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The Trinitarian “Trace” and the Divine Energies

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the concept of relation, as it lies naturally implicit within the whole of creation. We started with the different kinds of relationship identified by Aristotle and went on to consider the Trinitarian trace which runs through creation, ordering it in accord with God’s plan. Under the impetus of original sin, dramatic changes have occurred but the trace is still believed to exist, albeit in a hidden way. This concept of the Trinitarian trace was approached from the perspective of an Orthodox study of the divine energies as distinguished from the divine essence. Two different views were presented: the western, influenced by the concept of the filioque; and the eastern, where this concept is unknown. It was shown that the filioque introduces an ‘excess’ into the perfect and complete inner divine relations, whereas the concept of the energies, where no such ‘excess’ is implied, considers that the inner Trinitarian relations are known and can be participated in outside the Trinity.

Keywords

relation, Trinitarian trace, energies, essence, filioque.

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Relations. Relation is one of the ten Aristotelian categories and one of the four categories of being of Stoic philosophy. To denote relation Aristotle generally uses the term *pros ti* and the Stoics – *schesis*. Aristotle reserves the term *pros ti* for denoting relative terms – that is, things which stand in certain relationships. Instead, referring to relations themselves the Stoics speak particularly of man’s relations to other men, to God, and to objects. Plutarch attributes to Zeno the view that “virtue is one, and only differs in its relations (*scheseis*) to things according to its actions.”¹

In the patristic era the category of relation occupied a central place in the fight against iconoclasm during the eighth and ninth centuries. It had become vitally important at the time to clarify the exact relationship between the icon and its prototype, and between the ‘beholder-and-venerator’ of an icon and the icon itself. The notion of relation also plays an important role in patristic discussions of man’s relation to God, to our fellow men, to material things and secular values. The preferred term in patristic works is the Stoic *schesis*, not Aristotle’s *pros ti*. The Fathers who authored special chapters on the category of relation, such as John Damascene and Photios the Great, tend to use Aristotle’s expression *pros ti* for denoting a relative term, such as “master” and “slave,” and *schesis* in referring to relations themselves, such as “master of” and “slave of.”²

When using the term *schesis* the Greek Fathers paid more attention to the psychical relations and their binding character. Their most significant contributions can be found in their application of the notion of *schesis* to the moral and spiritual life. Besides a mere awareness of the existence of things or persons there is also an emotional or volitional human attitude towards such objects as money, material possessions, human glory, as well as persons. A binding relation begins as an interest in a thing. When this interest, called *prospatheia* (“feeling towards”), becomes strong, the relation to the thing is called *empatheia* (from *en* – in, and *pathos* – passion), and the particular emotion involved is called a “passion.” It has become a strong emotional identification with a person or thing. Then the relation (*schesis*) appears to be a sort of bondage or enslavement. The Greek Fathers teach the need of freeing oneself from such enslaving relations.³

¹ Pearson, A. C. *The Fragments of Zeno and Cleanthes*. London, 1891, pp. 173-174. As cited in Cavarnos, Constantine. *The Hellenic-Christian Philosophical Tradition*. Belmont, Massachusetts: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1989, p. 77.

² Ibid., p. 78.

³ Ibid., p. 79.

In the field of the Trinitarian relations, there is an absolute freedom from any subjection. While speaking about “the Son of the Father” or “the Spirit of the Father” the term *schesis* might be in use, but never in a sense of bondage. The term *pros ti* is more appropriate since it is less associated with the idea of subordination. It may have contributed to the formation of the word *prosopon* (person) and when it is used to denote the relations between the Persons of the Holy Trinity it excludes any notion of subordination.

