

Orthodox Theology of Personhood: A Critical Overview (Part 2)

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Bogdan Lubardić

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade

Abstract

This paper offers a critical overview of the more recent Orthodox theology of personhood. This theology is put into perspective in terms of overviewing its development and transmission between four notable exponents: Lossky, Yannaras, Zizioulas and Horuzhy. The model of personhood they share is shown to be re-received and specifically reworked by each, not without sparks of mutual critique. Still, the general tendency is to make the conception of personhood more ecclesially and anthropologically relevant. Critical consequences of this of theological thought are not to be understood narrowly. For they ramify to bear upon epistemology, ontology, philosophy, theology proper and ethics. Apart from fruitful solutions to the questions raised by thematizing the challenge of personhood (as immanent to our being image-bearers of God), we display entry points for critical problematization of this Orthodox current of thought. Hence critical consequences of the theology of personhood are not articulated without reference to the meta-critique of it, as offered by a third generation of Orthodox theologians. We propose to view this process in general as a birth of a 'theological age' of sorts: the nascent of ecclesial understanding of our personhood in God.

Keywords

God, image and likeness, personhood and nature, ecclesial communion, the way of being, relational being, the other, deification, the age of personhood

'... predestined to be conformed to the image (*summorphous tes eikonos*) of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren' (Rom 8, 29)

3. Transmission and Development

The theology of personhood which has become one of the distinctive features of Orthodox theology in the 20th Century should be positioned in

relation to its primary context of reception and re-reception. We shall place the model of personhood thereby presupposed into the basic frame of its critical development. Four main theologians, i.e. Lossky, Yannaras, Zizioulas and Horuzhy, it could be safely said, do not diverge *in principle* in relation to what personhood, image and likeness, human nature and its goals are or should

* An asterisk denotes that the italics have been added by the author.

Corresponding author:
Bogdan Lubardić
Email: blubardic@pbf.rs

be. However, the following selected specificities and differences should be noted.

3.1. Theoretical paradigms and markers of personhood

Vladimir Lossky is the *spiritus rector* of this personalist movement in Orthodox anthropology. Christos Yannaras takes up all the major conceptual and ideological suggestions offered by Lossky: the (1) Trinitarian and (2) theandrical grounding context of theology, (3) the awareness of western intellectual challenges, the distinctions between (4) person and nature, (5) essence and personalized energies of essence or nature, and, in particular (6) the apophatic dimensions of divine-human communion. As to personhood, he accepts Lossky's four markers of personhood: (1) the hypostatic (= uniqueness), (2) the ecstatic (= freedom), (3) the relational (= being for the other) and (4) kenotic (= sacrificiality) modes of the person transcending its given and fallen nature. However, ecstasis is synthesized as (1) *eros*, and relationality is forensically explicated in categories of (2) *enpersonalized energies of human nature* 'ecstasizing' erotically and inviting communion. He says much more on the triune aspect of the image as well, not refraining from identifying the human image – analogically – as image of the *Trinity*. Furthermore, he suggests that the image of God in man is the image of the *Church* potentially. Therefore the *imago Dei* is in fact (3) *imago Trinitatis* and *imago Ecclesiae*. He also radicalizes Lossky's critique of the Latin and modern West, at moments reaching an ideological negation of things western.

John Zizioulas does have a fundamental debt to both. However, he is willing to acknowledge Yannaras rather than Lossky, whom he suspects of jeopardizing the interpersonal moment in divine-human communion by releasing the Trinity of divine *Persons* into a trans-personal apophatic of 'triadicity'. This explains Zizioulas's reserve not only to Lossky, but towards Dionysius the Areopagite, and also one of the reasons for his reluctance to endorse Palamism more explicitly.

