Communion and Being

Re-thinking Ontology and Morality with John Zizioulas

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Abstract

This project is an appreciative yet critical extension of John Zizioulas's theological system. Zizioulas has constructed an ingenious synthesis of patristic and philosophical insights. Nonetheless, commentators are right to suggest that his system devalues the ascetical and ethical aspects of the Christian tradition. The fault in not in his system itself, however. In fact, the system, properly expounded, demands a robust ascetical and moral theology. The problem is that while Zizioulas sets forth an innovative framework for differentiating two separate ontologies—two different definitions of "being"—he effectively re-confuses them, building his theology on an equivocal and inconsistent ontology. The following chapters offer an interpretation of Zizioulas's theological system for the purpose of (1) providing a coherent account of his dual-ontology and (2) expounding the implicit ethical aspect of his theological system. In consequence of these two objectives, I also uncover a more nuanced way of differentiating Eastern and Western ways of theology which opens new possibilities for ecumenical encounter.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to a great many people who made this project possible.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Sarah and our three children: Andrew, Elizabeth, and George. It would not have been completed without their willful sacrifices, constant encouragement, and welcomed distractions. I know these few pages cannot repay the countless dinners, bedtimes, date nights, and trips to the park I have missed, but I hope they share in the joy of this accomplishment as much as I.

I am also happily indebted to my parents, Carl and Debbie Wright, for so many years of loving support. They successfully passed on their faith to their children and not only tolerated but encouraged the questions of a young would-be theologian.

Nor can I express enough appreciation to Professor Vigen Guroian. I came to the University of Virginia because of Vigen, and I am blessed to call him my mentor and my friend. Even in retirement, he has remained invested in this project. But this is no surprise; for as any of his students will attest, he is a truly great teacher and an inspiring person.

After Professor Guroian's retirement, Professor Kevin Hart took over as my dissertation director. His insights and comments have been invaluable in preparing the final draft.

In the Autumn of 2014, I happened to meet a young priest and PhD candidate at a conference. Fr. Matthew Baker and I became friends immediately, and he continues to inspire me. Tragically, Fr. Matthew passed away only a few months later on March 1, 2015. Metr. John Zizioulas sent a letter to be read at the funeral which said in part, "We had the one, and we lost him." May his memory be eternal.

During our time in Charlottesville, we were blessed to call St Nicholas Ukrainian Orthodox Church our home. We will never forget the warmth and kindness of the people at St. Nick's. I would like to thank Fr. Robert Holet in particular for his thoughtful guidance and encouragement during an often-stressful time.

for Sarah

and for Andrew, Elizabeth, and George

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Introduction

Advancing the Neo-Patristic Project

Eastern Orthodox theology today grows increasingly factious over the proper reception and interpretation of the Church Fathers. The focus of this multi-faceted debate centers on what Georges Florovsky termed "neo-patristic synthesis." Unfortunately, Florovsky devoted little effort toward developing a rigorous definition, nor did he attempt a sustained demonstration of his methodological proposal. In consequence, his immediate legacy became a reactionary rejection of modernity in favor of a "return to the Fathers." Twentieth-century Orthodox theology became virtually synonymous with patristic theology. More recently, however, scholars have been re-thinking the neo-patristic project by emphasizing the constructive and ecumenical aspects of Florovsky's thought. Some Orthodox are even questioning whether neo-patristic theology should not be abandoned in favor of a *post*-patristic endeavor that focuses on (re)contextualizing the writings of the Fathers.[1]

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[1] In June 2010, a major Orthodox conference was held at the Volos Academy for Theological Studies on the controversial theme of "Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology be Contextual?"

Simply put, there are three "schools" competing for the future of Orthodox theology. The traditionalists and progressives stand in direct opposition to one another with Florovsky's neo-patristic school occupying the ill-defined middle ground. The emergence and re-emergence of these schools is a complex and often polemicized story that is still being written. I cannot presume to provide here a complete account of Orthodox theology over the past one hundred and fifty years, but an overview of this history will provide the necessary context for the following chapters that critically engage and expand upon the work of Florovsky's most faithful and renowned theological heir: John Zizioulas.

I.   The Standard Narrative

The dominant narrative of contemporary Orthodox theology propagated throughout the latter half of the twentieth century presented Florovsky's model of neo-patristic synthesis as a corrective to the modernizing theology of the so-called Russian Religious Renaissance, or Russian school.[2] In particular, Florovsky condemned the so-called sophiology, expounded by Vladimir Soloviev and advanced by Sergius Bulgakov, for having more in common with modern philosophy than with the Fathers.[3] In particular, he saw in sophiology a tendency toward monism, even pantheism,

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[2] Notable figures include Nicholas Berdyaev, Sergius Bulgakov, George Fedotov, Pavel Florensky, and Nicholas Lossky. See Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[3] "In elaborating a sophiology Bulgakov continues in the tradition of Soloviev and Schelling. Unwilling to accept the Neo-Kantian reduction of the transcendental subject of human culture to 'the epistemological subject,"...Bulgakov posits a super-individual ground of humanity, a human *hypostasis* in God [called World Soul, Divine Sophia, the Pleroma, demiurge]...The fluidity of the terminology, a feature also of Soloviev's sophiology, allows Bulgakov to annex a variety of thinkers to the presumed sophiological tradition, including Plato, Plotinus, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, John Scotus Erigena, Jacob Boehme, Franz Baader,

derived from the German Idealism of Hegel and especially the later Schelling.[4] Standing against the influences of European philosophy, Florovsky proposed that Orthodox theology return to historical formulations of doctrine rather than give way to modern theological innovations. Valliere bluntly states that "Florovsky rejected the notion [that] Orthodox theology required any sort of alliance with modern philosophy. He championed tradition-based patristic Orthodoxy, not philosophical sophic Orthodoxy."[5]

The standard narrative pits Florovsky's patristic defense of ontological dualism regarding God and the world against Bulgakov's philosophically derived monism. For Florovsky, the world is created *ex nihilo,* whereas for Bulgakov the world is created by God and so ultimately comes *ex Deo.* For Bulgakov and others of the Russian school, God is unthinkable and non-existent apart from the world. Russian religious philosophy therefore belongs to the philosophical tradition extending from Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus to Kant, Hegel, and Schelling. In direct opposition to philosophical accounts of the God-world relation which denied divine transcendence, the neo-patristic school emphasized the patristic explanation of God's immanence and transcendence by appealing to the essence/energies distinction articulated by St. Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century.[6]

Schelling...Sophiology is not a gnostic quest for truths beyond the world but reflection on creative processes taking place within the world." Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 260–61.

[4] Schelling's "positive philosophy" was particularly influential. See ibid., 236, 253–78, 295–96, 356–57; See also Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 11–21, 50–54, 68, 110–12, 163; Dale M. Schlitt, *German Idealism's Trinitarian Legacy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017), 71–104.

[5] Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 5.

[6] See, for example, Georges Florovsky, "St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers," in *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, vol. 1, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), 105–20.

As the generation of Russian modernists began to disappear in the middle of the century, it became clear that their school, too, was not long for this world. Valliere notes that Neo-patristic school had "effectively sidelined the Russian school by the late 1940s…Almost no one in the Orthodox world talked any longer about going 'beyond the fathers.'"[7] By 1968, Florovsky could report: "I do not see anyone following the 'sophianic way.' Fr. Sergius [Bulgakov] has been nearly forgotten. Only a few follow Berdyaev. This is understandable, for there is nowhere to go."[8]

II.   The Revised Narrative

In the twenty-first century, theologians are beginning to question the prevailing narrative that paints Florovsky as the savior of historical Orthodoxy from the threat of philosophical innovation. Instead of pitting Florovsky against Bulgakov, or the neo-patristic school against the Russian school, the trend is to reject a binary opposition in favor of a more nuanced narrative. This means, first of all, that "it does not seem fair to the thinkers of the Russian Religious Renaissance simply to accept Florovsky's resolute condemnation of their work at its face value."[9] Florovsky's program is recast as far more compatible with the Russian school than he himself would have allowed. For example: Paul Gavrilyuk argues that "the foreshadowings of Florovsky's theological program are already discernable in the Russian Religious Renaissance;" Brandon Gallaher demonstrates that

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[7] Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 4–5.
[8] Florovsky, Letter to Iu. Ivask, November 16, 1968, Vesnik RKhD, 130 (1979), 50, cited in Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, 4.
[9] Ibid., 5.

"Florovsky's theology is also very much a development of German Idealism;" and Aristotle Papanikolaou reveals the "'neo-patristic' character of Sergius Bulgakov's theology."[10]

There is no need to evaluate the specific arguments offered in support of this revised narrative, for there is no question that Florovsky's program was influenced by philosophical trends. Nor is there any question that Bulgakov's sophiology appealed to certain patristic precedents. As Matthew Baker has shown, Florovsky's criticism of the Russian school was in no way based on a strict opposition between sacred tradition and secular philosophy: "Florovsky's work contains a profound emphasis upon the task of theology as an ecclesial exercise in *fides quaerens intellectum*, a reasoning from the divine economy apprehended in faith and within tradition towards a cognitive apprehension of revealed Truth, constitutive of true philosophy."[11]

Gavrilyuk is certainly correct to point out that "the debate between the generation of Bulgakov on the one hand and the generation of Florovsky on the other was not *whether* patristic theology was foundational…but rather *how* to engage the patristic tradition this side of modernity."[12] However, Gavrilyuk mistakenly reasons from this observation to the assertion that "Florovsky's program need[s] to be understood as a theological option *within* the Renaissance, not merely as a theological alternative to the Renaissance."[13] This revised narrative has succeeded in shedding new light on Florovsky and his interlocutors, but it seems motivated more by a desire to revive the Russian school than by an interest in historical accuracy.

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[10] Ibid., 3; Brandon Gallaher, "'Waiting for the Barbarians:' Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky," *Modern Theology* 27, no. 4 (2011): 679; Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Eastern Orthodox Theology," in *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Chad Meister and James Beilby, Routledge Religion Companions (London: Routledge, 2013), 538.
[11] Matthew Baker, "'Theology Reasons' – in History: Neo-Patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality," *Θεολογία* 81, no. 4 (2010): 81.
[12] Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, 3.
[13] Ibid., 271.

III. Three Schools

The fact that we should avoid any facile depiction of the two schools—e.g. philosophers v. historians or modernists v. traditionalists—does not mean that we should infer a genuine continuity between the Renaissance and Neo-patristic schools. Florovsky himself understood the formal similarities between the Russian school and his own project, which led him to evince an ambivalence toward its leaders. In one of the first published uses of the phrase "neo-patristic synthesis," Florovsky alternates between affinity and antipathy:

> It was a noble endeavor, and a daring and courageous one…Unfortunately, this reinterpretation was unnecessarily linked with the adoption of German idealistic philosophy…There is no need to endorse their findings and speculations. But it is high time to walk in their steps…The standing legacy of this school is not their peculiar conceptions, but precisely their aim: to show and to prove that a modern man can and must persist in his loyalty to the traditional faith and to the Church of the Fathers without compromising his freedom of thought and without betraying the needs or requests of the contemporary world…We are perhaps on the eve of a new synthesis in theology—of a neo-patristic synthesis, I would suggest. Theological tradition must be reintegrated, not simply summed up or accumulated.[14]

Here, Florovsky sets up a dichotomy between the Russian school's aim, which is admirable, and its findings and speculations, which are condemnable. Thus, whereas the standard narrative distinguishes Florovsky from the Russian school because it identifies the latter with its conclusions rather than its aims, the revised narrative suggests that Florovsky actually belongs to the Russian school because of a common aim and in spite of very different conclusions.

Florovsky himself would seem to propose a different narrative altogether. As the above passage suggests, Florovsky imagines the neo-patristic synthesis as occupying a middle ground

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[14] Georges Florovsky, "The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* 31, no. 2 (1949): 69–70; See Baker, "Theology Reasons," 107; Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, 259–60.

between two extremes. On the one hand, the Russian school begins with philosophy and reinterprets patristic doctrines to adhere to a pre-conceived system. And on the other hand, the traditionalists eschew philosophy in favor of uncritically repeating the ancient words of the Fathers. In contrast to both of these, Florovsky advocates engagement with contemporary philosophies as well as creative interpretations in the spirit of the patristic tradition without uncritical adherence to the exact words of the Fathers. Just as the apostle Paul speaks of having the "mind of Christ" though he rarely quotes Christ's words, Florovsky exhorts theologians to acquire the "mind of the Fathers."[15]

Since it is Lossky—rather than Florovsky—who became the preeminent neo-patristic theologian of the twentieth century, the neo-patristic school garnered a decidedly conservative reputation. Lossky's denigration of philosophical reasoning in favor of mystical *apophaticism*, derived primarily from Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas, pulled the neo-patristic school away from Florovsky's middle ground in the direction of traditionalism. This is not to suggest, however, that Lossky's theology merely repeats the words of the Fathers. Rather, Lossky belongs to the traditionalist school because of his narrow view of patristic tradition.

Lossky assumes a level of consistency among the Eastern Fathers that is historically untenable. Gavrilyuk rightly claims that "While it is possible to regard Lossky's theology as a species of the neo-patristic synthesis, both in method and in content, he departed from Florovsky substantially. In his approach to patristic sources, Lossky stressed a logical connection of ideas, rather than their concrete historical genealogy."[16] Lossky and his heirs proceed as if a synthesized

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[15] See, for example, Florovsky, "St Gregory Palamas," 107–8.
[16] Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, 239.

tradition were always and already driving the work of individual Fathers; as if a synthesis was objectively present in the Fathers instead of constructed by each new generation according to its own questions and concerns. In short, Lossky and the traditionalists tend to read the Fathers as if they were all disciples of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas. Such interpretations are clearly at odds with Florovsky's vision of neo-patristic synthesis.

The consequence of the neo-patristic school's shift towards traditionalism is that the middle ground was left unoccupied. Florovsky's neo-patristic program never actually developed into a "school." Therefore, recent scholars are right to reject the standard narrative of twentieth-century Orthodox theology. However, the revised narrative offered by these critics is no less flawed. Florovsky belongs neither to the traditionalists nor the modernists. Therefore, as Baker suggests, "a renewed assimilation of [Florovsky's] perspective is a necessity today, overcoming both the shortcomings of the neo-patristic approach as currently received, and the temptations of liberal theology hazarded by its critics."[17]

IV. Christian Hellenism and Ecumenism

In developing his vision of neo-patristic synthesis, Florovsky introduced two corresponding concepts which help clarify his mediating position between traditionalism and modernism: "Christian Hellenism," and "pseudomorphosis." All too often, these terms have been misunderstood as promoting a regressive traditionalism against progressive modernism. In fact, Florovsky employs these concepts in order to combat tendencies toward both traditionalism and modernism. On one hand, the affirmation of Christian Hellenism suggests a wholesale integration

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[17] Baker, "Theology Reasons," 82.

of dogmatic faith with intellectual culture. On the other hand, the repudiation of theological pseudomorphosis is an invitation for Orthodoxy to rediscover its own particular history and identity.

Florovsky advocated the Hellenism of the Fathers not as a particular philosophical system but as a method of applying philosophical rigor to the doctrines of the faith. Indeed, he bluntly states that "Hellenism means philosophy."[18] Christian Hellenism, says Florovsky, "begins with the truths of faith and finds therein the light of reason. One can say that the Christian dogma contains by way of premises the entire metaphysics…The Christian philosopher has to find, define, and explain these premises. Christian philosophy is a speculative exegesis of the Christian fact."[19]

Christian Hellenism concerns dogma but is not itself dogmatic. It leaves a great deal of room for significant differences and disagreements among theologians; it is ecumenical. Florovsky does not hesitate to include the Latin Fathers among Christian philosophers: "Christian Hellenism is much wider than one is prepared to realize. St. Augustine and even St. Jerome were no less Hellenistic than St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. John Chrysostom…Pseudo-Dionysius was influential in the West no less than in the East…Thomism itself is surely Hellenistic. …Christian Hellenism was never a peculiarly Eastern phenomenon."[20]

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[18] Georges Florovsky, "Ad Lectorem," in *On the Tree of the Cross: Georges Florovsky and the Patristic Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. Matthew Baker, Seraphim Danckaert, and Nicholas Marinides (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, 2016), 139.

[19] Georges Florovsky, "The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy," George Florovsky Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Unpublished translation/revision in Florovsky's own hand of "L'idée de La Creation Dans La Philosophie Chrétienne," *Logos: Revue Internationale de La Synthése Orthodoxe*, no. 1 (1928): 3–30 cited in Baker, "Theology Reasons," 89. Baker says the manuscript is "dated 1949 but not the same as the published 1949 article of the same name."; Cf. Georges Florovsky, "The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 8, no. 3, Supplementary Issue (1949): 53–77.

[20] Florovsky, "Ad Lectorem," 138.

Florovsky also points out, however, that certain thinkers were more Hellenic than Christian, and "some of them went astray. One would naturally think here of Origen or of Psuedo-Dionsyius."[21] Indeed, "Medieval Scholasticism was perhaps overburdened with unreformed philosophy. Yet what was repudiated in the Reformation was Philosophy itself. Away from philosophy and back to the Bible, as if they were radically irreconcilable…Morals and psychology were introduced instead."[22] For Florovsky, a long tradition of overly-Hellenized Christianity led the Reformers to adopt a de-Hellenized, or anti-philosophical, Christianity.

Protestant Europe, however, could not long sustain a total rejection of philosophy. Baker summarizes Florovsky's reasoning, saying: "It is no coincidence that Idealism arose in the Protestant milieu: having rejected the tradition of Christian-Hellenic philosophy (albeit in the form of a debased scholasticism), Protestant thought was eventually thrown back onto pre-Christian Greek metaphysics, of which German Idealism was a kind of atavism."[23] Most problematically, the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and the world was lost.[24]

In responding to de-Christianized Hellenism, Florovsky is careful not to swing the pendulum back toward fideism. Baker explains:

> Florovsky agrees with Kierkegaard and neo-orthodoxy in their critique of idealism and their emphasis upon the need for Christian thought to begin with the event of the Incarnation. However, he objects, the new rejection of philosophy reduces historical man to passivity. Alternatively, the neo-scholastic solution of an "unchanged Aristotle" is an unworthy compromise…Between the Scylla and Charybdis of Hellenized Christianity and irrationalist fideism, the only way forward lies in return to the Christianized Hellenism of the Fathers.[25]

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[21] Ibid., 139.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Baker, "Theology Reasons," 86.
[24] Florovsky, "Ad Lectorem," 139–40.
[25] Baker, "Theology Reasons," 86–87.

Christian Hellenism equally opposes the de-Christianized Hellenism of the Enlightenment and Idealism (Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Marburg Neo-Kantians) and the de-Hellenized Christianity of religious existentialism and dialectical theology (Kierkegaard, Shestov, Brunner, Bultmann, early Barth).[26]

Of course, Florovsky was not concerned with the essentially Protestant dichotomy between faith and philosophy for its own sake. He took up this theme because he found Orthodox theologians adopting it. Eastern theology became increasingly influenced by incommensurable strands of scholasticism, fideism, idealism, and existentialism. Not that Orthodox theologians fully embraced any of these western modes of thought. Yet instead of seeking a creative synthesis of Christianity and philosophy, Eastern theologians were content to vacillate between faith and philosophy, fideism and metaphysics, without concern for coherence or consistency.[27] Florovsky explains:

> Not seldom, Western manuals were directly used in Orthodox schools, in a rather promiscuous and eclectic manner, Roman and Protestant together. One may even speak of a certain "pseudomorphosis" of Orthodox theology. And yet there was no real "encounter" with the West. Influence and imitation are not yet "encounter." The study of the West in the East was limited to the needs of polemics and refutation. Western weapons were used to fight the West.[28]

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[26] Ibid., 86.

[27] The Russian Renaissance school constitutes a notable exception to this diagnosis, which again explains Florovsky's restrained praise for Soloviev and Bulgakov. But ultimately, Florovsky judged the sophiologists to be more beholden to their philosophical systems than to the Christian tradition. We might say they were more interested in Hellenizing Christianity than Christianizing Hellenism. This is a relatively minor distinction compared to the difference between Christian Hellenism and de-Christianized Hellenism. Indeed, the "revised narrative" described above attempts to conceal any meaningful difference at all. But Florovsky certainly thought the difference significant enough to distinguish his neo-patristic project from the Russian Religious Renaissance.

[28] Georges Florovsky, "The Problem of Ecumenical Encounter," in *Re-Discovering Eastern Christendom: Essays in Commemoration of Dom Bede Winslow*, ed. A. H. Armstrong and E. J. B. Fry (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963), 68.

Eastern theology remained formally distinct from Western theologies, but the actual content of Orthodox theology had lost its unique properties.[29] By defining itself in opposition to Western ways of theology, Orthodoxy failed to foster its own tradition. The ancient faith of the Church Fathers had become a fossil, sedentary and lifeless.

Florovsky's program of returning to the Fathers, therefore, was aimed less at rejecting Western forms of theology and more at recovering an authentic form of Eastern theology. Indeed, the neo-patristic project belongs to the ecumenical movement insofar as a re-discovery of the unique Orthodox identity must precede any genuine rapprochement between East and West.

Still, Florovsky does not shy away from criticizing Western theologies. For even criticism can serve an ecumenical purpose: "It is not enough to refute or reject western errors or mistakes—they must be overcome and surpassed through a new creative act."[30] For Florovsky, East and West belong to a singular tradition but are separated due to "a disintegration of mind." The way forward for ecumenism is therefore "not that of a *correlation* of parallel traditions, but precisely that of the *reintegration* of a distorted tradition."[31] Florovsky would seem to have no interest in de Regnon's facile determination that the contrary modes of Eastern and Western Trinitarian theology should be held together in spite of (or because of) their differences. Instead, reintegration of the estranged traditions requires a "reconciliation" and a new "overarching synthesis."[32]

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[29] Pseudomorphosis is a mineralogical term indicating the process whereby one mineral (or other substance) replaces another without changing the original shape; e.g. the petrification of wood is the replacement of wood by silica.

[30] Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology, Part Two*, vol. 6, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 301.

[31] Georges Florovsky, "Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church," in *Aspects of Church History*, vol. 4, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 29.

[32] Georges Florovsky, review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, by Vladimir Lossky, *The Journal of Religion* 38, no. 3 (1958): 207.

Florovsky himself never proposed a comprehensive neo-patristic synthesis of Eastern and Western Christian Hellenism. Instead, he was content to lay the historical and conceptual groundwork on which future generations could create speculative theological systems. Unfortunately, the majority of Florovsky's heirs took a different route and directed their efforts towards expounding the fundamental superiority of Eastern Palamism over the Western Thomism. Oddly enough, Florovsky agreed with this assessment and was not wary of saying so. Thus we arrive at the tension in Florovsky's thought. On the one hand, he was convinced that East and West could be reconciled by a grand, overarching theological system. But on the other hand, his writings did very little to indicate that such a system was actually possible.[33]

In the present project, I leave behind Florovsky's particular thought and instead focus on his most prominent student. Like Florovsky, John Zizioulas advocates a middle way between traditionalism and modernism. Unlike Florovsky, though, Zizioulas ventures to create a theological system. The following chapters think with and beyond Zizioulas in order to fulfill Florovsky's vision of an overarching ecumenical synthesis.

V.   John Zizioulas

Known primarily for the successful yet controversial reception of a collection of essays published in English as *Being as Communion,* Metropolitan John of Pergamon has become one of the most

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[33] "Florovsky's appeal to re-Hellenize Orthodox theology was provocative and potentially misleading. Those who were not familiar with his comprehensive critique of non-Christian Hellenism--particularly what he considered to be its pagan and German Idealist expressions--could mistake such an appeal for a version of Greek cultural chauvinism. While Florovsky was no Greek nationalist, his exclusive preference for Greek theological categories sent a mixed message and was often misunderstood in the Greek context. In principle, Florovsky welcomed the future creative Orthodox appropriation of western theology. But in practice, as a historian, he fiercely attacked all forms of western influences in modern Russian theology, condemning them as distortions." Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, 269.

influential theologians of the twenty-first century. Born in Greece in 1931, Zizioulas began his studies in 1952 at the universities in Thessaloniki and Athens. Then, after spending a year at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, he traveled to the United States in 1955 to continue his studies at Harvard, where he encountered Georges Florovsky (at Harvard from 1956-1964). Except for a two-year hiatus to fulfill his mandatory service in the Greek military, Zizioulas spent the next ten years in America, working on two doctoral theses. Under the direction of Florovsky, Zizioulas submitted a dissertation on Maximus the Confessor, but this work was never published and is now lost. The other thesis, supervised by George Williams, was on the topic of patristic ecclesiology. Zizioulas eventually submitted this work to the University of Athens, instead of Harvard, in 1966.[34]

In the late sixties, Zizioulas was involved with the Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Then in 1970 he taught patristics at the University of Edinburgh before taking up a position as Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Glasgow where he remained for fourteen years. In 1985 *Being as Communion* appeared in English and marked Zizioulas as a leading Orthodox voice.[35] The following year he was ordained Metropolitan of Pergamon. Subsequently he has held academic positions in Thessaloniki, Geneva, King's College London and the Gregorian University in Rome. More recently, the Metropolitan

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[34] Published in English as *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001).
[35] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985).

has served as the Orthodox chair on the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.[36]

Now in the twilight of his theological career, Zizioulas's influence continues to grow. Books and dissertations abound placing Zizioulas in dialogue with other notable thinkers.[37] As a member of the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan advises Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and was instrumental in organizing and setting the agenda for the 2016 Orthodox Council in Crete. Still, Zizioulas's theological and ecumenical positions have garnered all manner of criticism from every corner of the theological world.

Two broad criticisms in particular have been leveled persistently at Zizioulas. First, critics have claimed that Zizioulas's theology is more philosophical than theological. And second, Zizioulas is often faulted for neglecting, if not rejecting, the ascetical and ethical aspect of the faith. The former criticism I regard as specious and already thoroughly refuted by Zizioulas himself and by others. Thus I give it only minimal attention here and do not revisit it in the following chapters. The latter criticism, however, is not without merit. It is true that Zizioulas rarely addresses ascetical or moral theology with more than a few lines. Indeed, this is the criticism that

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[36] Relatively little is known about the particulars of Zizioulas's life. As yet, only brief biographical sketches have appeared. See Patricia A. Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson, and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 3–5; Svein Rise and Staale Johannes Kristiansen, eds., *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern* (Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2013), 435–37; Luke Ben Tallon, "Our Being Is in Becoming: The Nature of Human Transformation in the Theology of Karl Barth, Joseph Ratzinger, and John Zizioulas" (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 2011), 229–30.

[37] Recent studies on Zizioulas include Yik-Pui Au, *The Eucharist as a Countercultural Liturgy: An Examination of the Theologies of Henri de Lubac, John Zizioulas, and Miroslav Volf* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017); Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015); Alan Maxym Lysack, "The Ascetic and Eucharistic Dimensions of Orthodox Spirituality: Metropolitan John Zizioulas and the Debate in Contemporary Orthodox Theology" (PhD diss., Sherbrooke University, 2016); Jason Gary DelVitto, "Encountering Eucharistic Presence within a Postmodern Context: A Dialogue among Chauvet, Schmemann and Zizioulas" (PhD diss., Duquesne University, 2013); Nicholas A. Zientarski, "The Eschatological Role of the Holy Spirit in the Roman Eucharist: The Epiclesis in Modern Liturgical Reform in Light of the Pneumatology of Yves Congar, John Zizioulas, and Robert Jenson" (STD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2015); Tallon, "Our Being Is in Becoming."

motivates the entirety of the current project. In its most basic form, my thesis is that Zizioulas's theology, properly understood, contains a deeply ascetical dimension and provides a basis for a thoroughly and uniquely Christian account of the ethical life.

VI.   Patristic Existentialism

Zizioulas is often accused of imposing twentieth-century, existentialist personalism onto the Fathers. There can be no question that he is influenced by certain philosophers of that movement, nor is there any doubt that he accepts certain of their questions and problems as central to the contemporary concerns of humanity. The issue is whether Zizioulas derives his answers and solutions from these philosophers or from the Fathers. In other words, this criticism is tantamount to a traditionalist criticism of modernists. Traditionalists maintain a strict separation between philosophy and theology and therefore reject modernist methods of correlation that compromise the kerygma. But Zizioulas is no modernist. Like Florovsky, he occupies the middle ground between traditionalists and modernists. Zizioulas's theology seeks to synthesize the tradition of the Fathers so as to create a coherent system of thought—a Christian philosophy. This means he cannot be content to repeat the Fathers, relying always and only on their exact words.

For the sake of clarity, we can distinguish three basic strands of this criticism leveled at Zizioulas, though all three are perhaps indivisible. First is the general charge that he relies on philosophy to interpret Christian doctrines and thereby distorts the canon of faith. Second, there is the more specific claim that he is an existentialist philosopher rather than a Christian theologian. And third, the most specific criticism claims that Zizioulas deliberately misinterprets the Fathers in order to substantiate his own personalist philosophy. I will address the particulars of each strand,

but it should be remembered that the criticism is fundamentally a rejection of Florovsky's neo-patristic program.

The criticism that Zizioulas relies too much on philosophy has been repeatedly employed by John Behr. Even though Behr usually avoids direct reference to Zizioulas, his allusion to the author of *Being as Communion* is perfectly clear:

> The dogmatic formulae of the Church are not abstract, detachable statements which we can use to construct a metaphysical system responding to our existential or philosophical concerns. Of course, theological reflection became ever more abstract, but the point of such ongoing reflection is not to describe ultimate structures of "reality," to elaborate a fundamental ontology, whether of "Being" or "communion" (or both), which then tends to function as if it constitutes the content of the revelation itself…The aim of such theological reflection was and is to articulate as precisely as possible, in the face of perceived aberrations, the canon of truth, so as to preserve the undisturbed image of the Christ presented in the Scriptures.[38]

For Behr, philosophy is based on human reason and speculation, whereas theology derives from divine revelation. Abstracting from the canon of truth in order to arrive at a philosophical account of "ultimate reality" is therefore incompatible with the task of theology. Behr sees no theological need for Zizioulas's preoccupation with ontology. Indeed, he sees it as a wholly inappropriate use of sacred theology. To extrapolate a "fundamental ontology" from Being and/or communion ultimately "reduces the Christian confession to an odd mixture of metaphysics and mythology."[39]

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[38] John Behr, "Faithfulness and Creativity," in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 176; See also John Behr, "The Paschal Foundation of Christian Theology," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2001): 123; John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 74–75; John Behr, *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 16.
[39] Behr, The Nicene Faith, 16.

In defense of Zizioulas, Alan Brown claims that Behr belongs to a group of anglophone Orthodox patristic scholars who have broken with the neo-patristic school and instead proclaim "the consensus patristic interpretation of Anglican postliberalism to be the position of Orthodox theology *simpliciter*."[40] Postliberal Orthodox theologians therefore belong to the traditionalist school insofar as they prioritize the examination of individual authors and texts rather than the creation of a patristic synthesis. For Behr and others of this school, it seems that the task of Orthodox theology was completed at some point in the past. Behr concedes that the Fathers used philosophy in order to combat "perceived aberrations," but this is, apparently, no longer necessary.

Behr's criticism of Zizioulas suggests that constructive, philosophical theology is now obsolete because all possible heresies were refuted by the Fathers. In this light, Behr's criticism appears untenable. The Fathers used increasingly abstract and philosophically complex concepts to combat heresies because the heresies themselves derived from philosophically sophisticated ideas. In a similar fashion, Zizioulas does not attempt to construct a "fundamental ontology" for its own sake. Such would be an exercise in de-Christianized Hellenism. But neither is Zizioulas interested in Behr's de-Hellenized Christianity. Like Florovsky, Zizioulas advocates a neo-patristic synthesis of philosophy and theology—a Christian Hellenism.

Despite Zizioulas's critical and restrained reception of existentialist and personalist philosophers, some have maintained that he is more existentialist than theologian.[41] Zizioulas forcefully responds that

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40 Alan Brown, "On the Criticism of *Being as Communion* in Anglophone Orthodox Theology," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 37.
41 See, for example, Lucian Turcescu, "'Person' versus 'Individual,' and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (2002): 527–39; Nicholas Loudovikos, "Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas' Final Theological Position," *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 4 (2011): 684–699.

such criticism entirely misses the point on which patristic theology and modern existentialist philosophy fundamentally differ. For not a single one of these philosophers would draw his personalism from a source other than a study of the human being. This is exactly what I consistently refuse to do…

      Both the Cappadocians, read correctly, and I myself stress that, in spite of any "deficient" analogies between human and divine persons, true personhood is only what we observe in the Trinity, not in humanity.[42]

Zizioulas claims to derive his personalism from Trinitarian theology and not the other way around, as some would have it. This rebuttal does not satisfy critics, however, since it opens up the deeper question of the patristic provenance of Zizioulas's Trinitarian ontology.

The Metropolitan attributes his Trinitarian ontology to the Cappadocians. He claims that they were the first to identify ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*, subsistence) with πρόσωπον (*prosopon*, person) and give these terms ontological primacy over οὐσία (*ousia*, substance, essence). Critics maintain that the Cappadocians make no such innovation in ontology. They argue that while the Cappadocians may be responsible for popularizing the use of *prosopon* as a synonym for *hypostasis*, the Fathers do not give personhood ontological priority over substance. Indeed, these critics point to texts wherein certain Fathers use *hypostasis* and *prosopon* as synonyms for individual (ἄτομον) or particular substance (ιδική οὐσία).[43] These sorts of examples ostensibly prove that the patristic tradition wholly subscribes to substance ontology rather than any form of personalism.[44]

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[42] John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 177.

[43] Turcescu focuses on Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *Ad Graecos* in which *hypostasis* and *ousia* are used in the same way that Aristotle uses primary and secondary substances. "'Person' versus 'Individual,'" 533–34; Cf. PG 45, 177; See also Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 111; Törönen points out that Maximus uses the terms in the same way. *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53–55; Cf. *Letter 15*, PG 91, 549BC.

[44] Loudovikos adds examples from Leontius of Byzantium and Ps. Cyril of Alexandria. "Person Instead of Grace," 689–90; Cf., PG 86, 1305C and 77, 1149B respectively.

In response to this claim that he purposefully misreads the Cappadocians, Zizioulas offers a two-pronged apologia. First, he addresses the specific issue. He claims that "this equation of πρόσωπον with ἄτομον, made by Gregory of Nyssa [and Maximus], was not meant to be applied to divine personhood."[45] And even if certain Fathers sometimes refer to the divine *hypostases* as individuals, they certainly do not mean to use these terms univocally regarding the Trinity and human beings. If the notion of individual used "in the case of human beings were to be transferred and applied to divine personhood in an unqualified way, as meaning person *tout court*, we would end up with three Gods."[46] Zizioulas reasons that this is why "the term ἄτομον never found its way into the official dogmatic vocabulary with regard to the holy Trinity."[47]

Even if the Cappadocians do not intend to distinguish person from individual in exactly the way Zizioulas suggests, neither did they intend to suggest that ontological categories can apply to God and humans in the same way. Zizioulas's constructive reading of the Fathers suggests that the Trinity is three *hypostases* and persons but not individuals; animals are *hypostases* and individuals but not persons; and only human beings can be referents of all three terms. These helpful distinctions cannot be made using substance ontology alone. The Metropolitan is not mis-reading the Fathers; he is reading them charitably. In other words, Zizioulas does not read the Cappadocians, or the Fathers in general, as historical artifacts. Nor does he view patristic tradition as bound by the exact words used by any particular Father. It is the "mind of the Fathers" that matters.

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[45] Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 175.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

Therefore, the second prong of Zizioulas's apology has to do with the hermeneutical task of the theologian. He says that "dispute about words contributes only to philology and history. Theology is about fundamental matters of faith."[48] Despite his constant appeals to patristic sources, Zizioulas is not interested in doing patristic theology. Nor is he a historian like his teacher at Harvard. He is a neo-patristic theologian. Zizioulas does not study patristic tradition; he participates in the tradition.[49]

VII. Ontology and Morality

The central tension in Zizioulas's oeuvre is not between philosophy and theology (reason and revelation) as is most often suggested. Rather, it is between ontology and morality (being and act). Numerous commentators have noticed a dearth of insight into the ascetical and ethical aspects of the tradition to accompany Zizioulas's considerable contributions to Trinitarian theology, anthropology, and ecclesiology. Zizioulas ostensibly disregards moral transformation through ascetical discipline and instead focuses exclusively on the ontological transformation experienced in the Eucharist. This has led some critics to conclude that Zizioulas has little regard for moral theology. And indeed, these critics are correct if moral theology is defined in such a way as to conflate ethics and ontology as does Western theology from Augustine and Aquinas up to Rahner and Barth.

Eastern theology, says Zizioulas, takes a different path. Early on, the Greek Fathers rejected philosophy's identification of being and activity in order to preserve God's absolute freedom and

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[48] Ibid., 176.
[49] See also Brown, "On the Criticism of *Being as Communion*," 66–67; Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? Response to Lucian Turcescu," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004): 600–608.

transcendence from the world. Zizioulas does not employ this distinction to polemical effect, however. Instead, he concludes that Eastern and Western theologies are prone to different errors:

> Orthodoxy is often thought of…as a vision of the future or heavenly things without an interest in history and its problems. By contrast, Western theology tends to limit ecclesiology (and actually the whole of theology) to the historical content of the faith—to the economy—and to project realities belonging to history and time into the eternal existence of God. …Orthodox theology runs the danger of historically disincarnating the Church; by contrast the West risks tying it primarily to history, either in the form of an extreme Christocentrism…lacking the essential influence of pneumatology or in the form of a social activism or moralism…[50]

Thus the central tension between ontology and ethics in Zizioulas's work is also a tension between Eastern and Western ways of theology. The crucial question, then, is how this tension can be resolved. Zizioulas's answer echoes that of his teacher:

> The two theologies, Eastern and Western, need to meet in depth, to recover the authentic patristic synthesis which will protect them from the above dangers. Ecclesial being must never separate itself from the absolute demands of the being of God—that is, its eschatological nature—nor from history. The…Church must always incarnate its eschatological nature without annulling the dialectic of this age and the age to come, the uncreated and the created, the being of God and that of [humanity] and the world.[51]

Like Florovsky, Zizioulas advocates that East and West adopt a neo-patristic project that binds them together and therefore mitigates the distinct risks of their individual theological trajectories.

In *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas lays out his proposal for an overarching ecumenical system centered on the event of the Eucharist. Drawing on his early work on patristic ecclesiology, he argues that the Eucharist constitutes an absolutely unique event wherein eschatological being meets historically situated activity. In the Eucharist, ontology and ethics momentarily merge in an experience of *being as communion.* "The Eucharist, as distinct from other expressions of ecclesial

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[50] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 19–20.
[51] Ibid., 20.

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life…manifests the Church not simply as something instituted, that is, historically *given*, but also as something *con-stituted*, that is constantly realized as an event of free communion, prefiguring the divine life and the Kingdom to come."[52]

As helpful as Zizioulas's proposal is for merging the concepts of eschatological being and historical action, it does not solve the ultimate tension between ontology and morality. The Eucharist may be the central event of the Church, and it may even be considered an ethical act insofar as it promotes the ultimate good of human beings. But in Zizioulas's theology, the imperative to participate in the eucharistic event seemingly supersedes all other imperatives. Zizioulas has not so much synthesized Eastern and Western theologies as subsumed the latter into the former. The Eastern emphasis on the eschatological Kingdom remains central while the Western emphasis on historical activity remains marginalized.

VIII. Communion and Being

The present volume is an appreciative yet critical extension of Zizioulas's theological system. Zizioulas has constructed an ingenious synthesis of patristic and philosophical insights. Nonetheless, commentators are right to suggest that his system devalues the ascetical and ethical aspects of the Christian tradition. Consequently, his goal of bridging Eastern and Western ways of theology falls short. The fault in not in his system itself, however. In fact, the system, properly expounded, demands a robust ascetical and moral theology. The problem is that while Zizioulas sets forth an innovative framework for differentiating two separate ontologies—two different definitions of "being"—he effectively re-confuses them, building a system on an equivocal and

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[52] Ibid., 22.

inconsistent ontology. The following chapters offer an interpretation of Zizioulas's theological system for the purpose of (1) providing a coherent account of his dual-ontology and (2) expounding the implicit ethical aspect of his theological system. In consequence of these two objectives, I also uncover a more nuanced way of differentiating Eastern and Western ways of theology which opens new possibilities for ecumenical encounter.

The title of this project is an obvious homage to Zizioulas's best known work. However, I have reversed the order of the terms and changed the preposition to a conjunction. The reasons for these changes are threefold. First, the alteration expresses the simultaneously interpretive yet critical nature of the project. Second, the change rebuffs the prevalent misconception that Zizioulas intends to posit a relation of strict identity between being and communion. And third, it signals the ontological primacy of communion over being. The titles of the chapters also reflect parallel distinctions derived from communion and being.

The first chapter, "Personhood and Divine Being," concerns Zizioulas's Trinitarian theology, which is primarily derived from his reading of the Cappadocian Fathers. According to Zizioulas, the Cappadocians invent a new ontology of personhood in order to respond to a renewed form of the Arian heresy. In light of this heretical revival, the Cappadocians found Athanasius's defense of the Trinity inadequate. Zizioulas argues that the Cappadocians therefore revolutionized ontology with three philosophical moves. First, they distinguished *hypostasis* from *ousia*. Second, they identified *hypostasis* with *prosopon*. And third, they gave *prosopon* ontological primacy over *ousia*.

In effect, the Cappadocians introduced an alternative ontology—not in place of substance ontology but in addition to it. In consequence of this ontological revolution, the relation between "being" and "act" became much more complex. Athanasian theology—which still prevails in both

East and West because of its simplicity—identifies the immanent Trinity with the unknowable divine substance and the economic Trinity with the divine will and activities. The problematic ambiguity of this theology is evident in the tension between the Thomistic and Palamite traditions that both lay claim to the Athanasian legacy.