The relation (*pros ti* or *ad aliquid*) in the thought of Aristotle-Aquinas is twofold: *real* and *of reason*. Real relation is the order in things themselves. Thus, for example, an effect is related to the cause on which it depends, a part to the whole, potency to act, and an act to its object. A relation of reason is an order that results from mental contemplation as, for example, the order of the predicate to the subject, and of species to genus. Real relation can be ‘transcendental,’ or it can be ‘essential,’ or ‘predicamental,’ as, for example, the relation of essence to existence and matter to form, or the relation of faculties, habits, and acts to the specific object.

Real relations are divided into *transcendental* and *predicamental*. A transcendental relation is of an order that is included in the essence of a thing as, for example, the soul’s relation to the body, that of matter to form, essence to being, an accident to its subject, a science to its object, etc. All these things have these relations by their very essence, and the transcendental relation lies *perdue* even when the term disappears. Thus a separated soul continues to be individuated by its relation to the body, which is to rise again. It is called transcendental because it transcends the particular predicament of relation and is found also in other categories, for example, in substance and quality – indeed there is scarcely anything that is not ordered to something else by its nature.

Predicamental relation, which is also called relation according to being (*secundum esse*), is defined by Aristotle as a real accident whose whole being is ordered to something else. This relation is not included in the essence of the thing, but it comes to the essence as an accident. It is pure order, only existing in reference to a term, as, for example, paternity, filiation, the equality of two quantities, likeness.

The real existence of these relations is certain, for, antecedent to any consideration of the mind and independent of anyone’s thoughts on the matter, two white things are really alike and this man is really the father of another. On the contrary, the relation of the predicate to the subject in a sentence is a relation of reason, which does not exist until after the consideration of the mind, and as the result of the mind’s activity.

The predicamental relation requires a real basis in the subject and a real terminus really distinct from this basis in the subject. This relation does not lie *perdue* after the terminus disappears, and this is how it differs from the transcendental relation. The basis of the predicamental relation is the reason for the reference or ordering. Thus, in the relation of paternity, the man who begets a son is the subject, the son is the terminus, to whom the father refers; the basis of the relation is generation since the reason why the father is referred to the son is the fact that he begot him.

Trinitarian relations in Aristotelian terms would seem to be of the predicamental character as, in the relations Father-Son, Father-Spirit, there is a real basis in the subject and a real terminus really distinct from this basis in the subject. However if one does not follow the doctrine of the *Filioque* – that is, the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son as well as from the Father – then the relation Son-Spirit does not seem to be of the same character as the two others. There is no real terminus in the relation Son-Spirit when the *Filioque* is rejected. All that can be said about this relation is that it has its origin within the relations of both Persons with the Father. This symmetrical principle of the monarchy of the Father imposes from the start an understanding of the triadic relations which is beyond what can be established by a rational logic. There is no genuinely Trinitarian relation if the third party is excluded. Therefore, any relational movement that starts from the Father must return to Him eternally in agreement with the Son and with the Spirit. The Father is both subject and terminus of the relations of the Trinity whereas the begetting or the procession is simply the basis in the subject of the relations Father-Son and Father-Spirit, respectively. However, such triadic-like relations, in which a third party cannot under any circumstances whatsoever be excluded, do not fit the Aristotelian scheme. The Trinitarian relation requires completion. It starts from within the Father as a source, it involves the Son as begotten from the Father, and comes back in the Spirit as processing from the Father. There is in the Trinitarian relations a complete relational plenitude.

The *Filioque* gives a different interpretation to the triadic relations. It agrees with the Aristotelian definition of the predicamental relation. A third party is not an essential part of such a definition. So difficulties might arise about the role of the Father in the Son-Spirit relation or the Spirit in the Father-Son relation or the Son in the Father-Spirit one. The relation Father-Son, for example, is complete in itself without involving the Spirit Who is processing from the Son and from the Father likewise. The Father-Spirit and Son-Spirit relations look the same in their basis and in their terminus. This may introduce a certain vagueness into the Father-Son relation as both its subject and terminus appear as subjects in the other

relations which complete the Trinity. It also introduces *an excess* into the “closed system” of these relations.