He makes his turn to the apostolic¹ and Cappadocian fathers and Maximus the Confessor (the latter featuring prominently in early Yannaras). In fact, he tries to overcome the top-to-bottom approach (of Lossky) by commencing from the ecclesial presuppositions of personhood (thus the 'vertical' conception of personhood, i.e. God + humanity, is interiorized and historicized from within *ecclesial* thinking). Zizioulas criticises Yannaras too, for 'flirting' with Heideggerean ontology (and borrows some parts of his criticism from Levinas²) viz the danger of temporalizing God, ontologizing death, and projecting Trinitarian description through 'panoramic' ontology at the expense of a more traditional understanding (which he, perhaps problematically, binds to the idea of 'monarchy' of the Father) etc.³ Zizioulas is more attentive to the (1) ecclesial and (2) eucharistic identity of personhood *and vice versa* (in relation to both Lossky and Yannaras) and his (3) relational ontology of sameness *vis-à-vis* otherness is specifically characteristic as well (although Yannaras develops a theology of otherness too, but so does Horuzhy). He is to be credited for shedding important light on the fact that it is (4) the *prosopon* which is the foundation of being and hence for the 'prosopic' or 'personalistic' interpretation of the *hypostasis*. The prosopic re-interpretation of the hypostasis is articulated through (5) the opposition of the 'biological' and 'ecclesial' or 'eucharistic' type of hypostasis.⁴

¹ An exemplary instance is his dissertation, drawing upon the genius of Ignatius of Antioch as it reconstructs primordial ecclesial and eucharistic horizons of theology of the early Church; v. John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries* (the original appeared in Greek 1965), Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline MA 2001.

² John Zizioulas, 'Personhood and Being', 44 n. 40.

³ It seems that Zizioulas is not entirely fair to Yannarasean readings of Heidegger, who may be usefully introduced into the debate; moreover, Yannaras's, say, 'theo-ontology' or 'theo-prosopology' is a powerful tool for overcoming problematic aspects of Heideggerean analyses of *Dasein* and time ecstasy.

⁴ John Zizioulas, 'Personhood and Being', 52-53.

Lossky belongs to the strand of Orthodox anthropological personalism more focussed on the doctrine of hypostatic transformational energies of God. Yannaras and Zizioulas belong to the strand of the *same* personalist current or movement more focussed, however, on the *prosopon*, particularly in regard to placing it *within* a more explicit ecclesiology. Both Yannaras and Zizioulas develop further the third major distinction underpinning the recent Orthodox theology of personhood and Christological anthropology. Namely, next to (1) the person/nature and (2) essence/energy distinctions they articulate (c) the difference between the way of being (*tropos tes hyparxeos*) and the essence of being (*logos tes ousias*). This distinction is not unknown to Lossky, and Horuzhy is fully aware of it too.

Sergeii Horuzhy distinguishes himself by developing his theology of personhood, and the respective anthropology, from *philosophical* presuppositions of *phenomenological* description of the human condition in regard to spiritual experience of transformation consequent to union with Christ by the Spirit. He analyses consequences for personhood in cases when this experience is lacking and when it is ascetically acquired. In doing so he refers to Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* and his critique of 'this-worldliness', as points of departure for analysis. At the same time Horuzhy demonstrates the perspective of Orthodox personalist anthropology as the necessary complement to philosophical anthropology *per se*. By combining the horizons of the philosophy of Heidegger and theology of Gregory Palamas he tries to show the philosophical potential of Orthodox theology. This takes him back to Lossky and simultaneously beyond Lossky, for his (1) method of phenomenological description of personhood is fruitfully innovative and different from that of Lossky (for instance in thematizing the *aesthetic* consequences of personhood syn-energetically regarded). He displays a fully fledged theory of (2) syn-energetic ontology of personhood and a conception of (3) theurgy conceptualized as the cooperation with God in universalizing the activity of the Church *cosmically*. This is his

specific contribution (although he does shy away from acknowledging Bulgakov on the theurgic point). Horuzhy's contribution is acutely personalist yet committed strongly to the energetic and syn-energetic sides of human ascetical activity. He does justice to Gregory Palamas without ensnaring himself in Lossky's overly apophatic emphasis. He seems to make peace between what we could call the 'energological' and 'prosopological' strands of personalistic Orthodox anthropology. Like the others, he remains strict in the critique of the 'sophiological' strand (being very reserved towards pantheistic tendencies of sophiological⁵ substantialist 'in-rooting' [Russ. *ukornyenie*] of the divine into the world).