In contrast to Athanasius, the Cappadocians identify the immanent Trinity with the unknowable and ineffable Persons and the economic Trinity with the divine Persons who are inherently related to the created world. In consequence, both the divine essence and divine activities must be identified with the economic Trinity and not the immanent Trinity. I argue, therefore, that Zizioulas's reading of the Cappadocians provides an alternative to both Thomistic and Palamite theology. Or, rather, it provides a way to synthesize the two: God may be called *actus purus* but only when we consider the economic Trinity. Likewise, we can affirm the essence-energies distinction but only if we reinterpret the doctrine to distinguish between the transcendent Persons and the immanent energies of the divine substance. In expounding this complex dual-ontology, this chapter reveals the key to understanding the whole of Zizioulas's theology and thereby lays the groundwork for the following chapters that reveal and develop the role of ascetic morality in Zizioulas's system.

The second chapter, "Personhood and Human Being," examines whether and how Zizioulas's theological personalism affects theological anthropology. Following the Christology of Athanasius reinterpreted through the lens of Cappadocian ontology, Zizioulas contends that humans are not created as persons but are granted the possibility of personhood through the work of the incarnate Son of God. The doctrine of deification, therefore, is interpreted as "personification." For it is impious to contend that human beings should become divine in the same way that the Trinity is divine. The divine substance is beyond the reach of humanity, but

personhood, i.e. ontological communion, is possible for humans who are granted to transcend their human substance just as the immanent Trinity transcends the divine substance. I argue that communion with the Trinity is possible for human beings only according to personal ontology. By contrast, substance ontology makes ontological deification impossible.

Chapter Three, "Sacraments and Ascesis," extends the argument of Chapter Two by examining the two different ways in which the doctrine of deification is described by the Christian tradition. Virtually all of the Fathers speak of deification as both a sacramental and an ascetical endeavor. The problem is that the Fathers do not offer a synthetic account of the relation between the sacraments and ascesis. Indeed, the Fathers tend to speak of the sacraments independently of ascesis and vice versa—as if they are two separate but somehow complementary paths to deification.

Against the tradition, Zizioulas argues that deification is sacramental and only sacramental. Consequently, he has been heavily criticized for eschewing the ascetical aspects of the faith. But in defense of his position, I demonstrate that ascetical deification is not deification at all. Whereas the sacraments offer ontological communion with the Trinity, ascesis can accomplish only a moral imitation of the divine attributes.

But if ascesis does not accomplish deification, why do the Fathers speak as if it does? In the fourth chapter, "The Eucharist and Repentance," I contend that ascesis relates to deification in the same way that the Cross relates to the Resurrection and the in the same way repentance relates to the eucharistic event. Without ascesis, the Cross, and repentance, there can be no deification, Resurrection, and Eucharist. Indeed, the Cross is an ascetic act of repentance and the Eucharist is a deifying foretaste of the Resurrection. Christ's commands to imitate the divine attributes culminate in the command to take up our own crosses and follow after his kenotic death for the

sake of others. Therefore ascesis is best understood as radical repentance, for it involves taking responsibility not only for one's own sins but for the sins of others—even unto death.

The final chapter, "Communion and Ethics," attempts to flesh out the ramifications of penitential ascesis for Christian ethics. Theological personalism and eucharistic ecclesiology have been employed by various other theologians in order to promote a Christian ethics based on the notion of communion. The problem is that these theologians invariably confuse and conflate ontological communion with moral communion. Consequently, the relationship between the Church *ad intra* and the Church *ad extra* is blurred or lost altogether; sacraments become moral imperatives, and moral imperatives become sacraments. Such confusion betrays a misunderstanding of the fundamental distinction driving Zizioulas's theology. For Zizioulas, the purpose of moral actions is penitence, not pietistic perfection. Only the sacraments can bring about ontological communion that transcends morality. Without this distinction between morality and ontology, Zizioulas's theology has little to offer to Christian ethics; indeed, without this distinction, Christian ethics has little to offer to the world.

Chapter 1

Personhood and Divine Being

Zizioulas's Trinitarian theology—indeed, the whole of his theological system—rests on a particular concept of personhood. There is no dearth of explication, analysis, and criticism of the Metropolitan's views regarding the Trinity, but all seem to underappreciate or misunderstand the "revolution" of personal ontology that he attributes to the Cappadocian Fathers. Interpreters have tended to draw hasty conclusions about his Trinitarian project and read him with the narrow aim of fitting his thought into a Procrustean bed made from existentialism, personalism, social Trinitarianism, or hierarchicalism. Certainly one can find elements of each of these in his writings. The fundamental insight that Zizioulas discovers in the Cappadocians, however, is far more innovative than anyone has thus far recognized.

Yet it is understandable that Zizioulas should be misunderstood in such a variety of ways, since he rarely exhibits a sustained concern for terminological precision. In what follows, therefore, I offer a novel reading of Zizioulas's theological personalism that distills, develops, and defends his Trinitarian ontology.

I.   The Invention of Personhood

Zizioulas's personal ontology is framed by the narrative he tells surrounding the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century. Modalism, or Sabellianism, claimed that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were not ontologically distinct but merely modes or roles assumed by the one God. Alternatively, Eunomianism was an extreme form of Arian subordinationism which taught that the Father alone is truly God. These heresies were born of attempts to preserve monotheism and guard against tri-theism, but this caused both to discount the possibility of ontological multiplicity in God. The Cappadocian Fathers—St. Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian), St. Basil of Caesarea (the Great), and St. Gregory of Nyssa were able to affirm that God is both one and three by inventing a new ontological category that denoted *being as communion*.

The root of the problem for both modalism and subordinationism is that they are unable to imagine ontology otherwise than substance. These heresies rely on the ontological monism of Greek philosophy. "Ancient Greek thought," says Zizioulas, "remained tied to the basic principle which it had set itself, the principle that being constitutes in the final analysis a unity in spite of the multiplicity of existent beings."[1] In such a system of ontological unity, there is no transcendence. God (or the gods) belongs to the category of substance because there is nothing outside the cosmos. Therefore, in order to refute modalism and subordinationism without sliding into tri-theism, the Cappadocians initiated "a revolution in Greek philosophy" by identifying two previously unrelated terms: *hypostasis* and *prosopon*.[2] St. Athanasius, who led the theological generation immediately before the Cappadocians, understood *hypostasis* and *ousia* as

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[1] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 29.
[2] Ibid., 36.

synonymous: "now subsistence [ὑπόστασις] is essence [οὐσία] and means nothing else but very being [τὸ ὄν]."[3] *Prosopon* had no ontological connotations. It was a term employed by the theater, referring to a mask or an adopted role or character, which seems quite close to the way in which "persona" is used in modern parlance.[4]

The Cappadocians were not the first to use *prosopon* with regard to the Trinity, however. Early in the third century, Hippolytus used the term to refer to the Father, Son, and Spirit; and Tertullian used the Latin equivalent in formulating the influential expression "*una substantia, tres personae*."[5] The term *hypostasis*, likewise, had already been applied to the Trinity by Origen, whose theology was heavily influenced by Neoplatonic emanationism and entails both the subordination of the Son and Spirit as well as a rejection of God's absolute alterity in relation to the cosmos.[6] By identifying *hypostasis* with person, the Cappadocians were breaking new metaphysical ground which helped them secure three important tenets of Trinitarian theology: 1.) divine freedom and transcendence 2.) ontological multiplicity and equality 3.) monotheism.

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[3] Athanasius, *To the Bishops of Africa*, trans. Archibald Robertson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 4.490; PG 26, 1036B.

[4] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 31–32.

[5] Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, Ante-Nicene Fathers 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 7.226; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, trans. Dr. Holmes, Ante-Nicene Fathers 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 2.598;11-12.605-607; Cf. Thomas Marsh, *The Triune God: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Study* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1994), 76–82; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 37–38.

[6] Zizioulas rightly suggests a similarity between Origen's description of the three *hypostases* of the Trinity and Plotinus's description of the three primary *hypostases* identified as the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. *Being as Communion*, 37; Cf. Origen, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, trans. Allan Menzies, Ante-Nicene Fathers 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 2.6.328-30; Plotinus, *The Enneads*, ed. B. S. Page, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 5.1.369-79.

a. Substance and Will

The Arian controversy, which was the principal concern of the first Ecumenical Council in 325, forced the Church to decide whether the begotten Son was created along with the cosmos or uncreated along with the unbegotten Father. To demonstrate the full divinity of the Son, Athanasius needed to differentiate the way in which the Son is begotten from the way in which the cosmos is created. He accomplished this by distinguishing substance from will (θέλημα, *thelema*).[7] The Son is begotten from the Father's substance while the cosmos is created from the Father's will. "Athanasius," says Zizioulas, "was in a position to break out of the closed ontology of the Greeks which linked God to the world by an ontological *syggeneia* [relationship]. He thus avoided the trap into which Justin and Origen had fallen…To be is not the same as to will or, hence, as to act…God's being, in an ultimate sense, remained free in relation to the world."[8] For Athanasius, the ontological equality within the Trinity is based on a common, uncreated substance which stands in opposition to the created substance of the cosmos.

But as important as Athanasius's substance/will distinction was for establishing absolute alterity between God and creation, it would prove inadequate against the extreme subordinationism of Eunomius. Using the logic of the first Ecumenical Council against itself, Eunomius points out that the substance of the Father is defined as "unbegottenness" and the Son is said to be begotten "of the substance of the Father." For Eunomius, this is incoherent nonsense. If the Father is unbegotten and the Son is begotten, then the Father and Son do not share the same substance. The

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[7] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 83; Georges Florovsky, "St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation," in *Aspects of Church History*, vol. 4, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975), 39–62; Cf. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, trans. Archibald Robertson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 4, Second Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 1.13.62.342; 2.14.1-2.348-349.
[8] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 84. See also 115-116.

unbegotten Father and the begotten Son are distinct substances just as the uncreated God and the created cosmos are distinct substances. Consequently, Athanasius's distinction between substance and will loses its explanatory power. Eunomius's argument shows that the Son has more in common with the created world than with the unoriginate Father.[9]

b. Hypostasis and Substance

Athanasius's logic leads to the conclusion that the Son is not willfully begotten.[10] Therefore it seems that the Son must be generated by necessity in a way similar to Neoplatonic emanationism (despite Athanasius's claims to the contrary).[11] Thus, while Athanasius's position preserves ontological equality within the Trinity, it is Eunomius's position that preserves divine freedom and transcendence in opposition to the necessity of monistic emanations.[12]

The Cappadocians understood the logical force of Eunomius's argument and set about adjusting the Athanasian position. In order to preserve divine freedom and transcendence, they needed to find an alternative way to describe the generation of the Son and Spirit. "In response to

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[9] John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 159–61; Cf. John Behr, *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 267–82.

[10] "Be then the Son the object of the Father's pleasure and love; and thus let every one religiously account of the pleasure and the not-unwillingness of God." Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 3.66.430.

[11] "The accusation of the Arians against the Nicaeans, that by introducing the homoousios into the creed they made the generation of the Son necessary for the Father, was simply rejected by St Athanasius without any demonstration of why logically the Arian argument was wrong. Athanasius insisted that the Father generated the Son 'willingly' and 'freely,' but having made in his theology a clear-cut distinction between the creation of the world from God's will and the generation of the Son not from God's will but from God's substance, he had to say more in explanation of his statement that the Father generated the Son 'willingly.'" Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 120–21; See Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 3.66.430.

[12] "There is one good point which they may allege about this argument of theirs; namely, that they desert passion, and take refuge in will. For will is not passion." Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Third Theological Oration: On the Son*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 7, Second Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 6.302.

the Eunomian challenge," says Zizioulas, "the Cappadocian Fathers have made a clear distinction between the level of substance and that of the Trinity. The generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit," he explains, "should not be referred to the substance of God but to the level of His personal or *hypostatic* existence"[13]

Zizioulas argues that this radical ontological innovation is evident in the difference between the creeds formulated by the First and Second Ecumenical Councils, which were decisively influenced by Athanasian and Cappadocian thought, respectively. Both creeds affirm *homoousion* theology. But regarding the generation of the Son, the creed formulated at Nicaea refers to the Son as begotten "from the *ousia* of the Father," whereas the Second Council's creed reads simply "from the Father." For Zizioulas, this means that "The one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the 'cause' both of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit."[14]

The language of causation within the Trinity is controversial in contemporary theology, and this will be addressed in more detail below. For now, we are concerned with whether and how the Father can cause the Son and Spirit neither from his will, as Eunomius would have it, nor from his substance, as Athanasius teaches. Zizioulas argues that Gregory Nazianzen's third "Theological Oration" suggests a personal form of causation:

> And yet I think that the person who wills [θέλων] is distinct from the act of willing [θέλησις]; he who begets [γεννῶν] from the act of begetting [γέννησις]; the speaker [λέγων] from the speech [λόγος]…On the one side we have the mover, and on the

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[13] John D. Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom: Is God Free in Trinitarian Life?," in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Giulio Maspero and Robert Wozniak (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 195–96; Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, 2.301; Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius*, trans. Mark Delcogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, The Fathers of the Church 122 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 1.14-15.112-115.
[14] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41.

other that which is, so to speak, the motion. Thus the thing willed is not the child of that will…nor is that which is begotten the child of generation, nor that which is heard the child of speech, but of the person who willed [τοῦ θέλοντος], or begat [τοῦ γεννῶντος], or spoke [τοῦ λέγοντος].[15]

Zizioulas explains that both temporal willing *ad extra* and eternal generating *ad intra* originate with the Father. The difference is that willing involves all three persons of the Trinity, whereas generating belongs solely to the Father. Generating, therefore, is prior to willing; for apart from the begotten Son and the generated Spirit there can be no divine will. Likewise, generating is prior to substance; for apart from the begotten Son and the generated Spirit there can be no common substance. In short, Gregory implies that personal causation of the Son and Spirit is prior to and distinct from both the divine will and divine substance.

Gregory continues on in the same oration to explain why willing cannot be attributed to the Trinity *ad intra*. He rhetorically queries:

The Father is God either willingly or unwillingly…If willingly, when did He begin to will? It could not have been before He began to be, for there was nothing prior to Him…And if unwillingly, what compelled Him to exist, and how is He God if He was compelled—and that to nothing less than to be God?[16]

The point here is that the Father is God neither willingly nor unwillingly. Likewise it makes no sense to say that the Father begets the Son either willingly nor unwillingly. The immanent Trinity enjoys a freedom from willing and acting. They are free to exist as communion without the vicissitudes of chance and choice. That is, they are absolutely transcendent to creation.

The Persons of the Trinity *ad intra* do not show mercy to one another, act justly toward one another, or practice humble deference in relation to the other. Amongst themselves, the three

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[15] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, 6.303; PG 36, 81B; See Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 196; Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 121.
[16] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, 7.303.

persons of the Trinity have no reason or need to act, nor do they possess any actions or attributes in common. They simply exist as communion. The *hypostasis*/*ousia* distinction can therefore be described as the difference between "being as communion" and "being as commonality." Here we begin to see exactly why Zizioulas claims that "Gregory solves the problem of how Trinitarian existence, unlike creation, can be free…without coming from the *will* of God."[17]

II.   Two Types of Freedom

Zizioulas's most underappreciated insight is his distinction between ontological freedom and moral freedom. For it is in the concept of freedom that we can most clearly grasp the distinction between person and substance. For Zizioulas, the two senses of freedom correspond to the two senses of being and also to the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity.

To avoid the logical necessity of God (emanationist monism), we need not suppose that God exists contingently (as a result of willing). "Contingency," says Zizioulas, "is not the logical alternative to necessity. The fact that God's being is not contingent does not automatically mean that it is not attributable to freedom."[18] More precisely, Zizioulas means that contingency is not the only logical alternative to necessity. In the Cappadocian conception of *hypostasis*, Zizioulas sees an alternative form of freedom beyond the binary of necessity and contingency. "Freedom in this sense is ontological, not moral…the freedom to be oneself, uniquely particular, and not as a freedom of 'choice,' which would in any case be inappropriate for the Trinity."[19]

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[17] Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 196.
[18] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 36.
[19] Ibid., 121–22.

Each of the Trinitarian Persons is absolutely unique, possessing particular properties that no other Person can possess; the three Persons have no properties in common. Yet this absolute uniqueness does not mean that the Persons are isolated individuals or self-constituting gods. Rather, it is their absolute particularity—their irreducible otherness—that constitutes them as distinct yet inseparable Persons.

> The properties (*idiomata*) of unbegottenness or fatherhood for the Father, begottenness or sonship of the Son and *ekporeusis* (spiration) of the Spirit are personal or *hypostatic* properties which are incommunicable…whereas substance is communicated among the three persons. A person is thus defined through properties which are absolutely *unique*, and in this respect differs fundamentally from nature or substance.[20]

For Zizioulas, the Persons of the Trinity are absolutely unique, but the uniqueness of each Person is correlative to the uniqueness of the others. Gregory of Nyssa proclaims this truth in arguing that "even if both of these names [Father and Son] be not spoken, that which is omitted is connoted by the one that is uttered, so close is the one implied in the other and concordant with it; and both of them are so discerned in the one that one cannot be conceived without the other."[21] The divine Persons *ad intra* are not free in the sense of individual autonomy but in the sense of eternally unique identity constituted by unbreakable relations with others. "This is the difference between moral and ontological freedom: the one presupposes individuality, the other causes…personhood [i.e. communion]."[22]

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[20] Ibid., 160.

[21] Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 5, Second Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 4.8.169; Cf. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 122.

[22] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 122.

III.   Trinitarian Theology East and West

Now if we take this distinction between *ousia* and person—especially understood in terms of moral and ontological freedom—to its logical conclusion, we arrive at the central theological insight that distinguishes the legacy of Eastern or Greek theology from that of the Latin West. The result of the distinction between moral and ontological freedom is that as persons, the three *hypostases* of the Trinity are absolutely unique and irreducible to a common *ousia*. The Trinity *ad intra* has no common properties or operations; the immanent Trinity has no essence and no energies.

The divine persons, as absolutely transcendent to all things created, do not participate in a common substance by which all three may be called by the same name. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three names of three persons and only "God" in a secondary sense—according to substance. Strictly speaking, the immanent Trinity of persons is not God. For "God" would constitute a common essence. Likewise, it is improper to speak of the immanent Trinity of persons as "divine," lest the three be classified under the category of divinity. The (divine) persons *qua* ontological communion exist otherwise than being. They are beyond the monism of substance ontology. The persons exist beyond ontological categories connoting commonality.[23]

What then are we to make of the traditional formulation: "one substance, three persons," which suggests that the unity of the three persons is found in their common essence? Zizioulas explains that "Although the Cappadocian Fathers do speak of the one substance of God with reference to his unity, they never…elevate the one divine substance above or before the person of

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[23] "If otherness is to be ontologically primary, the one in God has to be a person and not substance, for substance is a monistic category by definition (there can only be one substance and no other in God), while a person, such as the Father, is inconceivable without relationship to other persons." Ibid., 34–35.

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the Father."[24] For the Cappadocians, the Father is the one God, the one *arche* (*monarchia*), of the Trinity.[25] The Trinity begins with a Person and not with a substance. Personhood, as an ontological "category," logically precedes the category of substance, which only emerges "when" the three persons will and act in unison *ad extra* toward creation. This is the Cappadocian legacy that endures (albeit faintly) in Eastern theology.

The Latin West followed a different trajectory based on the theology of Augustine rather than the Cappadocians. Zizioulas is therefore quite critical of Western theology in both its Roman Catholic and Protestant varieties. And he is not alone in this criticism. Much of twentieth-century Trinitarian theology came to adopt de Regnon's paradigm (penned in 1892) which observes that Eastern theology makes the Trinity primary and struggles to establish the unity of God, while Western theology begins with God's unity and has trouble explaining the Trinity. Zizioulas sums up the oft repeated argument this way, which is worth quoting at length:

> There can be no doubt that Augustine makes otherness secondary to unity in God's being. God *is* one and *relates* as three. There is an ontological priority of substance over against personal relations in God in Augustine's Trinitarian theology. This was followed faithfully by medieval Western theology, which treated *De Deo uno* before the Trinity. On the whole, Reformation theology followed the same course, and the result has been an inability of Western theology to accommodate the doctrine of the Trinity in its devotion and logic. The fact, well-known as an observation of historians, that the West always started with the one God and then moved to the Trinity, whereas the East followed the opposite course, quite often has amounted to the West's beginning and ending up with the one God and never actually arriving at the Trinity.[26]

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[24] Ibid., 118.

[25] Ibid., 119; Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *The Book of Saint Basil on the Spirit*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 8, Second Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 16.38.23-25; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, 2.301.

[26] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 34.

But this rather facile distinction between East and West is now widely dismissed. Indeed, as Kristen Hennessy demonstrates, de Regnon's original intent was to bridge East and West by demonstrating that their respective strengths and weaknesses were complementary. Despite its intended purpose, subsequent polemicists used de Regnon's paradigm as a wedge to drive East and West further apart.[27]

Eastern and Western Christianity are united in the affirmation that God is both one and three. The dispute concerns the relationship between substance and person. Whether we start with the One or the Three *in recto*, the other is simultaneously considered *in oblique*.[28] Thus, de Regnon assumed a deep dialectical compatibility between the two ways of Trinitarian theology. He even claimed that the difference was valuable to the study of theology as long as the two ways are held together rather than separated.[29] So when Barth and Rahner are credited with revitalizing Western Trinitarian theology in the twentieth century, it is because they seek to balance the One and the Three exactly as de Regnon suggested. My interest here is not whether they succeed in that goal but in the assumption that motivates their Trinitarian projects.

IV.   The Ontological Priority of Personhood

Though Zizioulas seems to affirm de Regnon's paradigm, he actually proposes a more fundamental distinction between Eastern and Western theologies. Butner summarizes de Regnon's paradigm in more detail as follows:

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[27] Kristen Hennessy, "An Answer to de Regnon's Accusers: Why We Should Not Speak of 'His' Paradigm," *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 179–97.

[28] Ibid., 251; See also D. Glenn Butner, "For and Against de Régnon: Trinitarianism East and West," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 4 (2015): 401–2.

[29] Butner, "For and Against de Régnon," 402.

> [De Regnon] posited a Greek approach that understood the divine actions to be the basis for distinguishing the persons while affirming their consubstantiality, insofar as the Father worked through the Son and Spirit in a united action. In this approach, the persons were in the foreground with the nature a logical conclusion that follows from it. Conversely, a Latin approach understood the spiritual nature of God to itself explain the reasons for divine processions through a psychological analogy while rejecting divine action as a basis for distinguishing the persons as a result of the doctrine of appropriations and through the claim that operations *ad extra* were indistinguishable. The Latin approach understands nature as the base out of which subsistence emerges, while the Greeks understand *hypostasis* as a container with nature as the contents.[30]

Put in these terms, there is no reason to think that Greek and Latin ways of doing Trinitarian theology are ultimately incompatible. Michel Barnes and Lewis Ayres are therefore right to criticize the divisive and polemical ways in which de Regnon's paradigm has been employed. Futhermore, when Barnes and Ayres accuse de Regnon's paradigm of reductive oversimplification by finding counterexamples in Patristic literature, they are actually confirming de Regnon's motivating assumption that the different ways of doing Trinitarian theology simply emphasize different aspects of the same metaphysical mystery.[31]

Alternatively, Zizioulas describes a more profound difference. He argues that in response to the Eunomian challenge

> theology could only choose between two options…Augustine proceeded to a disjunction between God and Father, making of divine substance a notion (*divinitas*) logically prior to that of the Father, and assigning to it the role of expressing divine unity…However, things were different in the East…[The Cappadocians] preferred to face the [Eunomian] challenge in a way that was faithful to the biblical equation of God with the Father.[32]

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[30] Ibid., 401.

[31] See Michel René Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1995): 51–79; Michel René Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 237–50; Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[32] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 117-18.

John Behr, who otherwise has little affinity for Zizioulas's theology, has confirms the Metropolitan's distinction. He explains that

> Augustine…does not seem to be aware that he is using the term "God of the Trinity in a radically new manner, one that is not only different but also problematic. The concern of the Cappadocians, following Athanasius, Origen, and Irenaeus, was not the implications of how one affirms that each divine person is God and the one God, singularly and collectively, but the reverse: to affirm that the one God is the Father…These two ways of approaching the Trinity have resulted in very different idioms…To speak of "the triune" or "trinitarian God," the one God who is three, Father, Son, and Spirit, sound not only odd, but distinctly modalist. The Greek idiom no doubt sounds equally odd to the Latin ear, but for appearing to be tritheist and subordinationist. Yet the word "God" *is* being used in a new manner by Augustine; the approach and framework *has* changed. The legitimacy of this development cannot be sidestepped by overlooking this very real difference. This difference, however, is not that of the so-called "de Regnon paradigm," which alternates between starting with the one substance or the three persons…It is rather the difference between starting from the one God who is Father, and beginning with the Father, Son, and Spirit who are each, and together, the one God.[33]

The Cappadocians add depth to Athanasius's Trinitarian ontology without completely abandoning his insight. On the one hand they preserve Athanasius's distinction between substance and will, yet on the other hand they deny the ontological primacy of substance for the Trinity. Augustine, however, takes a decidedly different path. He completely rejects the substance/will distinction and proceeds to identify the divine substance with the divine attributes—including the will and activities.

Augustine most fully explains his Trinitarian ontology in books 5 to 7 of *De Trinitate.* Here he justifies the identity of divine substance and divine attributes by appealing to the notion of divine simplicity:

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[33] John Behr, "Calling upon God as Father: Augustine and the Legacy of Nicaea," *in Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 162–63.

> With God to be is the same as to be wise…So the Father is himself wisdom, and the Son is called the wisdom of the Father in the same way as he is called the light of the Father, that is, as we talk of light from light, and both are one light…What being wise is for wisdom, and being powerful for power, and being eternal for eternity, being just for justice, being great for greatness, that simply being is for being.[34]

"The central point," says Behr, "is that in God all qualities are identical with his essence."

"But," Behr continues, "lest we end up concluding that the Son, as begotten, is necessarily other in essence than the unbegotten Father, Augustine points out that not everything said of God is directly predicated of his substance, for besides talking about God according to substance, we may also talk about him according to relation."[35] Contra Eunomius, the Father is not unbegotten according to substance. Rather, the Father's unbegottenness denotes relation, or lack thereof.[36]

Since the Father is only relationally unbegotten and not unbegotten according to substance, Augustine concludes that unbegottenness does not ultimately define the Father. He says:

> What it comes to is this: every being that is called something by way of relationship is also something besides the relationship; thus master is also a man, and a slave is a man, and a draught-animal is a horse, and a security is a sum of money. Man and horse and sum of money are said with reference to self, and signify substances or beings; while master and slave and draught-animal and security are said with reference to something else, to signify certain relationships…So if the Father is not also something with reference to himself, there is absolutely nothing there to be talked of with reference to something else.[37]

In short, Augustine argues that the Father is God according to substance and unbegotten Father of the Son according to relation. Furthermore, the Father's divinity is ontologically prior to

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[34] Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 7.1.2.
[35] Behr, "Calling upon God as Father," 158.
[36] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.1.7-8.
[37] Ibid., 7.1.2

his relations with the Son and Spirit; for otherwise there could be "nothing there" to relate to the Son and Spirit.

Zizioulas is therefore somewhat mistaken when he asserts that "Augustine…[makes] of divine substance a notion (*divinitas*) logically prior to that of the Father."[38] Augustine does not make divinity logically prior to the Father but to the relations among the Father, Son, and Spirit. The divine substance, which is identical to the attributes and activities of the divine persons, logically precedes the relationships among the divine persons. So even if the divine substance is not logically prior to the Father, it is certainly logically prior to the Son and the Spirit.

Regardless of whether Zizioulas is right about the priority of substance over persons in Augustine, he correctly identifies the problematic nature of Augustine's ontology. As Bradshaw explains it:

> The issue is rather divine free choice, *liberum arbitrium.* Could God have chosen not to create, or could he have chosen to create things differently than he did? Augustine's answer to these questions appears to be no. In book 3 of *De libero arbitrio* (*On Free Will*) he argues that for God not to have created any of the things "necessary to the perfection of the universe"—such as souls whom he foreknew would be damned—would be a kind of "envy" that is impossible for God…In being so confident that God's will must issue in one determinate action, Augustine relies upon his strong sense of the identity of God's will with his essence. His reasoning is in fact quite similar to that of Plotinus, who argues that the Good by its nature must produce all that it is capable of producing."[39]

In contrast to the Cappadocians, who seek to differentiate Christian ontology from the monism of Greek philosophy because it leads to a denial of moral freedom, Augustine seems to have no qualms about closely correlating his ontology with that of the Neoplatonists. Perhaps, then, it is

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[38] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 118.
[39] David Bradshaw, "Augustine the Metaphysician," *in Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 242. See Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 4.8.6, 5.12.45-48.

no coincidence that freedom—both divine and human—became a perennial theological question in the West in ways it never did in the East.

V.   Immanent Trinity and Economic Trinity

Because the East developed distinctions between essence and energies as well as between persons/substance, Orthodoxy has done a better job of balancing *apophatic* theology with *kataphatic* theology, divine transcendence with divine immanence, and the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity, without reducing the dualities to unities. This is why Zizioulas can assert that even though Barth and Rahner were able to find a greater balance between the threeness and oneness of God than their immediate predecessors in the West, the "problem will remain for as long as otherness is not made into a primary ontological category."[40]

Barth and Rahner do not attempt to hold together two distinct ontologies but only to emphasize the dialectical relationship between oneness and threeness within the sole ontological category of substance. Thus they fulfill de Regnon's hope of achieving dialectical balance between the two compatible emphases. However, this balance only underlines the fact that de Regnon's paradigm does not point to the real difference between East and West. Instead, de Regnon only points to a tension internal to the Trinitarian ontology of substance. From the Eastern perspective, Barth and Rahner both fail in their attempts to hold oneness and threeness together because an ontology of substance cannot avoid the reduction of multiplicity to unity.

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[40] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 34.

This reduction of difference to sameness is perhaps most evident in Rahner's influential rule that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa."[41] Zizioulas argues that such a rule is the ineluctable fruit of the Augustinian tradition's tendency to identify act with being in God.[42]. The Cappadocians preserve divine transcendence and freedom by distinguishing *ousia* from *hypostasis*. Augustine does not make this distinction, and so the West tends to conflate the being of God (*theologia*) and the acts of God (*oikonomia*).[43]

But, of course, this does not mean that we should affirm two separate Trinities. Zizioulas explains that

> the immanent Trinity is indeed the economic Trinity and the economic Trinity is indeed the immanent Trinity, for otherwise the world would not be in communion with the life of the Triune God…This identification of the two Trinities manifests the ek-static character of God, i.e. his freedom to reach beyond himself…But the way he reaches beyond himself is dictated…not by any inner logical or ontological necessity…The economy manifests God's freedom precisely by showing that God is free to become what he is not rather than what he is in his own being.[44]

The distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity is therefore crucial and cannot be reduced to an identity of divine act and being. The ontological freedom of the immanent Trinity, which exists prior to and otherwise than substance provides a way to contemplate the divine persons as concrete entities who first exist in communion and subsequently will to create the cosmos, thereby using moral freedom (activity) to determine the substance (being) of the Trinity.

In creating the cosmos through a unified will and act, the divine persons define their common substance as uncreated Creator in opposition to creation. The divine persons exercise

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[41] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1997), 22.
[42] Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 205.
[43] Orthodoxy most often describes this in terms of Gregory Palamas's essence/energies distinction.
[44] Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 205–6.

moral freedom as an ecstatic expression of their ontological freedom and become the one God, whose substance is uncreatedness which stands in opposition to all else that belongs to created substance.[45] We may also call this uncreated substance "divinity" or "God" since both signify a relation of superiority over all creation. But we must not confuse this divinity or God-substance with the one God who is the person of the Father within the immanent Trinity.

VI. Objections

Critics of Zizioulas's Trinitarian theology tend to find fault with the priority of personhood over substance. The objection is spelled out in a number of ways, but the point of contention always comes back to the *hypostasis/ousia* distinction. I will discuss what seem to be the two strongest and most comprehensive versions of the objection and then evaluate Zizioulas's responses. The first objection is that Zizioulas distinguishes person from substance by identifying person with freedom and substance with necessity, which introduces an irreconcilable conflict into divine being. The second objection claims that prioritizing person over substance leads Zizioulas to subordinate the Son and Spirit to the Father.

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[45] It is entirely appropriate, therefore, to suggest that "God's being is in becoming" according to substance ontology which applies to the economic Trinity. But this can only be affirmed as long as Rahner's rule is also rejected. For substance ontology cannot apply to the immanent Trinity without sacrificing God's freedom and transcendence. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004).

a. Nature and Necessity

It is often claimed that the Metropolitan problematically identifies personhood with freedom and substance with necessity such that freedom amounts to a triumph over nature.[46] In other words, the person/substance distinction pits the two ontologies against one another. One is either a person existing in free communion or an instantiation of substance defined in opposition to other substances. Personal freedom is *freedom from* substance. The complaint is that this implies a conflict between the divine nature and the divine persons, i.e. that God's exists as *either* one *or* three, *either* by necessity *or* in freedom.

In recent essays, Zizioulas has addressed this objection directly, and it is worth reading his own words at length:

> As to the application of necessity to God's nature, all statements in my writings which speak of "necessity" in divine nature presuppose the *hypothesis* that divine nature is conceived apart from or prior to divine personhood: in such a case (which in fact does *not* apply to God since in God nature and person are inseparably united as two aspects of His being) *our* references to divine nature would make God a "necessary being" and God's nature a necessity for God. In other words, a personless nature in God (or in humans), or a nature which has—in our statements about it—the priority over the person, is subjected to necessity. It is in this sense and in such a context that it can be said that the person "frees nature from necessity." The real point, therefore in speaking about necessity and freedom is not that nature=necessity, and person=freedom (which is, more or less, how my positions is presented), but that nature and person must be spoken of together, for otherwise nature is subjected to necessity (which does *not* form part of its definition).[47]

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[46] See, for example, Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 86; Nicholas Loudovikos, "Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas' Final Theological Position," *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 4 (2011): 686–87; Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 87; Douglas Farrow, "Person and Nature: The Necessity-Freedom Dialectic in John Zizioulas," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 121–23.

[47] John D. Zizioulas, "Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor," in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection*, ed. Bishop Maxim Vasiljevic, Contemporary Christian Thought Series 20 (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2013), 106-107n56; See also Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 197.

Zizioulas completely rejects any reading of his Trinitarian theology which would equate person with freedom and nature with necessity. Critics have confused Zizioulas's own criticism of substance ontology—or, rather the *priority* of substance—with his assertion of the priority of the person. The conflict between person and nature concerns priority not compatibility. If substance is primary, then persons are determined by substance rather than vice versa.

That personhood and substance are distinct but not incompatible is discussed in more detail above. I argue that Zizioulas's distinction between person and substance entails that the persons of the immanent Trinity have no substance because they possess nothing in common other than their perichoretic communion. But Zizioulas seems to reject this explicitly in his claim that "nature and person must be spoken of together." What he means by 'together" is clarified elsewhere in the same essay when he declares that "*ousia* or *physis* and *hypostasis* or *prosopon,* can be distinguished but in no way separated from each other. There is no person without nature, and there is no nature without *hypostasis*. The two taken together constitute what we call 'being.'"[48] And again, he says, "nature and person form an unbreakable ontological unity, as they represent two aspects of every being, divine or human. This is a view I have always maintained and stated already in my *Being as Communion* many years ago."[49]

While it is certainly the case that Zizioulas's ontology of personhood requires that no nature can exist without being hypostasized, the reasons for disregarding the inverse are twofold. First, nowhere does Zizioulas offer an explanation or defense of the claim that no *hypostasis* can exist

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[48] Zizioulas, "Person and Nature," 86.
[49] Ibid., 106.; Zizioulas states: "The basic ontological position of the theology of the Greek Fathers might be set out briefly as follows. No substance or nature exists without person or *hypostasis* or mode of existence. No person exists without substance or nature." Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41-42n37.

apart from nature. In fact, this claim seems more in line with the Greek philosophical tradition of ontological monism than Zizioulas's account of the Cappadocians' personal ontology.

The second reason for disregarding Zizioulas's assertion that there is no *hypostasis* without *ousia* is that it undermines, even obviates, the ontological revolution that is the focus of Zizioulas's theology. If the divine persons *ad intra* have a common substance, then we lose the ability to differentiate between *theologia* and *economia*, or between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, i.e. we lose divine transcendence. Since whatever substance the persons have in common can only be identified in opposition to other substances, we must conclude that the divine substance is contingent upon the divine will to create the cosmos. Or rather, as I argued above, the divine substance *is* the divine will, i.e. God's immanent, ontological freedom expressed *ad extra.* Consequently, if no persons can exist without a nature, then God cannot exist without creating the cosmos. In other words, Zizioulas's aphorism—no substance without *hypostasis*, and vice versa— is equivalent to Rahner's rule, which Zizioulas rightly rejects because it undermines God's transcendence.[50]

The reason for the confusion seems to be a failure to correlate the person/nature distinction with a distinction between communion and commonality. Or we may get at the same point by distinguishing between person and *hypostasis.* A *hypostasis* may be a person-in-communion, or an individual member of a particular classification. As Zizioulas notes, "All creatures possess a *hypostasis*, a mode of being. Yet not all creatures are gifted with the freedom to relate this

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[50] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 201.

hypostasis to the divine 'mode of being' which is not subject to death, and thus to allow or enable their *hypostasis* to exist for ever as particular [and] truly personal."[51]

Three mice, for example, are *hypostases* with a common nature but they are not persons-in-communion.[52] Likewise, the economic Trinity is three *hypostases* who share a commonality in opposition to everything created. But the immanent Trinity is three *hypostases* who exist in communion without commonality. Thus it is only in considering the Trinity *ad intra* that we may identify *hypostasis* and person. In the realm of substance, personhood is not possible *per se*. Considered *ad extra*, the Trinity is manifested as three *hypostases* of a common nature rather than three persons in communion.

Therefore, contra Zizioulas's critics, there is no conflict between person and nature, but contra Zizioulas, neither are the person and nature inseparable. Personal ontology and substance ontology are neither identical nor disjunctive but complementary. This is why Zizioulas can maintain his position despite repeated demonstrations that the Cappadocians, and the patristic tradition as a whole, speak of the common divine substance as the unity of the Trinity. Zizioulas does not reject substance ontology; he argues that it is secondary to personal ontology. The ultimate cause of all that exists is not a substance but a person. This is the only way to avoid monistic emanationism and preserve freedom—both ontological and moral.

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[51] Ibid., 95.

[52] Ibid., 66, 95, 110, 177; Cf. Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53–59.

b. Monarchy and Reciprocity

At the end of his excellent book comparing the theologies of Lossky and Zizioulas, Papanikolaou clarifies the above quotation by Volf concerning the centrality of the person/nature distinction for Zizioulas's theology. Papanikolaou asserts that Zizioulas's theological system "seems to stand or fall on the adequacy of his understanding of the monarchy of the Father."[53] In other words, the monarchy of the Father is the crux of Zizioulas's argument for ontologically grounding substance through person, and thereby the crux of his entire theology. It does not bode well, then, for Zizioulas that his particular account of the monarchy of the Father is widely rejected by both Eastern and Western theologians.[54] Though the West does not typically speak of the monarchy of the Father, such terminology is not absent in the Latin tradition. It has become commonplace now to point out that even Augustine speaks of the Father as the source of divinity. It cannot be denied, however, that the East is far more comfortable with the *monarchia* of the Father than the West.

Still, Zizioulas takes the *monarchia* further than most other Eastern theologians in stating that the Father is not only the origin (ἀρχή) and source (πηγή) but also the sole cause (αἰτία) of the Trinity. To many, this position sacrifices the absolute equality of the persons, and so it is often suggested that Zizioulas balance his notion of the Father as cause with some sort of reciprocity. However, Zizioulas remains adamant that the Trinity must have only one personal cause. His

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[53] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 161 n.125.

[54] See, for example Volf, After Our Likeness, 78–80; Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation with Special Reference to Volume One of Karl Bath's Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 290–94; Thomas Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 63; Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 196; Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 148–54; Loudovikos, "Person Instead of Grace," 688–96; Chrysostom Koutloumousianos, *The One and the Three: Nature, Person and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015), 9–47.

critics, therefore, balk at this paternal totalitarianism that prohibits egalitarian communion and accuse the Metropolitan of advocating an offensive, if not heretical, subordinationism.

There are two issues to tackle here. First, I will address what Zizioulas means by "cause" and whether this leads to subordinationism. Second, I will discuss whether the monarchy of the Father can be alternatively construed through reciprocity without sacrificing the primacy of personal ontology.

Zizioulas seems to do his critics' work for them when he openly admits that "In making the Father the 'ground' of God's being—or the ultimate reason for existence—theology accepted a kind of subordination of the Son to the Father without being obliged to downgrade the *Logos* into something created."[55] Alan Torrance, for one, cannot understand why Zizioulas would affirm *any* sort of subordinationism. "[T]he very concept of communion includes that of persons. Should this not mean," he asks, "that the intra-divine communion is…ontologically primitive and original?"[56] Zizioulas responds to Torrance by reasserting that since person is an inherently relational term, the person of the Father can in no way be conceived or exist apart from the other persons of the Trinity. "It is, therefore, impossible to make the Father ontologically ultimate without, at the same time, making communion primordial."[57]

This is not an entirely satisfying response, however, because causation implies time insofar as a cause must precede its effect. That is, if the Father is the divine cause, he must precede the Son and the Spirit. Zizioulas thus goes on to explain that by *cause*, he does not have in mind any of Aristotle's four causes (formal, material, efficient, or final).[58] Rather, Zizioulas argues that the

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[55] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 89.
[56] Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 293.
[57] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 126.
[58] Ibid., 127–28.

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Cappadocians understood another kind of causation that has nothing to do with time or substance. Personal causation is a matter of ontological freedom rather than moral freedom.

Nevertheless, Zizioulas's critics are not satisfied because the Father's freedom seems qualitatively different, or superior, to the freedom of the Son and Spirit.[59] It is claimed that "Zizioulas cannot escape the fact that if the Father 'perpetually confirms through "being" His *free will to exist*'…then the Father has a type of freedom which the Son and the Spirit do not possess."[60] In other words, Zizioulas makes the Father superior to the Son and Spirit because the Father alone freely generates and alone is free from being generated. Put in these terms, the criticism amounts to an accusation of Eunomianism, which is rather ironic since Zizioulas claims that the Cappadocians identified the Father as the cause of the Trinity in response to Eunomianism.