Within the Holy Trinity the Trinitarian relations must be self sufficient. God has made the world freely, under no kind of constraint, according to His goodness, and He wills that the world should know Him through Trinity-like relations. He relates to the world through His energies, or uncreated light, of which we will talk below. “All that we say positively (*kataphatikos*) of God manifests not His nature but the things about His nature”.⁴ St John Damascene takes up this thought of Gregory Nazianzen and renders it more precise, using expressive images of ‘movement’ (*kinesis*) or of the ‘rush of God’ (*exalma Theu*) in describing the divine energies.⁵ The Fathers apply to the energies the name of ‘rays of divinity’, penetrating the created universe.⁶

The word ‘energy’ is derived from Aristotle’s term *energeia* which is usually rendered in English translations of Aristotle as ‘actuality’ or ‘activity.’⁷ In Aristotle’s philosophy *energeia* is identical with form or determinate structure. *Energeia* is the opposite of *dynamis* or ‘potentiality,’ which is identified by Aristotle with ultimate matter, matter devoid of definite structure. Aristotle conceives God as pure form without any matter or potentiality, in other words, as *energeia*, pure actuality. He makes no distinction between God’s essence and His energy. However, there is a clear distinction between these two in the Greek Patristic writings. This distinction was particularly emphasized in the fourteenth century by St. Gregory Palamas and his followers, in opposition to the view of a Latinizing faction led by the monk Barlaam. For Barlaam, who followed the western philosophers and theologians, a real distinction between the essence of God and His energy or energies was inconceivable. In this they were faithful to Aristotle, regarding him as the infallible philosopher. Palamas and the other hesychasts, on the basis of their own experience, and in agreement with the Fathers such as Denis the Areopagite, Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian, asserted that although the essence of God is beyond the powers of the human mind to grasp, contemplate, or participate in, God’s uncreated, eternal energies can be contemplated and participated in as ineffable, suprasensible light – God’s glory, experienced as Divine grace. Instead, Barlaam and his fol-

⁴ Gregory Nazianzen. *In Theophaniam*, Oratio XXXVIII, 7, P.G. XXXVI, 317. As cited in Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Trans. from the French, first published in English in 1957. New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002, p. 73.

⁵ John Damascene. *De fide orthodoxa*, I, 14, P.G., XCIV, 860 B. As cited in *ibid*.

⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷ E.g., in *Metaphysics*, XII. 1072a5-33, 1072b 15-31.

lowers held that these energies are created, subjective phenomena (*phantasm*) produced in the human mind.⁸

If the uncreated status of the divine energies acting within the world is not acknowledged, then the above mentioned element of *excess* within the divine relations becomes the only means by which the world can relate to God. So when we study the Orthodox distinction between the divine essence and energies, we find that its denial inevitably produces an orientation towards the *Filioque*. Referring to Aquinas' theology of analogy, which is based on the *Filioque*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,

The likeness, the analogy of man to God, is not *analogia entis* but *analogia relationis*. This means that even the relation between man and God is not a part of man; it is not a capacity, a possibility, or a structure of his being but a given, set relationship.⁹

Such a relationship is supposed to be understood as analogous to the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son within the inner relations of the Trinity. If there is no procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son as well as from the Father, then there is no *excess*, going beyond the self-sufficiency of the inner divine relations and, therefore, no basis for an analogy of relation. In that case the relations of God the Trinity remain inaccessible for man even as analogy.

Palamas noted that the essence of God, being one and altogether indivisible, is never spoken of in the plural, whereas the uncreated energy of God is referred to by Orthodox theologians both as one and as many, as being "divisible indivisibly," like the rays of the sun. It is through the uncreated energies that we know that God exists, though not what He is. God's essence is above reason, incomprehensible. "This discussion helps us see that Aristotle's failure to distinguish between the essence of God and His energies resulted in the negation of God as a Creator and Providence, and the relegation of Him to a sphere altogether beyond human experience. In the West, it has resulted in Deism, Agnosticism, and Atheism."¹⁰

Western view. Introducing Augustine's statement that "when therefore we regard the Creator, who is understood by the things that are made we must need to understand the Trinity of whom there appear traces in the creature"¹¹ Thomas Aquinas points out:

⁸ Cavarnos, Constantine. *The Hellenic-Christian Philosophical Tradition*. Belmont, Massachusetts: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1989, p. 47.