Orthodox theology of personhood thus displays at least three strands of one major movement: the (1) sophiological,⁶ (2) energological and (3) prosopological strands. Of course, there are more lines to the movement, and the borders between most of them can be fuzzy at certain levels. The four authors mentioned represent two generations of the transmission process in the 20th Century, with Lossky belonging to the first (*terminus a quo* in the 30ies and 40ies) and Yannaras, Zizioulas, Horuzhy belonging to the second (*terminus a quo* in the 60ies and 70ies). The *third* generation of theologians made its appearance in the 90ies by trying to overcome neuralgic theoretical points of the newer Orthodox movement for personhood. Nikolaos Loudovikos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, to mention just the two, should be noted as thinkers of the latest generation of critical reassessment of the movement.

⁵ Sergeii Horuzhy, *Dyptichon on Silence...*, Moscow 1991 (= Sergej Horužij, *Diptih o tihovanju: asketsko učenje o čoveku u bogoslovskom i filozofskom tumačenju*, Brimo, Beograd 2002, 129-133).

⁶ Hence the early 'sophiological' current of thought is not to be counter-distinguished from a supposedly later 'personalist' current. Both are anchored in theologically understanding personhood as one of the eminent characteristics of Orthodox theology *per se*. It is better to think of neo-sophiological, post-sophiological and non-sophiological personalist tendencies within Orthodoxy.

III. Critical Consequences and Problems

1. Critical consequences

What are the positive contributions of this theology of personhood to contemporary theoretical interests and critical tasks? How does this legacy bear upon the fields of epistemology, ontology, mediation of philosophy and theology, theology proper and ethics? If we are excused for generalizing, then this is what might be said.

1.1. Epistemology. Truth is a function of a personal and interpersonal way of being of *being* (on he on). That is why, and that is how truth becomes existentially relevant. This is intended by conceptualizing being as hypostatic and hypostasis as ‘prosopic’, i.e. as personal. In the contrary case, namely when being is regarded as non-personal or when personhood is taken as a secondary ‘appendix’ to being, truth becomes objectified within the conceptual logic of impersonal abstracta. The truth of personhood is then reduced (equally so in various domains: from epistemology to sociology). In contrast, these Orthodox thinkers argue that truth is an intrinsic extension of experiential knowing of the event of participation in inter-personal energetic presences of our others (the latter taken as beings in communion). Truth is not (only, nor primarily) an analytical ‘adequatio’ of concept and thing, nor merely a coherence of the logic of statements, but consequent to experiencing the way of being which, by definition, is the way of personhood (= free transcendence of being by persons being for others). Let us note that we now may observe how the ‘apophatic turn’ (1.2)⁷ and theology of personhood converge, inasmuch as both are meta-ontical and meta-logical. As Yannaras says: ‘Before anything else apophatism represents an *attitude* towards knowledge and towards making knowledge true. It represents a

negation of “intellectual idols”, a negation of psychological strongholds of egocentric security and emotional self-protection furnished by rationalist propositions’.⁸ All in all, this personalist epistemology leads to a critique of naturalized epistemology in favour an existential and spiritual re-assessment of the latter.