Where the criticism goes wrong is in taking Zizioulas's claim—that the Father "perpetually confirms through 'being' His free will to exist"—as representative of Zizioulas's thought on the immanent Trinity. On the contrary, we have seen that the Cappadocians revise Athanasius's substance/will distinction into the person/substance distinction whereby substance and will are identical and secondary to the persons. Indeed, the above quotation comes in one of the most imprecise and thus confusing (or perhaps itself confused) passages in the Zizioulian corpus. In the same passage, which argues that the Father is the cause of the Trinity and the one God, Zizioulas states: "Thus God as person—as the *hypostasis* of the Father—makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God."[61]

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[59] Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 292; See also Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 203n93.
[60] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 150; Cf. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41.
[61] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41.

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The only way to make sense of this passage is to presuppose a distinction between person and substance/will, or, more clearly, a distinction between ontological freedom and moral freedom. What Zizioulas means is that a person determines the divine substance. That is, the Father's moral freedom to will and act in relation to the cosmos is grounded in his ontological freedom to exist as communion with the Son and Spirit. Therefore, Zizioulas's claim that the Father "makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God" means that the unified substance/will of the Trinity is not the primary ontological reality of God. The one God of the economic Trinity is the divine substance, but this divine substance originates from the one God of the immanent Trinity—the Father.

If this distinction is missed—if the two ways of identifying the one God are confused—then we will inevitably introduce will and substance into the immanent Trinity and consequently demand a unity of action (moral freedom) that is applicable only to the economic Trinity. This is precisely how critics arrive at the conclusion that if the Father causes the Trinity then the Son and Spirit are subordinate, when in fact, it is the notion of Father as cause that safeguards the unity of the Trinity both immanently and economically against any form of unbiblical subordination.[62]

Even if this argument for the Father as sole cause of the Trinity still seems weak, Zizioulas argues that the only alternative that would preserve the primacy of personal ontology is the mutual or reciprocal causation of the divine persons, which is completely unacceptable. Papanikolaou presents a particularly lucid case for mutual causation, though many others offer similar arguments.[63] He suggests that

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[62] As noted above, Zizioulas reserves the right to speak of a "sort of subordination" as long as this implies nothing more than Christ's statement that "the Father is greater than I" (John. 14:28) and the biblical norm of giving precedence to the Father (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:4-6; Phil. 2:5-8).

[63] See n53 for a selection of theologians with similar views on Trinitarian reciprocity.

if the Son and the Spirit are to be on an equal footing with the Father in terms of freedom, then they must "cause" the Father's existence as much as the Father is the cause of their existence…As we have seen Zizioulas affirms that communion and otherness are mutually constitutive…[T]his mutually constitutive relationship between communion and otherness means for the Trinity that the Son *causes* the Father and the Spirit to be; that the Spirit *causes* the Father and the Son to be; as much as the Father *causes* the Son and the Spirit to be…On the level of freedom, each person being the *cause* of the existence of the other persons means that each person freely confirms their free will to exist in communion with other persons, and by so doing, *causes* the existence of the other as person.[64]

Zizioulas has little patience, however, for claims of mutual causation. He dismisses them by saying that reciprocity "would imply that causation would either be irrelevant to the question of the oneness of God, in which case we should seek the divine unity in divine substance…or if relevant, would lead to tritheism (three causes equals three 'sources' or 'principles')."[65] Papanikolaou responds that tritheism is ruled out because God reveals himself as unified in and by "the same type of freedom."[66] But if this is the case, then mutual causation averts tritheism only to revert to the primacy of a common substance defined as freedom.

Therefore, Zizioulas is right to assert that the primacy of personal ontology entails that the Father alone is the cause of the Trinity. Even if we find it less than fully compelling, for whatever reason, there is no suitable alternative by which to affirm the Cappadocian distinction between person and substance against Eunomian subordinationism.

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[64] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 151.
[65] Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 201.
[66] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 152.

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VII. Conclusion

Zizioulas's Trinitarian theology challenges the growing consensus that Eastern and Western ways of theology are not as far apart as they seemed a century ago. But though Zizioulas may find common ground with de Regnon at a general level, Zizioulas makes a much different case regarding the reason for the East/West differences. In short, the West followed Augustine in identifying being and act in God, whereas the East followed Athanasius and the Cappadocians in distinguishing the divine being from the divine acts. And this difference was no less evident in the fourteenth century than in the fourth, as St. Gregory Palamas and his followers debated with Thomists on whether God's essence is distinct from God's energies. Therefore the East/West divide is not so easily resolved as de Regnon (and, ironically, his critics) assumes.

Nonetheless, Eastern and Western theologies can learn from one another without assuming more common ground than is actually there. For instance, Zizioulas's narrative wherein the Cappadocians re-think Athanasius's substance/will distinction as a distinction between person and substance provides the East with a way of affirming that being and act can be identified in God. And in recognizing that the identification of being and act in God has led to an emphasis on God's immanent presence in creation and history, the East can better appreciate the motivation behind Western moral and political theologies, which are lacking in Eastern theology.

Chapter 2

Personhood and Human Being

The monarchy of the Father is the cornerstone of Zizioulas's ontological revolution regarding the primacy of the person over substance. The Father must be the personal cause of the Trinity in order to preserve ontological equality in response to Eunomian subordinationism without sacrificing divine transcendence or monotheism. Thus personhood, rather than substance, is primary in Trinitarian ontology. "This does not cause any problems with regard to the being of God," says Zizioulas; "But what about the human being?"[1] "Is there some link or connection between the personal existence of God and what we call a human 'person'? Is Trinitarian theology able to throw light on anthropology, and in what way?"[2]

Zizioulas's anthropology is often mischaracterized due to uncareful readings and hasty oversimplifications. For example, he is often categorized within a movement of theological personalists that includes Christos Yannaras, Vladimir Lossky, Colin Gunton, Alan Torrance, and

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[1] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 108.
[2] John D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, ed. Gregory Edwards (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2010), 31.

Miroslav Volf. Certainly there is a level of similarity among this group. Indeed, all of these theologians seek to answer the sort of questions posed above concerning the persons of the Trinity and human personhood. And despite minor variations, all are working with a similar notion of personhood—one that emerged in various academic disciplines but flowered as an aspect of existentialist philosophy. Andrew Louth describes personalist anthropology this way:

> The term "person" then presents itself as a powerful notion to express our understanding of what it is to be human as relational and constituted by society. This is in contrast to…seeing the "individual" as a mere unrelated unit. A theological form of this emphasizes how persons achieve their personhood in the community of the church. It sees the church community itself as constituting a reflection of the tri-personal society of the Trinity. We are to aspire to become *hypostases*, to realize in our own lives the mutual coinherence, the *perichoresis*, of the persons of the Trinity.[3]

For Louth, personalist anthropology is "simple" and has yet to be thoroughly "tested." He therefore contrasts it with anthropology based to the patristic notion of the image of God.[4]

All of the theologians mentioned above would certainly dispute Louth's distinction between anthropologies derived from philosophical personalism and those based on the biblical notion of the divine image. Indeed, none of them develops a purely philosophical anthropology without reference to the image of God. Louth's division of theological anthropologies into two types is therefore unwarranted. Instead, it should be noted that personalists have adopted and adapted useful ideas and terminology from culturally significant philosophers in order to supplement and expound upon inherited Christian doctrines.

Nevertheless, Louth is right to suggest that the personalist anthropology he describes is rather "simple." However, this simplicity constitutes not a point of difference but of similarity with

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[3] Andrew Louth, "What It Means to Be Human: An Orthodox Point of View," in *Building Bridges: Between the Orthodox and Evangelical Traditions*, ed. Tim Grass et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 166.
[4] Ibid., 165.

imago Dei anthropology. Regardless of terminology, theological anthropology relies on analogy. Human beings are *like* God in certain respects but ultimately more unlike God because of the infinite qualitative distinction between humanity and divinity. The two natures are united in Christ, but such a union is not available to any other human being. Consequently, Christian anthropology is left to tell a rather simple and un-inspiring tale: humans are originally created *like* God; then humans sinned and became less *like* God; then because of Christ, humans are able to become more *like* God.

Even the doctrine of deification—union with God—is often muddled with the language of similitude. The oft repeated patristic aphorism "God became human that humans might become god" already assumes an infinite difference between "God" and "god." And this difference is further amplified by more recent interpreters who prefer to gloss the doctrine as "God became human that humans might become *like* God as far as humanly possible."

Zizioulas's anthropology offers something different and more profound. Personalism and the *imago Dei* are both central to his thought, but instead of analogy and equivocation, the Metropolitan attempts to employ the concept of personhood univocally. His personalism is therefore anything but simple, and this has led many of his readers to misunderstand his project. For example, the Metropolitan's personalism does not begin with the assumption that human beings are—or even can be—persons. Personhood is defined by the Trinity, so if human beings are to attain personhood, they must somehow become something other than merely human.

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Zizioulas is not interested in what it means for humans to be *like* persons.[5] His focus is on what it means for human beings to transcend their humanity and enter into the communal life of the Trinity. His anthropology is therefore less a study of humanity and more a study of deification disabused of analogy and equivocation. We might sum up Zizioulas's anthropology by rephrasing the aphorism: A person became human, that humans might become persons.

So as we move from a discussion of the persons of the Trinity *ad intra* to a discussion of their work *ad extra,* the primacy of personhood over substance becomes allied to the primacy of the eschaton over history. Salvation is the event wherein the eschatological future breaks into the historical present. Or again, salvation can be described as the realm of personhood breaking into the realm of substance. Salvation is not achieved by moral progress toward divine likeness but by ontological transformation unto personal communion. For Zizioulas, personhood applies to humans not as they are created but as they are created to become in the eschatological future.

I.   Transcendence and Creation *Ex Nihilo*

Zizioulas's anthropology begins with a strong notion of divine transcendence. For if God is not absolutely transcendent to the world, then Christianity becomes indistinguishable from neo-platonic monism with its necessary emanations and inevitable apokatastasis. If God creates of necessity, then human beings will be saved by necessity. Zizioulas argues that the Greek Fathers, therefore, rejected Greek philosophy for the sake of affirming freedom—both divine and human. The Greek Fathers understood that the God of the Bible "was so independent of the world that he

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[5] Indeed, this is reason his theology is justifiably criticized for focusing on metaphysics to the exclusion of ethics and ascesis.

was 'conceivable' without relation to the world and could do what he wanted, free from any logical or ethical obligation: a shockingly arbitrary God, who has mercy 'on whom he has mercy' (Rom. 9:15)."[6]

To preserve God's transcendence to his creation, the Fathers taught that the world does not originate from God but from nothing—*ex nihilo*:

> If [creation] was eternal it would not need to be created. If it were not created from nothing, this would mean that it was created form something that had some other existence…It would have to be an eternal creation which would make the world necessarily eternal, as Origen believed, and ancient Greeks had believed long before him.[7]

In other words, God's decision to create is due to divine freedom rather than the divine substance. Athanasius pioneered this distinction in his disputations against the Arian claim that the Son was part of creation. Athanasius argued that while the Son was begotten according to the divine substance, creation was a product of the divine will.

Zizioulas goes on to claim that God's freedom regarding creation means that "this world might just as well not have existed at all."[8] Here he takes a fairly straightforward and uncontroversial distinction and draws from it a rather radical conclusion about the contingency of creation. To be sure, Athanasius does not explicitly draw the same conclusion—and this, in and of itself, is enough to draw the ire of other Orthodox theologians.

In a published exchange with Zizioulas, Philip Sherrard objects to this notion of God's freedom regarding creation. Sherrard argues that "if indeed God wills to have communion with…the world, then the world must exist of necessity. Or should we say that God sometimes

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[6] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 255.
[7] John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 88.
[8] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 255.

wills it and sometimes does not? And besides, what kind of God would the Christian God have been, if he had not manifested his creative power?"[9] For Sherrard, God's substance and will may be conceptually distinguished, but God's actions must accord with God's being. But this is a distinction without a difference for Zizioulas. If God's eternal substance determines God's eternal will, then there is no way to differentiate actions performed by the substance from actions performed by the will; i.e. generation of the Son from creation of the world. Indeed, this is the very problem that prompted Athanasius to formulate the substance/will distinction in the first place in order to combat the Arian heresy.

If substance and will cannot be as closely identified as Sherrard suggests, neither can they be as strictly separated as Zizioulas suggests. For even though the distinction is an adequate defense against Arianism, it proves insufficient against Eunomian subordinationism. Eunomius adopted the substance/will distinction but argued that the Son cannot be generated from the divine substance because this would amount to the necessary emanationism of Platonism. To preserve the freedom of the God, Eunomianism held that the Son was generated by the divine will rather than the divine substance. Thus, neither identifying substance and will nor separating them can effectively preserve a difference between generation and creation. The exchange with Sherrard, therefore, ends in a stalemate.

Strangely enough, Zizioulas engages with Sherrard without mentioning the ontological revolution introduced by the Cappadocians. The dialogue centers on the divine substance and will without reference to *hypostasis* or person. And this explains the stalemate. Athanasian theology attempts to differentiate Christian dualism from Greek philosophical monism. And perhaps this is

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[9] Ibid., 271.

Zizioulas's only point here. If so, it is indeed an important one—not because Athanasius succeeds, but because his efforts open the door to the Cappadocian revolution in ontology. Athanasius makes as strong a distinction as possible between God and world, but because he relies on substance ontology, his dualism ultimately reduces to monism. The category of substance unifies the created and the Uncreated regardless of any differences between the two. Substance ontology makes absolute transcendence an impossibility—a problem that not even the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* can remedy.

An absolute difference between God and the world cannot be maintained as long as the two are united by a single conception of being. According to Zizioulas's reading of the Cappadocians, there are two distinct senses of being: person and substance. Personal ontology refers to the eternal (atemporal) communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which distinguishes the Trinity from the world. Substance ontology refers to God's eternal (omnitemporal) will and activity that unites God with the world. Only once we discern a distinction between personal ontology and substance ontology can we conceive of God's absolute transcendence.

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* by itself, then, does not preserve God's freedom from the world. We must also affirm the person/substance distinction. For as long as God is confined to the category of substance, God will be defined by his will to create. Substance ontology is therefore incompatible with God's absolute transcendence. Only by distinguishing between personal ontology and substance ontology can we open the possibility of a God who creates the world in freedom.

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II.   Creation *Ex Nihilo* and Mortality

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* does not do as much work as Zizioulas seems to think it does regarding divine transcendence. However, the doctrine—as described by Athanasius—is the foundation of the existential problem facing creation. Because the world is created from absolute nothingness, its nature is inherently limited, impermanent, and corruptible. The world is from nothing and, left to itself, will naturally return to nothing.

In an underappreciated passage of *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius claims that death is not a punishment imposed by God on account of sin. Nor is death the natural consequence of sin. Instead, death is the natural destiny of created things—regardless of human sin or obedience. "Man is mortal by nature," says Athanasius, "since he is made out of nothing."[10]

For Athanasius, what comes from nothing will naturally return to nothing; whatever has a beginning also has an end. In other words, only God is eternal. Zizioulas explains:

> What is *created* naturally contains, at its heart, no power of survival…Being *created* means for us that we are mortal and that we are under threat of total and absolute destruction…Our nature means that we come into the world as mortal people…The whole world—by the very fact that it is *created*—perishes while existing and exists while perishing: its life and ours are not "true life."[11]

Zizioulas sometimes refers to the natural mortality of human beings as "biological existence" or existence according to the "biological *hypostasis*" as opposed to the "ecclesial *hypostasis*." The defining characteristic of the created, biological *hypostasis* is the physical body. "His body is the tragic instrument which leads to communion with others, stretching out a hand, creating language,

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[10] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. A Religious of C.S.M.V., Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 4.4-6.
[11] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 257.

speech, conversation, art, kissing. But at the same time, it is the 'mask' of hypocrisy, the fortress of individualism, the vehicle of the final separation, death."[12]

The fundamental problem facing created beings, therefore, is not sin but their natural end in the same nothingness from which they came. It is not disobedience that elicits a radical response from God. Rather it is God's own act of creation that gives rise to the problem of death. "In conclusion, if we would truly understand and assess what Christ has saved us from…we must realize that he saves us from pre-creative 'non-being,' nothing less. But we shall never understand this unless we link the notion of death to destruction; because if Christ saves us from anything, it is from death."[13]

III.   The Image of God

Death, or the return to nothingness, is the natural end of the world. Yet God does not leave his creation to its natural fate. God created humans in his own image and likeness that humanity might save the world from annihilation:

> God did not make the world with the intention that it would disappear, but that it should have life…The only way that something created can transcend death and deterioration is to remain in constant communion with the eternal God. God and the world have to be in communion, and the means chosen for this communion is mankind…Man was created at the end of all creation so that he would bring all that is created to the uncreated God and unite them in permanent relationship.[14]

Adam and Eve were created in communion with God, but it was an imperfect communion. Perfect communion, as exemplified by the Trinity, is permanent, i.e. incorruptible. Created communion,

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[12] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 52.
[13] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 269.
[14] Zizioulas, *Lectures*, 89–90.

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however, is impermanent and corruptible because it involves human beings, who are created *from nothing* and naturally return to nothing.

For Zizioulas, the *imago Dei* does not refer to the nature or substance of humanity. The image tells us nothing about "what" humans are. Rather, the image has to do with humanity's relationship with God, through which all of creation is saved from annihilation. Here again, the Cappadocian distinction between person and substance plays a crucial role in Zizioulas's thought:

> Nature or substance points to the simple fact that something exists, to the *what* (*ti*) of something. It can be predicated of more than one thing. Person or *hypostasis*, on the other hand, points to *how* (*hopos* or *pos*) and can only be predicated of one being, and this in an absolute sense…The "image of God" in man has precisely to do with this *how*, not with the *what* man is; it relates not to nature…but to personhood.[15]

In short, human nature is not created in the image of God; human nature does not sin, nor does it need salvation. It is individual human beings (*hypostases*) who are created in the image of God, who sin, and who need salvation.

According to nature, humans are from nothing and tend back toward nothingness. According to the image of God, however, humans are created for communion with God. Humans, therefore, are confronted with a choice. From the beginning, each human is free to live either according to nature or according to the image of God. Zizioulas argues that living "according to nature (*kata physin*) would thus amount to individualism, mortality, and so on, since man is not immortal *kata physin*. Living according to the image of God means living in the way God exists— as an image of God's personhood, and this would amount to 'becoming God'"[16]

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[15] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 165.
[16] Ibid., 165–66.

IV.   The Image of God as Freedom

Humans are created in the image of God, which saves us from a natural return to the nothingness from which we come. This means the divine image is the gift of salvation from human nature; it is grace. The divine image is freedom from the necessity of annihilation that follows from creation *ex nihilo*. God does not impose this freedom on humans, however. As we have already seen, humans are free to live according to nature or according to grace. Humans freely choose between the freedom of death and the freedom of God.

Here we see the anthropological significance of Zizioulas's distinction between moral freedom and ontological freedom. Moral freedom is the freedom to choose between or among alternatives. Ontological freedom, we might say, is freedom from moral freedom:

> We normally use this word [freedom] in order to indicate the capacity to choose between or two more possibilities…But this is a relative, not an absolute freedom. It is limited by the possibilities given to us. And it is this *givenness* that constitutes the greatest provocation to freedom…[T]o be God means to be absolutely free in the sense of not being bound or confronted by any situation or reality *given* to you.[17]

Moral freedom presupposes an oppositional relationship between the self and other beings. The existence of others presents the self with choices concerning how to interact with them. Existence precedes moral freedom. Thus moral freedom presupposes time, mutability, and individuality— none of which applies to God *in se*. Trinitarian freedom is ontological. It is synonymous with God's existence. Zizioulas can therefore claim that that "ontological freedom is the only kind of freedom applicable to God."[18]

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[17] John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, ed. Luke Ben Tallon (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 167.

[18] John D. Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom: Is God Free in Trinitarian Life?" in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Giulio Maspero and Robert Wozniak (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 199.

What, then, does the *imago Dei* have to do with freedom? How do humans reflect the freedom of God? Zizioulas explains that the divine image given first to Adam and Eve would keep death at bay only for as long as they would choose to live *as if* they possessed the fullness of God's ontological freedom. Zizioulas puts it this way:

> [M]an is called to an effort to free himself from the necessity of his nature and behave in all respects as if the person were free from the laws of nature. In practical terms, this is what the Fathers saw in the *ascetic* effort which they regarded as essential to all human existence…Without an attempt to free the person from the necessity of nature one cannot be the "image of God."[19]

Here we should first note that Zizioulas uses the phrases "laws of nature" and "the necessity of nature" to refer to death. The divine image is given to humans as a gift of salvation from death. But the divine image is also a commandment that humans live *as if* we were ontologically free rather than morally free. Humans are created and immediately commanded to transcend our nature in order to live as gods rather than creatures. We are "called to…behave in all respects *as if* the person were free from [death]." The divine image is salvation from death, but this is not a final salvation because death remains a possibility for humans. The divine image was given as a contingent salvation, dependent upon how the image is used.

From the beginning, however, humans misused our moral freedom. Genesis 3 tells us that Adam and Eve refused to use their moral freedom to imitate God's ontological freedom. Instead, the serpent convinces Eve and Adam that full equality with God is within their grasp. Rather than living as if they were created gods, Eve and Adam were convinced of their inferiority. They were persuaded that they were not in communion with God but were restrained by a tyrannical God.

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[19] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 166.

The evil one convinces them that moral freedom is most fully exercised in rejecting heteronomy in favor of autonomy.

Had Adam and Eve correctly used their moral freedom, the original prohibition would not have presented itself as heteronomous. Because of the communion granted by the divine image, Adam and Eve were able to accept the original prohibition *as if* it originated in themselves. The image of God granted humans the freedom to live in communion with God, but the same freedom also allowed them to reject communion with God.

V.   Ontology and Morality

In the Genesis narrative, Adam and Eve are so easily deceived into rebellion against God because the serpent exploits their innate longing for deification—to ascend from the realm of moral freedom to ontological freedom. That is, the serpent presents moral freedom as the ground of ontological freedom, as if ontological freedom were the supreme expression of moral freedom. But, in fact, the reality is just the opposite. Ontological freedom is prior to moral freedom, just as personhood is prior to substance. The incarnate Son cannot sin even though he is fully human because his moral freedom is grounded in his ontological freedom of the eternal Trinity. In contrast, nothing prevents Adam and Eve from committing sin because their moral freedom is untethered to a prior ontological freedom of eternal communion.

For God, moral freedom is a manifestation of a more primary, ontological freedom. But for human beings, moral freedom may be used either to anticipate a future ontological freedom or to appease their natural instincts as animals who have no hope of communion. Again, the divine image is the gift of the possibility of living according to grace, rather than according to nature.

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Unfortunately, the difference between the way of grace and the way of nature is not always easy to discern. The two are easily confused. As the story of the Fall reveals, humans can seem satisfied with moral freedom until they are confronted with God's absolute freedom:

> Human beings appear to be very often content with the freedom of will, i.e. the ability to choose from among given possibilities…And yet deep in their hearts there lies a thirst for something more than that. It is the desire to be free from the given, including the given *par excellence* that is God.[20]

To incite rebellion, the serpent presents God as a limitation on human freedom. "The serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Gen. 3:4-5). In order to be free like God, Adam and Eve must reject God's authority and assert their autonomy. The serpent manages to convince Eve and Adam that what God calls death is really deification.

Zizioulas often quotes the words of Kirilov from Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* to articulate this existential struggle for absolute freedom: "Every one who wants to attain complete freedom must be daring enough to kill himself…This is the final limit of freedom, that is all, there is nothing beyond it. Who dares to kill himself becomes God. Everyone can do this and thus cause God to cease to exist, and then nothing will exist at all."[21] For Kirilov, God-like ontological freedom is achieved by seizing absolute moral freedom. To take control of one's own existence is to become God. And yet, in committing suicide one is simultaneously becoming God and killing God.

Zizioulas finds in Kirilov's words the tragedy of the human desire for freedom. "Tragedy is the impasse created by a freedom driving towards its fulfilment and being unable to reach it…As

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[20] Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom," 207.
[21] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 235; *Being as Communion*, 42; *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 168.

long as he is faced with the fact that he is 'created,' which means that his being is given to him, he cannot be said to be free in the absolute sense."[22] The human quest to achieve absolute freedom through moral freedom is therefore doomed to failure. Humans simply cannot employ their moral freedom to enter the realm of divine personhood; to reason otherwise is to confuse existentialist philosophy with existential theology:

> Philosophy can arrive at the confirmation of the reality of the person, but only theology can treat of the genuine, the authentic person, because the authentic person, as absolute ontological freedom, must be 'uncreated,' that is, unbounded by any 'necessity,' including its own existence. If such a person does not exist in reality, the concept of the person is a presumptuous daydream. If God does not exist, the person does not exist.[23]

Dostoevsky shows us that if the only way to become God is to kill oneself and thereby kill God, then the pursuit of absolute moral freedom leads to nihilism rather than ontological freedom. This means that existentialist philosophy has it backwards; moral freedom is not the ground of ontological freedom but vice versa. Absolute moral freedom is licentiousness unless it is grounded in ontological freedom.

Absolute moral freedom cannot achieve deification. Indeed, the absolutization of moral freedom leads not to eternal life but to death. Moral freedom is gifted to humanity for the sake of deification, but the two are neither identical nor contiguous. The divine image is given to humanity not as an end in itself but as a means. Where Adam and Eve chose to use moral freedom to grasp deification for themselves, Christ shows us the way of humility. Zizioulas contrasts the "two" paths of deification:

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[22] Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 168.
[23] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 43.

> Freedom, therefore, appears to present man with 'two' ultimate possibilities: either to annihilate the 'given' or to accept it as *idion thelema*. But because *in fact* the world is *not* man's *thelema*, if he is still to maintain his freedom in accepting the world, he can do this only by *identifying his own will with that of God*.[24]

Zizioulas is adamant, however, that this "identification of wills" is not a matter of obedience. When the Church relies too heavily on the language of law and obedience, it gives rise to two negative consequences. On the one hand, some people begin to feel like slaves and grow to resent and reject a despotic God. [25] And on the other hand, some of the faithful embrace a rigorism or legalism by which they aspire to achieve perfection by virtue.[26] These two consequences—atheism and pietism—share a deep commonality. The autonomy of atheism and the heteronomy of pietism are both self-centered. Atheism replaces God with the self by way of rebellion, and pietism replaces God with the self by way of ambition. The former views God as an obstacle to an end; the latter uses God as a means to an end. But Zizioulas identifies in Christ the way of grace which is neither autonomous nor heteronomous.

It seems, then, that we should identify three paths toward deification, i.e. two ways of nature and one way of grace. The ways of autonomy and heteronomy stand as opposite and equally erroneous poles. The true path avoids these one-dimensional extremes and requires communion instead of an oppositional relation with God. Following St. Paul, the Fathers came to call this communion of wills "synergy" (1 Cor. 3:9).

Now the full realization of this synergy is surely impossible as long as humans lack the ontological freedom that grounds the moral will of God. That is, as long as we are prone to sin, our wills cannot be identical with God's will. St. Paul articulates the frustration of this reality when

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[24] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 236–37.
[25] Ibid., 237.
[26] Ibid., 258.

he writes, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Rom. 7:19). Zizioulas addresses this difficulty when he says, "This state [of synergy] obviously can only be realized from outside human existence."[27] Synergy is therefore an eschatological goal. It is not a path to deification; synergy is deification. Thus Zizioulas concludes that "The whole of Christian doctrine ought to be precisely about this."[28]

Because synergy cannot be fully realized this side of the eschaton, the Christian life is characterized by ascetic struggle rather than sinless perfection. Indeed, the self-denial required by asceticism is a sort of death, a self-emptying or *kenosis*. Rather than placing oneself in opposition to God—as either autonomous or heteronomous—asceticism seeks to sacrifice the self for the sake of communion. For Christ, the self-sacrifice of synergy was literal death. And this is precisely what St. Paul instructs us to emulate. He says to imitate Jesus who "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant…He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8).

Paul's language might suggest that Zizioulas's rejection of obedience is over-stated. However, it should be noted that the obedience of Jesus contrasts with the disobedience of Adam and Eve who *did* consider equality with God something to be grasped. Christ does not opt for autonomy like Adam and Eve. But neither does Christ act in obedience to heteronomy. The Son, who is in fact equal with the Father, does not receive the command to die as from an external Other. Rather, the will of the Father is received by the Son as the Son's own will. Christ's "obedience" reveals a relation of synergy rather than heteronomy. Indeed, Christ does not die for

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[27] Ibid., 237.
[28] Ibid.

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any selfish end. The Son is already equal with the Father. Therefore, Christ has nothing to lose or gain for himself in his death. Paul commends Christians to imitate this selflessness unto death. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:34).

At root, autonomy and heteronomy assume the coincidence of being and act. Both assume that the absolute freedom of God only differs from the limited freedom of humans by degree (even if infinite) rather than by kind. One *is* (like) God by *acting* like God. Such a view of deification is unable to maintain the absolute transcendence of God and likewise unable to maintain a difference between history and the eschaton.

In contrast to autonomy and heteronomy, synergy assumes a distinction between being and act. By identifying one's own will with God's will, one does not thereby become God. Indeed, this is precisely backwards. For Zizioulas, one can fully identify one's will with God's will only if he or she is ontologically united with God. Christ's will is fully united with God's will because Christ's *hypostasis* transcends the realm of substance. Christ's *hypostasis* is the eternal Son and thus a person independent of substance, will, and action. When the Trinity enters into creation, their personal communion is manifested as an indivisible substance, will, and activity; communion becomes divinity and synergy. Likewise, human beings, must transcend our human substance in order to become persons in communion with the Trinity. Only once a human *hypostasis* has become a person can he or she manifest a will identical to that of God.

VI.   The Fall and Death

Death does not originate from the Fall. From a juridical perspective, we may say that sin is the proximate cause of death. And yet, the deeper cause of death is ontological; we die because we are created. Death "is something written into the very nature of what is *created*—no sooner created than mortal."[29] Only God has no beginning and therefore no end. This means God is ultimately responsible for death. And indeed, God takes responsibility for preserving humans from their natural end by creating humans in the image and likeness of God. The Fall is a fall from grace to nature; it is not a fall from a morally perfect human nature to a sinful human nature. Sin does not precipitate an ontological change but uncovers the natural state of humans apart from a salvific communion with God.

For this understanding of the Fall, Zizioulas relies primarily on St Athanasius. The following passage from *On the Incarnation* is key:

> For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it; for it is God alone Who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good. By nature, of course, man is mortal, since he was made from nothing.[30]

Zizioulas explains that, "Man was not created immortal, but [because of the divine image] he was made capable of communion with the immortal God. Death came to him not as a punishment in a juridical sense but as an existential consequence of the break of this communion."[31]

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[29] Ibid., 264.
[30] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 1.4.30.
[31] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 228.

The Fall, therefore, is the choice to reject the grace of communion, which results in a return to our natural state. Death is natural for humans; sin is not. Or in other words, death belongs to the *being* of humans and sin to the *acts* of humans. Or again, death is ontological, and sin is moral. In the Fall, ontology and morality are correlated, but this is only a contingent correlation. In creating humans in the divine image, God saves humans from their natural end by bestowing on them the moral freedom that enables them to reject this salvation.

We cannot say, however, that because God endowed humans with the condition of possibility for sin, God is thereby responsible for the Fall. Here again we see a clear distinction between sin and death. God's actions are *necessary* to bring about both sin and death but only *sufficient* concerning death. Thus, God is responsible for death but not responsible for sin. Indeed, if God is responsible for human sin, then humans are not morally free.[32]

As we have already seen, Zizioulas describes the moral freedom of humans as tragic. Though humans are created for union with God, our desire for deification is easily perverted toward an attempt to grasp equality with God by our own devices. And as a result, "men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them."[33]

According to Athanasius, "God faced a dilemma in either letting his creation return to nothingness or going back on his word that sin would result in death. The former violates God's goodness and the latter God's veracity. But "what, then, was God to do?" asks Athanasius. Perhaps the solution is for God to demand repentance. But while this would be consistent with God's goodness, Athanasius reasons that it would violate God's truthfulness:

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[32] Conversely, human beings are not ontologically free because God is responsible for our creation from nothing and consequent death.
[33] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 1.5.30-31.

Repentance would not guard the Divine consistency, for, if death did not hold dominion over men, God would still remain untrue. Nor does repentance recall men from what is according to their nature [i.e. death]; all that it does is to make them cease from sinning. Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun, men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature [i.e. death] and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God.[34]

For Athanasius, if the Fall were only a matter of sin, it could be resolved easily enough by repentance. However, the Fall concerns more than moral obedience; it is principally an ontological and existential problem. Repentance is a proper solution to moral failure, but repentance cannot overcome the power of death. Indeed, God cannot allow repentance to overcome the power of death without violating the consistency of the divine word. In response to the Fall, therefore, God can neither obviate death as a consequence nor allow death to destroy his handiwork. So again, "What was God to do?"

VII.   The Incarnation

To address the existential consequences of the Fall, God sends the Son into the world. The Nicene Creed affirms that Jesus Christ is "the only begotten Son of God…who for us humans and our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made human…" Athanasius explains the reason for the incarnation by arguing that

> it is not right that those who had once shared His Image should be destroyed…What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know Him? And how could this be done save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Saviour Jesus Christ? Men could not have done it, for they are only made after the Image…The Word of God came

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[34] Ibid., 2.7.33.

in His own person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could recreate man made after the Image.[35]

Zizioulas elaborates on Athanasius's position by claiming that it was necessary that the Son of God become incarnate to save humans because the real problem of the Fall was not the sin but the resulting corruption toward annihilation:

> Salvation has often been set out in moral and judicial terms, in which death has been caused by man's act of disobedience. But it was not our disobedience that caused this evil; it just made its cure impossible. The problem cannot be put right simply by our obedience. Athanasius pointed out that if the problem could be solved simply by forgiving Adam his sin, God could have done so...But Athanasius showed that the heart of the problem was not obedience or disobedience, because this was not a moral but an ontological problem."[36]

God created humans in the divine image that humans might bridge the created and the Uncreated and bring all things into the eternal life of God. And we have seen that the divine image is best understood in terms a moral freedom that reflects the ontological freedom of God. The Fall, therefore, was a misuse and perversion of the divine image and not the total destruction of the image. Zizioulas says, "It is an extraordinary mystery that by his possession of the God-given freedom, man was able to halt God's plan. God did not intend this hold-up, but he did not ignore it either. Though his plan had stalled, God's intention remained unaltered. It took a new course to relate to the changed situation. This is the logic St Athanasius sets out in his 'On the Incarnation of the Word.'"[37]

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[35] Ibid., 3.13.41.
[36] Zizioulas, *Lectures*, 102.
[37] Ibid., 105.

VIII. Redemption

The Incarnation itself, however, cannot achieve the salvation of humans.[38] The Son becomes incarnate in order to renew and recreate humans in the Image of God. But, says Athanasius, in order to carry out this task, "He had first to do away with death and corruption."[39] Thus, as the Creed declares, Jesus Christ "was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures…" For Athanasius, "This is, indeed, the very center of our faith."[40] The incarnate Son renews humans in the communal relationship of the Divine Image by "trampling down death by death." This is the only way to save creation from dissolution without violating God's own goodness or veracity.

God preserves his goodness by saving his creation from a fall into non-existence. Yet God accomplishes this through the death of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father. Therefore we may question whether God uses evil to overcome evil—death to overcome death. Indeed, this would be the case in either of two scenarios. First, God would be complicit in evil if the Father sent the Son to die without the assurance of his resurrection. That is, if Christ's death were simply a human sacrifice, it would be an evil event. The resurrection is the *sine qua non* of God's goodness *vis à vis* the Cross.

Second, even if the resurrection were guaranteed, God would be complicit in evil if the Father wills the Son to die without the Son concurrently willing the same. The Son must die willingly, not just obediently, or else the Father is guilty of killing the Son. Because the incarnate

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[38] Contra (1) those who criticize Athanasius for equating salvation with the Son's Incarnation apart from his death and resurrection and also (2) those who appeal to Athanasius to argue that the Incarnation itself is the deification of human nature.

[39] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, sec. 13.

[40] Ibid.

Son is not only a mortal human but also the immortal second person of the Trinity, (1) death has no power over him and (2) his will is inseparable from the will of the Father. The Father does not issue a command that obligates the Son's obedience. The Father wills the Son to die and rise again, and the Son's will is identical. Therefore, God indeed preserves his goodness in his plan of redemption.

God's veracity is a more troubling matter regarding redemption. When God forbids Adam to eat from a certain tree of the Garden, he says: "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Athanasius claims that after Adam and Eve eat from the tree, they immediately lose the salvation bestowed by the divine image. Adam and Eve return to their natural state, according to which they are destined to return to the nothingness from which they were created. However, the redemption effected by Christ's death and resurrection extends even to our primordial father and mother.[41] Thus we face a dilemma. Either God began to will Christ's redemptive death and resurrection only after and in response to the Fall, or God always willed Christ's redemptive death and resurrection. The first horn of the dilemma leaves us with a God who first fails to foresee that humans will sin, and who subsequently chooses to go back on his word. The second horn makes God's warning to Adam into an idle threat. In either case, God turns out to be liar, because sin does not actually result in a return to nothingness.[42]

Since God is not a liar, we must somehow affirm on the one hand that the consequence for sin is indeed death and on the other hand that Christ conquers death and saves even the first sinners

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[41] Indeed, rather than an image of the empty tomb, Orthodox icons of the Resurrection traditionally depict the "Harrowing of Hell" whereby Christ leads Adam, Eve and the Old Testament saints out of the prison of Hades.

[42] To avoid this dilemma, we could interpret God's promised consequence of "death" as referring only to bodily death. This would also avoid the weakness of viewing death as simply a break in communion. But if the result of the Fall is only bodily mortality and not total dissolution, then Christ's death and resurrection should restore the divine image to humans by putting an end to bodily death. But clearly, humans are still suffering bodily death.

from dissolution. Indeed, Christ's redemptive act is universal. He did not conquer death in a partial way such that death maintains dominion over some. Because of Christ, annihilation is made impossible. Death is defeated. Though Christ's death and resurrection occur temporally as part of history, the ramifications of this three-day event are omnitemporal. Christ's death and resurrection have a place in history, but they do not belong exclusively—or even primarily—to history. This is why we can affirm that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, chosen and slain before the foundation of the world.[43]

Christ's redemptive work is not a response to the Fall. Rather, from the beginning, God takes responsibility for death. Indeed, this is fitting since God, as the one who creates *ex nihilo*, is the ultimate cause of death. Creation and redemption are a single unified event for God. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus was not a revision of some original plan that the Fall derailed. From the beginning, God's plan was to save humans from existential annihilation by conquering death by death.

There is therefore no dilemma regarding God's veracity. God did not respond to the Fall by rescinding his warning of death. Nor was God's warning an idle threat. For in the same day that Eve and Adam ate of the tree of death, Christ was sacrificed on the tree of life. God's warning was not just directed at Adam and Eve but at all humans. Indeed, Christ's death and resurrection were foreordained even apart from the Fall because God willed to take responsibility for the consequence of his will to create *ex nihilo*. Thus in Christ's death and resurrection, all humans die

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[43] See Matt. 25:34; John. 1:36; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:20.

and rise again in immortality.[44] All humans receive salvation; all humans are (re)created in the divine image.

IX.   Redemption, Repentance, and Deification

Redemption is universal. But Athanasian universalism is far from the heretical doctrine of *apokatastasis*. The universalism we have derived from Athanasius begins with *creatio ex nihilo* and the principle that whatever is from nothing will naturally return to nothing. Athanasius's universalism is a Christological doctrine referring to Christ's work and the consequent gift of immortality to humans *in the beginning.* It has nothing to say about the final state of humans in relation to God. Though redemption is universal, it is only one of the two aspects of salvation.

According to Zizioulas, "Christology should not be confined to redemption from sin but reaches beyond that, to man's destiny as the image of God in creation." In other words, "There are…two aspects of Christology, one negative…and another positive."[45] The negative aspect of Christ's work is *salvation from* absolute death. The positive aspect is *salvation unto* full communion with God, or what the Father's called deification (theosis, or theopoesis).[46] Indeed, in virtue of being gifted with the divine image, humans desire absolute freedom; that is, humans desire to be God. We have seen how this drive towards absolute freedom leads to the Fall. Now we must explain how Christ's work of redemption opens up the path to deification.

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[44] 2 Cor. 5:14f.

[45] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 237.

[46] For a more thorough account of the two aspects of salvation, see Vladimir Lossky, "Redemption and Deification," in *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 97–110.

To understand the possibility of deification, we must first recognize that the term does not imply a change according to nature. One does not become divine and cease to be human. Nor does one become divine in addition to being human. Indeed, deification does not occur at the level of nature (*ousia* or substance) at all. We could claim that redemption applies to human nature because all humans receive this gift. But even this would be misleading, for Christ does not change human nature. Rather, Christ grants immortality to humans by defeating death itself. Death, which was necessary according to nature, became impossible. Similarly, deification does not affect the human nature. Rather, union with God, which is impossible according to nature, became possible in Christ. Deification refers to the possibility that humans may become "divine" not according to nature but according to grace.

Thus we arrive at a problem with the concept of deification. Eastern theology holds that "God became human that humans might become god." This maxim is first expressed by Irenaeus and subsequently affirmed by Saints Athanasius, Maximus, John of Damascus, Gregory Palamas, et al. down through the centuries. But Orthodoxy rejects the notion that humans can become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) in the same way that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit partake of the divine nature. The divine nature is strictly off limits for humans.

Zizioulas argues, therefore, that deification is a matter of becoming a person who exists in eternal and unbreakable communion with others. Indeed, this sort of communion defines the personal existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *ad intra*, apart from their interactions with creation. The divine persons, in themselves, are beyond all categorization—beyond "divinity," and even beyond the category of being or substance (*ousia*). For Zizioulas, deification is a matter of

entering this absolutely unique mode of existence.[47] Humans are called to transcend the realm of substance and enter the realm of personhood. Indeed, the realm of personhood is the realm of freedom from substance and all its corollaries—quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, affection. This is absolute freedom: freedom from necessity, attribution, specification, categorization, and limitation. This is the absolute freedom of God to which humans aspire.