⁹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Creation and Fall*. London, 1959, p. 37.

¹⁰ Cavarnos. *The Hellenic-Christian Philosophical Tradition*, p. 48.

¹¹ Augustine, Saint. *On the Trinity* (VI, 10). Trans. by the Rev. Arthur West Haddan, B.D. Online Edition by K. Knight, 2004. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>

“Every effect in some degree represents its cause, but diversely. For some effects represent only the causality of the cause, but not its form; as smoke represents fire. Such a representation is called a *trace*: for a trace shows that someone has passed by [from cause to effect] but not who it is. Other effects represent the cause as regards the similitude of its form, as fire generated represents fire generating; and a statue of Mercury represents Mercury; and this is called the representation of image.”¹²

He argues that in rational creatures, possessing intellect and will, the Trinitarian trace is found by way of image. In its own being every creature has a form in order to distinguish it from other species and determine its relations to them. Its being represents the cause and principle, thus showing the Person of the Father, Who is the “principle from no principle.” In having a form and a species, it represents the Word, and having a relation of order, it represents the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as He is love. Therefore Augustine says that according “as it is one individual,” and according “as it is formed by a species,” and according as it “has a certain relation of order” the trace of the Trinity is to be found in every creature¹³ and that “the whole united Trinity is revealed to us in its works.”¹⁴

How the Trinity is observed to be present in creation differs according to the perspective of any particular observer. For Augustine, it is principally the human mind that offers an image, albeit an imperfect one, of the triune God.¹⁵ Bonaventure, John Calvin,¹⁶ and Johannes Kepler,¹⁷ however, consider that it is in the entire cosmos that the image of God is to be seen.¹⁸ Bonaventure says: “The First Principle created this perceptible world as a means of self-revelation so that, like a mirror (*speculum*) or a footprint (*vestigium*), it might lead the human being to love and praise God

¹² Aquinas, Thomas. *The Summa Theologica*, Vol. 2, Ia. q. 45, 7. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Second and revised edition. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1921. See also online edition by Kevin Knight, 2003: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>.

¹³ Augustine. *On the Trinity* (VI, 10).

¹⁴ Augustine, Saint. *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans* (XI, 24). Trans. by H. Bettenson. London: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 457.

¹⁵ Augustine. *On the Trinity* (X, 12).

¹⁶ See Zachman, Randall C. “The Universe as the Living Image of God: Calvin’s Doctrine of Creation Reconsidered,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No.4, 1997, pp. 299-312.

¹⁷ See Kepler, Johannes. *The Harmony of the World*. Trans. E. J. Aiton, A. M. Duncan, J. V. Field. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997. The theme of the Trinity observable in the universe is also very strong in Kepler’s *Epitome of Copernican Astronomy*; see *The Fontana History of Astronomy and Cosmology*. London: Fontana, 1994, p. 323.

