply cannot do that work. Within the context of the

grammar of the doctrine itself, *hypostasis* and *prosopon* emerge in order to make sense of the God who in love and freedom is incarnate in Jesus Christ. More problematic for Zizioulas is his grounding the being of God in the freedom of the Father, which raises the question of whether the Son and the Spirit possess the same freedom as the Father, and thus, are persons in the same way as the Father.

CONCLUSION

In spite of their theological differences, Bulgakov, Lossky, and Zizioulas agree that the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in the experience of divine-human communion in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Each in his own way highlights a strand within the patristic tradition: Lossky rightly emphasizes that knowledge of God is not propositional but an experience of union, so that Trinitarian theology is inevitably apophatic and is itself an ascetical exercise whose goal is to give expression to the Christian understanding of God in such a way that guides the ascetical struggle to God; both Zizioulas and Bulgakov see clearly the revolutionary ontology Christians were declaring in the doctrine of the Trinity and attempt to advance the implications of early Christian thinking on the Trinity—Zizioulas on *hypostasis*, and Bulgakov with his interpretation of the *homoousios* as Sophia. The way forward for a contemporary Orthodox theology on the Trinity is not to oppose these three trajectories, but to integrate their best insights into a theology of the Trinity that is faithful to the impulse of early Christian thinkers on the Trinity, and that delineates the wider cultural, economic, and political implications of the Christian belief in a God whose being is communion.

SUGGESTED READING

The following are recommended: Bulgakov (2004); Lossky (1974); Papanikolaou (2006); Zizioulas (1985). See also:
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