Whereas the Son is a person who condescends into the realm of substance, humans are created to transcend substance and become persons. "But," says Zizioulas, "the realization of this drive of man towards personal ontology cannot be provided by created being. Here *Christology* emerges as the only way of fulfilling the human drive to personhood. And this on the following conditions:

1. **Christology is…*from above,* not from below**…[I]t is important to hold the view that man acquires personal identity and ontological particularity only by basing his being on the Father-Son relationship in which nature is not primary to the particular being…Chalcedon, therefore made an important ontological statement in speaking of the *hypostasis* of the Son as the only personal identity of Christ.

2. **In Christology the crucial thing for our subject is not the *communicatio idiomatum*, but the *hypostatic* union.** What enables man in Christ to arrive at a personal identity in ontological terms is that in Christ the natures *are* only because they are particularized in one person…Thus, the cause of being is the particular, not the general.

3. **For man to acquire this ontology of personhood it is necessary to take an attitude of freedom *vis-à-vis* his own nature.** If biological birth gives us a *hypostasis* dependent ontologically on nature, this indicates that a "new birth" is needed in order to experience an ontology of personhood…identical with that which emerges from the Father-Son relationship…Baptism gives "sonship."

4. **Finally, this identity can never be fully realized in history as long as nature still dictates its laws to man, particularly in the form of death**. When death

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[47] Perhaps "deification" is an imprecise and misleading term, but the only appropriate alternative might be "personification"—to become a person—which is likely even more misleading.

ceases to be 'natural,' humanity will experience the true ontology of the person. Meanwhile, man is called to fulfill the image of God in him as much as possible, striving to free himself from the necessity of nature, experiencing 'sacramentally' the 'new being' as a member of the community of those "born again," and maintaining an eschatological vision and expectation of the transformation of the world.[48]

These four conditions of deification in Christ are actually four aspects of one condition: the primacy of the person over substance. Conditions (1) and (2) both affirm that the person of Christ is not defined by the divine and/or human nature but by the *hypostasis* of the eternal Son. It is only in the act of creating/redeeming the world that the Son enters the realm of substance whereby he may be properly called divine and human. For Zizioulas, the doctrine of "the communication of idioms" is of little value since the subject of all of Christ's actions is the eternal Son and not one or the other of his natures. Only a *hypostasis* can be an agent. A nature relies on a *hypostasis* and not vice versa.

Conditions (3) and (4) shift from Christology to soteriology. Deification in Christ is not about becoming divine like Christ but becoming a person like Christ by joining the ontological relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Baptism is the second birth whereby we are adopted and made sons of God—not according to nature but according to grace. And yet this grace is never fully realized in history because while Christ has granted all humans salvation from dissolution, physical death remains a lingering consequence of created nature. Annihilation is no longer a threat, but physical death remains natural until God grants the freedom to transcend nature. Until then, we are to live "as if" we are free from human nature and "as if" we are "deified" persons. In

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[48] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 108–10.

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short, humans are called to live ascetic lives just as Adam and Eve were called to do in the beginning.

Christ redeems and recreates all humans in the divine image, but this is not a restoration of perfection. The Fall was inevitable, and sinfulness remains inevitable. Moral perfection is unattainable. Such is the price of moral freedom. But if perfection is impossible, then perhaps asceticism is not worth the effort. Indeed, if salvation were only a matter of redemption, it would be difficult to justify the imperative of asceticism and morality.[49] In order to make sense of moral imperatives, we must look to the positive dimension of salvation; it is the doctrine of deification makes asceticism necessary.

Asceticism is the way in which humans imitate the selfless sacrifice of Christ. Just as the Cross is a prerequisite of Christ's resurrection, so also is asceticism a prerequisite of deification. Ascesis cannot achieve deification; it can only aim at detachment from the trappings of this world—even from one's own nature. Asceticism is the *kenosis* that opens up to the possibility of *theosis*.

Thus the ascetic life has more to do with repentance than with the acquisition of virtue. For no amount of virtue can make one worthy of deification nor can it nullify the need for continual penitence. Indeed, returning to Athanasius's logic, since Christ has conquered the existential threat of death and recreated humans in the divine image, sin is now "a case of trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption. [Therefore] repentance [is] well enough."

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[49] For example, Barthian ethics faces this problem. Since Christ has accomplished the salvation of humanity, the morality of particular humans has no substantive role to play in salvation. Not that morality is of no concern for Barth, but it is divorced from God's principal gift of salvation.

Because of Christ's redemptive work, penitence (not virtue) is the defining characteristic of the Christian life this side of the eternal Kingdom.[50] Repentance is the renewal of baptism which is otherwise scorned with every subsequent sin. Repentance, therefore, provides the link between the two aspects of salvation. Redemption is universal, but deification is available only to the penitent.

X.   Human Nature and Personhood

For the Trinity, personhood is primary. Indeed, for the Trinity, *hypostasis* and personhood are synonymous terms. This is not the case for creatures, however. Humans are *hypostases* but persons. Or, rather, only one human *hypostasis* has ever existed also as a person: Jesus Christ. But we should avoid the conclusion that the divine nature determines the personhood of the incarnate Son. No, the Son begins as a person beyond substance (*hyper-ousia*) who "enhypostasizes" two substances. Humans begin as *hypostases* of a particular nature and are called to become persons beyond nature.

Strictly speaking, a human *hypostasis* cannot be a person; nor can a divine *hypostasis*. This is not because the human and divine natures are incompatible with personhood, but because nature and personhood refer to distinct ontologies. We can properly say call Jesus Christ a divine and human *hypostasis* but not a divine and human person. Christ is a person not in virtue of his divinity but in virtue of being the eternal Son of the Father. Inversely, we may not say that human *hypostases* become divine, yet we may affirm that human *hypostases* become persons. Human beings become persons not according to any change in nature but by adoption into the life of the

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[50] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 4.

Trinity. The full realization of this adoption is not consummated until the end of time; but here and now, we are to strive to imitate Christ by living as if we are already persons.

Zizioulas offers three interrelated concepts that collectively define what it means for humans to live not according to human nature (*kata physin*) but according to eschatological personhood: freedom, uniqueness, and love.[51] To be clear, Zizioulas is not suggesting that these concepts define what it means to be human. For in truth Zizioulas does not offer a theological anthropology. Anthropologies, even theological ones, prioritize substance over *hypostasis*, and thereby operate contrary to the principle of the primacy of personhood that drives Zizioulas's entire theology. Freedom, uniqueness, and love are not capacities of human nature but concepts that describe eschatological "being as communion." Thus we should understand these concepts as fleshing out Christ's command to "be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

We have already discussed the concepts of freedom, uniqueness, and love in this and the preceding chapter. But here we will focus on the way that each concept requires permanence and precludes any notion of change or "becoming." Personhood is most properly understood as being, while nature or substance refer activity. Without the distinction between personal and substance ontologies, we are left to equate being with activity, which leads to a problematic monism whereby God is inseparable from creation.

Because "nothing is more sacred than the person," Zizioulas claims that "the person cannot be sacrificed or subjected to any ideal, to any moral or natural order, or to any expediency or objective." And again, Zizioulas reiterates that to be a person, "you must be free from and higher

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[51] Ibid., 165-168. See also 108-112.

than any necessity or objective—natural, moral, religious or ideological."[52] Here we should recall that Zizioulas differentiates two kinds of freedom: ontological and moral. The former belongs to personal ontology and the latter to substance ontology. The absolute freedom of the person is freedom from judgement, choice, and action. Ontological freedom is liberation from moral freedom.

But absolute freedom belongs to the Trinity alone and is therefore unrealizable for humans. We cannot attain ontological freedom here and now, but that should not stop us from using our moral freedom to imitate ontological freedom. This is exactly what the ascetic ideals of detachment and *kenosis* point us toward. We can by no means actually free ourselves from our substance, but we can take an attitude of freedom toward it. For this reason, the desert Fathers so often speak of the "remembrance of death." Our very lives are tied up with the categories of substance ontology and moral freedom. Death is a reminder of the transitory nature of all we encounter through our senses. Thus the martyr is by definition a saint because he accepts the end of his life without choosing it. Indeed the martyr does not choose faith over apostasy; he lives according to freedom rather than attachment.

The second concept Zizioulas uses to define personhood is absolute uniqueness. In, fact absolute freedom entails absolute uniqueness. For Zizioulas, "personhood is not about qualities or capacities of any kind; biological, social or moral...Uniqueness in the absolute sense of the term…cannot be guaranteed by reference to sex or function or role, or even cultivated consciousness of the 'self' and its psychological experiences, since all of these can be *classified*, thus representing qualities shared by more than one being and not pointing to absolute uniqueness."

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[52] Ibid., 166.

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This explains the "tendency of the Greek Fathers to avoid giving any positive content to the *hypostases* of the Trinity by insisting that the Father is simply not the Son or the Spirit, and the Son means simply not the Father and so on."[53]

Like freedom, uniqueness eludes humans in the here and now. Still we may imitate absolute uniqueness by refusing to live according to the classifications of biology, society, morality. We may to live as if none of these categories actually defines us. And more importantly, we may live as if no category can separate us from others. By rejecting classifications, we come to see beyond all attributes and actions. Instead, we use an eschatological vision to see all others for their potential personhood. The absolute uniqueness of one person, therefore, requires the absolute uniqueness of all others. Absolute uniqueness does not set one person apart from others but defines the way in which persons are related. Uniqueness requires absolute communion, for it is only then that one "becomes an unrepeatable and irreplaceable particularity in the 'mode of being' which we find in the Trinity."[54]

Absolute freedom makes the person absolutely unique; and absolute uniqueness requires absolute communion in love. Zizioulas claims that "As a person you exist as long as you love and are loved. When you are treated as nature, as a thing, you die as a particular identity."[55] And conversely, when you treat the other as a thing, you reject your own particular identity. Absolute love is therefore an unbreakable communion, and only the eternal Trinity enjoys unbreakable communion.

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[53] Ibid., 111.
[54] Ibid., 168.
[55] Ibid., 167.

In order to imitate absolute love here and now, "one does not—and should not—identify the other with the help of their qualities (physical, social, moral, etc.), thus rejecting or accepting the other on that basis as a unique and irreplaceable partner…[Instead], one rather loves *in spite* of the existence or absence of such qualities, just as God loves the sinner."[56] The only way to truly love the other is to see past all of her actions and qualities—even beyond her humanity—and regard her as if she were a person, as if she were united with the eternal Trinity. Only then does one see the other as truly created in the image of God.[57]

Indeed, Zizioulas goes so far as to advocate what he terms "ethical *apophaticism*" regarding the other. He says: "we cannot give a positive qualitative content to a *hypostasis* or person, for this would result in the loss of [the other's] absolute uniqueness and turn [the other] into a classifiable entity. Just as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not identifiable except simply through being who they are, in the same way a true ontology of personhood requires that the uniqueness of a person escape and transcend any qualitative *kataphasis*."[58] Absolute love is not a matter of judgement, discernment, or exclusivity. Imitating absolute love requires a radical freedom and detachment from the sensual world and the passions; love requires ascesis. Love is not acquisitive but self-sacrificial even unto death.[59]

Personhood, defined by freedom, uniqueness, and love properly applies only to the Trinity and can only be imitated by human beings. As we have already pointed out, Zizioulas's theology of personhood is not an anthropology—not even a theological anthropology. Zizioulas does not

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[56] Ibid., 111.
[57] Cf. the two greatest commandments in Matt. 22:36-40 and the relation between the love of God and the love of others in 1 John 4:20.
[58] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 112.
[59] Cf. John 15:13; 1 Cor. 13.

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intend to provide an account of what it means to be human. Nor does his personalism provide a common category by which to describe a communion between the divine and the human. Rather, for Zizioulas, deification has nothing to do with the divine or human natures. Whatever a human nature is, or however we may define the human, the imperative for human beings is to transcend their substance and become persons in communion with the Trinity.[60]

XI. Objections

One of the most astute readers of Metropolitan John's work, Colin Gunton, asserts that "The greatness of John Zizioulas as a theologian is shown by the very tensions in his work, by the fact that he allows the weaknesses of the tradition to come into view while operating in faithfulness to it.[61] Gunton understands better than most that there exist "two rather different sources of Orthodox theology, ancient and modern alike, which might be supposed to provide one reason for the fact that, despite its apparently rather monolithic character…it reveals some major differences. Between Lossky and Zizioulas, for example, something of a gulf is fixed."[62] The "two sources" of Orthodox theology that Gunton references are left unspecified. But if we assume that Lossky and Zizioulas may be taken as representatives of the two sources, then perhaps Gunton has in mind the difference between mystical theology and sacramental theology.

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[60] Critics contend that Zizioulas begins with a commitment to modern existentialism and proceeds to build a theological system to undergird his philosophy. In fact, Zizioulas begins with existential *questions* and seeks theological answers. Zizioulas seeks to reveal the poverty of existentialism by comparing its answers to those found in Christian theology. See Introduction.

[61] Colin Gunton, "Persons and Particularity," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Ltd, 2007), 107.

[62] Ibid., 97.

The distinction between these two ways of Orthodox theology is discussed at length in the following chapters, but here it will suffice to characterize the two aspects in rather simplistic terms. Mystical theology, culminating in the writings of St. Gregory Palamas, suggests that humans relate to God by participating in the energies or activities of God. Sacramental theology, however, reasons that humans properly relate to God through the sacramental rites of the Church. In short, mystical theology focuses on moral transformation, while sacramental theology deals with ontological transformation. Gunton questions whether Zizioulas, and Orthodox theology in general, can coherently hold these strands together.

a. Identifying Persons with Activities

At the end of a short essay on Zizioulas's personalism, Gunton offers a series of incisive comments and questions. Here I will summarize his criticisms and then respond to each with reference to the reading of Zizioulas presented above. First, Gunton suggests that there is a tendency in Orthodox theology to underemphasize the ubiquity of sin. Or in Western terminology, Gunton laments that the East did not suffer its own Pelagian controversy and consequently temper its overemphasis on human freedom. Gunton explains:

> Confession of sin does indeed bulk large in Eastern liturgy but appears to have little structural effect on Orthodox theology…[M]uch Orthodox theology fails adequately to encompass the deep fallenness of the human condition…In a word, by failing to take adequate account of the *bondage* of the will, Eastern theologians, among them John Zizioulas, can appear to ascribe to the human capacity more than is justified apart from redemption.[63]

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[63] Ibid., 104.

Gunton is quick to point out that sin and repentance are not completely absent from Zizioulas's theology. But he complains that references to such concepts are scant and seem inconsequential to Zizioulas's project. Indeed, Gunton reads Zizioulas as affirming "that created personal being, simply by virtue of the fact that it is what it is, involves eternity."[64] On this basis, he warns that Zizioulas should not "steer so close to the wind of the Greek philosophical divinization of the human."[65]

Gunton admits the tenuousness of his first criticism because Zizioulas's work focuses so heavily on the ecclesial context of human personhood. Thus his next criticism completely changes tack. "The second question therefore concerns a position which appears to presume the opposite, that the personal ontology which is being recommended is an ecclesial ontology, and therefore the outcome of redemption rather than of creation."[66] Gunton questions whether such an ecclesial personalism does not refuse to recognize the full humanity of those outside of the Church. Since "Christ is the mediator of creation as well as being mediator of salvation…does it not follow that even our biological selves are already personal, as created?…Should we not render respect to those created in the image of God as well as those in whom the image is being daily renewed in Christ?"[67]

Here we arrive at the tension that drives Gunton's critical stance towards Zizioulas's personalism. Gunton sees a tendency in Zizioulas to derive human personhood sometimes from creation (first criticism) and sometimes from redemption (second criticism). In the former case, humans are created as persons in relation to God and are called to perfect this relationship through their choice of actions. In the latter case, humans become personal through the Church and her

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 105.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

sacraments. For Gunton, a proper theological anthropology must account for both aspects of personhood. Humans are always already persons, and yet we are called to a more perfect personhood in the Church and ultimately in the eschaton.

This leads to Gunton's final, and most nuanced, criticism. He questions whether Zizioulas's emphasis on *apophaticism* regarding personal attributes does not render his personalism impractical and void of meaningful content. Following the Cappadocians, Zizioulas refuses to identify persons with their activities. For Gunton, Zizioulas thereby falls prey to a theological error common to both East and West. Gunton avers that Zizioulas "is indeed right to say that the Western predilection for privileging being over person has crippled its trinitarianism. But has not the same happened in the East by a refusal to particularize the distinctive forms of action, and so the being, of the three persons?"[68] Here Gunton perceptively suggests that Western essentialism and Eastern Palamism are, in fact, not as different as theologians often presume.[69]

As remarkable as this claim is, Gunton follows it up with perhaps a more remarkable assertion—that Zizioulas is a neo-Palamite.[70] Citing an influential essay by Dorothea Wendebourg, Gunton explains that "the development of Trinitarian theology from Cappadocia to Palamas drove the three *hypostases* deeper into the being of God, at the expense of their economic action."[71] For East and West alike, the divine activities are linked to the divine essence and not to

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[68] Ibid., 106.

[69] For a similar view, see A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); For the opposite view see David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[70] "John Zizioulas will not thank me for suggesting it, but I do wonder whether he is here too influenced by the development of theology in the tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius and Palamas." Colin Gunton, "Persons and Particularity," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 106.

[71] Gunton, "Persons and Particularity," 2007, 106; Cf. Dorothea Wendebourg, "From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory Palamas: The Defeat of Trinitarian Theology," *Studia Patristica* 17, no. 1 (1982): 194–98.

particular persons of the Trinity. Gunton argues that *apophaticism* regarding personal attributes and actions undermines Zizioulas' Trinitarian theology by unintentionally prioritizing essence and energies over personhood. And since Zizioulas's personalism relies on an analogy between divine and human personhood, this *apophaticism* also undermines Zizioulas's anthropology.

b. Distinguishing Persons from Activities

To respond to Gunton's criticisms, we must consider the first two in unison. Together these criticisms highlight a tension that Gunton sees as unresolved, or perhaps unresolvable. Indeed, Volf points out the same tension when he claims that

> if it is salvific grace that first constitutes a human being into a person ontologically, then that human being cannot simultaneously be both person and individual, or cannot be the one or the other to a greater or lesser degree; she *is* either the one or the other.[72]

The problem here is that Gunton and Volf assume a different notion of salvation than the one presented by Zizioulas. Western theology tends to bifurcate the works of God into discrete acts of creation and redemption, which necessarily locates God entirely within time. Such theology takes a decidedly anthropocentric, i.e. historical, perspective and ultimately sacrifices divine transcendence on the altar of *Heilsgeschichte*. For Zizioulas, and Eastern theology in general, creation and redemption comprise a single divine act. In speaking of personhood as the outcome of *either* creation *or* redemption, Gunton imposes a foreign conception of salvation onto Zizioulas's theology.

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[72] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 101; See also Edward Russell, "Reconsidering Relational Anthropology: A Critical Assessment of John Zizioulas's Theological Anthropology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 2 (2003): 168–86.

Nonetheless, Gunton is correct to see humans as recipients of "salvific grace" and freedom from the very beginning. As discussed above, Zizioulas adheres to a sort of universalism regarding redemption. And yet, this does not entail universal salvation unto deification. For Zizioulas, all humans are redeemed from the grasp of death, but this is not the same as eternal life in union with God. Thus there is no danger that Zizioulas is veering toward the Greek philosophical notion of the divinization of the human. Nor is there any indication that his ecclesial personalism sanctions the denigration of human beings outside the Church. Christ validates the dignity of all humans through universal redemption. Indeed, since personhood is fully realized only in the eschaton, it cannot constitute a standard by which to judge others here and now. Furthermore, we have seen that Zizioulas's personalism precludes classification based on attributes or actions. He advocates a strict *apophaticism* regarding persons of the Trinity and all others who participate—even potentially—in the Trinitarian communion.

Finally, this reference to *apophaticism* brings us to Gunton's third criticism. For Gunton, *apophaticism* regarding the actions and attributes of persons leads ineluctably to essentialism. In the East, essentialism takes the form of Palamism, which ostensibly rejects essentialism by distinguishing between essence and energies. Gunton apparently draws a connection between Palamas and Zizioulas based on a shared commitment to *apophaticism*. He claims that *apophaticism* disconnects the person from his attributes and actions; and he rejects the consequence that we can know a person's attributes and actions yet still not know the person. For theology, this means that we cannot identify God as the one who led the Israelites out of Egypt or the Son as the one who came to die on the Cross. And for anthropology, this means we cannot identify the Other as virtuous or vicious. Nor can we identify the Other as "my spouse" or "my child."

Here it becomes clear that Gunton fails to appreciate the ontological distinction at the center of Zizioulas's personalism. Zizioulas's *apophaticism* does not entail that we cannot make meaningful claims about the activities of the divine *hypostases*. Nor does it entail that we cannot ascribe attributes and actions to individual humans in order to assign credit, blame, or relational status. For Zizioulas, *apophaticism* is appropriate concerning the realm of personhood but not the realm of substance. This means that while we cannot say anything about the immanent trinity, the economic trinity is another matter. Likewise, regarding anthropology, we should practice *apophaticism* regarding the ultimate salvation all human beings, but we can still make judgements regarding life here in the penultimate. Someone who commits murder must be held accountable, but no action can overcome the potential for this "murderer" to become a person in eternal communion with the Trinity. Zizioulas's "ethical *apophaticism*" is not absolute but part of the ascetic struggle to see the world "as if" from the eschaton.

At root, Gunton's criticisms betray a tendency to equate being and act in precisely the way that Zizioulas rejects. Gunton is no essentialist, however. Instead of equating act with substance, he equates act with person. His criticisms assume that persons are defined by their actions. In other words, Gunton is committed to something like Rahner's rule that the economic trinity is the immanent trinity and vice versa. As we have seen, Zizioulas rejects this rule because it reduces transcendence to immanence. Rahner's rule also has negative consequences for the doctrine of deification. If God is bound within time and history, then so are humans. In this case, deification can denote nothing more than what can be accomplished in the world as we know it. Union with God in the eschaton is replaced by an historical utopia realized by moral perfection. Such a view cannot distinguish between moral freedom and ontological freedom and is therefore committed to

an oppositional relationship between God and the world. Human beings are left either to reach for self-deification in moral autonomy or to surrender their freedom in pietistic heteronomy.

XII.   Conclusion

The ontological distinction between person and substance does not translate as easily from Trinitarian theology into anthropology as Zizioulas sometimes seems to suggest. The problem is not that personhood cannot be used univocally regarding divine and human *hypostases*. Rather, the point of the ontological revolution is that personhood is ontologically distinct from substance. There are no such things as divine persons or human persons *per se*. Properly speaking, persons have no substance; they have nothing in common except their communion. Personhood is being beyond being, hyper-ousios, and super-essence. For theology this means that the persons of the Trinity exist independent of, and ontologically prior to, the creation of the world of substances. For anthropology, the primacy of personhood over substance means that humans are not persons unless and until they transcend the human substance.

Though personalism has gained wide support among Orthodox theologians, few theologians fully appreciate the radicality of Zizioulas's ontological revolution. The primacy of personhood over substance means little unless personal ontology is distinguished from substance ontology. But of course, since this innovative ontological distinction went unappreciated for so many centuries, it now seems to run counter to Orthodox tradition. In contemporary Orthodox theology, a tension has emerged between personalism and Palamism. Interestingly, and somewhat ironically, both sides trace their beginnings to the Cappadocians. But this common provenance is unsurprising once we understand that personalism and Palamism share a common commitment to

distinguish being from act. The disagreement only concerns the way in which this distinction is elucidated.

Properly situated within the tradition, Zizioulas's focus on the ontological transformation received in the Sacraments and Palamism's emphasis on moral transformation achieved through asceticism have more in common than is often recognized. Indeed, Zizioulas's personalism draws on a long history of Orthodox teaching that places asceticism and morality at the center of the Christian life. But, as we will see, a truly Christian ethics is not reducible to any philosophical account of virtue as modern theologians tend to assume.

Chapter 3

Sacraments and Ascesis

Of the many differences that characterize Eastern and Western theology, the doctrine of deification stands out as the most distinctively Orthodox. It has been aptly observed that "Contemporary Orthodox Christian theology, and perhaps even the Eastern Christian tradition in general, has almost become identified with the soteriological and mystical notion of 'deification' or *theosis.*"[1] Not that deification is entirely absent from Roman Catholicism and some forms of Protestantism, but the doctrine does not occupy the same pride of place there that it enjoys in the East. Still, it is not the doctrine of deification *per se* that distinguishes the theology of the East from those of the West. As discussed in the previous chapters, the fundamental theological disagreement between East and West concerns the metaphysical relation between *being* and *act*. For the West, God's being and activities are identical, but the East draws a strict distinction between the two. Consequently, it is difficult, if not impossible, for Western theology to affirm the doctrine of deification without implying that human beings can participate in the divine substance.

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[1] Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God," *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (2003): 357.

In contrast with the West, the East seems to suffer from the opposite problem concerning deification. Orthodox theology developed two different approaches to the doctrine. Orthodox sacramentalism suggests that deification is a communal gift bestowed through participation in the Church's ritual practices, while the ascetic tradition views deification as a mystical goal achieved through self-discipline. Sacramentalism and asceticism both affirm that deification concerns an ontological transformation of the human being, and both deny that humans may participate in the divine substance. However, for the sacramental approach, deification is participation in the personal communion of the Trinity, while for the ascetical approach, deification is participation in the divine energies. The problem for Orthodoxy is the twofold ambiguity that results from these approaches. On the one hand, patristic tradition affirms both approaches with little discussion of their interrelation or compatibility. But on the other hand, contemporary Orthodox theologians are increasingly divided by the two approaches based on their incompatibility.

To be sure, the problem is not that ascetic practices are incompatible with participation in the sacraments. Virtually no one doubts that both are required for deification. The question is *why* both are required in order to attain deification. If union with God is attained in the sacraments, what purpose does ascesis serve? But if ascesis brings about deification, what of the sacraments? The question concerns the relative purpose of ascesis and the sacraments. Contemporary Orthodox theology finds itself in the uncomfortable position of having no recourse to tradition in this case. Indeed, appeals to the Fathers are of limited use since the Fathers did not acknowledge the problematic equivocation.

The equivocal notions of deification, while incompatible, share the metaphysical assumption that being is ontologically distinct from act. Thus to resolve the equivocation, we should analyze how each approach handles this distinction. Since both approaches reject the

possibility of participation in the divine substance, we might reasonably conclude that both approaches suggest that deification happens according to a synergy between divine and human acts. But this is only the case if we identify being with substance and reject Zizioulas's interpretation of the Cappadocians' ontological revolution.

The distinction between being and act is more readily discernable in Orthodox asceticism than in sacramentalism. Ironically, however, the ascetical approach to deification has more in common with Western essentialism than does the sacramental approach. For ascetical deification, substance remains ontologically primary. Asceticism, therefore, suffers from the same problem as the whole of Western theology concerning deification. Since participation in the being of God is impossible, ascetical deification is ultimately about moral imitation rather than ontological participation.

In contrast to the ascetical approach, the sacramental approach to deification requires an alternative ontology in order to explain how humans can participate in the Trinitarian communion without participating in the divine substance. That is, sacramental deification relies upon the ontological revolution of the Cappadocians whereby personhood is ontologically prior to substance. By distinguishing personal ontology from substance ontology, the sacramental approach is able to affirm participation in the being of God without implying participation in the substance of God.

I.   Ontological Deification

Papanikolaou points out that Lossky and Zizioulas share a commitment to the realism of deification, or "divine-human communion."[2] Both theologians define deification as a real or ontological transformation and reject notions of deification that suggest only a nominal, analogical, or ethical kinship.[3] Indeed, Papanikolaou argues that in placing an ontological conception of deification at the center of their theological projects, Lossky and Zizioulas have helped to establish "an identifiable consensus in contemporary Orthodox theology" by which Eastern theology distinguishes itself from Western theology.[4]

For both Lossky and Zizioulas, patristic theology develops along two trajectories. The Western trajectory is characterized by the centrality of reason (*logos*) and intellect (*nous*). This line that begins with Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen leads to Augustine and culminates in the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas. The Eastern trajectory, however, prioritizes ontology over epistemology. The Eastern line runs from Irenaeus to Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus the Confessor.

Clearly, this bifurcation of the Fathers oversimplifies the divergent theologies of East and West. The theology of Origen, for instance, heavily influenced Maximus, whereas the link between Origen and Augustine is less obvious.[5] Still, it is reasonable to suggest that Origen and Augustine belong to a different (not unrelated) theological trajectory than Maximus. The two distinct

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[2] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*.
[3] Russell distinguishes four types of deification in the Greek patristic tradition: nominal, analogical, ethical, and real. For our purposes, real deification will be understood as ontological deification. Nominal, analogical, and ethical deification will be grouped together under the concept of moral or ascetical deification. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[4] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 2.
[5] See Gyorgy Heidl, *The Influence of Origen on the Young Augustine*, 2nd ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009).

trajectories are not meant to identify lines of direct influence but only different trends among the Fathers.

The epistemological trajectory that undergirds the Western trajectory locates the God-world relation in reason or rationality. Beginning with Justin Martyr, this line holds that truth is tied to reason and therefore universally available to all people and evident to some degree in pagan philosophy.[6] Consequently, Western Christianity is more likely to create theological systems that correlate to philosophical systems (e.g. Origen and Augustine's Neoplatonism, Scholasticism's Aristotelianism, Neo-Orthodoxy's existentialism).[7] Lossky and Zizioulas find fault with this overly-rational, intellectualized theology because it makes deification into a sort of scientific pursuit of divine knowledge. The underlying assumption of this form of theology is that God is first and foremost a rational being (or Reason itself) who reveals himself in rational acts. Indeed, God is identified with his rational acts.

Regardless of the drawbacks of correlationism, locating Christian doctrines within a specific philosophical framework provides a systematic coherence that Eastern theology often lacks. Eastern Orthodoxy has traditionally been more concerned with synthesizing for the sake of consensus than with systematizing for the sake of coherence. The East has therefore become much more amenable to paradox and antinomy than the West—even to a fault. For it is one thing to accept and enjoy the mystery of God but quite another to accept ambiguity without critical scrutiny.

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[6] "Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians...For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them." Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 13.193.

[7] The Eastern trajectory includes theologians who are influenced by philosophical systems as well. The point is simply that Western theologians seem to have more readily adopted a correlational methodology, and this accounts for the prevalence of systematic theologies in the West as well as the relative dearth of systems in the East.

As Papanikolaou observes, even though Lossky and Zizioulas agree on the patristic trajectory of Eastern theology, their "similarities…do not extend much further than this affirmation of the realism of divine-human communion as the central core of theological discourse."[8] Papanikolaou avers that "The central debate is over the use of *apophaticism* in theology."[9] Whereas "Lossky adheres to a strict separation between the immanent and economic Trinity, or between *oikonomia* and *theologia*," Papanikolaou claims that "for Zizioulas…the God experienced in the eucharist is not the God beyond being but the immanent life of the trinitarian God."[10] Papanikolaou concludes that "one could frame the debate between Lossky and Zizioulas…as one over Karl Rahner's famous axiom…Lossky would reject the identification of the economic and the immanent Trinity, while Zizioulas would accept Rahner's axiom with qualifications."[11]

While Papanikolaou is right to distinguish the theologies of Lossky and Zizioulas, he does so on the wrong basis. Indeed, Zizioulas is no more amenable to Rahner's rule than Lossky, though both certainly affirm that there is but one, indivisible Trinity. Furthermore, Zizioulas upholds the separation of *theologia* from *economia* just as strictly as does Lossky. In fact, it would be virtually impossible to identify with the Eastern trajectory of theology without embracing a strong sense of *apophaticism* regarding *theologia* in opposition to *kataphaticism* regarding *oikonomia.* It is the Western trajectory that downplays *apophaticism*; for if God's being *is* God's activity, then knowledge of God's activity is knowledge of God's very being. Lossky and Zizioulas are united in their affirmation of *apophaticism* regarding God's being. The difference, then, concerns not

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[8] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 2.
[9] Ibid., 3.
[10] Ibid., 5, 3.
[11] Ibid., 3.

apophaticism itself but the way in which the two theologians employ *apophaticism*, i.e. the way in which they differentiate being and activity.

In Lossky's theology God's being and act are identified with the divine essence and divine energies, respectively. The Trinity is knowable according to the economic energies but unknowable according to the immanent essence. In contrast, Zizioulas identifies the unknowable being of God with the immanent Trinity of persons and the knowable activities of God with the essence *and* energies of the economic Trinity. In short, the difference is that Lossky defines the immanent Trinity in terms of the common essence whereas Zizioulas's Trinity is communion without commonality.[12]

Having differentiated Lossky and Zizioulas, it is informative to, again, compare them with the Western theology of, say, Rahner, (or Barth, or Pannenberg). Lossky and Zizioulas distinguish being from act, Rahner does not. Rahner and Lossky prioritize substance, Zizioulas does not. Zizioulas and Rahner equate God's essence and energies, Lossky does not.

Extending this comparison to the doctrine of deification, we can conclude that ontological deification for Rahner would require participation in the divine substance, which is unthinkable since it would obviate any ontological distinction between God and God's creatures. This is why Western notions of deification tend toward metaphor rather than realism. Lossky has an easier time defending ontological deification because he argues that participation in the energies of God does not entail participation in God's essence. The difficulty for Lossky is that he must explain how God's energies can be ontological without collapsing the essence/energies distinction. Lastly,

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[12] At least, this is the interpretation of Zizioulas offered here. I argue that this is the logical consequence of Zizioulas's theological personalism even though Zizioulas does not explicitly acknowledge it.

Zizioulas is able to avoid the problems of both Rahner and Lossky. For Zizioulas, deification is participation in the personal communion of the immanent Trinity rather than participation in the economic essence or energies of God.

II.   Ascetical and Sacramental Deification

Because Lossky and Zizioulas disagree on the proper way to distinguish being from act in God, they arrive at very different conceptions of ontological deification. Nonetheless, both find ample evidence in the Eastern Fathers to support their approaches. In the trajectory of Eastern theology that runs from Irenaeus to Maximus, the doctrine of deification is developed around two foci. The first focus of the Fathers is participation in the Church's sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist. And second, the Fathers focus on moral progress through ascesis. The Fathers are in agreement that both the sacraments and ascesis are necessary, but they struggle to offer a coherent account of how the two aspects of deification cooperate. In effect, the Eastern Fathers offer two distinct types of deification that correlate to being and act. Sacramental deification concerns being, while ascetical deification concerns actions.

a. Irenaeus

Irenaeus does not develop a full-fledged doctrine of deification, but his contributions to the doctrine cannot be overstated. His two most influential ideas were the so-called "exchange formula" and the distinction between the divine image and likeness from Genesis 1:26. Irenaeus introduces the exchange formula at the end of the preface to Chapter Five of his great work, *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus's claim that "He became what we are that He might bring us to be even what

He is himself"[13] henceforth links the Son's descent into humanity with humanity's ascent toward divinity.

Irenaeus's second major contribution to the doctrine of deification was his distinction between the divine image and the divine likeness. For Irenaeus, the divine image pertains to the physical human body while the likeness refers to human participation in the divine life and freedom.[14] The image remains constant for humans, but the likeness was lost in the Fall and not restored until Christ offered it anew. In baptism, and continually renewed in the Eucharist, human beings are adopted as sons of God and thereby restored to participation in eternal life.[15] It might seem, then, that Irenaeus offers a purely sacramental notion of deification. However, Irenaeus claims that baptism only imparts the *potential* for eternal life. To attain the immortality of God, human beings must use their freedom to obey the commandments of God [16] Russell sums up Irenaeus's position:

> Moral behavior and the reception of the Eucharist are the two complementary ways in which the Spirit is nurtured in the believer. On the moral level obedience to God produces the fruits of the Spirit…Conversely immoral behavior impoverishes people…and renders them the mere flesh and blood that will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. On the sacramental level the union with the Spirit initiated by baptism is maintained by the Eucharist. Through being nourished by the body and blood of the Lord the body does not go to corruption but partakes of Life.[17]

For Irenaeus, deification is a matter of regaining the divine likeness (as opposed to the divine image) comprised of eternal life and freedom from sin. Eternal life is bestowed by the Sacraments but also somehow conditioned by moral progress towards absolute obedience to God.

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[13] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies,* trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers 1, Second Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), preface.526.
[14] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, 5.6.1.531-32; 5.16.1-2.544
[15] Ibid., 3.19.1.448; 4.18.5.486.
[16] Ibid., 5.11.1.537.
[17] Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 110.

Here we arrive at the central tension between sacramental and ascetical deification that remains unresolved to this day. The question is whether it makes any sense to claim that the deifying adoption granted in baptism and reaffirmed in the Eucharist can, in any way, be affected by moral actions. Indeed, if moral progress is required in order to attain deification, then deification can be attained only by the morally perfect. For the concept of a "deified sinner" is nonsense. Still, even if we choose to accept the paradox as an antinomic mystery of the faith, the result is that moral progress is rendered superfluous to deification after all (just as "works" are of limited value for Luther). So, if deification requires moral progress, it must require moral perfection. And since even the holiest of saints practice continuous penitence for their imperfections, either deification itself is unattainable, or it does not require moral progress.

Indeed, since Eastern theology separates being from act, that is, ontology from morality, we should expect that ontological deification would demand a union with God according to being rather than act. If moral acts take on an ontological character, then the distinction between being and act immediately unravels. In Irenaeus, this problem is only nascent, but in Athanasius it becomes quite clear.

b. Athanasius

As with virtually all of his theology, Athanasius's conception of deification is tailored to refute the subordinationist theology of the Arians. The Arians also held a doctrine of deification, but for them Christ was a creature and only *homoiousios* with the Father. Therefore, Arian deification was limited to union with the god-like Christ. Union with the unoriginate Creator was unthinkable. Against the Arians, Athanasius argues that there is no real benefit to being united with the Son if he is a creature like us. Therefore, Athanasius makes the important distinction between the

generation of the Son and Spirit and the *creation* of the world. The former is accomplished according to the divine substance while the latter is the result of the divine will.

Because Athanasius is primarily concerned with refuting the Arians, he develops the concept of deification along two distinct lines that correspond to the distinction between God's substance and will. Ontological deification is based on the premise that Christ is the eternal Son and of the same substance as the Father. Therefore when the divine Son becomes human, he deifies human nature; i.e. he restores humanity to immortality according to the image of God. This is what Athanasius means when he echoes Irenaeus's exchange formula: "He became human that we might become God." Ontological deification means overcoming the threat of annihilation. But more precisely, we should call this salvation or redemption from death rather than deification. The Incarnation itself does not make humans into sons of God. Nor does it offer union with God in the eternal Kingdom. For Athanasius, it is the Sacraments of the Church that bring about divine adoption and union with the Trinity.[18]

The other line which Athanasius develops is ethical, or ascetical, deification. Inspired by the life St Anthony, Athanasius acknowledges that the ascetic life makes one more like God. But it is not clear how ascetic deification relates to ontological deification. Indeed, since the two lines correspond to the being and activity of God, it is not apparent that they can be coherently integrated without re-opening the door to Arianism. Just as God's being is not the result of his will, nor vice versa, neither can ontological deification result from ethical deification, nor vice versa.

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[18] Ibid., 182–85; Cf. Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, trans. Archibald Robertson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 4, Second Series 2.41.370.

Thus Athanasius does not solve the problem of deification begun with Irenaeus but makes it more acute in his refutation of Arianism. A generation later, however, when the Cappadocians face a more radical version of Arianism, their response opens a new possibility for ontological deification.

c. The Cappadocians

The Cappadocians have much in common with Athanasius regarding the doctrine of deification. All three Fathers give mention to the sacraments as well as ascesis in their accounts of deification. And like Athanasius, and Irenaeus before him, they are unable to explain how the two lines of thought may be integrated. However, unlike Athanasius, the Cappadocians were inclined toward philosophy and much less hostile toward Origen's Platonism.[19] Their view of deification (despite various differences) attempts to somehow reconcile Origen's monism and Athanasius's dualism. They attempt to affirm the possibility of union with God according to grace while still maintaining an infinite difference between divinity and humanity.

The Cappadocians are credited with two key contributions in the development of ontological deification. These contributions were advanced against the Eunomian heresy which maintained the identity of essence and energies in God and also denied the possibility of ontological difference within the one divine essence. In response, the Cappadocians first solidified

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[19] Recent scholarship calls into question the view that Origen was a Platonist. But Daniel Boyarin gets to the heart of the matter when he observes that this interpretation falsely assumes that Christianity and Platonism are mutually exclusive. He dismisses the idea that "one can be properly called 'Platonist' only if Platonism is understood as antonym to Christianity." Daniel Boyarin, "By Way of Apology: Dawson, Edwards, Origen," *Studia Philonica* 16 (2004): 188–217; See also Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition," *Religions* 8, no. 21 (2017): 1–20; Cf. Mark J. Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, Ashgate Studies in Philosophy & Theology in Late Antiquity (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

the distinction between God's essence and energies. And second, they invented a distinction between essence and *hypostasis*.

The distinction between the divine essence and energies did not significantly strengthen the orthodox position against the Eunomians. It was a re-affirmation and clarification of Athanasius's distinction between substance and will, which the heretics rejected. This distinction is important in order to preserve God's transcendence and freedom from the world, but as a response to the Eunomians, it only begs the question. Regardless, it is this distinction that later funds the ascetical approach to ontological deification. Since God's essence is entirely transcendent, God is only available to us in the immanent energies.

The Cappadocian distinction between essence and *hypostasis* was the more potent response to the Eunomians. Prior to the invention of this distinction, there was no ontological term with which to differentiate the Father, Son, and Spirit without implying tritheism. To be sure, Aristotle had differentiated primary and secondary substances. But when applied to the Trinity, it suggests that Father, Son, and Spirit are three gods just as Peter, Paul, and Mary are three humans. Thus, essence and *hypostasis* may be equated with Aristotle's primary and secondary substances regarding created beings but not regarding the Trinity. To make sense of the Trinity, the Cappadocians invented the concept of ontological personhood. The person is a *hypostasis* defined by communion rather than commonality. This is what Zizioulas terms the ontological revolution of the Cappadocians.