¹⁸ Panikkar’s scheme develops this notion further to suggest that not only humanity, but also reality itself has a Trinitarian structure – matter/energy, consciousness and transcendence/freedom. See Panikkar, Raimon. *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*. New York: Maryknoll, 1993, p. 121.

the artisan”.¹⁹ Calvin writes that “in the whole architecture of His world God has given us clear evidence of His eternal wisdom, goodness and power ... He shows himself to us in some measure in his work. The world is therefore rightly called the mirror of his divinity.”²⁰ Kepler “saw in the visible universe the symbolic image of the Trinity.”²¹ Indeed, for Kepler, God’s purpose in creation “was to create the most beautiful and perfect world that would reflect the divine image.”²²

That Augustine, Bonaventure, Calvin, and Kepler see God’s image in varying phenomena points to the cosmos and humanity as different images of the same God. Indeed, it is fitting that the image of the infinite God is conveyed in many different modes. It remains for humanity to “on the one hand <...> distinguish between the world that we see and the God whose image it is, and, on the other hand, there must be a similarity or analogy between the image and the God representing himself therein.”²³

It may be possible to discern images of the Trinity which are not literally threefold. We know of God’s triunity because of divine revelation, not because of observation. Augustine, Bonaventure, and Kepler perceived the image of God as itself tripartite. Yet as Australian scholar Denis Edwards has noted, it is because of God’s Trinitarian nature that communion is the fundamental ontological category. “Once the nature of God is understood as relational, then this suggests that the fundamental nature of all reality is relational.”²⁴ God’s image thus need not be recognised in creation only when a suitable triad is located, but God’s image is visible wherever there exists a reality grounded in communion, that is, in Edward’s words, “Being-in-relation”.²⁵

Central features of the Western Trinitarian doctrine are the unity among divine persons and their equality. It was firmly claimed by The Fourth Lateran Council, that the unity of the Godhead was not just a collective unity ‘in the way that many human beings are said to make one people, and many believers one church’. Rather it is the same ‘thing’, ‘that is divine substance, essence or nature’ which ‘truly is the Father, and is the Son, and

¹⁹ Bonaventure, Saint. *The Breviloquium*, II.11.2. Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1963.

²⁰ Calvin, John. *Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St Peter*. Trans. W. Johnston. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1963, p. 160.

²¹ “Kepler,” *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. C.C. Gillispie. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973, p. 307. Kepler likewise asserted that Man was created in the image of God, *ibid.*

²² Kepler. *The Harmony of the World*, xv.

²³ Zachman, p. 304.

²⁴ Edwards, Denis. *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999, pp. 26-27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

is the Spirit', 'That thing is not begetting, nor begotten, nor proceeding, but is the Father who begets, and the Son who is begotten, and the Holy spirit who proceeds, so that there may be distinction of persons but unity of nature.'²⁶ The interpretation of the *omoousios* (of the same substance) as a relation 'which links the persons closely while allowing them to be discernible with respect to a certain range of properties' gives an opportunity to get the right (i.e., a non-Sabellian) teaching that there are three distinct persons, not just three modes of operation of one person.

With regard to the equality one has to accept that "the Three are radically equal to one another; none is in a position of superiority over the others <...> all imply one another, so that none of them can be understood in a position of primacy over the others."²⁷ Such equality is necessary if communion and not substance is the nature of the Trinity. If one Person were superior, that Person would be the 'locus of divinity'. Equality among Persons ensures that the divine life is defined by mutual giving, not by the substance of divinity.

In the Western Christian tradition the doctrine of the Trinity is often articulated in two forms: *social* Trinitarianism which might stress the separateness of the persons and *relative* Trinitarianism stressing in a way the unity of the Godhead. The relative one is supported by the early Karl Barth in his "Church Dogmatics" giving the Trinity as simply three 'modes of existence' of one God²⁸ and Karl Rahner to whom the Trinity is 'the three-fold quality of God in himself', his triune 'personality'²⁹. Jürgen Moltmann opposes their views in his social Trinitarianism³⁰, although not giving an adequate account of what binds the persons of the Trinity together. Sympathizing rather with Moltmann than with Barth or Rahner Richard Swinburne, the author of a tetralogy on the philosophy of the Christian doctrine, offered a *moderate* form of social Trinitarianism, "one which stresses both the logical inseparability of the divine persons in the Trinity, and the absence of anything by which the persons of the Trinity are individuated except their relational properties."³¹

²⁶ Denzinger, H. *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 23rd edition. Freiburg, 1963, 803f.