1.2. Ontology. If it can be demonstrated, as far as human reality is concerned, that there is no being outside the event of persons in communion, if being is en-hypostatized primordially, if being is – for lack of a better word – ‘a priori’ personal and communal, then ‘ontotheology’ (of the ens qua ens) shifts from its metaphysical and essentialist mode into a post-metaphysical ontology of personhood. Or, more exactly, it is transposed into a theology of personhood taken to be *the* ontology proper. Moreover, if the ontological reality of the person, on the level of ‘structure’, is fundamentally determined by the image of the triune God, and if the reality of the person, on the level of ‘content’, is determined by the reception of divine energies or grace, then ontology as conceived by the modern tradition of philosophy of consciousness (the speculative Subject, or transcendental Ego, or dialectical Absolute) reaches its ‘end’. Let us note that here too we may observe how the ‘apophatic turn’ (1.2) and theology of personhood converge, inasmuch as speculative ontology is deconstructed by displaying the precedence of personal relationality to the speculative ‘Subjectum’, the relation involving a dialogue of created and the uncreated Other addressing us as persons. This opens radically the closed system of speculative metaphysics. All in all, a critique of the dialectics of the speculative ‘Subject’ is put in motion in favour of existential and phenomenological descriptions of relational inter-subjectivity, the later placed on the ontological plane of divine-human inter-communion. This marks a condi-

⁷ We refer to the theological turns of newer Orthodox theology as such. In the first part of our article (cf. the previous issue of *The Expository Times*) we have listed these as the neo-patristic (1.1), apophatic (1.2), Trinitarian (1.3), eucharistic (1.4) and ascetical (1.5) ‘turns’.

⁸ Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God...*, Athens 1967 (= Hristos Janaras, *Hajdeger i Dionisije Areopagit*, 11).

tional congruence of Orthodox theology of personhood with theoretical and social sensitivities of *post-modernity*.

1.3. Philosophy in and for theology. Another prominent aspect of the theology of personhood explicated so far is the re-discovery of *philosophical* potentials of Orthodox *theology*. What is innovative is the way the four paradigmatic thinkers, by means of their theologizing, offer theoretical ‘megaphones’ for voicing the messages of the *fathers* of the Church in registers attuned to contemporary theoretical, i.e. philosophical discourse. Not only do they ‘understand’ modern philosophy but they simultaneously offer means for critical deconstruction of it. Let us note that we now may observe how the ‘neo-patristic turn’ (1.1) and theology of personhood converge, inasmuch as the tradition of Christianizing ‘Hellenism’ becomes transposed – and re-actualized – through their attempted Christianization of contemporary philosophical or ideological mind sets. All in all, the approach is *inclusive* to philosophy in general but critically discerning (*diakrisis*) at the same time. Another invaluable consequence of this is the overall gain for theology. Critical dialogue within a philosophical context serves the *missiological* function of theology. That is to say, by engaging with philosophy as disciplined discourse, the universal and self-critical moments of philosophy are integrated into the Church via theology: the ecclesial message becoming trans-ecclesially communicable.

1.4. Theologia. The theology of personhood is not to be understood as a partial ‘reconstruction’ of Orthodox theology. It is rather a new way of theology itself: vividly marked by a post-apologetic and non-confessionalist attitude. Theology is defended not by recursive confessional deductions, but by witnessing authentic as much as salvific and beatific prospects for persons in communion with Christ by the Spirit. It is Yannaras and Zizioulas in particular who strikingly potentialize integration, if not identification, of participation in communion with ‘knowledge’ (of truth), hence demonstrating that