The Cappadocians themselves do not relate this ontological revolution in Trinitarian theology to the doctrine of deification. But this is precisely what later proponents of sacramental deification strive to do. Like Athanasius, the Cappadocians proclaim the centrality of the sacraments for the Christian life. Of the three Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa devotes the most time to

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the sacramental aspect of deification. But Gregory does not progress far beyond Athanasius's claims that baptism grants divine adoption while the Eucharist confers participation in Christ's deified flesh. Nowhere do the Cappadocians speak of deification in terms of becoming a person and joining the ontological communion of the Trinity. Despite their revolution in Trinitarian ontology, the Cappadocian Fathers remained loyal to substance ontology regarding the doctrine of deification.[20]

d. Maximus the Confessor

Though the sacramental and ascetical approaches both trace their lineages back to the Cappadocians, the contemporary discussion of deification focuses primarily on the thought of Maximus the Confessor. In Maximus, the Cappadocian distinction between substance and *hypostasis* is finally brought to bear on Christology and the doctrine of deification.[21] However, Maximus does not appreciate the full ontological implications of the distinction and so remains beholden to substance ontology—not unlike the Cappadocians themselves. Though Maximus has much more to say on the topic of deification than his predecessors, he does not surpass them in clarity or precision regarding the doctrine.

In Maximus, the Cappadocian distinction between substance and *hypostasis* becomes a distinction between λόγος φύσεως (*logos physeos*) and τρόπος ὑπάρξεως *tropos hyparxeos*.[22] Or, perhaps more precisely, the Cappadocian distinction between nature and person is only one aspect

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[20] See Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 206–34.
[21] Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, Herder, 1955), 178.
[22] Ibid., 155–80.

of Maximus's multi-faceted distinction between "*logos* of nature" and "mode of existence."[23] Indeed, given the myriad uses Maximus makes of this distinction, it is arguably reductionistic to identify logos of nature with substance and mode of existence with *hypostasis*. However, the relevant issue here is not the comprehensive definition of each term but their specific definitions regarding the doctrine of deification.

While it is generally agreed that *logos physeos* refers to nature or substance, there are three main schools of thought concerning the meaning of *tropos hyparxeos.* The first school is connected to Thomistic personalism and represented by J.-M. Garrigues.[24] The second is the school of Orthodox personalists—or proponents of sacramental deification—led by Zizioulas. And the third school interprets "mode of being" in terms of the divine energies rather than personhood. This group reads Maximus through the lens of St. Gregory Palamas and is represented by Jean-Claude Larchet.[25]

The commonalities among the three schools may be summarized in this way: Larchet and Zizioulas distinguish being from act; Garrigues does not. Zizioulas and Garrigues prioritize *hypostasis* over nature; Larchet does not. Garrigues and Larchet identify ethical imitation with ontological participation; Zizioulas does not.

Garrigues and Western notions of deification do not interest us here. As noted above, because the West identifies being and act in God, it has difficulty articulating a doctrine of ontological deification without collapsing the distinction between created and uncreated nature.

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[23] Jean-Claude Larchet, "The Mode of Deification," in *The Oxford Handbood of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 341–59.
[24] See Jean-Miguel Garrigues, *Maxime le confesseur: la charité, avenir divin de l'homme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976).
[25] See Jean-Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 1996).

Garrigues avoids the ontological problem by interpreting *tropos hyparxeos* in purely ethical terms with no reference to nature.

It is no surprise that Larchet and Zizioulas both find fault with Garrigues's ethical reading of *tropos* since the former represent the East and the latter the West. Larchet and Zizioulas share a theological lineage that strictly separates being from act without neglecting either term. But, of course, the two Eastern theologians disagree on the meaning of the being/act distinction.

Larchet argues that Zizioulas's position is virtually identical to that of Garrigues because both want to identify *tropos hyparxeos* with *hypostasis*. "The agreement between the two schools, however, seems to be based on a general opposition of person to nature, according to the existentialist principle 'existence precedes essence,' rather than on a common conception of the person (which the members of the [Garrigues] school consider especially in terms of subjectivity, and which Zizioulas understands above all in terms of otherness and relationship)."[26] Larchet claims that similar to Garrigues, Zizioulas "strongly accentuates person at the expense of nature."[27]

In contrast to the personalists, Larchet interprets *tropos* in Maximus as "accounting for the fact that the reality of any natural order can attain to a new, supernatural mode of existence, while remaining the same in its essence."[28] If this explanation is unclear, Larchet further explains that

> Maximus says repeatedly that human beings, by virtue of their divinization, undergo a complete transformation, and that this transformation does affect their nature, which, in a way—in accordance with a certain *tropos*—is actually changed...He says that human beings become 'like God'…More specifically, Maximus shows in several ways that human nature remains unchanged.[29]

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[26] Larchet, "The Mode of Deification," 341.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 343.
[29] Ibid., 349.

Clearly, Larchet wants to affirm that deification entails some sort of ontological transformation involving human nature. And yet, he also feels compelled to reject the possibility of any alteration according to nature.

Larchet acknowledges the difficulty in his contradictory statements, but he claims that Maximus resolves the antinomy by way of the essence-energies distinction:

> The deification of human beings…means their participation in God according to the divine energies. Like his predecessors, Maximus relates energy (whether divine or human) to essence or nature, and not to *hypostasis*. The divine energies are distinct but in no way separate from God's essence (or nature), of which they are the manifestation *ad extra*. God, who in his essence is wholly imparticipable, nonetheless manifests himself fully and entirely in his energies, and through them makes himself fully and wholly participable.[30]

I address the essence-energies distinction in more detail in the following section on Gregory Palamas, but here we should note that this distinction does not resolve the antinomy as Larchet suggests. By interpreting *tropos hyparxeos* in terms of energies, Larchet attempts to chart a middle path between the hazards of participation in the divine nature on the one hand and mere ethical imitation of God on the other. The *tropoi*, or energies, are understood to somehow mediate between humanity and divinity—bridging the ontological gap. But this approach only reformulates the antinomy; it does not resolve it.

In short, Larchet argues that for Maximus, deified human beings remain human according to nature but become divine according to their "supernatural" participation in the energies or "qualities" of God.[31] On the one hand, Larchet wants essence and energies to be distinct but inseparable such that the energies make God fully and wholly participable. But on the other hand,

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30 Ibid., 350–51.
31 Ibid., 350–52.

he must maintain that the essence and energies are distinct and separable in order for human beings to participate in the divine energies without also participating in the divine nature. If Larchet accurately depicts Maximus's thought, then Maximus achieves little, if any, conceptual progress in the doctrine of deification beyond his predecessors.

In contrast to Larchet, Zizioulas presents an entirely different reading of Maximus's *tropos hyparxeos*. Larchet faults Zizioulas and Garrigues for identifying *tropos* with *hypostasis* and all but rejecting any role for *logos physeos,* or nature, in deification. But Zizioulas paints the picture differently. He characterizes Garrigues and Larchet as overemphasizing the roles of the person and nature, respectively:

> There is, for example, a divergence of opinion between the position of J.-C. Larchet, on the one hand, and other scholars such as von Balthasar…and especially Garrigues, on the other, as to the role played by the person in salvation and *theosis*.[32]

Zizioulas argues that a proper understanding of the doctrine of deification as articulated by Maximus must account for the relation between person and nature rather than choose between the two:

> Thus, those wishing to attach more significance to nature than to person in the thought of the Greek Fathers, including St Maximus in particular (and in order to fight the personalism of certain authors, like myself), would tend to see in personalism a threat to the importance of nature in theology (Larchet is a good example), and *vice versa* personalist thinkers would fight essentialism as an enemy to the importance of the person in theology. We are, therefore, confronted with the need to recover the organic and unbreakable unity of nature and person, with which the Greek Fathers operated in ontology.[33]

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[32] Zizioulas, "Person and Nature," 86.
[33] Ibid., 88.

In sum, Zizioulas claims that Larchet comes dangerously close to "de-hypostasizing" the person and Garrigues risks "denaturalizing" the person.[34]

Against Larchet and Garrigues, Zizioulas asserts that in Maximus and all the Greek Fathers, "nature and person are two indispensable and mutually conditioned aspects of every being. All beings possess a nature and a *hypostasis* inseparably linked with each other."[35] For Maximus, there is no such thing as an un-hypostasized nature; a nature is always a nature of a *hypostasis*.[36] And neither, says Zizioulas, can a *hypostasis* exist apart from nature; for Maximus declares that *hypostasis* is inconceivable without nature.[37] Zizioulas therefore proffers the principle, "there is no nature without person, and vice versa."[38]

This principle of the inseparability of *hypostasis* and nature, however, contradicts Zizioulas's understanding of the Cappadocian revolution in ontology. The problem with the principle, however, is much deeper than the consistency of Zizioulas's thought over time. Indeed, Zizioulas readily admits that this principle represents something of a shift from his previous position.[39] The deeper problem with the principle, "no nature without person, and vice versa," is that it precludes the possibility of ontological deification.

Zizioulas has long maintained that the *hypostasis* is ontologically primary. He argues that "In St Maximus' understanding, it is not the nature that is the subject of a *hypostasis* but the reverse: *the hypostasis is the possessor of the nature*."[40] Likewise "it is not nature that gives being

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[34] Ibid., 94.
[35] Ibid., 88.
[36] Ibid., 89.
[37] Ibid., 90; Cf. *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica*, PG 91, 264AB.
[38] Zizioulas, "Person and Nature," 109. See also 99.
[39] Ibid., 106.
[40] Ibid., 89.

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or existence to *hypostasis*, but it is *hypostasis* that makes nature…acquire being."[41] Presumably it is these sorts of claims that prompt Larchet to criticize Zizioulas for overemphasizing *hypostasis* at the expense of nature. But Zizioulas is quick to point out that nature carries an indispensable ontological function. "Nature," he says, "does not give being to *hypostases*, as if it were their 'cause,' but it holds them together in one κοινωνία τής φύσεως. The function, therefore, of nature is this and nothing else: to relate the *hypostases* to each other, to make them relational."[42] And Zizioulas claims that this has been his position all along by citing a passage in *Being as Communion*, where he states: "substance possesses almost by definition a relational character."[43]

But here's the rub. If it is nature that makes *hypostases* relate to each other in a sort of natural communion, then *hypostases* only relate to others with whom they possess a nature in common. If *hypostases* are held together in a "communion of nature," then divine *hypostases* relate only to other divine *hypostases*, and humans only to other humans. Perhaps this consequence serves to justify the Incarnation, which joins divinity and humanity in a single *hypostasis*. Even so, if communion is defined as possessing a common nature, then human beings can relate to Christ only *qua* human *hypostasis* and not *qua* divine *hypostasis*. Further, since the Son is the only incarnate *hypostasis* of the Trinity, human beings would be cut off from communion with the Father and Holy Spirit. On such a reckoning of nature, ontological deification would require human beings to participate in the imparticipable divine nature.

To avoid this paradox that has continuously plagued the doctrine of deification, we should reject Zizioulas's principle—"no nature without *hypostasis*, and vice versa"—because it rests on

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[41] Ibid., 90.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 84.

a faulty assumption regarding the function of nature. In *Being as Communion,* Zizioulas does indeed state that substance is relational, but in its context this claim refers to Athanasius's defense of the *homoousian* Trinity against the Arians. In other words, nature defines the sameness of *hypostases* in opposition to the otherness of *hypostases* with a different nature. Nature, in fact, does not hold *hypostases* in relation to one another, but instead delineates the difference between opposing sets of *hypostases*. This is why Zizioulas concludes that Athanasius "played an indispensable part in the development of a [Trinitarian] ontology...but he does not show to what extent 'interior' communion within one substance implies otherness at an ontological level."[44]

This problem of "interior" otherness is not resolved until the Cappadocians distinguish two kinds of ontological otherness, i.e. two distinct ontologies. The Trinity's relations *ad intra* are defined by the *perichoresis* of the *hypostases*, but "whenever the question of the ontological relationship between God and the world is raised, the idea of *hypostasis,* from now on ontological in an ultimate sense, must be completed with that of substance if we do not wish to fall back into ontological monism."[45] Zizioulas's earlier position, therefore, was that nature belongs only to the Trinity *ad extra*—the economic Trinity that creates and saves the world. The Trinity considered *ad intra* is not related to the world and therefore has no nature.

Returning to the doctrine of deification, the Cappadocian revolution in ontology opens up a new possibility for overcoming the paradox of ontological communion with God. Person and nature do not comprise two aspects of a single ontology, but two distinct ontologies. In this light, Maximus's distinction between *logos physeos* and *tropos hyparxeos* represents a significant

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[44] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 86–87.
[45] Ibid., 89.

development in the doctrine of deification. Nature represents the unbridgeable and infinite distinction between divinity and humanity. Maximus's notion of *logos physeos* does not challenge this tradition. Neither does Maximus's contribution to deification have to do with identifying *tropos hyparxeos* with either energies or *hypostases* as inseparable from nature. Rather, Maximus uses *tropos hyparxeos* to suggest that certain *hypostases* are not necessarily bound to their nature. This is not to say that a *hypostasis* can change natures. The point is that certain *hypostases* can be said to exist according to an entirely different ontology.

When Maximus claims that a *hypostasis* without a nature is "inconceivable," both Zizioulas and Larchet take this to imply impossibility. But since Maximus follows the Cappadocians in making *hypostasis*, instead of nature, ontologically primary, there is no reason why a *hypostasis* cannot exist without a nature. A *hypostasis* without a nature is not impossible *per se* but only impossible to comprehend because such an entity exists without relation to any external other; it is utterly transcendent to the realm of substance. And indeed, the immanent Trinity, the God beyond being, is inconceivable in just this way. This is why the Greek Fathers have nothing to say about the immanent Trinity other than to posit its existence. They do not attribute any qualities or distinguishing characteristics to the three persons besides their absolute alterity in perichoretic unity. The persons are communion without commonality.

Maximus's unique contribution to the doctrine of deification is the notion of *tropos* which explains how human *hypostases* can enter into communion with God without thereby participating in the divine nature. But like his predecessors, Maximus remains ambiguous regarding how exactly human *hypostases* can become deified. He devotes much of his writing to the process of ascetical progress in the virtues, but he also pens a profound commentary on the Divine Liturgy in which the eucharistic event offers an experience of ontological deification. Like the Cappadocians,

Maximus provides an ontological innovation that helps solve the question of deification, but he does not follow through with it. For Maximus, deification involves both ascesis and the Sacraments, but the relation between the two remains a mystery.[46]

e. Gregory Palamas

Some seven hundred years after Maximus, Gregory Palamas defended the Eastern mystical practice of hesychasm against a Western critic by emphasizing the typical Eastern position that God's being is wholly distinct from God's activities. In refuting his antagonist, Palamas appeals to a long-standing distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. But because of the specific context regarding hesychasm, Palamas develops the essence-energies distinction further than any of his predecessors.[47]

The value of Palamas's thought and of modern neo-Palamism is the clear delineation of the difference between God's being and God's activities. In this regard, Palamism staunchly maintains the Eastern trajectory of theology in opposition to the alternative path of the West. Or at least it attempts to preserve this tradition. We have already seen that Larchet's Palamite reading of Maximus does not solve the problem of ontological deification but only re-frames the problem in different language. Here I will demonstrate the weakness of Palamas's theology in its own right

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[46] Cf. Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995), 427–32; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 293–95.

[47] See Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz, Studies and Texts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988); Gregory Palamas, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2010); John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974); Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 221–77; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 304–8.

before suggesting that the essence-energies distinction should be revised in order to prioritize personal ontology instead of substance ontology.

The crystallization of the essence/energy distinction is the result of a fourteenth-century controversy surrounding hesychasm (from ἡσυχία, silence). The hesychast monastics in the Byzantine East practiced a disciplined and ritualized form of prayer. A monk would bow his head and set his gaze toward his heart. Then he would recite the Jesus Prayer— "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me"—in synchrony with his breathing. This holistic form of prayer was meant to join intellect and heart, to orient the entirety of the person toward God. Nikiphoros the Hesychast says, "this prayer protects the intellect from distraction, renders it impregnable to diabolic attacks, and every day increases its love and desire for God."[48]

It is not merely the peculiarity of this form of prayer which would become controversial, though. The hesychasts believed that through prayer they could experience the uncreated divine light; they experienced deifying visions of God. Gregory of Sinai explains that "the energy of the Holy Spirit, which we have already mystically received in baptism, is discovered in two ways. First…through arduous and protracted practice of the commandments…Secondly…through the continuous invocation of the Lord Jesus [the Jesus Prayer]."[49] Through obedience and prayer, the mind is purified and "plunges its thought into light and itself becomes light;" the mind "grows luminous and immaterial, becoming through ineffable union a single spirit with God."[50]

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[48] Nikiphoros the Hesychast, "On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart," in *The Philokalia*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 205–6; See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 231–34.

[49] Gregory of Sinai, "On the Signs of Grace and Delusion," in *The Philokalia*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 3.259.

[50] Gregory of Sinai, "On Commandments and Doctrines," in *The Philokalia*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 23.216, 116.239, 118.240; Gregory of Sinai, "On Prayer," in *The Philokalia*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 8.286.

The controversy sprang up because the hesychasts sound suspiciously close to the Messalian heresy. The Messalians valued meditative prayer above the Sacraments, believing that one is perfected through the former. In prayer, unlike in the Sacraments, one may be blessed to see the essence of God with physical eyes, and, in receiving this gift, one is freed from the life of passions and made wholly perfect. Though this heresy was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431, it enjoyed a lasting influence on monasticism throughout the East.

In the mid fourteenth century, Barlaam the Calabrian, a renowned Orthodox philosopher and theologian particularly interested in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, visited certain hesychast hermitages on Mt Athos. He was immediately appalled by what he perceived as an overwhelming influence of Messalianism. In particular, he was dismayed to hear monks claiming to experience visions of God manifested as an immaterial and uncreated light. For Barlaam, following the *apophaticism* of Pseudo-Dionysius, God's immaterial and uncreated "being" (*hyper-ousia*) is absolutely invisible and unknowable. He writes:

> If they [the hesychasts] agree to say that the intelligible and immaterial light of which they speak is the superessential God himself and if they continue at the same time to acknowledge that he is absolutely invisible and inaccessible to the senses, they must face a choice: if they claim to see this light, they must consider it to be either an angel or the essence of the mind itself, when, purified of passion and of ignorance, the spirit sees itself and in itself sees God in his own image…But if they say that this light is neither the superessential essence, nor an angelic essence, nor the mind itself…I do not know what that light is, but I do know that it does not exist.[51]

For Barlaam, if God is beyond being (superessential, *hyper-ousia*) and thus invisible and unknowable, then "seeing God" must mean "seeing a manifestation of God," i.e. experiencing God through a created means. Perhaps the hesychasts see God *via* the magnificent splendor of an angel.

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[51] Gregory Palamas, *Triads* 2.3.7.

Indeed, many times in scripture we find men bowing down before angels as before God himself. Or perhaps the hesychasts look inward and, having attained a divine level of purity, they recognize themselves as holy icons, the very image of God.

The point, for Barlaam, is that the hesychasts may be seeing any number of created manifestations of God, but it is impossible to see the uncreated essence of God. In calling the hesychasts' visions illusory, Barlaam reveals his essentialist notion of God. Barlaam strictly identifies God with God's (superessential) essence. And since God's essence is invisible and unknowable, whatever is visible or knowable cannot be God.

What, then, does Barlaam make of the incarnation? If Jesus Christ is the Son of God, *homoousian* with the Father, then surely God may be seen. Indeed the feast of the Theophany celebrates a manifestation of all three members of the Trinity at once. Surely then, God may be seen and heard—not in essence but in the three divine *hypostases*. If this is the case, then perhaps the hesychasts' visions of the uncreated light should be likewise explained as visions of the divine *hypostases*.

Barlaam does not deny that Christ is God incarnate; rather, he insists that the uncreated Son of God is only visible insofar as he takes on created flesh. Strictly speaking, God was not visible in Jesus Christ—at least not with physical eyes. Likewise the Spirit was made visible through the medium of the created form of a dove, and the Father was heard through the created medium of a voice. Thus, the *hypostases* of God are only visible and knowable through created means. So even if the light beheld by the hesychasts is a manifestation of a divine *hypostasis*, it would still be a *created* light and thus not God himself. Barlaam's essentialism entails that even the divine *hypostases* are essentially invisible and unknowable—otherwise they could not be God. Indeed, for Barlaam, union with God requires surpassing the knowledge of God revealed in the

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Trinity, for this knowledge of God is revealed through the mediation of created manifestations. Barlaam understands Pseudo-Dionysius to teach that union with God requires transcending all knowledge and seeking a state of "pure un-knowing."[52]

In refuting Barlaam and his followers, Gregory Palamas attacks Barlaam's essentialism. For Palamas, God's being can be conceived in different ways, for God has multiple modes of being. He claims "there are three realities in God, namely, substance, energy and a Trinity of divine *hypostases*."[53] But Palamas has little to say about the divine *hypostases*. He devotes most of his work to spelling out the distinction between the other two modes—a distinction he discovers throughout the patristic tradition.

The essence/energy distinction, however, is not original to Christianity; it was first made by Plotinus in the third century. Plotinus identified the ultimate first principle as the One, or the Good. As the ultimate principle of all things, the One itself is no-thing, or beyond being. The goodness of the One is so great that it cannot be contained; it overflows giving rise to Intellect— which is not unlike Aristotle's Prime Mover. A sort of mediator between the One and all beings, the Intellect is present in all things as their being, life, and all their perfections. Yet even the Intellect cannot comprehend the One from which it arose. In attempting to contemplate the One, the Intellect's thought is refracted into an array of intelligible perfections—the Forms. This system gives rise to the dialectic of *kataphatic* (positive) and *apophatic* (negative) predications of God. But more to our purposes, the system also allows Plotinus to speak of two kinds of energies— internal and external. Internal energy is constitutive of a thing's substance whereas external energy

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[52] Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 233.
[53] Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 75.171.

comes forth from the substance. The One is thus unknowable in its internal energy (essence), but knowable in its external energy (Intellect or Forms) which permeates all things.

A century after Plotinus introduces the essence/energies distinction, it is adopted and employed by Basil of Caesarea against a resurgent form of Arianism. Eunomius taught that since God is ungenerated, or uncaused, the Son who is begotten (generated, caused) cannot be fully God. Because God is simple, Eunomius claimed that whatever is predicated of God is predicated of his essence. If the Father is unbegotten while the Son is begotten, then the Father and Son must be of two separate essences. Basil's response is worth quoting at length:

> We say that we know the greatness of God, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his providence over us, and the justness of his judgment, but not his very essence…But God, he [Eunomius] says, is simple, and whatever attribute of Him you have reckoned as knowable is of His essence. But the absurdities involved in this sophism are innumerable. When all these high attributes have been enumerated, are they all names of one essence? And is there the same mutual force in His awfulness and his lovingkindness, His justice and his creative power, His providence and His foreknowledge, and his bestowal of rewards and punishments, His majesty and His providence requital, his majesty and his providence? In mentioning any of these, do we declare his essence?...The operations are various [ἐνέργειαι ποικίλαι], and the essence simple [οὐσία ἀπλη], but we say that we know our God from his operations [ἐνεργειων], but do not undertake to approach near to his essence [οὐσία]. His operations [ἐνέργειαι] come down to us, but his essence [οὐσία] remains beyond our reach.[54]

Here Basil argues that many things may be attributed to God—goodness, wisdom, and power, for example—but it is not possible that any one of these attributes could constitute his essence; nor could the aggregate. The attributes, or energies, of God reveal different aspects of God that are not always easily reconciled with one another—such as his jealous wrath, justice, mercy, and lovingkindness. The energies reveal God to us, but to think any one energy is his essence is to

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[54] Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 234*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 8, Second Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 274; Cf., PG 32, 869AB.

diminish God. And to assert that the aggregate of energies can be understood so as to reveal the essence is complete hubris. Even if we could understand and reconcile all of God's energies, this would only give us further knowledge of God's external energies. His internal energies, his essence, would remain incomprehensible.

Almost one thousand years after Basil, Palamas describes the energies of God as "natural symbols." He argues that "every symbol either derives from the nature of the object of which it is a symbol or belongs to an entirely different nature. Thus when the sun is about to rise, the dawn is a natural symbol of its light."[55] Palamas's claim is that the energies are God's visible and knowable mode of existence. Just as dawn can be described as both the manifestation of a not yet visible sun and as the visible presence of light from the sun, so may God be described in terms of an invisible and unknowable essence and also the presence of a visible and knowable manifestation of the essence. In short, both the approaching sun and the morning light from the sun can be called the dawn. Likewise the invisible essence and the visible energies are both God.

Moreover, Palamas suggests that all of our knowledge of the dawn, including the existence of an invisible sun, comes to us from our experience of the morning light just as all of our knowledge of God, including the existence of an unknowable essence, comes to us from our experience of the divine energies. There is no approaching sun apart from the morning light, and *vice versa*. Likewise, there is no divine essence apart from divine energies, and *vice versa*. Though it is true that the energies are from the essence, like light from the sun, they are not created by the essence but exist eternally with the essence—as a natural symbol.

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[55] Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 3.2.14.100.

Deification, then, involves recognizing these natural symbols (energies) in oneself and cultivating them towards purity and perfection. Indeed, the virtuous life is at once the condition of possibility and the consequence of participating in the divine energies. Palamas says, "Every virtue and imitation of God on our part indeed prepares those who practice them for divine union."[56] And also, "The divine energy and grace of the Spirit, while it is everywhere present and is inseparable from him, remains imparticipable, as though absent, for those who are unfit for participation on account of their lack of purification."[57] Deification is thus a perpetual process of entering more deeply into the divine life as purity begets purity.

One does not simply achieve deification through virtue and purity, however. Deification is also a gift. Palamas explains that "the mysterious union itself is effected by grace. It is through grace that 'the entire Divinity comes to dwell in fullness in those deemed worthy'…Do not imagine that deification is simply the possession of the virtues; but rather that it resides in the radiance and grace of God, which really comes to us through the virtues."[58]

So for Palamas, deification is not reducible to either human or divine action but is a synergy of the two. He cites Basil of Caesarea as saying, "A soul which has curbed its natural impulses by a personal *ascesis* and the help of the Holy Spirit becomes worthy (according to the just judgment of God) of the splendor granted to the saints."[59] And of course, Palamas identifies this "splendor" with the deifying, uncreated light beheld by the hesychasts. Alluding to various biblical texts, Palamas argues:

> The splendor granted by the grace of God is light, as you may learn from this text: "The splendor for those who have been purified is light, for the just will shine like

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[56] Ibid., 3.1.27.83.
[57] Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 93.193.
[58] Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 3.1.27.83.
[59] Ibid.

the sun; God will stand in the midst of them, distributing and determining the dignities of blessedness, for they are gods and kings." No one will deny that this relates to supracelestial and supracosmic realities, for "it is possible to receive the supracelestial light among the promises of good things." Solomon declares, "Light shines always for the just," and the Apostle Paul says, "We give thanks to God who has counted us worthy to participate in the heritage of the saints in light."[60]

This is the culmination of Palamas's defense of hesychasm. Through prayer and obedience, the hesychast seeks purity and virtue in order to become worthy to receive God's gracious gift of deification which manifests itself as radiant light appearing at once external and internal to the vision of the one deified. Though one may participate in the divine energies, internalize them, they extend beyond the farthest grasp of human hands, ever stoking the flames of desire.

The most common objection to Palamism is that it entails pantheism or at least denies God's absolute transcendence. If the energies are *natural* symbols of God, and it is the energies that are responsible for creating the cosmos, then creation seems a natural part of God. Rowan Williams argues that "God and the world appear to be bound up in a kind of organic unity…It is practically impossible to salvage from this any notion of contingency in the world."[61] Aristotle Papanikolaou explains that "Those who reject the notion of the uncreated character of divine energies would argue that if God's activity is uncreated then what is communicated is God's very essence, and this would obliterate the distinction between uncreated and created essence, a distinction at the heart of Christian ontology."[62] He then sums up the objection by saying, "If the energies are God, then everything is God."[63]

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[60] Ibid., 3.1.27.83; Cf. Matt. 13:43; Ps 81; Prov. 13:9; Col. 1:12.
[61] Rowan Williams, "The Philosophical Structures of Palamism," *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977): 37.
[62] Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 26.
[63] Ibid., 27.

Facing similar objections in his own time, Palamas argues that God's creativity has a beginning, i.e. that the act of creating is not an eternal act. He says, "we for our part know that while all the energies of God are uncreated, not all are without beginning. Indeed, beginning and end must be ascribed, if not to the creative power itself, then at least to its activity, that is to say, to its energy as directed towards created things."[64] Thus, it seems that while creativity can be called an eternal energy of God, it is not necessarily the case that God eternally enacts this energy. The energy of creativity can exist in God as a potentiality that may or may not be enacted. In this case, creation itself is not eternal with God—only its potentiality. John Meyendorff puts it this way: "If the creation actually is an 'essential' act and independent of the divine will, then creatures are necessarily coeternal with the divine essence; that is exactly the conception of God formed by the Greek philosophers. But the God of the Bible 'created when he wished'; before time, he only possessed the power to create."[65]

Williams responds to this defense of the uncreated energies by calling it "gross." He continues:

> It involves us in supposing that God is subject to some form of temporal succession…that he has unfulfilled or unrealized potencies—in short that he is mutable. What Meyendorff apparently does not understand is that it is no answer to say that God's *ousia* is immutable and His *energeiai* mutable, as this drives a very considerable wedge between the two terms: what is true of one 'mode' or aspect of God is not true of another...[I]t is the purest Neoplatonism.[66]

On the one hand, Williams's criticism seems to beg the question. If there is a problem with the essence-energies distinction, it is not that a wedge is driven between the two terms; distinguishing the two terms is the point. At root, Williams's objection is the product of the Western assumption

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[64] Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 3.2.8.96.
[65] Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 222–23.
[66] Williams, "The Philosophical Structures of Palamism," 38.

that God's being and act are identical. In other words, Williams endorses the same sort of essentialism that Palamas initially faced from Barlaam.

On the other hand, Williams's criticism of Palamism as "the purest Neoplatonism," is instructive since this is exactly what Palamism aims to avoid. Both Meyendorff and Williams want to preserve God's freedom and avoid any tinge of Neoplatonic emanationism, but they go about it in ostensibly opposite ways. For Meyendorff, God's essence contains God's energies in the mode of potentiality, and God activates certain energies according to the freedom of the divine will. But for Williams, the divine essence, energies, and will are indistinguishable and therefore equally imbued with divine freedom. Despite appearances, however, Meyendorff's Palamism, and Williams's essentialism are virtually identical. Consequently, both approaches fail to preserve God's freedom.

Williams's position makes God inseparable from the world. If God's being and activities are identical, then divine freedom and transcendence are not only inconceivable but ontologically impossible.[67] Palamism avows to avoid this problem by distinguishing God's being from God's activities. God is not Creator according to essence because the divine essence contains only potential energies which may be activated by the divine will. But there are two problems here. First, if the potential energies located in the divine essence are activated, then the divine essence changes. Alternatively, Palamism could assert that the energies remain eternally potential within the divine essence and are only activated *ad extra*. Indeed, this seems to be the view that Williams rejects by asserting that Palamism unintentionally drives a wedge between the essence and

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[67] Nor does it help to assert that God's freedom from the world is found in God's eternal decision to determine his essence as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. In this case, either the divine will ontologically precedes the divine *hypostases* and the divine essence or the will, *hypostases*, and essence co-exist eternally without origin. In either case, freedom becomes indistinguishable from necessity.

energies. The result of this bifurcation is that God remains potentially Creator according to the energies within the essence even while God creates the world. In this case, we no longer have one God in two modes but two separate Gods.

The second problem with Palamism concerns the way in which the potential energies are freely activated by the divine will. The divine will is proffered as the agent of the energies. But as itself an activity, the will must be an energy of God. And if the will is an energy, it is a "natural symbol" of God's essence and thus dependent upon the essence as the light of dawn is dependent upon the still unseen sun. In other words, the eternal and immutable divine essence determines the divine will. And if the divine will is a natural symbol of the essence, then we must conclude that God's acts are determined by the divine essence.[68] Bradshaw asserts that "if the divine energies are to manifest the divine *ousia*, then although they can vary enormously they must fall within the range that is properly related to the divine *ousia*…as expression to source."[69] This means that if God wills to create, it is because the act of creation expresses God's essence as Creator.

Divine freedom and transcendence require a strict separation of God's being and activities. Despite appearances, however, Palamism fails to separate the two terms any more than Western essentialism. Therefore, Palamism's solution to the paradox of ontological deification is untenable. In sum, participation in the divine energies is either participation in something other than God, or it is tantamount to participation in the imparticipable divine essence. At root, the problem is that ontological deification is itself incoherent as long as ontology is defined in terms of substance.

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[68] That is, unless the will is only a potentiality like creativity. But this leads to an infinite regress: the potential will would need to be activated by some other energy, which itself would have been potential until activated by yet another energy, and so on *ad infinitum*.

[69] David Bradshaw, "The Concept of Divine Energies," *Philosophy and Theology* 18, no. 1 (2006): 112.

Nothing can bridge the ontological divide between Uncreated substance and created substance. A doctrine of ontological deification requires a different ontology altogether.

III. Person and Essence

Ontological deification requires an ontology that does not prioritize substance. But this does not mean that substance ontology must be discarded. Nor does it mean that Western essentialism and Eastern Palamism must be entirely rejected. Essentialism and Palamism link God to the world according to both God's being and God's activities. And we cannot drive a wedge between these two terms without dividing the one God into two Gods. Therefore, if we are to maintain the Eastern theological trajectory and affirm ontological deification, we must arrive at a different way of distinguishing God's being from God's activities.

The Cappadocians innovated a crucial ontological distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia* in their Trinitarian theology. And Maximus took the first steps of applying the ontological revolution to deification by developing the notion of *tropos hyparxeos*. But not until Zizioulas did an Eastern theologian attempt to describe deification on the basis of "being as communion." Far too often, interpreters of Zizioulas have misunderstood this phrase as a re-definition of substance. Indeed, Zizioulas himself is to blame for this misreading since he continues to affirm that "substance possesses almost by definition a relational character."[70] But we have seen that Zizioulas is less than precise in his usage of "relational" in such instances. This is why it is useful to distinguish between commonality and communion. Both terms express a sort of relation between or among *hypostases*; but "being as commonality" suggests a relationality within and among

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[70] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 84.

substances, while "being as communion" denotes a personal ontology derived from Trinitarian theology.

To avoid any implication that deification requires participation in the divine essence, a doctrine of ontological deification must employ a personal ontology—not in place of substance ontology, but in addition to substance ontology. The Trinity of persons exist together in communion and enter into the realm commonality through the act of creation. Inversely, human *hypostases* are created within the realm of commonality and are granted entrance into the personal communion of the Trinity through the work of the incarnate Son.

The key distinction, therefore, is not that of essence and energies. Nor does the Cappadocian distinction between substance and *hypostasis* or Maximus's distinction between *logos physeos* and *tropos hyparxeos* fully explain the possibility of ontological deification. In fact, even Zizioulas fails to give a fully coherent account of ontological deification because he persists in using *hypostasis* and *person* interchangeably. But, in fact, the key distinction for the doctrine of ontological deification has to do with the ability of *hypostases* to exist in different modes or according to different ontologies. *Hypostases* may exist as either persons or instantiations of a substance, or both.

The distinction between personal ontology and substance ontology preserves God's absolute transcendence to creation without appealing to the divine, Uncreated nature. Neither does this distinction dissolve or denigrate the unbridgeable gap between the Uncreated and created substances. It turns out that according to the Uncreated-created distinction, God is only relatively transcendent, different only in degree from the way Peter is transcendent to Paul. Indeed, if the divine energies that permeate all of creation are natural manifestations of the divine essence, then the divine essence is inseparable from creation. According to substance ontology, God's energies

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reveal the divine essence. If God's essence remains inscrutable, it is only because of the incomprehensible multitude and magnitude of the energies. God's essence is not unknowable in principle or purposefully hidden. The unknowability of the divine essence is a result of human incapacity. According to substance ontology, Rahner's rule is perfectly acceptable: the economic trinity is the immanent trinity, and vice versa. If substance encompasses everything, then the Western theological trajectory is correct not to distinguish God's being from God's activities.

But substance is not everything. According to personal ontology, the Eastern theological trajectory is correct to posit a strict separation between God's being and activities. In fact, there is no economic Trinity according to personal ontology. Neither is there a divine essence nor any divine energies. The Trinity of persons *ad intra* is absolutely transcendent to creation but the divine essence and energies are essentially bound up with creation. The immanent Trinity according to personal ontology has no attributes and no commonalities and is therefore unknowable in principle. We can only know that the immanent Trinity exists; we cannot know what it is.

Once we properly distinguish the two ontologies, the paradox of ontological deification is resolved. Since God's essence and energies may be distinguished but not separated, participation in the divine energies is participation in the divine essence. Therefore, ontological deification involves neither of these terms. Deification is a transformation of the human *hypostasis* from its natural mode as a particular instantiation of the human substance into a personal mode wherein commonalities are exchanged for communion. From this perspective, we arrive at the counter-intuitive conclusion that the divine energies are knowable but imparticipable, while the Trinitarian persons are participable but unknowable.

The Palamites and Zizioulas both distinguish God's being from his activities and agree that God's essence is imparticipable. But whereas the former identify deification as participation in the

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God's activities, the latter defines deification as participation in the Trinitarian communion. Thus, despite the fact that Palamism boils down to a form of essentialism, Zizioulas's personalism is not a complete rejection of the Palamite tradition. Rather, Zizioulas and the Palamites share a common theological trajectory that has been plagued with paradox. It is therefore most helpful to view Zizioulas's personalism as an innovative reformulation of Palamism not unlike the Cappadocians' innovative reformulation of Athanasius's theology.

IV. Deification and the Eucharist

If ontological deification requires participation in the absolutely transcendent persons of the Trinity, then deification is an impossible achievement for human beings. There is nothing human beings can do to bring about their own deification. Ascetic practices can make one more like God, i.e. more virtuous and less controlled by the passions, but moral imitation is not ontological participation. To assume otherwise is to collapse the Eastern distinction between God's being and God's activities not unlike the tradition of Greek philosophy taken up by Western theology.

Ontological deification, therefore, is effected by the sacraments and not by ascetic practices. Participation in the Trinity cannot be achieved by human beings; it must be gifted to human beings. Or, more precisely, personhood is gifted to human *hypostases*, changing their mode of being from natural to supernatural—or as Zizioulas sometimes puts it, from biological *hypostases* to ecclesial *hypostases*.[71] For Zizioulas, "There is no *theosis* outside the Eucharist, for it is only there that communion and otherness coincide and reach their fullness."[72] Only in the

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[71] Ibid., 49–65.
[72] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 85.

eucharistic event of communion are human beings allowed to transcend their humanity and taste of truly personal communion. And since the eucharistic event, which is the apex of historical existence, takes place always and only within the Church's divine liturgy, Zizioulas concludes that the Eucharist is the constitutive event of the Church. That is, "the Eucharist makes the Church." Zizioulas therefore takes up the mantle of "eucharistic ecclesiology" introduced by the preceding generation of theologians led by Nicholas Afanasiev (1893-1966) and Henri de Lubac (1896-1991).[73]

There are a number of theologically consequential aspects of eucharistic ecclesiology, but for our purposes, the most important is the identification of the Eucharist with the eschatological kingdom.[74] For Zizioulas:

> The Divine Liturgy is an image of the Kingdom of God, an image of the last times. There is nothing so clear as this in the Orthodox liturgy. Our liturgy begins with the invocation of the Kingdom, continues with the representation of it, and ends with our participation in the Supper of the Kingdom, our union and communion with the life of God in Trinity.[75]

The question is how a mundane historical event, such as a common meal, can bring about participation in the absolutely transcendent Trinity. Eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ somehow unites the communicants as the Body of Christ, but there is a materiality to this union in Christ that renders it immanent to creation. Since the Body of Christ belongs to the

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[73] Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Eglise*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Aubier, 1953); Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Vitaly Permiakov (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Nicholas Afanasiev, "The Church Which Presides In Love," in *The Primacy of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 91–143; Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue*, 2nd edition (Fairfax, VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2006); Kallistos Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and His Successors," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2–3 (2011): 228.

[74] Erickson identifies seven main characteristics of eucharistic ecclesiology. John H. Erickson, "The Church in Modern Orthodox Thought: Towards a Baptismal Ecclesiology," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2–3 (2011): 141–42.

[75] Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 39.

activities of the economic Trinity, the incarnate Christ belongs to the realm of substance. Thus it is not immediately clear how union in the Body of Christ can allow communicants to transcend the realm of substance.