²⁷ Cunningham, David. *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 111-112.

²⁸ Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*, Volume I, Part 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1975, ch. 2, pt. 1, 'The Triune God'.

²⁹ See, among other places, the short essay in his *Theological Investigations*, iv, 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise "De Trinitate"', trans. K. Smith. Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1966, p. 101f.

³⁰ Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. Trans. M. Kohl. SCM Press, 1981.

³¹ Swinburne, Richard. *The Christian God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 189.

Humanity can never fully comprehend the mystery of the economic Trinity, nor the dynamic of the immanent Trinity. As Boff writes,

Even revealed, the truth of the Trinity remains a mystery ever open to new efforts of human understanding, but finally an absolute mystery handed to us in freedom and love for our divinisation. This mystery is of the essence of the Trinity, and so will remain a mystery for all eternity.³²

Similarly, God's plan for the evolution of the universe remains beyond the grasp of humanity. We may never understand what role a particular species may play in the evolution of the cosmos. To emphasise the importance of a single component of creation over any other part is unwarranted.

Human existence relies firmly and absolutely upon the non-human creation, animate and inanimate. Indeed as each person of the Trinity can be understood as pointing outward to the other two members of the divine communion, each member of creation points to everything else in the cosmos. Just as it is with the persons of the Trinity, so too each part of the creation has a specific mission to fulfil. Thus both anthropocentrism and even an un-Trinitarian christocentrism are called into question when reality is viewed from a Trinitarian perspective. It is with humanity on earth as it is too with Christ in the Trinity: each is unique within the relations by which they are constituted, but not superior to them. Creation is, in the words Cunningham uses to describe God, "Relation without remainder".³³

Orthodox view. The main distinguishing characteristic of Orthodox theological methodology is its use of antinomy – oppositions of contrary but equally true propositions. There is for example the completely unreconcilable antinomy concerning the knowable and the unknowable in God. Accordingly, two theological ways – the positive and the negative – exist antinomically and there is no need to unify them or try to reconcile them for any purpose whatsoever. It was established by Dionisius the Areopagite that there are two ways by which God can be known: *positively*, attributing to Him the perfections which one finds in the created world: being, goodness, love, wisdom, beauty; and *negatively*, through ignorance, denying to Him as subject everything that pertains to the realm of being, and considering Him to be above any being, above everything which can be named.

³² Boff, L. *Trinity and Society*. London: Burns and Oates, 1988, p. 99.

³³ Cunningham. *These Three are One*, p. 165.

Reinterpreting the Thomist theory of analogy, Battista Mondin concluded that, in his teaching, names applied both to God and to other beings, if they are names of absolute perfections, are predicated according to the analogy of one thing with another. Since Aquinas' constant aim was to preserve the absoluteness of God he denies that any analogy between two things and a third, or many things and one, can be used. For such an analogy to be possible, the two or more things must be preceded by something else to which each of them bears some relation. Since nothing precedes God, but He precedes the creature, the above kind of analogical predication is not applicable to Him. On the contrary, according to the analogy between one thing and another, the same absolute perfection is predicated both of God and His creatures, not in the same way but following *priority and posteriority*.³⁴ "Analogy of one to another is fit for theological discourse since, on one hand, it safeguards God's absoluteness and uniqueness and, on the other hand, does not destroy the ontological consistence of finite beings."³⁵ This has provided a basis for the continued development of scholasticism in Western theology.