eucharistic participation and theological cognisance coincide. They insist on the primacy of experience and of the communion event over epistemic revelation. As stressed by Zizioulas: ‘... the life of communion with God, such as exists within the Trinity is actualized within the members of the eucharistic community’⁹; moreover: ‘The life of the eucharist *is** the life of God Himself’.¹⁰ An overcoming of the ‘revelatory model’ of the Church in the name of the ‘liturgical-eucharistic’ model of the Church is thereby proposed.¹¹ They insist on a most literal integration of the life of the triune God with ecclesial practice.¹² This becomes the control instance for ‘theology’ which is thus deconstructed and in fact ‘liberated’ from its position of *a priori* intellectual dominance over the Church event: ‘... ecclesial being is bound to the very being of God. From the fact that a human being is a member of the Church, he becomes an ‘image of God’, he exists as God Himself exists, he takes on God’s “way of being”’¹³. Their integration of the ontology of triune personhood with ontology of divine-human communion within the context of *ecclesiology*, thus, allows for and leads to understanding that the primary value of *knowing* is appropriated as a function of *salvation*. In other words, knowledge is ontologically and existentially potentialized as a *dynamic* function of salvific communion with God. It is for these reasons that they introduce Trinitarian thought in a key of dynamic personhood. It serves as the regulative ‘norm’ for other domains of theology, traditionally clogged up with static and substan-

⁹ John Zizioulas, ‘Truth and Communion’, 81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Gerhard Liedke, ‘The Challenge of the Church to Science and Theology’, in J. M. Mangnum (ed.) *The New Faith-Science Debate*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis – WCC Publications, Geneva 1989, 165.

¹² Cf. Alan Torrance’s very appreciative yet lucidly critical account: ‘Triune Personhood. John Zizioulas’, in *idem, Persons in Communion. An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1996, 287 et passim.

¹³ John Zizioulas, ‘Personhood and Being’, 15.

tialist understandings of both God and man. Let us note that now we may observe how the 'Trinitarian' (1.3) and 'eucharistic' (1.4) turns converge with the theology of personhood, inasmuch as the triune way of being of God is reflected *as* the way of being of the human being living eucharistically in and as the *Church*. In the name of the Father, Christ eucharistically communes with us inter-personally by the Spirit: in free ecstatic relationality and pure self-sacrificial (kenotic) love of his others as brothers and sisters by grace.¹⁴ As powerfully stated by Zizioulas: 'Jesus Christ does not justify the title Saviour because he brings the world a beautiful revelation, a sublime teaching about the person, but because He realizes in history *the very reality of the person* and makes it the basis and "hypostasis" of the person for *every** man'.¹⁵ All in all, anthropology is founded personalistically and, since the person is a divine-human structure, this means that anthropology is required to integrate a 'pneumatic' Christology and 'pneumatic' ecclesiology. For it is by the Spirit that 'persons' realize their movement from biological individual conglomerates to communal personhood in which 'our' being is realized in and through being for others, as is the case with the triune God. These are, *inter alia*, the meanings implied by Yannaras's formulation of the 'ethos of Trinitarian communion' as the condition of the properly Christian meaning of the 'event of the holy' (Heilsgeschehen).

1.5. Ethics. One major consequence of the theology of personhood, on the level of ethics, is that sin is understood not as an immoral occurrence *per se*, but as an ontological event. As states for instance Yannaras: 'This fall from the person (to prosopo) into the individual (to atomo), from loving communion to autonomic

¹⁴ Let us recall the biblical indications of this, namely, we are: '... predestined to be conformed to the *image** (summorphous tes eikonos) of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren' (Rom 8, 29 [and 2Cor 4, 6]).

¹⁵ John Zizioulas, 'Personhood and Being', 54.

individuality *is** the existential content of the sin (hamartias) of man, that is, his failure in relation to his existential truth and authenticity'.¹⁶ In other words, sin implies a failure to be in accord to the proper *way of being*,¹⁷ the latter revealed as the way of Christ or the communal and sacrificial way of the Church of Christ. Let us note that we now may observe how the 'ascetical turn' (1.5) and theology of personhood converge, inasmuch as the re-conceptualization of ascetical endeavour demands a re-structuring of one's way of being into a mode of ecclesial personhood: ethics is pre-opened by ecclesial-communal *ethos*. The fulfilment of biblically secured moral precepts follows this movement but does *not* pre-condition it.¹⁸ Another quintessentially important consequence, apart from the metamoralist gain mentioned, is the defence of the *absolute* value of the human person in view of its divine-human potential and calling. We can only but most briefly add that this defence of divine-human status of personhood has repercussions in the domains of bioethics (viz genetic engineering, euthanasia, abortion, suicide etc), human rights (viz various types of instrumentalization of the human person for ends of profit, submission, technocratic and corporatist control etc), rights of biospheric nature (viz the de-sacralisation and 'rape of nature' – since nature is also called to commune with God in Christ through our humanity in Christ, etc) and in terms of culture-creativity. As to the latter, again, the ethical encompasses not only bringing oneself to an other in a morally acceptable