In order to deify human beings, the eucharistic event must bring about a transformation in the *tropos* of human *hypostases*. Zizioulas attributes this transformation to the Holy Spirit:

> We partake of Christ but, at the same time, 'in the communion of the Holy Spirit' (Liturgy of Saint Basil). 'And unite all of us who partake of the one bread and the one cup one to another in the communion of the one Holy Spirit,' as the Liturgy of Saint Basil prays to the Father at the sacred moment of the Anaphora. The Spirit does not come down only 'upon these gifts here set forth' but also 'upon us' (the celebrants and the eucharistic gathering).[76]

For Zizioulas, the work of the Holy Spirit should be distinguished from the work of the incarnate Son. Even though the work of the Trinity is one and indivisible, the work of each divine *hypostasis* "bears its own distinctive characteristics, which are directly relevant for ecclesiology in which they have to be reflected."[77] Zizioulas continues:

> Both the Father and the Spirit are involved in history, but only the Son *becomes* history…The economy, therefore, in so far as it assumed history and has a history, is *only one* and that is the *Christ event*…The Spirit is the *beyond* history, and when he acts in history he does so in order to bring into history the last days, the *eschaton*.[78]

In the hymns for Pentecost, the Orthodox Church declares that the Holy Spirit "holds together the whole institution of the Church."[79] Thus there is a clear identification of the Church with the Holy Spirit and the "last days" prophesied by Joel (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28). Quoting Maximus's

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[76] Ibid., 75.
[77] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 129.
[78] Ibid., 130.
[79] Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 74.

commentary on the Lord's prayer, Zizioulas concludes, "It is no exaggeration to identify the Kingdom and the Holy Spirit: 'Thy Kingdom come: that is, the Holy Spirit.'"[80]

The Orthodox Church, therefore, enjoys a reputation of prioritizing Pneumatology in ecclesiology. Indeed, Zizioulas notes that "It is often assumed that Orthodoxy can be helpful in the ecumenical discussions by contributing its Pneumatology to them." However, he tempers this assumption by claiming that while Orthodox Pneumatology can offer a corrective to Christocentric ecclesiologies typical in the West, Orthodox ecclesiology tends toward Pneumatocentrism: "A proper synthesis between Christology and Pneumatology in ecclesiology," says Zizioulas, "concerns Orthodoxy as much as the West."[81]

In contemporary Orthodox theology, Pneumatocentric ecclesiology begins with the nineteenth century Slavophile notion of *sobornost* (catholicity, conciliarity). In contrast to the rationalism and authoritarianism of Western ecclesiologies, Aleksei Khomiakov and others held that "The decisive factor in church life is not power but love."[82] Khomiakov writes: "The church is the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the mutual love of Christians, to that love which leads them to the Father through his incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ."[83]

Khomiakov and the Slavophiles were justifiably criticized for their romanticized and idealistic view of the Church by succeeding generations. Vladimir Soloviev compared the Slavophile ecclesiology to the *monophysite* heresy. Likewise, John Romanides claims that

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[80] Ibid., 74; Maximus the Confessor, "Commentary on the Our Father," in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 107.

[81] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 126.

[82] Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology," 220.

[83] Aleksei Khomiakov, *L'eglise latine et le protestantisme au point de vue de l'eglise d'Orient* (Lausanne: B. Benda, 1872), 267; See Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology," 220; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 124.

Khomiakov's ecclesiology does not account for the Fall, the power of sin, or the central role of asceticism in striving to achieve *sobornost*.[84] If the Church is so closely influenced and identified with the Spirit, then it is difficult to account for the human and historical aspect of the Church. Indeed, such an emphasis on communion in the Spirit risks overshadowing the work of Christ, even devaluing it. Zizioulas notes that Florovsky responded to the *sobornost* ecclesiology by insisting that the doctrine of the Church is "a chapter of Christology." [85]

Instead of choosing between the Spirit and Christ, Lossky's ecclesiology took a step towards synthesizing Pneumatology and Christology:

> The Orthodox theologian who was destined to exercise the greatest influence on this subject in our time was Vladimir Lossky…Lossky would develop the view that both Christology and Pneumatology are necessary components of ecclesiology and would see in the sacramental structure of the Church the "objective" Christological aspect which was to be constantly accompanied by the "personal" or "subjective" aspect. The latter is related to the freedom and integrity of each person, his inner "spiritual life," deification, etc.[86]

But while Lossky is able to ensure a necessary role for both Christ and the Spirit in the Church, the two aspects remain separated—as if the Spirit were not involved in the Incarnation and Christ were not involved in Pentecost. For Lossky, God's economy of salvation begins with the objective work of Christ and is completed by the subjective work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Church is first objectively instituted in the eucharistic liturgy and then subjectively constituted by subsequent, individual asceticism.[87]

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[84] Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology," 225.

[85] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 124; Georges Florovsky, "Le corps du Christ vivant," in *La Sainte Eglise Universelle: Confrontation Oecuménique* (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1948), 12.

[86] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 124–25; Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 135, 156, 174.

[87] Note the connection to Palamism and ascetical deification here. Deification is achieved by participation in the energies of the Spirit.

Zizioulas criticizes Lossky's ecclesiology for two main reasons. First, Lossky's schematization of the Church remains Pneumatocentric. Christ and the Eucharist are of limited use since neither is personally efficacious unless and until the individual communicant completes the process of purification, illumination, and deification in the power of the Holy Spirit. And second, there is a tinge of historicism to Lossky's ecclesiology. Or to put it differently, there is a tendency to equate being and act such that the eschaton is contiguous with history. And as we have already seen, this Palamite ecclesiology leaves no possibility for ontological deification.

In contrast to Khomiakov and Lossky's ecclesiologies which make the Spirit into an historical figure, Nicholas Afanasiev's revival of St Ignatius's eucharistic ecclesiology properly identifies the Spirit with the eschaton. In the eucharistic liturgy, the Spirit breaks into history and grants communicants a foretaste of eschatological communion with the Trinity. However, where Khomiakov and Lossky focus myopically on the historical context of the Church, Afanasiev's ecclesiology is overly eschatological. Khomiakov and Lossky integrate the Kingdom too much into history whereas Afanasiev keeps the Kingdom too removed from history. This discontinuity between history and eschaton enables Afanasiev to justify intercommunion—at least between Orthodox and Roman Catholics. He reasons that historical divisions between East and West are superseded by eschatological unity in the Eucharist. Prioritizing the eschatological "oneness" of the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, Afanasiev saw intercommunion as a basis for ecclesial reconciliation.[88]

Despite differences, Khomiakov, Lossky, and Afanasiev are united in a shared commitment to Pneumatocentric ecclesiologies. Each in his own distinctive way identifies the

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[88] Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology," 229.

Church primarily with the work of the Holy Spirit and underappreciates either the work of Christ (Khomiakov), eschatology (Lossky), or history (Afanasiev). Zizioulas's take on eucharistic ecclesiology remedies all of these problems by fully synthesizing eschatological Pneumatology and historical Christology. Christ becomes history; he moves history toward the eschatological Kingdom. The Spirit is eschatological; he brings the Kingdom into history. The Spirit accomplishes the eschatological aspect of Christ's work, and Christ accomplishes the historical aspect of the Spirit's work. For Zizioulas, the Eucharist makes the Church because the Eucharist marks the singular, yet repeated, event of participation in the Body of the historical Christ and in the communion of the eschatological Spirit. Apart from the Eucharist, Christ is absent from the physical world. Likewise, apart from the Eucharist, the eschatological Spirit reveals the Kingdom as a future event only and not a present event.[89]

Ware contends that Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology has been almost universally accepted by Orthodox theologians. He claims that critics "suggest modifications on points of detail rather than to propose a fundamentally different alternative."[90] Indeed, in making this point, Ware emphasizes the superficial continuities among Khomiakov, Afanasiev, and Zizioulas rather than the significant differences. Ware focuses his attention on the unifying theme of communion and neglects the diverse ways in which these theologians develop the notion. Thus, when Ware gives mention to Zizioulas's recent critics, he has no reason to suspect that they represent Pneumatocentric ecclesiologies incompatible with eucharistic ecclesiology. But this is precisely the case for two of Zizioulas's most notable ecclesiological critics.

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[89] Zizioulas, *Lectures*, 148–61; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 126–32; Cf. Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, 32–38.
[90] Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology," 231.

Calinic Berger and John Erickson offer the same basic criticism of Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology. First, both theologians argue that Zizioulas overemphasizes the eucharistic event at the expense of Baptism and all the extra-sacramental actions of the faithful. For Berger and Erickson, the Spirit brings the Kingdom into history not just during the momentary event of the Eucharist nor exclusively through the Sacraments. They see "the Church as experiencing a *continual epiclesis*, and…*being unceasingly transformed into the Body of Christ*, in all its members, and through all their gifts, ministries, labors, and sufferings."[91] And second, Zizioulas's ecclesiology promotes, they say, "a triumphalist view of the Liturgy."[92] The worry is that an emphasis on the eschatological dimension of the Church "begins to creep from the Eucharist into other aspects of church life, so that the Church *qua* Church comes to be seen as perfect in every respect."[93] Such a view of the Church undermines any impetus toward ascetic discipline and moral progress.

On the one hand, Berger and Erickson criticize Zizioulas for limiting the eschatological presence of the Spirit solely to the eucharistic event. And on the other hand, they suggest that Zizioulas's ecclesiology leads to a triumphal view of the Church outside the eucharistic event. The problem is that these claims are mutually incompatible. Indeed, it seems more reasonable to suggest that triumphalism threatens the ecclesiologies of Berger and Erickson because of their

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[91] Calinic Berger, "Does the Eucharist Make the Church? An Ecclesiological Comparison of Stăniloae and Zizioulas," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2007): 57; Similarly, Erickson states, "The Church...lives in a continuing state of epiclesis, of invocation of the Holy Spirit. It depends continuously on the Spirit to gather and refashion humankind, broken and divided as it is, into one body of Christ." "The Church in Modern Orthodox Thought," 148.

[92] Berger, "Does the Eucharist Make the Church?" 55; Erickson says, "By failing to see the Eucharist in the light of baptism, eucharistic ecclesiology too easily lends itself to triumphalism." "The Church in Modern Orthodox Thought," 149.

[93] Erickson, "The Church in Modern Orthodox Thought," 149.

insistence that the Church aims to experience a *continual epiclesis*, both within and without the liturgical Sacraments.

Despite an internal inconsistency, Berger and Erickson's criticism is not without warrant. While Zizioulas's main works contain numerous references to Baptism and asceticism, Zizioulas does not thematize them with any degree of depth or precision. As Ware suggests, this represents a significant lack in Zizioulas's *oeuvre*.[94] And yet, if Zizioulas were to offer a comprehensive account of Baptism and asceticism, it would likely not satisfy Ware's expectations. Ware wants Zizioulas to elaborate on "the inner appropriation of the grace of Holy Communion by each believer personally," as if the Eucharist were an instrument or means to assist one in achieving deification through ascetical practice. Ware continues: "Participation in the fullness of the sacrament does not happen automatically but demands as ascetic struggle on the part of every communicant as each seeks to advance on the path of 'deification.'"[95] Here Ware betrays his affinity for Lossky's distinction between objective institution and subjective constitution of the Church, which Zizioulas rejects.

Zizioulas agrees that deification does not happen automatically in the Eucharist, but his ecclesiology cannot abide the view that the Sacrament must be subsequently appropriated by individuals. He argues that "The notion of the Church and her unity is not expressed to the full in a eucharistic unity which lacks any preconditions. The Church has always felt herself to be united in faith, love, baptism, holiness of life, etc."[96] Ware quotes these words of Zizioulas but does not

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[94] Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology," 232.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, 17; See Ware, "*Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology," 231.

seem to appreciate that Zizioulas speaks of ascetical practice as a precondition of the Eucharist rather than an appropriation of it.

Like his conceptions of personhood and deification, Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology forms part of a trajectory of a theological tradition. There are significant similarities between his thought and that of Khomiakov, Lossky, and especially Afanasiev, but we do Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology a disservice if we diminish its distinctiveness for the sake of a mythical consensus. Indeed we do a disservice to the Church itself when pretensions take the place of reality. Zizioulas has had a tremendous impact on Orthodox ecclesiology, but the particularities of his Eucharist-centered thought remain anything but universally accepted. Even those who presume to adopt Zizioulas's ecclesiology with only minor qualms or addendums would, in fact, convert Zizioulas's ecclesiology into a Pneumatocentric, neo-Palamite ecclesiology that makes deification an ascetical achievement rather than a sacramental gift.

V.   Conclusion

Something of a rift has opened up in modern Orthodox theology between those who see deification as an ascetical achievement and those who see it as a sacramental gift. Both sides agree on three fundamental principles. First, God's being is distinct from God's activities. Second, deification entails an ontological transformation and not merely moral imitation of God. And third, both sides agree that God's substance is imparticipable. Furthermore, we have seen that both sides find ample support among the Eastern Fathers. The difference is that while the ascetical approach cannot coherently account for a direct connection between ascetical practices and ontological transformation without violating at least one of the three principles above, the sacramental approach can hold all three principles without contradiction.

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The crucial question that remains, then, is how the sacramental approach—and Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology in particular—can account for the central role that asceticism occupies in the tradition. We have seen that ascetical practices cannot achieve deification, but this does not mean such practices are peripheral, much less superfluous, to the Christian life. Indeed, Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology cannot lay claim to the entirety of the Orthodox tradition unless and until it can be shown to require a robust ascetical theology.

Chapter 4

The Eucharist and Repentance

In recent years, eucharistic ecclesiology—and that of John Zizioulas, in particular—has been criticized for paying too little attention to the ascetical tradition of the Church. If the Church is constituted by the eucharistic event, which manifests the eschatological Kingdom and unites communicants with God, then it becomes difficult to maintain a thorough-going ascetical theology insofar as asceticism strives to achieve that which the Eucharist offers as a gift. In other words, eucharistic ecclesiology seems to render Christians utterly passive in the realization of the Kingdom of God, or deification—a consequence which is altogether incompatible with ascetical theology and unconscionable in a world plagued by so much evil and suffering.

A crucial question for eucharistic ecclesiology, then, concerns not only whether and how it can incorporate ascetical theology but also a notion of Christian ethics commensurate with the tradition of social and political theology in the West. For if asceticism is the mode in which Christians are called to engage with the world, then ascesis should be practiced both individually and collectively. This chapter argues that, despite claims to the contrary, Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology includes and requires a robust asceticism even if Zizioulas himself is all too reticent

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on the topic. The subsequent chapter will continue the argument by fleshing out the implications of Zizioulas's notion of ascesis for Christian ethics.

I.   The Eucharist and Ascesis

According to Papanikolaou, "eucharistic ecclesiology has engendered the impression of a tension between the communal and the ascetical within the Orthodox tradition, [and] to date, there is no coherent integration of these two pervasive poles."[1] Nicholas Loudovikos identifies the same tension when he addresses the historical "contradistinction between the eucharistic and the 'spiritual', or 'therapeutic', or simply, to employ the known Origenist term, the 'gnostic' (γνωστικός) aspect of the Church."[2] Both Papanikolaou and Loudovikos criticize eucharistic ecclesiology—and Zizioulas in particular—for failing to integrate ascetic spirituality and practices. While Papanikolaou argues for a balanced reorientation of eucharistic ecclesiology and Loudovikos concludes that the project should be abandoned in favor of a more dialectical and *apophatic* ecclesiology, both theologians attempt to find a more holistic ecclesiology that can account for the absolute importance of both sacraments and asceticism. I will argue, however, that Loudovikos and Papanikolaou prioritize asceticism over the sacraments, disregard the eschatological dimension of the sacraments, and thereby confuse the moral transformation acquired by ascesis with the ontological transformation received in the sacraments.

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[1] Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Integrating the Ascetical and the Eucharistic: Current Challenges in Orthodox Ecclesiology," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2–3 (2011): 185.
[2] Nicholas Loudovikos, "*Eikon* and *Mimesis*: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and the Ecclesial Ontology of Dialogical Reciprocity," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2–3 (2011): 123.

Loudovikos and Papanikolaou express a legitimate concern regarding the relationship of ascetic theology to eucharistic ecclesiology. They want to ensure that asceticism remains a *sine qua non* of the Church. They worry that if the Church is constituted by the sacraments, and the eucharistic event in particular, then asceticism moves to the periphery of the Christian life, becoming supererogatory, even superfluous. However, Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology provides a way to relate asceticism to the Eucharist in such a way that asceticism remains a necessary component of the Christian life without undermining the centrality of the Eucharist as the constitutive event of the Church.

For Zizioulas, asceticism does not make the Church but is a necessary pre-condition of the Church's constitutive eucharistic event. That is, even though the Church is not brought into existence by ascetic practice, neither can the eucharistic event constitute the Church apart from ascesis. For Zizioulas, the church exists from the eschaton rather than from history. In the fallen world, the church struggles against evil, but since it is not from the fallen world it cannot be defined by its struggle. To identify the Church solely or primarily with its historical struggles against evil is to deny the eschatological dimension of the Body of Christ. For just as evil has no place in the eternal Kingdom, neither has ascesis.

This does not, indeed cannot, mean that Christians are required to rid themselves of their passions and acquire all the virtues prior to partaking of the Eucharist. Such would entail that the Kingdom of God, foretasted in the Eucharist, is a reward to be earned rather than a gift. Ascesis, as a pre-condition of the Eucharist, should not be thought in terms of attaining perfection but in terms of penitential preparation to worthily accept the gift of eschatological communion. Therefore, in unfolding the logic of Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology, I will argue that ascesis is best understood as repentance for the sake of eucharistic participation.

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II.   Apophatic Ecclesiology

Loudovikos identifies Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as the historical source of the modern tension between eucharistic ecclesiology and ascetical theology. Though Dionysius offers an ecclesial corrective to Origen's Neo-Platonism, Loudovikos argues that Dionysius is unable to fully disentangle his theology from Neo-Platonic philosophy. For Dionysius "the institutional/structural is understood as eucharistic, while the spiritual/charismatic is understood as participational."[3] Loudovikos then blames the ambiguity regarding the relationship between these two dimensions of the Church for the rise to two competing and incompatible modern ecclesiologies. On the one hand, John Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology represents an over-emphasis of the institutional dimension, while on the other, John Romanides's therapeutic ecclesiology over-emphasizes the charismatic dimension.

To move beyond the one-sided ecclesiologies of Zizioulas and Romanides, Loudovikos looks to Maximus the Confessor, whose "correction of the Areopagitic ecclesiology has not yet been properly understood."[4] A recovery of Maximus's ecclesiology, it is claimed, will resolve the tension between ascetical theology with eucharistic ecclesiology, but the resolution will not produce a more precise definition of the church. Rather, Loudovikos argues for a de-centered, dialogical and *apophatic* ecclesiology.

Origen's Neo-Platonic spirituality, or gnosticism, was problematic, says Loudovikos, because it prioritized the spiritual dimension of the Church over the institutional/eucharistic dimension such that

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[3] Ibid., 124.
[4] Ibid., 125.

> the so-called '*gnostikoi*', experts on the spiritual techniques that ensure the acquisition of divine gifts and graces, were exalted as the only real Christians, above the institutional Church where the mass of ignorant believers lie. Thus the possession of certain spiritual knowledge was regarded as the culmination of Christian experience, while the absence of such knowledge could make all the ecclesial charismata meaningless.[5]

For Origen, the sacraments were practically inconsequential; the real work of the Church took place outside of the liturgy in the private devotions of the spiritual experts. Loudovikos explains that Dionysius was able to move beyond Origen's Neo-Platonism by defining the relationship between the institutional and the charismatic dimensions of the Church. Dionysius still acknowledges different spiritual ranks within the church, but he explains that the primary task of those who occupy the higher ranks is to hand down and distribute the gifts they receive from above to the ranks below. Nonetheless, the crucial issue remains ambiguous in the Areopagite's writings. It is clear that the sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular, are essential in the anagogical movement toward union with God, but Dionysius does not clearly articulate the manner in which the sacraments and spiritual charismata work together to bring about spiritual ascent.

Loudovikos argues that this ambiguity eventually led modern theologians to emphasize either the institutional/eucharistic or the spiritual/charismatic dimension of the Church rather than attempting to synthesize the two. For this reason, Loudovikos is appreciative yet critical of Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology and Romanides's therapeutic ecclesiology.[6] Zizioulas is "deeply ecclesio-centered and specifically Eucharist-centered [which] has been exactly the point of departure of a great part of patristic theology," while Romanides is "remarkable…at bridging the gap between the living Orthodox spiritual life and academic theology."[7] But both theologians

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[5] Ibid., 123.
[6] Ibid., 124.
[7] Ibid.

represent "the incomplete understanding by modern Orthodox theologians of the patristic theology which followed the Areopagite texts and corrected it."[8] In particular, Loudovikos claims that Maximus the Confessor's ecclesiology has been misunderstood.

Loudovikos argues that Maximus overcomes the Areopagite's ecclesiological ambiguity by synthesizing the structural/sacramental dimension with the charismatic/ascetical dimension such that "the charismatic *is* the structural and vice versa."[9] According to Loudovikos, modern Orthodox ecclesiologists have failed to appreciate Maximus' description of the Church in terms of *eikon* (εἰκών, icon) and *mimesis* (μίμησις, imitation).

Maximus, it is claimed, takes these seemingly disparate terms and makes them synonymous. First, Loudovikos explains that in his *Mystagogy,* Maximus uses *eikon* to refer to "a dynamic analogy of activity and not a static reflection of the divine super-being. An image can be static, but an *eikon* is rather an active encounter, an existential response and gift…"[10] Then Loudovikos goes on to claim that Maximus clarifies his use of *eikon* by pairing it with the term *mimesis*.[11] "Thus, of course, for Maximus, *mimesis* means not an external imitation of moral type, as we usually take imitation to mean today, but an active personal participation in the many divine *enhypostatic* energies/personal activities that constitute God's gifts/*charismata* to his Church in Christ."[12]

Eikon and mimesis do not represent the passivity of ontology and the activity of morality, respectively, but cooperatively refer to the activity of ontological participation in the acts/energies

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[8] Ibid., 125.
[9] Ibid., 128.
[10] Ibid., 125.
[11] Cf. Maximus the Confessor, "The Church's Mystagogy," in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 186; PG 91, 664D.
[12] Loudovikos, "*Eikon* and *Mimesis*," 126.

of Christ. Indeed, Loudovikos argues that taken separately, the two terms become problematic, even dangerous, when applied to the Church: "[W]ithout *mimesis* our eikonological ontology of the Church tends practically to be a-historical…a transcendental consolation for the shortcoming of real history," while "*mimesis* alone would bind us within history and would perhaps make our Church into a secular utopic institution of social work."[13] Loudovikos concludes that "[t]he true dialectics between history and *eschata* is thus safeguarded only through the combination of *eikon* and *mimesis*."[14]

Here we arrive at the first indication of a problem with Loudovikos's ecclesiology. Loudovikos acknowledges that, understood independently, *eikon* and *mimesis* represent a tension between eschatological ontology and historical morality. However, Loudovikos argues not for a dialectical relationship between *eikon* and *mimesis* but for their identity. The Church is *eikonic* only insofar as it is actively *mimetic* and *mimetic* only insofar as it is actively *eikonic*. The tension is not resolved, or clarified, such that the two terms harmoniously explain two distinct dimensions of the Church. Rather, Loudovikos dissolves or nullifies the tension such that the two terms synonymously describe the one and only dimension of the Church. Thus it is not clear how the "combination" of *eikon* and *mimesis* can safeguard the "dialectic" between eschatological ontology and historical morality in the Church as Loudovikos claims.

In fact, by combining *eikon* with *mimesis* into a single concept, Loudovikos thereby also combines ontology with morality, the sacraments with ascesis, and the eschaton with history. For Loudovikos, the historical/ascetical dimension of the Church must somehow be *eikonic*; it must

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 127.

be synonymous with the eschatological/sacramental dimension. Likewise, the eschatological/sacramental dimension must somehow be historical/ascetical, that is, *mimetic*. This is what Loudovikos means when he asserts, "the charismatic *is* the structural and vice versa."

Loudovikos claims that identifying the charismatic with the structural and vice versa overcomes the "Areopagitic ambivalence" that still haunts Orthodox theology today. However, when he explains how the unified structural/charismatic Church operates, he reverts to language which suggests a distinction between the two ecclesial dimensions after all. "The Church," says Loudovikos, "is not an *eikon* of the Kingdom, unless it is an event of analogical *mimesis*/participation."[15] In other words, participation in the Church's structural dimension is "somehow affected" when one "does not proceed synergetically/mimetically toward the likeness, i.e. the full and willed and continuous participation in the analogous divine energy in Christ."[16] Here, Loudovikos explains that the *eikonic* (structural, sacramental, eschatological) aspect of the Church precedes and is fulfilled by the *mimetic* (charismatic, ascetical, historical) aspect. In the Church, "structure is given by God in Christ by the Spirit, but it is not completely *active* without the free dialogical consent of the believers."[17]

So it turns out that Loudovikos does not actually intend to identify *eikon* with *mimesis* and the eschaton with history. Rather, he is attempting to ensure that the Church is not reduced to either dimension by itself. He wants to ensure the Church is constituted in the activity of "dialogical reciprocity" between God and his people. Therefore, it is misleading for Loudovikos to identify *eikon* with *mimesis* and to claim that the charismatic is the structural and vice versa. It is not that

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[15] Ibid., 128.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

these terms themselves are identical but that they share the same referent; the Church is both *eikonic* and *mimetic*.

It is not the case that the charismatic is the structural and vice versa. Rather, Loudovikos's argument suggests that the *mimetic*/charismatic *Church* is the *eikonic*/structural *Church* and vice versa. Likewise, Loudovikos does not intend to claim that the historical is the eschatological and vice versa but that the historical *Church* is the eschatological *Church* and vice versa.

Loudovikos believes this ecclesiological formulation overcomes the Areopagitic ambivalence because it precludes the possibility of reducing the Church either to its sacraments as Zizioulas does or to its therapeutic ascesis as Romanides does. Consequently, it becomes impossible to locate the Church in any particular place, event, or activity. "[T]he Church is neither eucharistic, nor, of course, baptismatic, nor therapeutic. The Church comprises all these things, but she is infinitely more than these."[18]

Therefore, Loudovikos advocates "a kind of *apophaticism* in our ecclesiology."[19] He explains that even though the patristic tradition affirmed that the Church "is signified in the Sacraments," which "culminate and are fulfilled in the Eucharist," it "persistently refused to call the Church either eucharistic, or baptismatic, or therapeutic, etc."[20] Loudovikos reasons that the patristic tradition is wary of identifying a signification, or manifestation, of the Church with the eternal being of the Church:

> The only thing that we can describe, speaking of the Church, is perhaps the mode of her existence, the how she happens, her manifestation…But absolutely to identify the manifestation of the Church with her eternal being, this would be analogous with the absolute identification of divine essence with divine

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[18] Ibid., 135.
[19] Ibid., 128.
[20] Ibid., 135.

acts/energies…So, as it is wrong to believe that we understand the divine essence because we participate in its acts, it is also wrong to decide that we fully understand the essence of the Church, because we participate in the sacraments and the *charismata* by which she is signified.[21]

Loudovikos applies the Palamite essence-energies distinction to ecclesiology in order to explain further why the Church cannot be reduced to, and defined by, only one of its dimensions.

But this is a problematic application Palamism. The explanatory force of Palamism comes from a robust conception of God's transcendence, or radical alterity, which mandates that God's essence is unknowable and imparticipable. The essence/energies distinction grants humanity access to God without violating God's transcendence. But the Church is not transcendent to creation. Indeed, it is comprised of created human beings and has no existence or meaning apart from creation. In Loudovikos's words, the Church is "the pre-eternal will of God for the Economy/gathering of all beings in the incarnate logos."[22] Thus, it makes little sense to speak of human participation in the energies, as opposed to the essence, of the Church when it is divine-human communion that defines the Church's essence.

Furthermore, if humanity is involved in the very essence of the Church, then perhaps we should question not only Loudovikos's application of Palamism to ecclesiology but also his application of *apophaticism* to ecclesiology. As noted above, Loudovikos is led to an *apophatic* ecclesiology by his assertion that the *mimetic*/charismatic (Church) *is* the *eikonic*/structural (Church) and vice versa. Thus it is impossible to identify the entirety of the Church in any particular place, event, or activity. The Eucharist does not make the Church, nor does baptism,

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

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prayer, or ascesis. Instead "the Church is being formed" through a process of "dialogical reciprocity."[23]

The sacramental life of the Church represents the reception of God's grace which is then activated and utilized in becoming more like the incarnate Christ who freely offered the entirety of his life back to God. "In this way, the Church is, in a moment, absolutely given, but, at the same time, somehow achieved, better or worse—with triumphs of grace but also shortcomings—in the course of this historical, participative dialogical reciprocity; eschatology is thus closely connected to history."[24] Indeed, we have already seen that Loudovikos's argument entails that the historical Church *is* the eschatological Church and vice versa. And here, in this "vice versa" lies the rub. To identify the eschatological Church with the historical Church is ultimately to deny the truly eschatological dimension of the Church.

Because the historical Church will always exist under the conditions of the Fall, it will forever exist in the vicissitudes of "better or worse" and "triumphs of grace and also shortcomings." But the eschatological church—the Kingdom of Heaven—has no room for "worse" and "shortcomings." The eschatological Kingdom is the end of history, the end of vicissitudinal existence. It is the fulfillment of the "pre-eternal will of God for the Economy/gathering of all beings in the incarnate logos." Thus, if the sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular, are the *eikonic* events whereby participants are granted a foretaste of the eschaton, this foretaste can only be fulfilled by the perfection of the eschaton itself and not by historical *mimesis* which is characterized by constant struggle against sin rather than a final victory.

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 135–36.

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Loudovikos's application of *apophaticism* to ecclesiology, then, is the result of reducing the finality of the eschatological Church to the imperfection of the historical Church. While Loudovikos's claim that the historical Church is the eschatological Church must be accepted (in order to overcome the Areopagitic ambivalence concerning the two) the inverse must be rejected.[25] The historical Church with its mimetic, charismatic, and ascetic struggles against sin is defined by its call to be fulfilled in the eschaton, which may be foretasted in the sacramental life of the Church. In contrast, the eschatological Church cannot be defined in terms of historical activities because such activities are bound up with sin and death, which have no place in the eschatological Kingdom. In other words, the historical Church is the eschatological Church but not vice versa.

Loudovikos has rendered a great service to ecclesiology—and Orthodox ecclesiology in particular—by highlighting the Areopagitic ambivalence that can lead to one-sided ecclesiologies that emphasize either the sacraments or ascesis instead of both. However, in attempting to formulate an ecclesiology that integrates both aspects, Loudovikos identifies the two by ultimately folding the sacramental into the ascetical. Consequently, he reduces the Church to a historical community defined by its struggle to achieve moral transformation in imitation of Christ rather than its ontological transformation iconically foretasted in the Eucharist. In Loudovikos's ecclesiology, the sacraments are instrumentalized, used as a means, for the sake of ascetical achievement, as if the Church's *telos* is part of history rather than the end of history. Ascesis is fulfilled by the sacraments, not vice versa. Loudovikos inverts the proper order between historical ascesis and eschatological Sacraments.

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[25] Note the similarity between Loudovikos's ecclesiological formulation and Rahner's Rule regarding the Trinty—that the economic Trinity is the imminent Trinity, and vice versa. Whereas Rahner reduces the imminent Trinity to its economic activity, Loudovikos reduces the eschatological Church to its historical activity.

III.   Ascesis as Communion

Like Loudovikos, Aristotle Papanikolaou identifies a tension between the sacramental and ascetical dimensions of the Church. In contrast to Loudovikos, who has abandoned the project of eucharistic ecclesiology, Papanikolaou seeks to demonstrate that a Eucharist-centered ecclesiology can include a robust ascetical dimension. Also in contrast to Loudovikos, Papanikolaou maintains the proper order between historical ascesis and eschatological sacraments by claiming that the Eucharist is the consummation of the Church's ascetical activities. However, despite these differences, Papanikolaou's eucharistic ecclesiology ends up very close to Loudovikos's *apophatic* ecclesiology. For both Loudovikos and Papanikolaou, the degree to which the Eucharist iconically manifests the eschaton is entirely determined by the degree of asceticism practiced by the community.

Even though Papanikolaou wants to affirm the Eucharist as the fulfillment of ascesis, his ecclesiology suggests that the eucharistic event can offer nothing to the Church that it has not already achieved through ascesis. Thus, in his attempt to find a necessary role for asceticism within eucharistic ecclesiology, Papanikolaou unintentionally undermines the necessary role of the Eucharist and effectively joins Loudovikos's abandonment of eucharistic ecclesiology in favor of a one-dimensional ascetical ecclesiology.

Papanikolaou's criticism of eucharistic ecclesiology is that while its depiction of the eucharistic event as the realization of divine-human communion "is persuasive, powerful, and, simply, beautiful…it simply does not appear to be realized in all its fullness in the eucharistic

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gatherings of local parishes."[26] He laments that "[w]hat the eucharistic and communion ecclesiologies do not fully nuance is how Christians do not live up to being Christians."[27] Papanikolaou concludes from this observation that the Church cannot, therefore, be defined solely by the Eucharist but must include asceticism. "The entire Christian ascetical architecture is built on the premise that to be all that one was meant to be, it requires ascetical struggle."[28] But by introducing ascesis into eucharistic ecclesiology, Papanikolaou seems to undermine the centrality of the Eucharist. "The eucharistic gathering," says Papanikoloau, "is the church par excellence, and it is an event of the inbreaking of the Holy Spirit and, as such, a realization of the body of Christ. It is also clear, however, that the community is in movement to participate and, hence, realize the body of Christ more fully."[29]

What is not immediately clear is how the eucharistic event can be the realization of the body of Christ *par excellence* if it is possible for the Church to "realize the body of Christ more fully" through ascesis. Yet Papanikolaou is adamant that "to interject the ascetical into the eucharistic gathering does not challenge the fundamental logic of eucharistic ecclesiology."[30] Papanikoloau's stated goal is

> the synthesis of the ascetical and sacramental trajectories within the Orthodox tradition for a fuller understanding of the Church, such that the sacramental is not simply a means for spiritual growth, but is, perhaps potentially, an iconic participation in the *eschaton;* put another way, the re-emphasizing of the importance of asceticism for ecclesiology should not detract from the important insight gained in the last one hundred years that the Church is most fully Church in the Eucharist.[31]

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[26] Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 82.
[27] Ibid., 85.
[28] Papanikolaou, "Integrating the Ascetical and the Eucharistic," 184.
[29] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 84.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Papanikolaou, "Integrating the Ascetical and the Eucharistic," 182.

Papanikolaou makes clear his desire to synthesize the sacramental and ascetical dimensions of the Church while maintaining the centrality of the Eucharist as a spiritual end rather than a means. Again, Papanikolaou iterates

> that the Church is most Church in the eucharistic assembly, and that thinking about the Church must begin in the place and space of the Eucharist…[I]t is in the eucharistic act that the Church is not simply manifested but realized. The very point of asceticism is a eucharistic relation to the world, and, thus a movement toward a communal eucharistic act.[32]

Papanikolaou does not mean that asceticism somehow fulfills the eucharistic event. This would make the Eucharist a means and not an end and thereby undermine its centrality in the life of the Church. Rather, he means that asceticism is the Church's striving toward greater realization of the body of Christ which is subsequently fulfilled in the event of the Eucharist.

For Papanikolaou, greater ascesis is required for greater eucharistic participation in the Kingdom of God. Papanikolaou sums up his project with a rhetorical question: "Is there space within eucharistic ecclesiology to think of how some eucharistic assemblies image the *eschaton* to a greater degree than other communities, and this difference in degree depends on how each of the individual members of the community are integrating into their lives the ascetical spirituality of the tradition?"[33]

The problem is that Papanikolaou's integration of ascesis into eucharistic ecclesiology is that despite his repeated insistence that he is maintaining the "fundamental logic of eucharistic ecclesiology," he is, in fact, undermining it. If the Eucharist makes the Church, it is because the eucharistic event offers an iconic manifestation of the eschaton which is not otherwise available.

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[32] Ibid., 185.
[33] Ibid., 186.

In other words, if the Eucharist is not a unique event but simply one possible manifestation of the eschaton among others, then the Eucharist is not the Church *par excellence*.

Though Papanikolaou wants to affirm that the Eucharist is a unique iconic realization of the eschaton, his observation that "Christians do not live up to being Christians"[34] leads him to find a way to "mitigate the claim of identification of the Eucharist with the [eschatological] kingdom of God." This is why Papanikolaou wants to speak of eucharistic participation in the eschaton in terms of degrees which directly correspond to degrees of participation in asceticism. But the consequence of correlating degrees of participation in the eschaton with degrees of participation in asceticism is that the Eucharist loses any claim to uniqueness. Indeed, in this case the Eucharist becomes redundant and superfluous because it has been emptied of any unique content. Asceticism does all the work of achieving divine-human communion—or at least of achieving it as far as possible for any given individual or community—while the Eucharist functions as neither means nor end of the achievement.

Nevertheless, Papanikolaou's contribution to ecclesiology is considerable. Though his "ascetical correction" of eucharistic ecclesiology is ultimately untenable, the difficulties that emerge from his project shed light on how we may more successfully "move forward without surrendering one of the more important insights of Orthodox and Catholic theologians of the twentieth century."[35]

Loudovikos and Papanikolaou have both pointed out that moving forward with ecclesiology requires a more comprehensive articulation of the relationship between the Eucharist

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[34] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 85.
[35] Papanikolaou, "Integrating the Ascetical and the Eucharistic," 185.

and ascesis, but in attempting to locate an essential role for ascesis in the Church, both theologians de-center the Eucharist as an iconic event of the eschaton and replace it with ascetical practices that imitate the Kingdom of God as far as humanly possible in a world still suffering the consequences of the Fall. The challenge for contemporary Orthodox ecclesiology, then, is to reconcile the sacramental and ascetical dimensions of the Church without undermining the centrality of the eucharistic event. The next section returns to Zizioulas in order to discern whether and how a robust asceticism can be integrated into his Eucharist-centered ecclesiology.

IV.   The Eucharist as the End of Ascesis

The common critique of Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology—that it undervalues the Church's tradition of ascetical theology—is not unfounded. It is true that Zizioulas has not taken up asceticism as a central theme in his work. But this is not to say that asceticism has no place in his thought. Further, the relative dearth of discussion regarding asceticism does not preclude asceticism from occupying a necessary role in Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology. Although Zizioulas's explicit account of asceticism is more suggestive than systematic, it reveals a way forward toward reconciling the ascetical and sacramental aspects of the Church that is at once new and also rooted in patristic tradition.

To understand the relationship between the ascetical and the sacramental in Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology, we must first understand the relationship between history and eschaton in the eucharistic event. For Zizioulas, the Eucharist is not simply one historical event among others but the event wherein the eschaton breaks into history and lifts up the faithful into the Kingdom of God. The patristic text that Zizioulas most often cites in support of this view is from a commentary on Dionysius the Areopagite attributed to Maximus the Confessor, which says:

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> [The Areopagite] calls "images (*eikons*) of what is true" the rites that are now performed in the *synaxis*…For these things are symbols, not the truth…The things that are unseen and secret…are the causes and archetypes of things perceptible. For those things are called causes which in no way owe the cause of their being to anything else…For the things of the Old Testament are the shadow; those of the New Testament are the image. The truth is the state of things to come."[36]

From this passage, Zizioulas gathers that the eucharistic liturgy, while not identical with the eschaton, is caused by the eschatological future rather than the historical past. "In other words," says Zizioulas, "the cause of 'what is accomplished in the *synaxis*,' lies in the future. The Eucharist is the result of the Kingdom which is to come."[37] The eucharistic event, therefore, serves to bridge history and the eschaton; it is a historical manifestation of the eschatological Kingdom. "[T]he divine Eucharist," says Zizioulas, "is both a historical *and* an eschatological event."[38]

So for Zizioulas, the Eucharist is an historical event like all others but also entirely unique among historical events because it comes from the future rather than the past. That is, "The Eucharist is not a repetition or continuation of the past, or just one event amongst others, but it is the penetration of the future into time."[39] But if this is the case, then the Eucharist does not seem to be a historical event at all. Rather, the Church seems to come into existence with each eucharistic event only to vanish again with the dispersal of the faithful into the fallen world. Indeed, he claims that the "Eucharist is witness to a morality that is not an historical evolution but an ontological grace, acquired only to be lost again, until on the last day it will be acquired definitively."[40]

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[36] Maximus the Confessor, Commentary on the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, PG 4, 137A-D; See Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 44.

[37] Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 45.

[38] Zizioulas, *Lectures*, 153.

[39] Ibid., 155.

[40] Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 130.

Miroslav Volf criticizes Zizioulas on this point, claiming that his Church ceases to exist between eucharistic liturgies and is therefore entirely eschatological and other-worldly.[41]

Zizioulas attempts to avoid this conclusion by spelling out the ethical implications of the Eucharist for the Church that persists outside the liturgy. He argues that "the moral life follows from the *transformation* and *renewal* of humanity in Christ, so that every moral commandment appears and is understood only as a consequence of this *sacramental* transformation. In such a vision of ethics" he continues, "…moral conduct is understood as a continuation of the liturgical experience."[42] So it would seem that the Church persists after the liturgy and is meant to transform the world by living according to the transformation experienced in the Eucharist.

However, Zizioulas is also clear that he "does not mean to say that a eucharistic vision will provide a solution to the moral problems of our society."[43] He specifically rejects any version of the "social gospel" by claiming that

> the Eucharist will always open the way not to the dream of gradual perfection of the world, but to the demand for heroic ascesis, an experience of kenosis and of the cross, the only way in which it is possible to live the Eucharist in the world until the victory of the Resurrection at the end of time. At the same time, the Eucharist offers the world the experience of this eschatological dimension that penetrates history in the eucharistic communion and makes possible our deification in space and time.[44]

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[41] Volf argues that Zizioulas "has no place systematically in the experience of salvific grace for the theologically necessary presence of unredemption." If the Church is defined by eschatological union with God, then "the historical character of the church, if the latter genuinely is to be a church, [is] transcended." The Church is constituted by an eschatological event that transcends the historical consequences of the Fall. Therefore the Church exists beyond sinfulness and death even though members of the Church continue to sin and die. Volf thus explains, "[t]hat the eschaton is realized exclusively in the Eucharist means not only that only eucharistic communities constitute the church in the full sense of the word, but that they are indeed the church only during the actual eucharistic synaxis." The Church seems to come into existence with each Eucharistic event only to vanish again as the people re-enter the world of sin and death. With good reason, Volf questions "why the dispersed church is then to be called 'church' at all in the proper sense of the term." *After Our Likeness*, 101–2.

[42] Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 129.

[43] Ibid., 130.

[44] Ibid., 131.

Here Zizioulas reveals what he means when he speaks of "the eucharistic vision of the world" as "a continuation of the liturgical experience."[45] He does not mean that the iconic manifestation of the eschaton is carried out into world in order that the world be transformed into the Kingdom of God. Nor does he mean that the Eucharist imparts an eschatological mode of being such that the Church is no longer involved in the history of the world.

Zizioulas argues that the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist is extended beyond the liturgy in the mode of forward-looking hope and struggle. He asserts that "As an image of the Kingdom, the Eucharist makes us appreciate more deeply the contrast between the world as it is, and the world as it will be in the last times."[46] For this reason, "The eschatological character of the Eucharist does not attenuate but rather intensifies the struggle against the evil which surrounds us."[47] But again, this struggle against evil is not for the sake of perfecting the world, or bringing about the Kingdom of God. Outside of the liturgy, the Eucharist can only be lived in the mode of ascesis, which Zizioulas defines in terms of imitating the kenosis of Christ on the Cross.