Those Western theologians who broadly received the Areopagitic tradition made different estimates as to what this antinomy of the two theological ways was worth. As we have seen, for Thomas Aquinas it seems to have no existence; the positive and negative ways are to be unified into a single way – that of the positive theology of analogy. The negative way simply means that all affirmations touching the nature of God must be understood in a more sublime sense (*modo sublimiore*). However, the great mystical dialectician Nicholas of Cusa preserves the whole value of that antinomy; these two ways remain irreducible for the human spirit, but their opposition is resolved in God.³⁶

Confirming that the antinomy between the positive and negative theologies has a real foundation in God, Gregory Palamas whose approach might be called *theology of antinomy* in place of Aquinas' *theology of analogy*, gives us a more precise understanding of Dionisius's dominant idea. Like, for instance, the antinomy of unity and trinity, which postulates a distinction between nature and persons in God, and all other theological antinomies – the antinomy of the two ways discloses to the human spirit 'a mysterious distinction within God's very being'. This is the distinction between divine immovable essence and God's movements, operations or

³⁴ Mondin, Battista. *The principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963, pp. 34-35.

³⁵ Ibid., as cited in Torrance, Alan J. *Persons in Communion. An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, p. 138.

³⁶ Lossky, Vladimir. *In the Image and Likeness of God*. Trans. from the French, ed. by John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001, p. 53.

energies.³⁷ Following Basil the Great, John Damascene and Gregory Palamas, Vladimir Lossky puts special emphasis on the fact that God goes beyond His essence, remaining the same God in His energies.

The energies are not the effects foreign to the divine essence; they are not acts exterior to God, depending on His will, like the creation of the world or acts of providence. They are the natural processions of God Himself, a mode of existence which is proper to Him and according to which God exists not only in His essence, but also outside His essence.³⁸

God is not bounded even by His essence and the divine energies do not exist only as a function of God's relation to what is external to Him. If the world were not created, God would be both within His essence and outside it, overflowing the essence in His energies. He is never diminished in His natural processions outside the essence. Palamas sometimes calls the essence 'superior divinity' in opposition to the energies as 'inferior divinity', although by no means indicating in the energies any diminishing of God. Despite the particular terminological resemblance to the Platonists, Lossky points out a basic difference: "essence can be said to be superior to energies in the same sense that the Father, the source of all divinity, is said to be superior to the Son and to the Holy Spirit". He also emphasizes that the distinction does not imply any separation or division of God into knowable and unknowable because "God reveals Himself, totally gives Himself in His energies, and remains totally unknowable and incommunicable in His essence."³⁹ According to Dionisius the Areopagite, there are two modes of existence in which God remains identical: sameness and difference (*to tauton ke to eteron*).⁴⁰ God is never limited by His essence and cannot be reduced to it. In order to emphasize that fact Palamas even prefers the word 'superessence' (*hyperousiotis*), borrowed from Dionisius.

When speaking of God, there is always, in the Orthodox view, the Holy Trinity. The energies can be designated by the word "divinities" only because they are proper to the Three consubstantial Persons as their life, power, wisdom, sanctity, which are common to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Flowing eternally from God's nature and being communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, each energy reveals to us the Trinity as a whole. Some efforts have been made, erroneously and without reference to Orthodox teaching, "to improve" palamism and make it more suitable for the purposes of ecumenical dialogue. Such is, for example, a proposal by

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 54.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁴⁰ Dionisius the Areopagite. *De divinis nominibus*, 9, 1; P.G. 3, col. 909B.

Michael Ipgrave to “develop a theory of Trinitarian appropriation whereby particular energies were understood as expressive of particular hypostases”⁴¹. While rightly considering that a Palamite study of *enhypostasia* would be “a more fruitful basis for a theology of appropriation than the rather arid assignation of various *attributa* set out in Latin scholasticism”⁴², his suggestion that wisdom, for example, would be associated with the Logos and life with the Spirit reveals a lack of understanding that, since it is always the one God, the energies reveal the Trinity as a whole. They are never to be associated with any particular hypostasis but act outside *apophatic* immovable essence as its *kataphatic* (positive way of knowing God) completion.