¹⁶ Christos Yannaras, *Truth and Unity of the Church*, Athens 1977 (we refer to the Serbian edition of this study = Hristos Janaras, *Istina i jedinstvo Crkve*, Beseda, Novi Sad 2004, 22).

¹⁷ Interestingly, this is precisely Yannaras's criterion for distinguishing authentic ecclesial community from heresy and heretical modes of the para-ecclesial.

¹⁸ Let us view this from another angle: in the eyes of Christ, it is the *humble* sinner who – by self-lessly reaching-out to God – stands as *first* in the ecclesial assembly (for the morally self-sufficient and self-content members are not really 'reaching-out').

form, but creating something good and beautiful in the world for one's other.¹⁹ one's ecclesial personhood to begin with.

2. Some problematic issues

As to critical re-evaluation of the movement, several major points of entry of criticism have appeared. If we leave aside the inner debate between the four (particularly Zizioulas versus Yannaras and Lossky) and consider *other* authors immersed in this movement of theological thought, notably those of the third generation of re-reception, then the following important critical concerns should be noted.

2.1. A monism in things plural? First it seems that the whole paradigm of neo-patristic synthesis is being currently re-evaluated. This is not conceptualized in terms of discarding the paradigm *in toto*. It is rather a process of re-considering some of its fundamental postulates, premises and concepts (e.g. 'experince' in and of Christ, 'mind' of the 'fathers', spiritual 'vision'²⁰). One objection, attuned to more reintroduction of *biblica patristica*, raises the question of insufficient exploration of *biblical* premises for the statements forwarded by the newer neo-patristic theology of personhood. The argument pivots on asking whether the statements truly complement the biblical foundations of Orthodox theology. A corollary to that, then, is to re-question the status and hermeneutical orientation of biblical stud-

ies in Orthodox theology as such. By transitivity, as a second type of objection, this argument is transposed to ask whether the Church *fathers* themselves offer biblical back-up for the conclusions drawn, i.e. to what extent and under what sort of hermeneutical 'regime'? The latter question, for example, is utilized in questioning the claim that Trinitarian groundings of personhood are to be abundantly, or properly found, say, in the theologoumena of the Cappadocian fathers, particularly in regard to the respective biblical 'evidence' (if yes, then in what sense should these statements be understood and developed). The third objection, by consequence, relates to its massive reliance on the *Greek* fathers at expense of *other* Orthodox thought traditions. The neo-patristic synthesis is thus suspected of what we might call a *Hellenic monism*²¹ (let alone the fact that Christian Hellenic thought is astoundingly complex and pluralized).²² Although of a different level, another objection tied to the previous one analogically is that the 'many' on the other side of the 'one' are reduced by presupposing what any *particular* agency of the many really and truly is, or might become. Hence the personal relations of one and many, despite the sensitivity to otherness, are suspected of being reduced by an imported *dialectic* of 'one and many' in terms of a binary logic of 're-logocentrization' (which implies a lack in deconstructive hermeneutical self-awareness).

¹⁹ John D. Zizioulas, 'Introduction: Communion and Otherness', 10.

²⁰ The following article by John Behr is very instructive in that regard: idem, 'Passing Beyond the Neo-Patristic Synthesis', *Bogoslovje* 70:1 (2011), 44-56 (this is a presentation he gave at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, on October 14th, 2010 [n. the same paper, slightly different in form, was first presented in June 3-6, 2010 at the Theological Academy in Volos, Greece at the respective patrological conference]). Behr states that his paragraphs of critique both of Bulgakov and Florovsky are considerably indebted to Brandon Gallaher's "'Waiting for the Barbarians': Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Flovosky" (forthcoming, in English).