Zizioulas is clear that the fullness of eucharistic communion is not possible outside of the liturgy because the eucharistic event is a foretaste of the ontological transformation that will only be fulfilled in the eschaton. Outside of the liturgy, under the conditions of the fallen world, we can only anticipate the eschaton by struggling against sin in imitation of Christ's victorious death. So we come to see that when Zizioulas affirms that the things of the Old Testament are shadows and the things of the New Testament are images of the eschaton, he means that asceticism is a shadow and the Eucharist is an image of the eschaton. Applied to ecclesiology, this means that the Church

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[45] Ibid., 129.
[46] Ibid., 80.
[47] Ibid.

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does not cease to exist between eucharistic liturgies but exists in a different mode outside of the liturgy. In the Eucharist, the Church foretastes the ontological victory of Christ over sin and death. But since the historical Church still awaits the Second Coming, outside of the liturgy the Church is again beset with evil. It struggles to imitate not the resurrected Christ for whom sin and death are already vanquished, but the crucified Christ who in obedient synergy with the Father assumed the burden of sin in behalf of all the world.

For Zizioulas, the eucharistic event is a matter of ontological participation in the resurrected Christ while asceticism is a matter of moral imitation of the crucified Christ. The Church does not pop in and out of existence with each eucharistic liturgy but perdures in two distinct modes: the iconic/sacramental as well as the mimetic/ascetical. This brings us back to our initial question concerning the relationship between the Eucharist and ascesis. Does an emphasis on ontological participation in Christ render the moral imitation of Christ ultimately inconsequential and unnecessary?

Zizioulas claims that love is the tie that binds the Eucharist and ascesis, for love transcends the boundary between history and eschaton. Citing 1 Corinthians 13, which contrasts the temporary nature of the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge to the unending nature of love, Zizioulas comments:

> The eschatological character of the Eucharist is essentially linked to the eschatological character of love, which is the experiential quintessence of the Kingdom. All asceticism and all cleansing from the passions is in essence a *precondition* for the Eucharist, because the Eucharist cannot be understood apart from love. Love is not simply a virtue; it is an ontological category, not simply an ethical one. Love is that which will survive into the 'age which does not end or grow old' when all the gifts which impress us today, such as knowledge, prophecy, etc., will pass away.[48]

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[48] Ibid., 76.

From this we may gather that love has two dimensions that correspond to the two dimensions of the Church. Moral love is a virtue achieved by ascesis and belongs to the realm of history, while ontological love belongs to the eschatological Kingdom and is manifested in the Eucharist. Thus, if love is that which will survive into the eschaton, it will do so in its ontological mode and not its ethical mode. This is why Zizioulas says that "All asceticism and all cleansing from the passions is in essence a precondition for the Eucharist."[49] Just as Christ could not experience the resurrection without first dying on the Cross, neither can we approach the Eucharist without first taking up our own crosses and imitating Him (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23). In this light, we can see that asceticism plays a necessary role in the life of the Church, but it is a means and not an end. "The ascetic life culminates in the Eucharist. There is no *theosis* outside the Eucharist."[50]

V.   Ascesis as Repentance

Zizioulas is clear that though the Eucharist makes the Church, asceticism maintains a necessary role in the Church. The Eucharist is the culmination of ascesis, and without ascesis there can be no Eucharist. But here we should return to Papanikolaou's criticism that "the eucharistic and communion ecclesiologies do not fully nuance…how Christians do not live up to being Christians."[51] This leads Papanikolaou to suggest that the degree of participation in the Eucharist is determined by the degree of asceticism practiced. Papanikolaou would therefore agree with Zizioulas that asceticism is a precondition for the Eucharist. But as we have seen, Papanikoloau's

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 85.
[51] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 85.

articulation of ascesis ends up rendering the Eucharist itself inconsequential. Papanikolaou reduces the Eucharist to a ritual re-enactment of an already realized communion. Zizioulas, on the other hand, asserts that "*theosis* is always *granted,* never achieved by the individual," for "[t]here is no *theosis* outside the Eucharist."[52]

For Zizioulas, whatever is achieved by ascesis is achieved in the realm of morality, not in the realm of ontology. Again, we see a difference between moral love and ontological love. Thus when Zizioulas claims that ascesis is a precondition for the Eucharist, he does not mean that attaining moral love by ascesis in any way merits the ontological love granted in the Eucharist. In fact, ascesis has nothing to do with positive achievements. "Ascetic life," says the Metropolitan, "aims not at the 'spiritual development' of the subject but at the giving up of the Self to the Other…that is, at love."[53] This is truly a difficult saying, but Zizioulas's point is that focusing on one's own spiritual development is all too often, even necessarily, a selfish endeavor.

To overcome egoistic self-love, one must acquire an "understanding of the Other as having primacy over the Self," even to the point of self-condemnation.[54] It is exactly this kenotic notion of asceticism that Christ exemplifies on the Cross and that we are called to imitate. Asceticism is therefore a response to the Fall and to sin; not that it is the final solution, but it is a precondition of the final solution, which is the resurrection foretasted in the Eucharist. In other words, ascesis is not a matter of imitating Christ's sinless life but his sacrificial death wherein he took on the sins of others. Ascetical perfection is not defined by sinlessness—an impossibility for us—but by kenotic self-condemnation and repentance.

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[52] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 84.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

In defining asceticism in terms of self-condemnation, Zizioulas is following the ascetical theology of Saphrony Sakharov whose spiritual master, St Silouan the Athonite, famously prescribed: "keep thy mind in hell and despair not." In this axiom, Silouan highlights the ascetic dialectic of self-condemnation and hope. The first part harkens back to an ancient axiom attributed to Nilus of Ancyra: "The beginning of salvation for everyone is to condemn himself [ἑαυτοῦ κατάγνωσις]"[55] The second half refers to the eschatological hope that results from the fact that Christ has already conquered hell.

There is a missing link here between self-condemnation and the hope of salvation, however. Though Christ has made salvation possible, hope in the eschatological Kingdom is dependent upon the repentance of the condemned. Thus we see that Silouan's axiom is, at root, a reformulation of the gospel message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2; Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). Or, in the context of eucharistic ecclesiology, we might reformulate the axiom—much less elegantly—as: "Practice ascesis that you may enter the Kingdom of God, which is foretasted in the Eucharist!"

Ascesis is repentance. Yet this is deceptively simplistic if we do not take into account the capacious nature of repentance in the patristic tradition. When Nilus and Silouan speak of self-condemnation, they are not only prescribing repentance but also proscribing the condemnation of others. Not only does this accord with Christ's teachings against judging others (Matt. 7:1-5; Luke 6:36-38), but it is a matter of imitating the kenotic self-condemnation of Christ for the sake of others. Zizioulas explains that the desert Fathers are the exemplars of this way of imitating Christ:

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[55] Nilus of Ancyra, *Monachi Capita Paraenetica*, PG 79, 1249C; See Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 84.

[T]hey insisted that the Other should be kept free from moral judgement and categorization. This they achieved not by disregarding evil but by *transferring it from the Other to the Self.*

…But this condemnation of the Self does not imply a negative attitude; it is tied up with one's positive attitude to the Other, with the liberation of the Other from his or her evil qualities, so as to be fully affirmed and accepted.

…The theological justification is Christological: Christ himself made his own the sins of others on the Cross, thus paving the way to self-condemnation so that the others might be justified. "Christ became a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "For our sake he [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).[56]

The height of asceticism is repentance not simply for one's own sin but also for the sins of others in imitation (*mimesis*) of Christ.

Zizioulas offers a few brief examples of ascetic repentance from the lives of the desert Fathers. He relates that a certain monk confessed and did penance for the sin of another as if it were his own, while another monk prayed that the devil possessing another man might pass into himself.[57] Zizioulas is particularly interested in the sixth century desert Father Zosimas, who not only forgives the offense committed against him but regards "the Other as a benefactor for having helped him to blame himself for this evil act."[58] And Zizioulas argues that such acts of self-condemning love are not only for monks and extremists but for all Christians. "[T]he essence of Christian existence in the Church is *metanoia* (repentance)…For we all share in the fall of Adam."[59]

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[56] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 82–83.
[57] Ibid., 82-83n183; See Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, trans. John Chryssavgis, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 72-123.97-141.
[58] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 83; See PG 78, 1680-1701.
[59] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 4.

VI.   Three Forms of Repentance

In a recent study entitled *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, Alexis Torrance develops a framework for understanding patristic teachings on repentance. Torrance proposes that repentance has three aspects or stages. "Initial repentance" applies to the beginning or a new beginning in the Christian life where one turns away from a sinful life toward God. "Existential repentance" refers to the continual process of self-examination that characterizes the Christian life. And "Christ-like repentance" denotes the act of taking responsibility for the sins of others. In particular, Torrance finds this threefold framework in the writings of St Mark the Monk (ca. 420—ca. 500), SS Barsanuphius and John (6th century), and St John Climacus (ca. 579—ca. 659). These fathers are chosen because they are at once representative and diverse. The authors were not only influential in their own time but remained so throughout the subsequent development of Eastern Christianity. Yet despite significant similarities in these writings, there is no reason to suspect any interdependence among them. Torrance thus concludes that the texts "speak for discrete ascetical traditions, and having found that they develop the concept of repentance along similar lines, it can reasonably by concluded that such understandings of the concept pervaded the late antique Christian environment."[60]

The gist of Mark the Monk's approach to repentance is summed up in the opening to his treatise *On Repentance* in which he expounds Matthew 4:17:

> Since our Lord Jesus Christ, the power and wisdom of God, himself as God knows and foresees the salvation of everyone, he set down the law of freedom by means of a variety of ordinances and ordained one goal appropriate for everyone when he

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[60] Alexis C. Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c.400-650 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33.

said, "Repent." Because of this, it is possible for us to know that all the various laws have as their goal one end: repentance.[61]

We should note here that Mark may seem to offer a different interpretation of the commandments than the apostle Paul who asserts that they are summed up by love (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14). But repentance and love are inseparable for Mark, though they come in a variety of forms. If the greatest commandments are to love God and neighbor (Matt. 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28), these commands are at once a call to perfection but also repentance. Only by recognizing one's failure to love can one begin to love. For Mark, repentance begins in humility as "grace first rouses the conscience in a manner that conforms to God's wishes; that is how even evildoers have repented and come to please God."[62]

So repentance is a grace, a gift of God, but it is up to humanity to accept the gift and enact it. Mark thus warns against two errors: "Some, without keeping the commandments, think they are keeping the faith, while others keeping the commandments, expect to receive the kingdom as a reward owed to them. Both have deprived of the kingdom."[63] Repentance (which sums up the diverse commandments) is a precondition of entering the Kingdom of God, but it in no way merits or attains the Kingdom on its own. Sacramentally, this initial repentance, or conversion, is realized in baptism, which is a precondition for participating in the Eucharist. Indeed, Mark will sometimes identify repentance with baptism. In his discussion of Hebrews 6:1-6, which states, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened…if they fall away, to renew them again to

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[61] Mark the Monk, "On Repentance," in *Counsels on the Spiritual Life*, trans. Tim Vivian, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 1.145.

[62] Mark the Monk, "Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works," in *Counsels on the Spiritual Life*, trans. Tim Vivian, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 56.119.

[63] Ibid., 17.115.

repentance," Mark understands that it is impossible for the apostate to be re-baptized—not that it is impossible for the apostate to repent.[64]

Repentance is not limited to initial repentance, or baptism, however. Mark also speaks of baptism as the "one foundation of repentance."[65] Since Mark clearly does not mean that one's baptism is the foundation for subsequent baptisms—an "impossibility"—we must conclude that Mark is stating that initial repentance (baptism) is the foundation of subsequent repentance. This subsequent repentance Torrance names existential repentance.

In opposition to the rigorist Novatians who rejected the repentance of apostates, Mark says that "repentance, in my opinion, is neither limited to times or actions, but it is practiced in proportion with the commandments of Christ."[66] Just as the Christian is to keep God's commandments in the forefront of her mind, so also must she remain vigilant in repentance. Existential repentance refers to the mode in which the Christian lives in the world.

Mark proclaims that "we are not judged on account of the multitude of evils we do, but rather because we refuse to repent and acknowledge Christ's wonderful deeds."[67] Likewise, we learn from the parable of the publican and the Pharisee that righteousness is a matter of recognizing one's own sinfulness (Luke 18:9-14). For Christ "did not come to call the righteous but the sinners" (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). Those who would pronounce themselves righteous have no ears to hear Christ's call. Only the sinner can become a saint.

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[64] Mark the Monk, "On Repentance," 7.154-156.
[65] Ibid., 7.155.
[66] Ibid., 6.153-154.
[67] Ibid., 6.153.

But Mark does not think that personal sin is inevitable, nor does he advocate sinning to ensure that one has the opportunity to repent. Rather, keeping the commandments to perfection amounts to the imitation of Christ's vicarious repentance on the Cross, or Christ-like repentance as Torrance calls it. Mark claims that "the saints are also compelled to offer it [repentance] on behalf of their neighbors. Without active love, the saints are unable to reach perfection."[68] Here again we find the coincidence of repentance and love. The highest expression of love is to take responsibility for the sins of others, even to the point of death, for "no one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John. 15:13).[69] And these words of Christ were echoed by the apostles in their teaching that "if the Lord laid down his life for us, we also should lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16), and that we should "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).[70] Regardless of personal sin, repentance remains the "single goal" of life, even for the holiest of saints.

Torrance finds that the threefold framework of repentance can also be successfully applied to Barsanuphius and John of Gaza as well as John Climacus. For Barsanuphius and John, the ascetic life of repentance begins with turning away from sinfulness,[71] continues on in "bearing fruit worthy of repentance,"[72] and is perfected in bearing the burdens of others in imitation of Christ.[73] Likewise, in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, John Climacus teaches that repentance begins

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[68] Ibid., 11.160.
[69] Mark the Monk, "A Monastic Superior's Disputation with an Attorney and Discussion with His Fellow Monks," in *Counsels on the Spiritual Life*, trans. Tim Vivian and Augustine Casiday, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 20.248.
[70] Ibid., 20.248-249.
[71] Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 1:261.267.
[72] Ibid., 1:115.134.
[73] Ibid., 1:239.243-245.

as "a contract with God for a fresh start in life."[74] Subsequently, the ascetic climbs the ladder of virtues toward perfection. But because each step brings an increased risk of pride and vainglory, John advises: "even if you have climbed the whole ladder of the virtues, keep praying for the forgiveness of sins, listening to Paul's call regarding sinners, 'of whom I am first' (1 Tim. 1:15)"[75]

And finally, the perfect love at the top of the ladder is experienced through Christ-like repentance. John says that "a man will know that he truly loves his brother when he weeps for the sins of that brother and is delighted by his progress.[76] John relates numerous examples of this penitential love. He says, "if one of them [the monks] committed a fault, many of the brothers would seek permission to take the matter to the shepherd and to accept both the responsibility and the punishment."[77] Like Mark and Barsanuphius and John, John Climacus teaches that perfect love is achieved in perfect repentance.

Torrance's framework of repentance is helpful because it demonstrates the richness and depth of the concept. While the three modes or stages are presented as conceptually distinct, Torrance is also aware that the boundaries among them are not firm and that "the threefold framework…in a sense breaks down on its own terms."[78] Initial repentance is easily merged with existential repentance, and existential repentance "naturally and imperceptibly" shifts toward Christ-like repentance.[79] Further, we may even say that Christ-like repentance is a matter of including the other in one's own initial and/or existential repentance. Yet this is no weakness, but

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[74] John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 5.121.
[75] Ibid., 28.276.
[76] Ibid., 4.106.
[77] Ibid., 4.96.
[78] Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, 184.
[79] Ibid.

perhaps the framework's greatest strength because it entails a continuity and coherence to the ascetic life without implying that the entirety of the Christian life is reducible to the ascetic life.

Even though penitential ascesis has both negative and positive aspects, in the greater context of the Christian life, asceticism as a whole remains the negative aspect of the sacramental life of the Church. Thus John Chrysostom can speak of the sacraments—and ultimately the Eucharist—as the goal of repentance:

> For this surely is the time of confession both for the uninitiated and for the baptized; for the one, that upon their repentance they may partake of the sacred mysteries; for the others, that having washed away their stain after baptism, they may approach the table with a clean conscience.[80]

Even Christ-like repentance, which is the positive aspect of repentance and the perfection of the ascetic life, cannot attain the perfection of the Kingdom of God as long as sin and death reign in the world. On the other hand, when sin and death no longer reign, there will be no need for repentance. Ascetic perfection is therefore the negative aspect of eschatological perfection.

VII. Mystical Communion and Ascetical Repentance

In contrast to penitential asceticism, the mystical/contemplative tradition, which follows Origen, Evagrius, and Pseudo-Dionysius in describing the way of mystical ascent in terms of purification, illumination, and deification, provides less continuity for the Christian life. Instead of striving toward greater depths of repentance, the contemplative mystic first strives to abandon sinfulness and then to acquire perfect union with God, or "that state which belongs to the kingdom of

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[80] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. George Prevost, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 10.6.65.

Heaven."[81] For penitential ascesis, there is continuity in the historical Christian life but transformation and discontinuity between history and the eschaton; for contemplative mysticism, there is transformation and discontinuity in the historical life but continuity between history and the eschaton. The problem is that Orthodox theology has uncritically adopted both strands of the tradition without acknowledging the distinction, much less the tension between the two.

Lossky perfectly reflects this problem in his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. In his chapter on "The Way of Union," Lossky explains that even though penitence is the first stage toward union with God, "It is in fact not a stage but a condition which must continue permanently…Repentance, like the way of ascent towards God, can have no end."[82] And again, Lossky asserts that "The prayer of the publican—'Lord, have mercy on me a sinner,' will accompany the just even to the gates of the Kingdom."[83] This is consistent with the penitential/ascetical teachings of Mark, Barsanuphius and John, and John Climacus. But then comes a significant shift.

Following St Isaac the Syrian, Lossky explains that the path toward union with God begins with the prayer of supplication, which "consists in a gradual ascent towards God in seeking and effort," but this is only preparatory for pure prayer.[84] Lossky says:

> It is the end of *praxis*, since nothing inconsistent with prayer can any longer gain access to the mind, nor turn aside the will which is now directed towards God, and united to the divine will…[A]t a certain level when one leaves the psychic realm, in which the spirit is active, all movement is at an end, and even prayer itself ceases.

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[81] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 208.
[82] Ibid., 204.
[83] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 206.
[84] Ibid., 207.

> This is the perfecting of prayer and is called spiritual prayer or contemplation…It is that state which belongs to the kingdom of Heaven.[85]

To be clear, the tension is between the ascetical claim that repentance—manifested in the prayer of the publican—is a permanent condition, which is never complete this side of death and the mystical claim that the mind can reach such purity that it ascends beyond the practical cares of this world and beyond supplicatory prayer to a state of pure contemplation, "which belongs to the kingdom of Heaven."

Lossky makes sense of this tension by using the Evagrian distinction between action (*praxis*) and contemplation (*theoria*) to explain that ascent towards union with God "is achieved simultaneously on two different but closely interrelated levels."[86] But this explanation is not supported by the passage above in which Lossky asserts that contemplation is "the end of *praxis*" when "even prayer itself ceases" because the mind has entered "that state which belongs to the kingdom of Heaven." In spite of his claims to the contrary, it seems clear that penitential prayer is not a permanent condition of the Christian life according to the mystical tradition. Because mystical theology speaks of attaining the kingdom of God within history, it cannot maintain that repentance is permanent. Ascetical theology makes repentance an unending requirement, but mysticism goes beyond asceticism.

Zizioulas argues along similar lines when he states that "it is wrong to associate asceticism with mysticism in an exclusive way. The ascetic Fathers are wrongly called the mystical

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[85] Ibid., 208; Lossky is drawing from St Isaac the Syrian who says, "The mind has ascended here above prayer, and, having found what is more excellent, it desists from prayer." Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans. A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Uitgave der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1939), 118.
[86] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 202.

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theologians *par excellence*, especially in the East."[87] Zizioulas claims that Evagrius's Origenistic mysticism by which the mind is purified of sensible things and ascends to union with God through contemplation "is essentially Neoplatonic mysticism and as such it was rejected by the patristic tradition."[88] Instead of contemplative mysticism, Zizioulas advocates the mysticism of St. Macarius. The center of the human being according to Macarian mystics is not found in the mind (nous), but in the heart. The goal of Macarian spirituality is to purify the heart of self-love and to acquire selfless love for the Other, which Zizioulas describes as imitation of Christ's kenotic sacrifice on the Cross.[89]

Zizioulas even understands *hesychasm* in terms of asceticism rather than mysticism. He says, "the light of Mount Tabor, the light of the Transfiguration, which the Hesychasts claimed to see, was given as a result of…communion in the sufferings of Christ," or we might say as a result of Christ-like repentance.[90] But the mystical vision of the divine light is not the goal of ascetic repentance. Seeing the divine light is not proof of union with God. It is a manifestation of the glory of God which reveals that the greatest human perfection is naught but imperfection. Thus even though the vision of the light of Mount Tabor may accompany ascetic discipline, the mystical vision in no way suggests that one has passed beyond the need for penitential prayer. Rather, the divine light is an affirmation of one's struggle. The light is a call towards ever greater depths of repentance.

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[87] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 301.
[88] Ibid., 305.
[89] Ibid., 302–6; Cf. Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31–45.
[90] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 305. Cf. 1 Pet. 4:13; Phil. 3:10; Heb. 2:9-10.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Zizioulas identifies the "mystical experience of the Church *par excellence*" as the eucharistic event.[91] The Eucharist is both like other mystical experiences and also entirely unique; it is not only a vision of the eschaton like other mystical visions, but also a proleptic participation in the eschaton. Thus Zizioulas can claim that "the Byzantine liturgy does its best to make out of the Eucharist a vision of the Kingdom" and that the "connection of the Eucharist with vision is the most convincing proof that the Eucharist is the mystical experience of the Church *par excellence*."[92]

Yet he also affirms that "by partaking of the eucharistic body, we enter into the new *aeon*, the new earth and new heaven."[93] On the one hand, the eucharistic liturgy is a mystical experience for the sake of greater asceticism. On the other hand, it is the eschatological goal or end of asceticism. This explains the twofold proclamation in the liturgy that the Eucharist is "for the forgiveness of sins, and for life everlasting." The Eucharist is simultaneously a mystical experience like unto a vision of the divine light of Tabor, and also an event of eschatological communion in which the Spirit has descended on the holy gifts as well as the communicants, uniting all in Christ. Participation in the eucharistic event belongs to a historical cycle of repentance and forgiveness, but it grants a foretaste of the eschatological end of this cycle; the Eucharist is a taste of the end of history and the end of repentance.

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[91] Ibid., 296–97.
[92] Ibid., 296.
[93] Ibid., 296–267.

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VIII. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology—far from rejecting or devaluing ascetical theology—requires a robust notion of ascesis. Critics assume a narrow view of asceticism whereby pious struggle for virtue is identified with the process of deification. Such is the pervasive influence of neo-Palamism. But Zizioulas's theology utilizes a different notion of ascesis, derived from the desert fathers, whereby pious struggle is aimed at greater depths of repentance rather than greater heights of virtue. The goal is to imitate Christ crucified rather than Christ the God-man. Indeed, the latter is impossible for humans who possess moral freedom not grounded in ontological freedom.

Even though Orthodox tradition is unmistakably clear that both asceticism and sacramental participation are essential aspects of the Christian life, the doctrine of deification requires that the sacraments take priority over ascesis. Therefore if ascesis is an essential aspect of the Christian life, it must be defined as the penitential pre-condition of communion with God. In the next chapter, I argue that this penitential notion of ascesis corresponds with a penitential notion of Christian ethics.

Chapter 5

Communion and Ethics

Zizioulas's theological personalism and eucharistic ecclesiology have been invoked by various other theologians in order to promote a Christian ethics based on the notion of communion. The problem is that these theologians invariably confuse and conflate ontological communion with moral communion. Consequently, the relationship between the Church *ad intra* and the Church *ad extra* is blurred or lost altogether. The Sacraments are moral imperatives and vice versa. Such confusion betrays a misunderstanding of the fundamental distinction driving Zizioulas's theology. For Zizioulas, the purpose of moral actions is penitence, not pietistic perfection. Only the sacraments can bring about ontological deification that transcends morality. Without this distinction between morality and ontology, Zizioulas's theology has little to offer to Christian ethics. Indeed, without this distinction Christian ethics has little to offer to the world.

I. The Trinity and the Church

Zizioulas draws on a text attributed to Maximus to the Confessor in order to identify the eucharistic event as an iconic manifestation of the eschatological Kingdom. In this text, "the rites that are now

performed in the synaxis" are called "images of what is true." The author reasons that "these things are symbols, not the truth…For the things of the Old Testament are the shadow; those of the New Testament are the image. The truth is the state of things to come."[1] Following this logic, Zizioulas argues that the Eucharist is distinct from other events because its cause is found in the futural eschaton rather than the historical past.

Of course, by identifying the Church with the Eucharist and the Eucharist with the eschaton, Zizioulas implies that the Church is purely eschatological, having no part in the vicissitudes of history. Consequently, the Church becomes a perfectly sinless institution that pops into existence during the liturgy only to disappear again after the fact. Such an ecclesiology seems counterintuitive at best and empirically false at worst.

I have argued that Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology relies on an implied distinction between the historical Church and the eschatological Church, which corresponds to a distinction between moral love and eschatological love. Moral love, practiced within the confines of history is expressed by a constant struggle against evil. Not that moral love aims to defeat evil or its mortal consequence. Moral love is not the remedy of the sin and death. Moral love suppresses the symptoms of our common condition but provides no cure. Likewise, the historical Church has a moral imperative in the world, but moral activities must not be confused with salvation from sin and death.

Salvation requires more than struggle against evil; it requires a triumph. That is, salvation requires participation in Christ's resurrection, which is only available in the Sacraments of the

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[1] Maximus the Confessor, *Commentary on the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, PG 4, 137A-D; See Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 44.

Church. Culminating in the Eucharist, the Sacraments usher the historical Church into the eschaton. In the eucharistic event, the historical Church, which abides in moral love, is transformed into the eschatological Church, which abides in the ontological love of the Trinity.

Concomitantly, the two aspects of the Church also correspond to the two aspects of the Trinity. Like the economic Trinity, the historical Church engages the world through moral love. But again, moral love cannot overcome the existential problem caused by sin. It is not the incarnate Son's virtues or obedience that redeems the world by defeating death. It is the very being of the incarnate Son that defeats death. Put another way, the gates of death are unable to constrain the crucified Christ not because he lived a morally sinless life. Rather, both Christ's victory over death and his moral perfection are grounded in his unbreakable ontological communion with the Father and Holy Spirit.

Now if the Church is analogous to the Trinity, then we might expect the historical Church to abide in the same sinless perfection as the eschatological Church just as the economic Trinity is no more guilty of sin than the immanent Trinity. But it is empirically false that the historical Church—both as an institution and as the sum of its members—has ever attained anything like sinlessness. Thus it may seem that the analogy with the Trinity breaks down here. We might think that while the Trinity has no part in sin either immanently or economically, the Church is divided by historical sin*ful*ness and eschatological sin*less*ness.

However, the two aspects of the Church are not as disparate as they may appear. To be sure, it is not the eschatological Church that re-enters the world to struggle with sin. For sin has no part in the eschatological Church. Zizioulas explains that

> the Liturgy [is] a solemn celebration from which the faithful return to the world full of joy and charism. But in crossing the threshold of the church, they find an unabated struggle…The Eucharist has given them the strongest assurance of the

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victory of Christ over the devil, but upon this earth, this victory will ever be a victory of "kenosis," the victory of the cross, the victory of heroic ascesis—as it has been understood and lived in Eastern monasticism.[2]

For Zizioulas, the Church does not cease to exist outside of the eucharistic liturgy but perdures in a different mode. Instead of "heroic virtue,"—a phrase common in the Roman Catholic tradition—Zizioulas prefers to describe the moral character of saints in terms of "heroic ascesis."[3] Though in practice, heroic virtue and heroic ascesis amount to similar, if not identical, sorts of activities, the conceptual difference between the two is profound.

If the Church is defined by its extreme virtue, then the failures of the Church present a significant problem. On the one hand, every instance of individual as well as institutional sin is evidence that the historical Church—defined by extreme virtue—does not truly exist. And on the other hand, defining the Church by heroic virtue might suggest that only the perfected saints constitute the Church while sinners are excluded. Indeed, it is against this emphasis on moral perfection that Luther proclaims the faithful *simul iustus et peccator.*

However, if the historical Church is defined not by virtuous perfection but by the sort of extreme asceticism exemplified by the Cross, then the historical Church cannot be defined apart from its relationship to sin. Indeed, Zizioulas goes so far as to claim that "the essence of Christian existence in the [historical] Church is *metanoia* (repentance)…For we all share in the fall of Adam, and we all must feel the sorrow of failing to bring creation to communion with God and the overcoming of death."[4] Therefore, Zizioulas implicitly links Christ's work of heroic ascesis on the Cross with the penitential task of the historical Church.

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[2] Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 130.
[3] See, e.g., Pope Benedict XIV, *Heroic Virtue: A Portion of the Treatise of Benedict XIV on the Beatification and Canonization of the Servants of God* (New York: E. Dunigan, 1950).
[4] John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 4.

Simply put, heroic ascesis is repentance. Indeed, Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross was an act of repentance. The sinless Christ was not repenting for his own sin, but he took responsibility for the sins of others—for the sin of the entire world (2 Cor. 5:21). What makes heroic ascesis truly heroic is that it goes beyond taking responsibility for one's own sins. Carrying one's own burden is respectable but hardly heroic or supererogatory. According to Zizioulas, Christ's exemplary activity, which the historical Church is called to imitate, is found not in his sinless life but in his heroic acceptance of the sin and death that rightfully belongs to the world.

Therefore the sinfulness of the historical Church does not undermine the analogy between the Church and the Trinity. We have seen that Zizioulas proclaims, contra Rahner, that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity but not vice versa. Similarly, Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology entails that the historical Church is the eschatological Church but not vice versa. The historical Church is called to imitate the work of Christ by taking responsibility for all the sins of the world.

II.   Heroic Ascesis and Ethics

Zizioulas stops short of setting up heroic ascesis as a universal ethico-political principle. And this for two reasons. First, he says, "It would be inconceivable to regulate social life on such a basis, for there would be no room for *law and order*… Given that justice is a fundamental principle of ethics and law," he continues, "any transference of moral responsibility for an evil act from the person who committed it to someone else would be totally unethical." Thus Zizioulas is skeptical of moral and political theologies that attempt to reconcile the requirements of justice with the supererogatory nature of Christ's commands. He concludes that

the Church cannot abandon or betray or distort the Gospel, and present to society an ethos different from the one emerging from Christ's life. If this is inapplicable to social life, that simply means that the Church can never coincide with society; she lives *in* the world but she is not *of the* world (John. 15:16). The ethos she preaches cannot take the form of a rationally or practically sustainable ethic.[5]

The second reason Zizioulas gives for not adopting heroic ascesis as a foundational principle for ethics is that such an endeavor would be self-defeating. The Metropolitan argues that

love cannot be turned into an institution. This is not to say that the Church could ever be inactive in the world: when someone is hungry, you share food with him…[The Church's] action is personal, rather than institutional…If charity becomes managed and administered, the Church will be driven by secular imperatives and cease to love, for love must always be free.[6]

Zizioulas worries that if heroic ascesis, which imitates the crucifixion and awaits the eschatological Kingdom, is institutionalized, it will devolve into a secularized social gospel, which passes over the crucifixion and attempts to achieve the eschatological Kingdom by its own efforts. In other words, political theology shifts the task of taking responsibility for the Other away from the individual and onto an impersonal institution. Institutions cannot repent. Nor can institutions partake in the eucharistic event. Furthermore, since institutions must continually justify their existence with measurable outcomes, they cannot help but treat their ethico-political goals as ends in themselves. Therefore, institutions cannot fulfill the sort of heroic ascesis enjoined by the gospel.

Zizioulas's objections to political theology cannot be ignored, and I will address them later. For now, though, we must recognize that the consequences of these objections are equally dire. First, it becomes impossible to identify the historical Church as an institution with any sort of

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[5] Ibid., 87.
[6] John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures,* 127.

ethical imperative in the world. Zizioulas implies that after the liturgy, the Church disperses into isolated individuals called to individual acts of heroic ascesis. Ontological communion is gifted to humans in the liturgy, but Zizioulas makes no room for the possibility of moral communion outside of the liturgy. If individual Christians come together to form an organized structure by which they may more effectively and comprehensively practice heroic ascesis, they thereby cease to love rather than increase their love.

Second, if heroic ascesis is left entirely to individuals, then only individual instances of evil can be addressed. We should in no way diminish the value of providing a meal for a hungry person or a home for a homeless person. Yet the evils at the root of poverty are manifold and affect both private and public activities. Problems such as poverty cannot be reduced to individual sins, nor can they be blamed entirely on oppressive social structures. Individual sins need individual attention and social sins require social solutions. By leaving heroic ascesis up to individuals, Zizioulas ignores systemic evils that not only afflict communities but also foster and enable the sins of individuals.

Third, Zizioulas's rejection of collective or institutional heroic ascesis makes it impossible for individual Christians to constitute any sort of ecclesial body outside of the eucharistic liturgy. In effect, Zizioulas undermines his own account of the historical Church by insisting that Christians can imitate Christ only as individuals. That is, the Church does not perdure in a different mode after the liturgy but entirely disbands into discreet individuals with their own ascetic struggles. In this case, the original criticism against Zizioulas reemerges—that his ecclesiology entails that the Church ceases to exist between liturgies.

Zizioulas's eucharistic ecclesiology, therefore, faces an intractable dilemma of its own making. In order to defend the existence of the Church between liturgies, Zizioulas defines the

work of the Church as penitential, heroic ascesis. And to avoid the secular and authoritarian usurpation of this religious endeavor, Zizioulas argues that heroic ascesis can only be practiced by individuals. But Zizioulas fails to see that if heroic ascesis is limited to the efforts of individuals, then it becomes impossible to identify these individuals as a unified ecclesial body.

The question, therefore, is whether ascetic repentance can be practiced collectively without subsuming the eucharistic event into a secularized project. To be sure, other accounts of eucharistic ecclesiology claim this as a real possibility. I will demonstrate, however, that the eschatological focus of eucharistic ecclesiology is not so easily reconciled with the historical emphasis of political theology.

III.   Eucharistizing the World

Like Zizioulas, William Cavanaugh claims that the eucharistic event constitutes the Church as the nexus of history and the eschaton. But in contrast to Zizioulas, Cavanaugh seeks to show that the Eucharist is directly involved in ethics and politics. For Cavanaugh, "The Eucharist is the ongoing action of Christ in the Spirit to go out from the altar into the streets and reconcile the world to the Father."[7] The result is that while Zizioulas struggles to explain how the eschatological Church can also exist within history, Cavanaugh struggles to explain how the historical Church can also transcend history. In this way Zizioulas and Cavanaugh serve as paradigmatic representatives of their respective Eastern and Western traditions.

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[7] William T. Cavanaugh, "The Church in the Streets: Eucharist and Politics," *Modern Theology* 30, no. 2 (2014): 392.

Cavanaugh sets up his eucharistic ethics by appealing to the liturgical theology of Alexander Schmemann. Cavanaugh agrees with Schmemann's insistence that the Christian liturgy breaks down the supposed distinction between sacred and profane.[8] He explains:

> The liturgy of the Church enacts a foretaste of the Kingdom on earth, which signifies precisely the blessing and transformation of everyday life. The cordoning off of a separate 'sacred' realm is precisely the denial of the eschatological import of the Church's liturgy, because it reinforces the status quo of worldly order.[9]

Thus Cavanaugh can claim that "the Eucharist spills well beyond the confines of the altar and out into the world…[M]embers of the Body of Christ who participate in the Eucharist take the social action performed and envisioned in the action of the altar out into the streets and invite others to participate."[10] This eucharistic activity "in the streets"—what Schmemann and other Orthodox have called "the liturgy after the liturgy"[11]—Cavanaugh identifies as a "counter-politics."[12] By this, he means that the Eucharist is "deeply involved in the sufferings of this world" and is therefore neither otherworldly and sectarian nor amenable to the "politics of the world which killed its savior."[13] For Cavanaugh, "the point is not to politicize the Eucharist, but to 'Eucharistize' the world."[14]

For examples of "Eucharistizing" the world, Cavanaugh turns to the work of the Vicariate of Solidarity and the Sebastian Acevedo Movement in Chile under the Pinochet regime. These two groups engaged in political activism from a Christian perspective, though neither party directly

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[8] Ibid., 388.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 391.
[11] See Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1996).
[12] William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 14.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

connected their political fight with the eucharistic liturgy nor did they attempt to exclude non-Christians from participation. Still Cavanaugh makes the strong claim that their actions were eucharistic in the proper sense and not the weaker claim that their activities simply possessed certain ritualistic or conceptual commonalities with the Eucharist. "The point," says Cavanaugh, "is rather that the same Spirit of Christ who makes the Church in the Eucharist, who calls together bodies into the Kingdom of God, is also at work in these movements producing new types of social bodies…that participate in the Body of Christ."[15]

Yet despite this explicit rejection of the opposition between the sacred and the profane, Cavanaugh's whole project implicitly relies on this distinction. Cavanaugh acknowledges that "politics will always be infected with finitude and sin," so he sets up the liturgical Eucharist as an exemplar and judge of not only the world's politics but the Church's politics as well.[16] The implication is that the liturgical Eucharist is perfect in itself. But when the liturgical Eucharist spills out into the streets, it fundamentally changes. The political Eucharist is imperfect, ineluctably tainted with sin. Therefore, the perfection of the liturgical Eucharist (i.e. the sacred) stands in judgment of the imperfect political Eucharist (i.e. the profane). Or in other words, the sin*less*ness of the eschatological Church stands in judgment of the sin*ful*ness of the historical Church.

Therefore, contra Cavanaugh, if certain social and political actions can be called eucharistic, it is only insofar as they are attempting to imitate the eschatological Kingdom within history and not because God is at work in them in the same way that God is at work in the liturgy.

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[15] Cavanaugh, "The Church in the Streets," 391.
[16] Ibid., 392. Cf. 389.

To suggest otherwise entails that either (a) these social and political actions manifest the perfection of the eschaton just as the liturgical Eucharist does or (b) the liturgical Eucharist is infected with finitude and sin just as our social and political actions are. But, as we have just seen, Cavanaugh explicitly rejects the former and implicitly rejects the latter.

IV.   Holiness as Repentance

Cavanaugh covers over the difference between the perfection of the liturgical Eucharist and the imperfection of political activities that imitate the Eucharist by arguing that "the holiness of the church is visible in its very repentance for its sin."[17] He reasons that

> sin is not just something that obscures the true nature of the church, any more than the cross was just an unfortunate thing that happened to Jesus in the course of his salvation of the world. Sin is an inescapable part of the church *in via*, just as the cross is an essential part of the drama of salvation. The existence of sinful humanity in the church does not simply impede the redemption that Christ works in human history, but is itself part of the story of that redemption… [H]owever, the story can only be told in a penitential key.[18]

For Cavanaugh, political actions are eucharistic when they visibly express the holiness of the Church through repentance. "The church's proper response to being taken up into the life of God is not smug assurance of its own purity, but humble repentance for its sin and a constant impulse to reform."[19]

In support of his penitential account of the political Eucharist, Cavanaugh cites Zizioulas's use of the desert Fathers—specifically, Nilus of Ancyra and Zosimas. But Cavanaugh reads these

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[17] William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 165.
[18] Ibid., 163.
[19] Ibid., 165.

Fathers somewhat differently than Zizioulas. Referring to self-condemnation and taking on the sins of others, he writes:

> The distinction between my sin and your sin is relativized. Christ himself has obliterated this distinction, choosing to take on the sins of others in his suffering on the cross. Those who would follow this act of kenosis must do likewise, and recognize the solidarity of all sinners. To do so is simultaneously to recognize the social nature of holiness, which is visible precisely in the penitence of the church.[20]

Whereas Zizioulas contrasts the individual nature of repentance with the communal nature of the Eucharist, Cavanaugh identifies the social nature of both. For Cavanaugh, social sin is overcome by social communion, which takes place both within and beyond the liturgy.

Here again, Cavanaugh implicitly relies on something like the sacred/profane distinction though he would feign to reject it. This time it manifests as a difference between the holiness of historical repentance and the holiness of eschatological sinlessness. Cavanaugh leans heavily on the unifying concept of holiness and attempts to downplay the fact that he is employing two very different senses of the term. In short, he fails to distinguish the moral nature of penitential holiness from the ontological nature of eschatological holiness. In effect, Cavanaugh attempts to conceal his equivocal notions of Eucharist by elucidating equally equivocal notions of holiness.

V.   The Dual-Aspect Eucharist

The root of the problem for both Zizioulas and Cavanaugh is that they profess to speak univocally concerning the Eucharist and the Church, but they are in fact speaking equivocally. Zizioulas begins with the eschatological Church and struggles to explain how this same Church can also exist within history. Conversely, Cavanaugh so strongly asserts the historical significance of the

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[20] Ibid., 166.

Eucharist that he struggles to explain how this imperfect political Eucharist can manifest the perfection of the eschaton. Both theologians want to affirm that the eucharistic event somehow merges history and the eschaton, but neither is able to provide an account that avoids a reduction of one to the other. Thus it may seem as if eucharistic ecclesiology leaves us with a choice: the eucharistic event which constitutes the Church is *either* eschatological *or* historical. But such is not the case.

According to the divine liturgy itself, the Eucharist serves a dual purpose. The Holy Gifts are distributed with the words "for the forgiveness of sins, and for life everlasting." On the one hand, the Eucharist belongs to a historical cycle of repentance and forgiveness. But on the other hand, as an eschatological event, the Eucharist offers a proleptic taste of the eternal Kingdom, which represents the end of history and its cycle of repentance and forgiveness. Furthermore, the foretaste of eternity, representing sinless communion with God and others, stands in judgement of the world to which communicants return after the liturgy. The perfection of the eschaton enables the faithful to see with increasing clarity the evils that permeate their own lives and the world at large. While the eschatological Eucharist stands apart from history, it also serves as a spur to greater depths of historical repentance. The eucharistic event possesses two distinct aspects and serves two distinct purposes.