It often escapes our attention that there is no single right way to embody our real experience of God in words or expressions. But a balanced approach is possible because the possibility of divine revelation is always open. God Himself wants us to know about Him. He steps forward towards man through the active energies that characterise the Three Persons in their *perichoral* relationship. The divine essence with its energies is *enhypostasized* in the three divine Persons; hence, a hypostatic principle or mode of the relational being of God the Trinity is to be considered as the most important means of approaching the knowledge of God. *Enhypostasized* energy should not be understood as belonging to a particular hypostasis and separate from the other ones but as revealing the unity of the Three.

Evoking natural examples such as the sun with its rays when trying to show that energies of God are the same God in His movements theologians use the term ‘light’. “God is called light not according to His essence, but according to His energy.”⁴³ Introducing the concept of the divine light Lossky writes:

This light (*phos*) or illumination (*ellampsis*) which surpasses intelligence and the senses is not of the intellectual order, as illumination of the intellect, taken in an allegorical and abstract sense, often is; neither is it of the sensible order; however this light simultaneously fills reason and the senses, manifesting itself to the total man, and not to just one of his faculties <...> The *Hagioritic Tome* distinguishes: (1) sensible light, (2) the light of the intelligence, (3) the uncreated light which surpasses both the others equally.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ipgrave. *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, p. 298.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gregory Palamas. *Against Akyndynos*, P.G. 150, col. 823.

⁴⁴ Lossky. *In the Image and Likeness*, p. 58.

Related to the concept of the divine light, the doctrine of grace for Orthodox theology is founded on the distinction of nature and energies in God. Both St Gregory Palamas and St. Mark of Ephesus said that illumination or divine grace is not of the essence, but of the energy of God. Being something more than a mere function, grace is more than a relation of God to man. "Far from being an action or an effect produced by God in the soul, grace is God Himself, communicating Himself and entering into ineffable union with man."⁴⁵ On Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration of the Lord the light which the apostles saw belongs to God by its nature as eternal, infinite and existing outside of time and space. It has been revealed in the theophanies of the Old Testament as the glory of God. Each theophany actually proves to be a point of intersection of the divine and human, created and uncreated, temporal and timeless, spatial and spaceless. When taking place in time and space in the presence of a created human being, it reveals the timeless and spaceless uncreated glory of God. What we have to notice here is that there is a sort of impersonal matter such as water, fire, cloud, rock, vestment (of Christ) involved in each of the theophanies that ever took place.

Palamas insists on the possibility of seeing God with corporeal eyes. This caused his opponents a great deal of distress and seemed to everyone to be absurd. However we must be careful not to evaluate too easily as "absurd" everything which appears strange to our rationalistic minds - the major part of the Christian dogmas for example. Lossky argues that it is not so for God the Trinity Who lives in inaccessible Light and Who penetrates by His energies the created world which is the world of pure spirits as well as that of physical beings. God is as equally distant from and close to the senses as He is distant from and close to the intelligence.

We forget that this opposition between the body and the soul, this struggle of the flesh against the spirit and of the spirit against the flesh of which St. Paul speaks, is a result of sin; that the body and the spirit are in reality only two aspects of the human being; that our last end is not only an intellectual contemplation of God but the resurrection of the total man, soul and body, the beatitude of human beings who are going to see God face to face in the fulness of their created nature.⁴⁶

We might similarly understand the opposition between the created impersonal nature and human persons as being a result of original sin. Analyzing the relations within the impersonal universe as they are

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

understood in the perspective of the latest research in physics, we can begin to approach an idea of the relativity of the created world which is much more profound than the merely materialistic one. Relativity, or relatedness, can also be understood as a result of uncreated energies penetrating the world. Although the energies reveal the Trinity as a whole, they are, necessarily, characterized by their deeply relational nature. When he observes the universe man enters into personal contact with its impersonal reality, thus affecting it and making it possible for it to be considered as a creation of God. The uncreated Light of God pours out upon the universe as a whole, human beings included, and the same Light forms it into a unity due to the collaboration with the rediscovered image and likeness of God in humanity.