²¹ This seems to surface as a tendency in one of the neo-patristic fore-fathers of the movement, namely in Florovsky's statement claiming that 'In the Church Hellenism has been *eternalized** (Russ. vyekovyechen): introduced into the very texture of churchhood (Russ. cerkovnost), as an eternal cathogory of Christian existence'; v. George Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology* (in Russian), YMCA-Press, Paris (1937) ²1983, 509.

²² This is a tentative suggestion. Still, it is potentially fruitful to critically distinguish between monistically 'Hellenizing' theology, on one hand, and, the primacy and colossal importance of our Greek fathers, on the other hand. In fact, what is *monistic* falls into both (a) monopolizing the Greek fathers at expense of (all) others and (b) viewing their own immanent diversity of thought and practice as more uniform than it actually is in historical practice, text and context.

2.2. *Who is to philosophize and how?* A second point of entry for criticism is voiced by asking to what extent contemporary philosophical thought patterns are, in fact, retroactively in-read into patristic and biblical textual sources. These are very complex issues of a hermeneutical order. It is one thing to display the philosophical potential of neo-patristic thought, in the act of re-interpreting the Church fathers – showing, in particular instances, even the possible supremacy of patristic philosophical capacity. However, it is an entirely other thing to ‘force’ them to speak in the manner of Heidegger and Levinas. The concern is that the latter might be an effect of undiscerning optimism of an overly inclusive hermeneutic: a seduction by secular thought forms. The hermeneutical ‘circulus’ in this context of concerns might be formulated as follows: are the Church fathers truly consulted as the criterion for understanding the ‘text’ of existence (i.e. the symbolic order of our philosophical, cultural and historical life world) or is it, in fact, the other way around.

2.3. *Shadows of inconsistency?* A third point of entry is articulated by seeking and finding what we may call mistakes of auto-referential inconsistency. One objection voiced by Papanikolaou, for example, is that theologizing on the ways the Trinity ‘is’ (in Lossky and more so in Yannaras) collides with the strict postulate of apophatic ‘unknowing’²³ (Zizioulas departs from the two markedly on that point of concern). Another from a host of objections seems to address what we might call performative paradoxes. The theologians of personhood state that their conceptions are in function of actualizing the reality of the person when what they *do* is to (theoretically) deactualize it. For example, the distinction of person (prosopon, hypostasis) and nature (physis) tends to be overly ‘sharp’ and too ‘vertical’ at the

expense of what is human nature. In fact, the distinction is possible only on the level of *ordo cognoscendi*, but not as an expression of *ordo essendi*. The concept of personhood, it is suspected, thus draws close to a mysticistic remnant of an illicit neo-platonism (the hypostasis ecstasizing – escaping – from the bonds of nature²⁴); moreover, nature is thereby viewed as a dark other, or *terra obscura* ‘lagging’ behind and ‘bellow’ our personal hypostasis – analogous, say, to the concept of ‘slumbering’ nature in *modern* German romantic idealism (where it is self-reflection of the spirit [subject] that brings nature to itself as the other-being of self-consciousness or the spirit), and so on. The latter is closely tied to a new awareness of problematic relapses into secular philosophical viewpoints at the expense of, as is argued, proper patristic hermeneutics. Of course, it is an entirely different matter whether this is, or is not, doing justice to Yannaras and Zizioulas who are primarily targeted, notably by Loudovikos.

3. *The nascent of the age of personhood*

The potentials of such Orthodox triadological, Christological and anthropological description of personhood, its hermeneutical and socio-cultural critical potential, but most of all the revelation of the event of God and man in

²³ Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2006, 106 et passim. We found this study helpful in our effort to overview recent prospects of personalist Orthodox theologizing.