In short, the Eucharist is both moral and ontological. Just as the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity but not vice versa, and the historical Church is the eschatological Church but not vice versa, likewise the moral Eucharist is the ontological Eucharist but not vice versa. The eucharistic event that belongs to history and offers forgiveness is none other than the Eucharist that offers a foretaste of ontological union with God. And yet, the eschatological Eucharist is not

a historical event. In the midst of the eucharistic liturgy, the Church exists in two irreducible modes at once.

To be sure, there are not two Eucharists (nor two Trinities, nor two Churches) but two distinct ways to understand the event, two distinct ontologies at play. Viewed according to substance ontology, the Eucharist is bound by the limits of history and therefore can offer forgiveness for sins but not a transcendent experience of sinlessness. In the realm of substance, humans cannot transcend their human nature. The cycle of repentance and forgiveness can in no way effect deification.

However, viewed according to personal ontology, the same eucharistic event offers ontological communion that is incomparable to any degree of moral communion. In the liturgy, human beings momentarily transcend their human nature by entering into the communion of the super-essential Trinity. Without ceasing to be human according to substance ontology, human *hypostases* take on an additional mode of existence whereby communion is not predicated on categories of commonality.

What this means for the relationship between eucharistic ecclesiology and ethics is that the two are inseparable insofar as the Eucharist requires repentance and repentance is ethical. Eucharistic ecclesiology teaches the Church to engage the world penitentially, to see ethics as repentance.

VI.   Heroic Ascesis and Ethics (Again)

Even if we can account for the ethico-political dimension of the Eucharist by appealing to repentance, it does not necessarily follow that heroic ascesis can be translated into a foundational principle of ethics. Recall that Zizioulas raises two potent objections against turning heroic ascesis

into a universal imperative. He claims first that heroic ascesis is at odds with justice and second that turning heroic ascesis into a universal imperative results in secularization and the loss of individual freedom. Zizioulas therefore concludes that heroic ascesis can only be practiced according to individual prerogative; it cannot sustain an ethico-political mandate. We have already noted the negative consequences of Zizioulas's ethical individualism. Now we are prepared to respond to Zizioulas's criticisms themselves. Mandated heroic ascesis neither undermines justice and freedom nor promotes secularization.

a. Heroic Ascesis and Justice

Recall that Zizioulas declares,

> [I]t would be inconceivable to regulate social life [according to heroic ascesis], for there would be no room for *law and order* if this attitude to the Other were to become a principle of ethics. Given that justice is a fundamental principle of ethics and law, any transference of moral responsibility for an evil act from the person who committed it to someone else would be totally unethical.[21]

The claim is that a society regulated by a principle of ascetic repentance would necessarily reject law and order in favor of unjustly transferring responsibility from the guilty to the innocent. But such a society would not, in fact, be regulated by ascetic repentance. For if the transference of moral responsibility to an innocent person is imposed rather than freely accepted, then it is no longer heroic, ascetic, or penitential. Thus, Zizioulas is correct to say that "it would be inconceivable to regulate social life on such a basis." But this does not mean that ascetic repentance would leave no room for law and order.

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[21] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 87.

In fact, repentance presupposes law and order. Without some form of law and a sense of justice, we cannot judge good and evil. We cannot repent for sin if we cannot recognize it.[22] Heroic ascesis begins with an understanding of justice but refuses to accept justice as an end in itself. Zizioulas makes this very point when he asserts that

> Justice inflicts [sic] us to give everyone what they deserve—they are entitled to it. The one who worked for two hours should be paid more than the one who worked for just one hour. Otherwise, an injustice occurs. That is justice, that is ethics…The Gospel changes this in the famous story about the workers in the vineyard. The only ethics that the Gospel knows about is 'love the sinner, or your enemy.' This is one illogical ethics and immoral morality.[23]

For Zizioulas, justice is logical, but the Gospel is illogical, although, perhaps it is more appropriate to speak of the Gospel's supra or hyper logic. For Christ does not suggest that the workers' wages are entirely arbitrary, nor does he suggest that any worker should receive less than his due. To those who complain, the employer in parable says, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil (πονερος), because I am good (ἀγαθός)?" (Matt. 20:13-15).

The employer does not act unjustly or irrationally. Rather, he fulfills his duty according to justice towards those who worked a full day, and he exceeds justice towards those who worked less than a full day. Furthermore, those who cry out for justice are aligned with evil and the employer who exceeds justice is called good.[24]

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[22] Cf. Rom. 7:7.

[23] John D. Zizioulas, "Ontology and Ethics," *Sabornost* 6 (2012): 12.

[24] "But in fact, the idea of justice is absent from Christ's teaching in a way that is provocative to all ethics since Aristotle: he likens God to the householder who paid the labourers in his vineyard the same amount whether they had worked one hour or twelve hours." Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 86.

The gospel that enjoins imitation of Christ's heroic ascesis does not equate justice with goodness. The employer is good because he gives his workers what they need rather than what they deserve. Likewise, the salvific work of Christ is not performed because humanity deserves it but because our existence depends on it. Therefore a society based on heroic ascesis would not repudiate justice but exceed the limitations of justice for the sake of a good better than justice.

b. Heroic Ascesis and Freedom

For Zizioulas, to adopt heroic ascesis as an ethico-political principle is self-defeating. For if heroic ascesis is obligatory, then it cannot be freely practiced. And if heroic ascesis is not practiced in freedom, it cannot be ascetical, much less heroically ascetical. When the parabolic employer rhetorically asks, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?" he signals the importance of freedom for heroic ascesis. Without freedom, the employer could not have exceeded justice by providing a full wage to all his workers.

To understand the relation of freedom to heroic ascesis, we must take a closer look at the sort of freedom claimed by the employer in this parable. It is important to note that the employer invokes his lawful freedom in order to justify his actions that exceed justice and not in order to justify any transgression of justice. Having promised to pay "what is right" to his employees, he is lawfully free to grant more than a fair wage to his employees but not free to bestow less. The freedom at issue here is not an absolute moral freedom (i.e. the ability to do otherwise) but a freedom to do *more than is required*. It is the freedom to accept an excess of responsibility—to add to one's own ethical burden.

If heroic ascesis entails the freedom to exceed what is ethically required, then the inevitable question becomes "What is ethically required?" or "What are the minimal requirements for

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fulfilling one's ethical responsibility?" Here we are reminded of another of Christ's parables. When a certain lawyer inquires, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?", this man already understands that the two greatest commandments are to love God and your neighbor as yourself. Then we learn the lawyer's true question, which is not whether he should love others but the extent to which he should love others. The lawyer asks, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate that the love enjoined by the law extends even to our perceived enemies. In other words, ethical responsibility does not contain thresholds and limits.

Nor is the Good Samaritan parable unique among Christ's teachings. The same point is made over and over again. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ presents a radically rigorous interpretation of the law's prohibitions saying, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." It is not enough to restrain oneself from the physical acts of adultery and murder. Christ contends that lust constitutes adultery and animosity is no different than murder. For Christ, perfection is required. Nothing less is acceptable: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies…that you may be sons of your Father in heaven…you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5).

Thus there can be no question of exceeding what is morally required. No such freedom exists. Or, rather, no such freedom exists within Christian ethics. Contra Zizioulas, not only can heroic ascesis be made a principle of ethics, but it has always already been the fundamental imperative of Christian ethics. Indeed, Christ warns that he will judge humans based on a standard of heroic ascesis:

> And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and

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you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me"…Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me."[25]

In other words, Christ will judge individuals based on whether they imitate Christ's heroic work on the Cross. It is not a question of taking *enough* responsibility but of taking *full* responsibility.

Faced with such an impossibly high ethical standard, we may be tempted with dejection as was the rich young ruler. And, in astonishment, we may wonder—along with Christ's disciples— "Who then can be saved?" To which Christ responds, "With humans *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27). The ethical standard is impossible to achieve, yet it is still right to lament our inability to achieve it. In fact, this is the point of Christian ethics. Any standard short of impossible perfection produces self-righteous Pharisees rather than penitent publicans. Here again we see why Christian ethics is fundamentally concerned with penitence. Christ-like repentance is the standard which we cannot hope to achieve. Yet through continual, existential repentance, we are made worthy to receive the gift of eternal life.

Heroic ascesis can be—and is—an ethical imperative. But Zizioulas worries that if a particular society mandates heroic ascesis, then individuals will be obliged to take responsibility for the evil and suffering of the world and therefore become unable to do it voluntarily. The flaw with this logic is that it implicitly assumes that such a society could effectively rid itself of evil and suffering. But if we assume—as Zizioulas does—that humans can only practice heroic ascesis

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[25] Matt. 25:31-46.

imperfectly, then there is always room for individuals to take responsibility for the Other in ways that exceed that which is civically mandated. In this way, the freedom required for individuals to practice heroic ascesis is unalienable, regardless of the ethical principles that govern society.

Indeed, because civic institutions must address the infinite responsibility of heroic ascesis with finite resources, politics will always entail unfortunate decisions regarding the allocation of resources that will ineluctably benefit some more than others. Still, since heroic ascesis means taking responsibility for the evil and suffering of the world, social laws based on this principle would aim always toward assisting "the least of these." That is, politically mandated heroic ascesis would necessarily entail a "preferential option for the poor," as it is termed in Catholic social teaching. Heroic ascesis is less concerned with preserving the freedom of the individual to practice asceticism (because it is unalienable) and more concerned with restoring an existential freedom to those most burdened with evil and suffering. Ultimately, then, heroic ascesis may be seen as the Orthodox answer to Western forms of liberation theology.

c. Heroic Ascesis and Secularization

For many Orthodox theologians, liberation theology represents a dangerous tendency towards secularization—or the reduction of transcendence to immanence. Much of the trouble stems from liberation theology's sympathy for Marxist ideas.[26] But as we have seen, a preferential option for the poor and oppressed arises organically from Zizioulas's notion of Christ-like ascesis.

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[26] "A crucially important reason that modern Orthodox thinkers did not give any great weight to poverty and injustice in their theological output was Orthodoxy's visceral distaste for Marxism. In one of history's greatest ironies, 'Marxism'—growing theoretically from a concern for human beings and their universal flourishing, became practically associated with regimes that were among the most murderous and oppressive known to modernity. As a result, the mere utterance of expressions associated with Marxism or Socialism, such as 'social justice' and 'the social

Zizioulas himself, however, does not draw this connection. Instead, the Metropolitan argues that the Church must resist the temptation to engage in the political sphere lest it become one more secular institution bent on fulfilling its own vision of social progress. Zizioulas reasons:

> The Church is transcendent of secular institutions, so it does not compete with them. As a sign of the limits and transience of all institutions, the Church prevents every worldly claim from becoming totalitarian…[T]he Church can live in the world without becoming absorbed into organized social outreach or into politics, just as it can without retreating into quietism.[27]

In short, "the Church can never coincide with society; she lives *in* the world but she is not *of* the world (John. 15:16)."[28]

Unfortunately, this notion of being in the world but not of the world has become a popular refrain for sectarian Christians who set themselves in opposition to all worldly concerns. Jennifer McBride points out that "the popular formula that Christians are *in* the world but *not of* the world [is] a pithy saying that nevertheless risks neglecting the central Christological point that Christ and the church exist *for* the world."[29]

But as important as it is to remember that Christ and the Church exist for the sake of the world, we must also keep in mind that the world exists for the sake of Christ and the Church. Christ tells us that the Law of Moses is for humans, not humans for the Law (Mark 2:27). In other words, ethics is for humans, not humans for ethics; repentance is for humans, not humans for repentance.

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gospel,' carried (and still carry) the most repulsive stench among many Orthodox." Peter Bouteneff, "Liberation: Challenges to Modern Orthodox Theology from the Contextual Theologies," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 63, no. 3–4 (2012): 30. See also Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*, trans. Gregory Edwards, Doxa and Praxis, Exploring Orthodox Theology Series (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012), 65–77.

[27] Zizioulas, *Lectures*, 127.

[28] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 87.

[29] Jennifer McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91.

Conversely, the Sacraments are not for humans, but humans for the Sacraments. This becomes clearer when we put it in terms of eschatology and history. The eschatological kingdom is not for the world but the world for the eschatological Kingdom. Again, the eschatological Church is not for the historical Church, but vice versa. This means the Eucharist is not created for humans, but humans for the Eucharist. Or, finally, we may say that ontological communion is not for humans, but humans are for ontological communion.

McBride is right to worry that the "in the world but not of the world" axiom "risks misconstruing Jesus's words as a call for Christians to endure existence in the fallen world rather than actively embrace this-worldly living through Christ."[30] Yet Zizioulas is also right to worry that an emphasis on Christ and the Church *pro nobis* runs the risk of reducing the transcendent aspect of the Church to purely immanent concerns. In short, Zizioulas is worried about what Charles Taylor calls immanentization. But Zizioulas reacts too strongly against this danger, swinging the pendulum back in the opposite direction.

A purely immanent Church cannot affirm that we are created for transcendent deification, and a purely eschatological Church cannot but render Christian ethics inconsequential. Thus while it is true that the Church is transcendent to transient institutions and cannot be strictly identified with any worldly agenda, it is not the case that the Church can exist in the world without being immersed in social and political concerns.

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[30] Ibid., 241n18.

VII.   Immanentism and Constantinianism

According to Taylor, immanentization, as a product of modernity, has unfolded in four phases. First, Enlightenment philosophers like Adam Smith and John Locke focused on God's providence at work in mundane human affairs rather than a grand narrative of cosmic salvation. Instead of orienting humans beyond their immediate desires and comforts, modern philosophers began to define *homo sapiens* as *homo economicus*. In this first phase, "God's goals for us shrink to the single end of our encompassing this order of mutual benefit he has designed for us."[31]

In the second phase, having determined that God's providential plan is discernable by human reason, modernity concludes that human effort is sufficient to realize the fullness of God's plan, i.e. without reliance on supernatural grace. Resulting from this "providential *deism*," the third phase of immanentization is described as a loss of mystery, which eventually leads to the final phase wherein we lose any notion of human transformation that exceeds what is attainable through individual and social improvement. Immanentization culminates in a rejection of ontological communion with the Trinity in favor of moral similitude with the divine.[32]

John Howard Yoder identifies a similar shift that occurs much earlier. For Yoder, the conversion of Rome to Christianity marks the same sort of corruption of Christianity as the shift from medieval to modern culture. Taylor and Yoder both harbor a certain nostalgia for bygone eras of the Church which were corrupted by cultural forces. Taylor criticizes the immanentism of modernity in comparison to medieval culture, and Yoder blames the rise of "Constantinianism"

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[31] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 221.
[32] Ibid., 177–229; Cf. James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 48–51.

for all subsequent compromises the Church has made for the sake of political power and influence.[33]

Despite this basic agreement on the corrupting influence of secular culture, Taylor and Yoder offer competing and incompatible views of the Church's role in society. Taylor's optimistic hope for (re)integrating Christian values into society carries forward Reinhold Niebuhr's vision of Christian realism.[34] Like Niebuhr, Taylor has no illusions of (re)establishing Christendom. Instead, he focuses on the virtue of humility in dealing with social problems. Christianity may not be able to solve the world's problems, but Christian principles provide an effective way of dealing with evil and suffering.

In contrast, Yoder was one of Niebuhr's greatest critics.[35] For Yoder, it is naïve to think that Christianity can be unproblematically aligned with any sort of political power. He argues that "Constantinianism" is an ancient heresy that now dominates American Christianity. The purity of the Gospel was lost when Constantine usurped the Cross as a symbol of worldly power. Niebuhr counters that pacifism offers a naïve reading of the Gospel that renders Christianity irrelevant in a world dominated by violence. But Yoder maintains that Christianity can only be relevant to society if it does not compromise its values.

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[33] See, e.g., John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 135–47.

[34] "The ethic of Jesus does not deal at all with the immediate moral problem of every human life—the problem of arranging some kind of armistice between various contending factions and forces. It has nothing to say about the relativities of politics and economics, nor of the necessary balances of power which exist and must exist in even the most intimate social relationships. The absolutism and perfectionism of Jesus's love ethic…has only a vertical dimension between the loving will of God and the will of man." Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 23–24.

[35] See, e.g., John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1968), 16–22.

The Niebuhr-Yoder debate is a paradigmatic example of the secularist-sectarian divide in Christian ethics. But if we take seriously Taylor's immanentization thesis, then the two sides appear much closer than they imagine. The reason Niebuhr and Yoder seem so disparate is because they have both immanentized Christian ethics. As Taylor argues, immanentism encourages us to draw "an unambiguous boundary between the pure and the impure."[36] But, then, using Taylor's own logic, it seems reasonable to conclude that Taylor's criticism of immanentism is itself implicated in immanentism.

Similarly, Alexander Sider alleges that Yoder's condemnation of Constantinianism engages in the same sort of "totalizing discourse" as Constantinianism itself. Sider suggests that "the resources one has by which to see oneself out of Constantinianism will themselves likely be implicated in Constantinianism."[37] Hauerwas—the heir to Yoder's anti-Constantinian theology— is convinced by Sider's conclusion that Constantinianism is virtually unavoidable. He admits that "the very narration of Constantinianism as apostasy reproduces a Constantinian view of history."[38] Hauerwas therefore concedes that he and Yoder remain Constantinian to some degree.[39]

VIII. Apophatic Ethics and Communion

If criticisms of immanentism and Constantinianism cannot escape the trap of totalizing discourse, then we are left to wander whether any ethico-political discourse can avoid totalitarian modes of

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[36] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 769.

[37] J. Alexander Sider, *To See History Doxologically: History and Holiness in John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 120.

[38] Stanley Hauerwas, "How (Not) to Be a Political Theologian," in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 263.

[39] Ibid., 263–64.

thought. However, while this concern to avoid all forms of totalitarianism became a central theme in ethics and politics in the wake of the atrocities of the twentieth century, totalizing discourse in theology has long been rejected.

Against the dominant forms of Greek philosophy, which held to monistic cosmologies, the Fathers maintained that God was both absolutely immanent and absolutely transcendent. Consequently, they distinguished between knowledge of God *ad intra* (*theologia*) and knowledge of God *ad extra* (*economia*). Concerning the latter, we may speak *kataphatically*. God reveals himself to be many things, including good, wise, and merciful. But these attributes apply to God only insofar as God stands in relation with the world. The attributes of God belong solely to the economic Trinity of persons who create and redeem the world. It is not at all clear how these attributes could apply to the internal relations among the mutually indwelling Father, Son, and Spirit. Thus, *kataphatic* assertions about the "God for us" must be balanced with *apophatic* negations concerning the Trinity *is se.*

In sum, *apophatic* theology is meant to guard against immanentism. A wholly immanent God is wholly knowable and therefore reducible to human concepts. And, as Taylor acknowledges, such a reduction of the transcendent to the immanent amounts to idolatry.[40] For if God can be conceptualized, or essentialized, then the limits of human cognition become synonymous with God's own limits. God becomes a creation of humanity rather than vice versa.

But Taylor demonstrates that immanentism is not only a theological problem. It is also an ethical problem. If immanentization reduces God to a human creation, it likewise inscribes ethics

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[40] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 769.

"within the limits of reason alone." Thus, immanentization leads not only to idolatry but also to nomolatry.[41]

The Fathers of the Church, however, do not seem as concerned with nomolatry as with idolatry. We do not find in patristic thought an explicit tradition of *apophatic* ethics that corresponds to *apophatic* theology. Nevertheless, there is an implicit *apophatic* ethics in patristic tradition that prioritizes humility, repentance, and responsibility for the Other. Zizioulas identifies this patristic theme as heroic ascesis, but he refuses to develop it into an ethical system for reasons addressed above. Furthermore, such an ethics cannot be expounded along the same lines as other ethical systems. An *apophatic* ethics, by definition, must renounce principles that fund ethical certitude.

Christos Yannaras—whose work significantly influenced Zizioulas—develops a sort of *apophatic* ethics by criticizing ethical objectivity. Not unlike Sider, Yannaras claims that objectivity provides the necessary conditions for totalitarianism. Yannaras claims that

> Totalitarianism is not the exclusive characteristic of certain political regimes, parties or organizations which manifest it more or less undisguisedly…The basis on which the historical and cultural life of the West has been built is the objectification of truth, the identification of truth with a particular function of human logic…When truth becomes "objective," this leads to the "infallibility" of its representatives and interpreters, of the bureaucratic structures which ensure it

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[41] "Modern liberal society tends toward a kind of 'code fetishism' or nomolatry." "Code fetishism means that the entire spiritual dimension of human life is captured by a moral code. Kant proposes perhaps the most moving form of this. His followers today like Rawls, Habermas, and countless others carry on this reduction." "Nomolatry makes us unaware of the vertical dimension, and hence what is involved in changing ourselves." "The slogan of Dostoyevsky's revolutionaries is: 'no one is to blame.' Evil comes from the working out of certain social laws. Things just have to be reconstructed in order to make these laws work for us. Blame and guilt are part of the discourse of myth and superstition that we have to put behind us. The slogan of his heroes is: 'we are all to blame.' They understand that the recognition that we are all complicit in sin is the gateway to grace, and hence to the transformation which can take us out of the structures of evil." Charles Taylor, "Perils of Moralism," in *Theology and Public Philosophy: Four Conversations*, ed. Kenneth L. Grasso and Cecilia Rodriguez Castillo (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 5, 6, 17.

"objective" implementation. It is thus justifiable even to subjugate by force people who disagree with the visible authority of dogma.[42]

Individuals and groups develop mutually exclusive ethical systems, all of them laying claim to unbiased objectivity. For Yannaras, this is evidence that objectivity is a farce. Claims of objectivity are thinly veiled iterations of the will to power.

In contrast to ethical objectivity, Yannaras advocates the penitential activity of the Church:

> The Church accepts the sinner, the person who has failed, and transforms his failure into an event of communion through repentance. The ethical "paradox" of the Church, which makes her radically different from any system of ethics or social organization, is the way she renounces any objective, evaluative precondition for the individual's participation in the community…The event which constitutes the Church [i.e. the Eucharist] is the dynamic act of taking man up, in his failure, and 'grafting' that failure into the communion of saints.[43]

Here it is apparent that Zizioulas is following Yannaras when he insists that penitence—rather than piety—is a precondition of eucharistic participation.

But Yannaras, much like Cavanaugh, fails to distinguish the penitential social action of the Church from the iconic realization of communion in the Eucharist. He says:

> The eucharist sums up a mode of existence which finds its social realization in the asceticism of the Church…Asceticism is not an individual exercise of the will…but an opportunity for communion and an act of communion…One might venture to maintain, then, that asceticism, as a social manifestation and practical application of the Church's truth, represents also a radical moral, social and ultimately political stance and action…Through the correct functioning of the eucharistic community there is created a form of politics which serves the existential truth and authenticity of man, a form of science which gives reason and meaning to man's relationship with the world, and a form of economics which serves life rather than subjugating it.[44]

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[42] Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, trans. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 201–2.
[43] Ibid., 215–16.
[44] Ibid., 218–19.

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For Yannaras, penitential asceticism is not only a pre-condition for eucharistic communion, it is the social manifestation of eucharistic communion. The Eucharist not only offers a foretaste of the Kingdom but inspires society to realize the Kingdom here and now. And in fact, claims Yannaras, this eucharistic society was realized by the Byzantine Empire. It turns out, therefore, that Yannaras's criticism of ethical objectivity is actually a criticism of *Western* ethical objectivity. Like Taylor and Yoder, Yannaras ultimately cannot escape the dominion of totalizing discourse.

Nevertheless, totalizing ethical discourse is not as unavoidable as it seems. Jennifer McBride has proven this point in her recent work on political theology. McBride sets out to uncover a way for the Church to present a "nontriumphal public witness in a pluralistic society." Thinking with and beyond Dietrich Bonhoeffer, she discovers that

> taking responsibility for sin is the definitive activity of the church. Through confession unto repentance the church both recognizes the serious and comprehensive nature of its sin and, like Christ, receives God's judgement upon itself out of love for the world…Because the church's exposed sin is incorporated into the logic of witness itself, public engagement based on confession unto repentance resists triumphalism. An ethic of confession unto repentance manifests that God alone is righteous and thereby signals a totally new mode of being and doing good, which disrupts the prevalent presumption among [Christians] that the church is called to be the standard-bearer of morality in public life.[45]

Like Yannaras and Zizioulas, McBride concludes that the point of ethics is not purity from evil but taking responsibility for evil in imitation of Christ's work on the Cross. And because both the Church's own sinfulness and its failure to repent in behalf of society are incorporated into the logic of repentance, McBride is able to criticize totalizing and triumphalist ethical systems without generating one of her own.[46]

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[45] McBride, *The Church for the World*, 19–20.

[46] The influence of Bonhoeffer on Zizioulas deserves an extended study of its own. Nicholas Loudovikos often suggests the influence is significant. See "Christian Life and Institutional Church," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas:*

Unlike Yannaras and Zizioulas, however, McBride does the ethnographic work to demonstrate how heroic ascesis can be practiced in the world today. McBride is not interested in using Bonhoeffer's involvement in assassination attempts on Hitler as an example of taking responsibility for the evils in the world. She sees Bonhoeffer's life as an extreme case and thus not readily applicable to our everyday lives. Instead, McBride presents two case studies intended to represent the effects of living according to a principle of "confession unto repentance."

In the first case study, McBride details how a church community in Portland, Maine is attempting to unlearn the ways of life that have led to a willful ignorance about the environment and the world's vulnerable populations. McBride recounts how this community is collectively undergoing "continuous conversion to the life of Christ…and in response they fashion right relationships with the earth and with a population of Sudanese refugees."[47] Then in the second case study, McBride details the motivation and work of an inner-city hospitality house in Washington, D.C. For McBride, "the ministry's work may be viewed as an ongoing activity of repentance—a making right—as it fosters relationships and draws other people into its communal life together, connecting people normally divided by race, religion, politics, economics, social standing, geography, and culture."[48]

McBride's ethnographic studies are insightful and help us visualize Zizioulas's notion of Christ-like heroic ascesis in a particular context. Yet, when compared to Zizioulas's Eucharist-

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Personhood and the Church, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 126; Nicholas Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 76–80, 96; Nicholas Loudovikos, "*Eikon* and *Mimesis*: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and the Ecclesial Ontology of Dialogical Reciprocity," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2–3 (2011): 131n13.
[47] McBride, *The Church for the World*, 20.
[48] Ibid., 21.

centered notion of heroic ascesis, McBride's penitential ethics seems incomplete. Whereas Zizioulas speaks of heroic ascesis as the necessary pre-condition for eucharistic communion, McBride suggests that penitential ethics itself constitutes communion. Thus yet again, and in yet another way, we see a confusion of repentance and communion. This time, however, in contrast with Cavanaugh and Yannaras, communion is achieved independently of the eucharistic event.

The problem with McBride's penitential ethics is that the Sacraments play no role. More to the point, McBride's penitential ethics lacks an eschatological *telos*. Repentance is made an end in itself. Christ's penitential work on the Cross is emptied of its ontological content and reduced to its ethical effects.

In contrast, Zizioulas makes heroic ascesis one aspect of the Cross. For the Cross is meaningless apart from the Resurrection. The Christian life is characterized by repentance, but repentance is not an end in itself just as the Cross was not an end in itself. Heroic ascesis is for the purpose of the triumphant Eucharist just as the Cross is for the purpose of the triumphant Resurrection.

Now, if the triumphant Eucharist is somehow experienced or achieved in the extra-liturgical world, then Christian ethics becomes triumphalist in precisely the way that McBride seeks to avoid. However, as we have seen, Zizioulas claims that the eucharistic event is momentary and liturgically bound. Furthermore, the sinless perfection of the Eucharist has nothing in common with the penitential sinfulness that defines Christian ethics.

In sum, an *apophatic* ethics of penitential responsibility for the evils of the world requires a transcendent goal. It requires a *telos* because the Gospel does not end with the Cross. And the *telos* must be transcendent in order to prevent penitence from devolving into a triumphalist, totalizing discourse. This is why Zizioulas's distinction between morality and ontology is so

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important. Moral communion may be achieved through heroic ascesis. McBride, Yannaras, and Cavanaugh all explain this possibility very well, but moral communion is not ontological communion. Ontological communion—the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is transcendent to creation and thus transcendent to morality. Penitence brings about moral communion, but only the Eucharist can offer a foretaste of ontological communion.

IX.   Conclusion

In order to draw out the significance of eucharistic ecclesiology for Christian ethics, we must recognize that even though the Eucharist cannot be ethical and ethics cannot be eucharistic, the two are inseparable insofar as the Eucharist demands repentance and repentance is ethical. Eucharistic ecclesiology teaches the Church to engage the world penitentially, to see ethics as penitence, and vice versa.

The ethically engaged Church does not condemn sinners but stands in solidarity with them in recognition of a common affliction. Likewise, the Eucharist does not teach us how to live in the Kingdom but how far we are from the Kingdom. It demands that we live our lives in the manner of Abba Bessarion who upon seeing an ill-reputed sinner turned out of the church arose and joined him, saying, "I, too, am a sinner."[49] If we have come to accept that the Eucharist makes the Church, we must now learn that the Eucharist makes the Church repent.

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[49] Benedicta Ward, ed. and trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Liturgical Press, 1984), 42.

Concluding Ecumenical Postscript

Towards an Overarching Synthesis

In the Introduction, I claimed that Zizioulas is the heir of Florovsky's neo-patristic project, which occupies the middle ground between the traditionalist and modernist ways of Orthodox theology. I also claimed that my interpretation of Zizioulas's ontology and ethics opens up new possibilities for ecumenical encounter. Here, I will suggest the ways in which the former leads to the latter.

For Zizioulas, the fundamental divergence of Eastern and Western theologies does not entail a fundamental incompatibility. However, a synthesis requires more than a facile affirmation of a dialectical tension between the two. Juxtaposition is not reconciliation. A motivating premise of this dissertation, therefore, is that East and West are alike in their fundamental difference; they are mirror images of one another. Zizioulas puts it this way:

> Orthodoxy is often thought of…as a vision of the future or heavenly things without an interest in history and its problems. By contrast, Western theology tends to limit ecclesiology (and actually the whole of theology) to the historical content of the faith—to the economy—and to project realities belonging to history and time into the eternal existence of God…Orthodox theology runs the danger of historically disincarnating the Church; by contrast the West risks tying it primarily to history,

either in the form of an extreme Christocentrism…lacking the essential influence of pneumatology or in the form of a social activism or moralism…[1]

Whereas the East tends to subsume historical morality into eschatological ontology, the West tends to subsume eschatological ontology into historical morality.

In response to Zizioulas's diagnosis of this fundamental theological divergence, we face a choice between two general paths toward theological reconciliation. The first path attempts to revise the theological narratives of both East and West. It suggests that the very notion of divergent theologies is a polemical and *ad hoc* fabrication. Theologians of this ilk emphasize the continuity of the entire Christian tradition. They eschew reductive readings of Greek and Latin Fathers in order to demonstrate the complexity of each author and of the tradition as a whole.[2]

There is much to commend this first path of ecumenical reconciliation. Simplistic and reductive readings of the Fathers are certainly unhelpful. Nor is it helpful to construct a wall between, for instance, the Western theologies of Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory the Great on the one side and the Eastern theologies of Gregory the Theologian, Basil the Great, and John Chrysostom on the other. Mutual influence is undeniable. In a real sense, the Latin and Greek Fathers belong to a singular Christian tradition, regardless of any differences between and among individuals.

The problem, however, is that this first path toward ecumenical reconciliation is not so much a solution to the problem as it is a rejection of the problem altogether. Indeed, it is no coincidence that proponents of this path tend to dismiss the idea that the Palamite distinction

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[1] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 19–20.
[2] See, for example, A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

between essence and energies is already present in fourth-century Greek theology.[3] Western theologians often accuse the East of anachronistically reading Palamite theology into the Greek Fathers in order to fabricate a fictitious dichotomy. Conversely, Eastern theologians accuse the West of ignoring the nascent Palamism of the Greek Fathers for the sake of imposing a fictitious homogeneity upon the tradition. This first path, therefore, leads to an ecumenical dead end. Rather than helping us move beyond the East-West dichotomy, it only serves to spur the two sides toward deeper opposition.

The second path toward reconciliation acknowledges real differences between East and West and seeks to construct a theological system large enough to incorporate both ways of theology without reduction or remainder. As I described in the Introduction, Florovsky's path toward ecumenical encounter proposes exactly this. He claims that reconciliation cannot rely on a return to the theological past; it requires the incorporation of the past into a new "overarching synthesis."[4]

Zizioulas carries out Florovsky's neo-patristic program by proposing an ecumenical synthesis centered on the event of the Eucharist. Drawing on his early work on patristic ecclesiology, he argues that the Eucharist constitutes an absolutely unique event wherein eschatological being meets historically situated activity. In the Eucharist, ontology and ethics momentarily merge in an experience of *being as communion.* "The Eucharist," he says, "as distinct from other expressions of ecclesial life…manifests the Church not simply as something instituted,

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[3] See George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Augustine and the Orthodox: 'The West' in the East," in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 36-38.
[4] Georges Florovsky, review of *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, by Vladimir Lossky, *The Journal of Religion* 38, no. 3 (1958): 207.

that is, historically *given*, but also as something *con-stituted*, that is constantly realized as an event of free communion, prefiguring the divine life and the Kingdom to come."[5]

Zizioulas's attempt to synthesize East and West, however, fails to escape the Eastern proclivity that he seeks to overcome. Though he recognizes the conditions of possibility for an East/West synthesis, Zizioulas tends to devalue historical activities for the sake of prioritizing eschatological ontology. In Zizioulas's writings, the Eastern emphasis on the eschatological Kingdom remains central while the Western emphasis on historical morality remains marginalized. Nonetheless, I contend that Zizioulas's theology provides a basis for constructing an overarching synthesis of Eastern and Western ways of theology. In the forgoing chapters, I have attempted to think with and beyond Zizioulas—to re-think his ontology and ethics with any eye toward reconciling Eastern and Western ways of theology.

I.   Re-Thinking Ontology

When Zizioulas contrasts the personal ontology of the Cappadocians with the substance ontology of Augustine, it is tempting to hear a polemical argument directed against the West. On the one hand, some may find it advantageous to lump Zizioulas in with twentieth-century, neo-Palamite, Orthodox traditionalists in order to dismiss his criticisms of Augustine. And on the other hand, these same Orthodox traditionalists may wish to find common cause with Zizioulas's seemingly anti-Western views. I contend that both readings of Zizioulas is misguided.

Zizioulas does not, in fact, identify Eastern theology with personal ontology and Western theology with substance ontology. Nor does he follow the neo-Palamites in claiming that the

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[5] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 22.

essence-energies distinction saves the East from Western essentialism. Zizioulas argues that the Cappadocians invent a new ontology of personhood not in order to replace substance ontology but to complement it. In consequence of this ontological revolution, the relation between "being" and "act" becomes much more complex.

Athanasian theology identifies the immanent Trinity with the unknowable divine substance and the economic Trinity with the knowable attributes and activities of God. The problem is that the ambiguity of this distinction promotes more confusion than clarity. Modern Western theology tends to read Athanasius in a manner consonant with Aquinas's insistence that God is *actus purus*. This leads to problematic doctrines such as Rahner's rule that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa as well as Barth and Jüngel's claim that God's being is in becoming. Such doctrines effectively eliminate divine transcendence.

In contrast, modern Eastern theology tends to read Athanasius's distinction between God's substance and God's will as a nascent form of Palamas's essence-energies distinction. Nevertheless, Palamite theology fails explain how the divine energies can be fully distinct from the divine essence if the former are eternal and uncreated. Modern Palamism therefore faces a dilemma. Either the divine energies constitute a separate divine being (a real distinction), or the essence-energies distinction is merely nominal (a conceptual or formal distinction). On one horn of the dilemma Palamism is polytheistic, and on the other horn it is virtually indistinguishable from the doctrine of *actus purus* which it ostensibly rejects.

In sum, while modern Western theology has effectively rejected a strong sense of divine transcendence, modern Eastern theology has failed to provide a coherent philosophical defense of the doctrine. Whereas the West came to read Athanasius's substance/will distinction as either

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conceptual or formal, the East saw it as a real distinction. Neither of these readings is theologically defensible.

Following the logic of Zizioulas's theology, I contend that the fault lies not with Eastern or Western readings of Athanasius's substance/will distinction but with the distinction itself. Zizioulas argues that the Cappadocians correct Athanasius's theology because the Eunomian heresy had revealed its limitations. There is no need to rehearse the details of the Cappadocian response to Eunomius here. Suffice it to say that they (1) differentiated *hypostasis* and *prosopon* from *ousia* and (2) gave ontological priority to a person rather than substance.

To be clear, there is little evidence to suggest that the Cappadocian Fathers thought of personal ontology as distinct from substance ontology. Furthermore, Zizioulas himself only implicitly adumbrates a system of dual ontologies. But in fact, Zizioulas's reading of the Cappadocians only makes sense if the immanent Trinity exists as three persons apart from any common substance. Divine transcendence requires that the Trinity *ad intra* exist as communion without commonality. Indeed, according to personal ontology, the Trinity is all that exists.

In contrast to the immanent Trinity, the economic Trinity is defined by the attributes and activities common among the divine persons as they relate to creation. The economic Trinity is defined by its commonalities, which constitute the Uncreated substance in opposition to created substance. So according to substance ontology, God is defined by a relationship with creation. In other words, divine transcendence is impossible.

The distinction between personal ontology and substance ontology resolves the tension between divine immanence and transcendence in a way not possible with a single ontology. Furthermore, it operates as a sort of synthetic reformulation of typically Eastern and Western ways of theology. On the one hand it affirms the Western doctrine of *actus purus.* And on the other

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hand, it also allows for a complete separation of God's transcendent being from God's immanent activities.

This ontological proposal affects not only abstract doctrine but *praxis* as well. Recognizing that the identification of being and act in God has led to an emphasis on the process and progress of history, the East can better appreciate the forceful imperatives behind Western moral and political theologies. Likewise, if the West can accept that God cannot be circumscribed by the activities of the economic Trinity, it will come to appreciate the limitations of moral and political theologies.

II.   Re-Thinking Morality

If Zizioulas is right that the East is too focused on mysticism and the West too bent on moralism, it is certainly not because the former has no ethical tradition or the latter no mystical tradition. Nor is this critical observation a simplistic division of Christianity into contrary monoliths. Rather it is an observation of the difficulty of synthesizing the moral and mystical elements of faith. Typically, either moral struggles represent a stage in mystical ascent, or mystical experience prompts moral progress. And though counterexamples abound, there can be little doubt that modern versions of Eastern and Western theology prioritize mysticism and moralism, respectively. Regardless, we might say that the East/West distinction is a concretized shorthand for the mysticism/moralism distinction.

Zizioulas attempts to synthesize mysticism and moralism by way of eucharistic theology. He claims that the eucharistic event "makes the Church" because it marks the intersection of history and the eschaton. But in expounding this intersection, Zizioulas unquestionably prioritizes the mystical over the moral. The Eucharist is a foretaste of eschatological communion and

completely set apart from the struggle against evil that characterizes life outside the liturgy. Even though Zizioulas recognizes the tension between Eastern mysticism and Western moralism, his eucharistic theology does not fulfill his ambition of reconciling the two.

If Zizioulas's eucharistic theology veers toward mysticism, then Cavanaugh's eucharistic theology bends toward moralism. Indeed, this is precisely what we should expect if Zizioulas's diagnosis of Eastern and Western theologies hold true. Whereas Zizioulas makes the Eucharist an ahistorical taste of the eschaton, Cavanaugh reduces the Eucharist to a purely historical event. For Zizioulas, the Eucharist affects our being and but does not directly involve our actions. For Cavanaugh, the Eucharist affects both our being and our actions because the two are virtually synonymous.

Zizioulas and Cavanaugh offer profound insights in their respective eucharistic theologies. I argue, however, that neither theologian presents a fully coherent account of the Christian life. Zizioulas's Eucharist is mystical and eschatological; Cavanaugh's Eucharist is moral and historical. What is needed is a Eucharist that is both. I contend that in order to conceive of the Eucharist as both fully historical and fully eschatological without contradiction, we must employ two distinct ontologies.

According to the divine liturgy itself, the Eucharist serves a dual purpose. The Holy Gifts are distributed with the words "for the forgiveness of sins, and for life everlasting." On the one hand, the Eucharist belongs to a historical cycle of repentance and forgiveness. But on the other hand, as an eschatological event, the Eucharist offers a proleptic taste of the eternal Kingdom, which represents the end of history and its cycle of repentance and forgiveness. Furthermore, the foretaste of eternity, representing sinless communion with God and others, stands in judgement of the world to which communicants return after the liturgy. The perfection of the eschaton enables

the faithful to see with increasing clarity the evils that permeate their own lives and the world around them. Thus, while the eschatological Eucharist stands apart from history, it also serves as a spur to greater depths of historical repentance.

In this way, a theology employing two ontologies is able to unify the eucharistic theologies of Zizioulas and Cavanaugh. More generally, a dual ontological system also reconciles the Western emphasis on history and morality with the Eastern emphasis on eschatology and mysticism in a new overarching synthesis. The Christian mystical tradition is shown to be inseparable from the moral tradition without being reducible to it, and vice versa.

The ecumenical ramifications of this project, therefore, are not insignificant. Not only does the distinction between substance and personal ontology reconcile Eastern mysticism with Western moralism, but it also opens the door to a Christian ethics that balances particularism with pluralism. I call this Eucharist-centered ethics an *apophatic* ethics of penitential responsibility. In imitation of the crucified Christ, Christians are called to take responsibility for evil rather than sit in judgement of it. An *apophatic* ethics of penitential responsibility is less concerned with bringing about the good (or even the lesser of two evils). Instead it is concerned with the struggle against evil in all its forms. Consequently, an *apophatic* approach to ethics guards against immanentism and triumphalism. Such is the path toward a uniquely Christian ethics that is also truly universal and pluralistic.

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