²⁴ In a rather harsh assault on Yannaras, Nikolaos Loudovikos makes such remarks. Cf. idem, *The Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality. Limits of Eucharistic Ecclesiology* (in Greek), Armos, Athens 2002, 22, 50, 150. As of recently he interrogates Zizioulas too on similar charges. To our mind he is successful in virtue of the fact that this, in itself, invites more theological reflection and critical discursive articulation. However, we are not entirely convinced that what he considers as ‘errings’ of Yannaras and Zizioulas (particularly *à propos* the person/nature distinction) correspond to what is actually intended by the two. Be that as it may, they are thus instigated to make the necessary clarifications of their positions respectively (Loudovikos is more convincing when criticizing, say, Zizioulas’s understanding of Lacanian desire, or when he deconstructs possible idealistic sedimentations in the Metropolitan’s conception of ‘nature’; v. Nikolaos Loudovikos, ‘Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas’s Final Theological Position’, *Heythrop Journal* 48 (2009) 1-16.

communion leading to spiritual deification, by virtue of personhood 'on both sides', theoretically executed in the newer Orthodox personalism – still remain revolutionary and radical in their implications. The *prima facie* extravagance of it all (to an unprepared mind) is due to the light of such insight being *eschatological*, not only theoretical or historical. The tidings of the biblical *kerygma* are in analogical status to the former. Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) says this himself: 'History does not incarnate nor does it always confirm the Gospel, no matter how revolutionary it is, and simply because we are dealing with a truth which is eschatological in its nature [...]. The same goes for the notion of person, which is nothing else but a borrowing from the eschatological way of our existence'.²⁵

However, these theologians are working in favour of a theoretical elucidation of what is a human being *sub specie Christi et ecclesiam*. Hence we are learning not only what we are going 'to be' but also what and who we already are in this process of *becoming human* as persons communing in the love of Christ by the Spirit. The stringency of their unwavering commitment to the anthropological question, the passion with which they connect all aspects of theology to the mystery of the human being as the image of God Himself, and the fertile contributions of theirs – exceeded only in deeply suggestive insights touching the heart of the meaning of being men and women before others and God – go far in convincing us that we might be on the brink of a new spiritual age in

the Orthodox church — *the age of Men and Women*. They have made it possible for us to comprehend that exploring our humanity, *ceteris paribus*, is the other side of the process of further understanding the divinity of our Other. What is more, the four paradigmatic thinkers may be seen as prompted by Orthodox anthropological leavenings prophetically manifest at the very beginning of the 20th Century. For instance, in 1902-1903 the following dialogue²⁶ took place between bishop Sergei Stragorodski (later to become *locum tenens* of the Russian Orthodox Church) and member of the Russian religious-philosophical intelligentsia V. A. Ternavtsev (1866-1940). Addressing Bishop Sergius, who was presiding as chairman of the Religious-philosophical gatherings in St Petersburg,²⁷ Ternavtsev states his opinion:

T.: 'In the fact of salvation, apart from the two mysteries about God and Christ another, third mystery is contained, the one on Man. This religious mystery has not been revealed through the work of the Ecumenical councils... Theology and Christology have been developed, but anthropology remains undeveloped, and *that is the great task for the future** [...]. Bishop Sergius responded:

S.: 'Are you saying that within Christianity there is no revelation as to what man is?'. The religious thinker replied:

T.: 'Yes'.

²⁵ John Zizioulas, 'The being of God and the being of Man' [in Greek 1991, re-edited but shortened in English 2010]. We quote according to the non-abridged Serbian edition of this study, where this *post scriptum* appears = Mitropolit Pergamski Jovan Zizioulas, 'Bitije Boga i bitije čoveka', *Vi-doslov* (2003) 77.

²⁶ Brought to our attention by Sergeii Horuzhy.

²⁷ Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York and Evanston 1963, 90-93.