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Apophatic Character of Christian Creatology According to Vladimir N. Lossky

According to Vladimir N. Lossky, one of the most eminent Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century, the Christian doctrine of creation does not constitute something like a philosophical *preambula fidei*, but is a dogma of faith, since its subject is the God-Trinity, and the difference between the Creator and the creation is in its essence inaccessible outside the Revelation accepted in faith. This truth has a radically apophatic character, founded on the apophatic mystery of Trinitatis, presentation of which is the purpose of the present text. Therefore, issues such as *creatio ex nihilo*, the absolute freedom of the creative act, the Trinitarian character of creation, creation in the perspective of theosis will be examined in turn. The whole will be crowned with a synthetic recapitulation of the most relevant issues, exposing the profound apophatic nature of the Lossky's creatology.

Key words: Vladimir N. Lossky, creatology, apophaticism, deification, orthodox theology.

Introduction

The creation of the world and of man, as the de-divine establishment of the imperishable relationship between Creator and creation, in which, or in virtue of which, the creation is called into existence and becomes itself, appears as being omnipotently apophatic, and therefore anchored in the apophatic fundamentality of God¹. As Vladi-

¹ We adopt the following understanding of apophaticism: it is an attitude, not only cognitive but lifelong, of man/creation, according to which man/creation's access to God is always already possible "from within" His self-revelation-self-giving, in which man/creation is called to exist and continually transcend itself in a deifying union with God, in itself, in its essence inaccessible and unknowable, incomprehensible even at the highest stages of union with Him – which

mir N. Lossky emphasises, from an (Eastern) Christian perspective, “God is known in revelation as in personal relationship. Revelation is always revelation to someone; it is made up of encounters which order themselves into a history. Revelation in its totality is therefore; it is the reality of history, from creation to parousia. Revelation is thus a ‘theocosmic’ relationship which includes us. Not only can we not know God outside it, but we cannot judge it ‘objectively’ from outside. Revelation knows of no ‘outside’, for it is this relationship between God and the world within which, like it or not, we find ourselves. But in the immanence of revelation, God affirms Himself to be transcendent to creation. If one were to define as transcendent that which escapes the sphere of our knowledge and experience, one must say that God not only is not a part of world but even transcends His own revelation”².

This paper aims to outline the most significant dimensions of the apophatic character of creatology in the thought of one of the most important Orthodox theologians of the 20th century, and at the same time a radical defender of the apophatic character of Christianity and its theology³, Vladimir N. Lossky, without claiming to present the entirety of the subject of creation as seen by him⁴. This issue will be discussed in four parts: in the first we will look at the problem of *creatio ex nihilo* as a truth of faith, then we will analyse the absolute

guarantees the preservation of the ontological difference and otherness-self of Creator and creation. The constitutive ontological-epistemological-teleological relationship of man/creation with God results in the apophaticity of man/creation-they are for themselves, in their essence as creations, and even more so as creations aiming at deification, not fully accessible, cognisable and garrabled, and as such always more themselves outside of themselves in God than in themselves. Viewed in this way, apophaticism is more than negative theology, which is its cognitive element but does not exhaust it, after all, cognition is in the function of union, which transcends cognition. It is therefore a kind of “spirit”-dynamism of apophaticism, founding and embracing the whole of Christianity and its theology, moreover: the whole of created reality, whose mystagogue is the Holy Spirit – cf. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of Eastern Church*, New York 1976 – further MT, pp. 238-249.

² V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, New York 1978 – further OT, p. 31.

³ See R. Williams, *The Via Negativa and the Foundations of Theology: an Introduction to the Thought of V.N. Lossky*, in: S. Sykes, D. Holmes (eds.), *New Studies in Theology I*, London 1980, pp. 95-117.

⁴ The text is a modified and thoroughly reworked extract from an unpublished MA thesis, and then bachelor’s thesis (canonical bachelor’s degree) entitled *The Trinitarian Essence of Christianity as seen by Vladimir Lossky*, written and defended at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

freedom of the creative act, next we will show the Trinitarian character of creation, and finally we will raise the issue of the orientation of creation towards deification. The whole will conclude with a summary, in which the most relevant intuitions concerning the title issue will be collected and its apophatic character exposed.

Creatio ex nihilo as a truth of faith

The creative act of God is the “beginning”, the basis and foundation conditioning all relationship between God and non-God, and thus creation. More than that, it does not only establish or make the relationship possible, but itself is a relationship, being the volitional relation of the God-Trinity to that which is different from Him. Lossky notes that

the world was created by the will of God. It is of another nature than God. It exists outside of God, “not by place but by nature” (St. John of Damascus). These simple affirmations of faith open onto a mystery of unfathomable as that of the divine being: the mystery of the created being, the reality of a being external to any presence of God, free in relation to His omnipotence, having an interiority radically new in face of the trinitarian plenitude, in brief the reality of the other-than-God, the irreducible ontological density of the other⁵.

In short, the mystery of the God-Trinity founds the mystery of creation⁶, the mysteriousness of which is founded on the relationship with the Creator and, in the first instance, on the creative relationship of God to His creation. Therefore, according to Lossky, we are not dealing here with a philosophical truth, but with a truth of faith⁷. Its constitutive components are, first of all, the *ex nihilo* of the divine *creatio* and the absolute non-necessity, the freedom of the creative *actio Dei*.

“Christianity alone, or more precisely, the Judaeo-Christian tradition, knows the notion of absolute creation. Creation *ex nihilo* is the

⁵ OT, p. 51. “We might say that by creation *ex nihilo* God ‘makes room’ for something which is wholly outside of Himself; that, indeed, He sets up the ‘outside’ or nothingness alongside of His plenitude”, MT, p. 92.

⁶ Cf. MT, p. 91. This is precisely why E. Jüngel described God as the mystery of the world, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, Tübingen 1977.

⁷ Lossky views the creation of the world primarily, if not exclusively, from the perspective of deification, being convinced that only in the context of this unifying orientation-transformation can the entire scientific and philosophical discourse on *creatio* find its fulfillment.

dogma of faith”⁸, “for outside revelation nothing is known of the difference between the created and the uncreated, of creation *ex nihilo*, of the abyss which has to be crossed between the creation and the Creator”⁹. The biblical expression and at the same time the basis, of this truth of faith is seen by Lossky particularly in the following words from 2 Maccabees: “Behold the heavens and the earth, and seeing all that is there, you will understand that God has created it from nothing’ (ἐκ οὐκ ὄντων, according to the translation of the Septuagint)”¹⁰. Commenting on the translation of the Septuagint, Lossky draws attention to the linguistic procedures employed in this passage, contrary to the rules of grammar, but ‘understandable’ if we remember that we are dealing here with an attempt to utter the unspeakable, something that human language is incapable of encompassing, since it itself is a derivative of¹¹.

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The nothingness of creations is as mysterious and unimaginable as the divine Nothingness of apophatic theology. The very idea of absolute nothingness is contradictory and absurd: to say the nothingness exists is a contradiction in terms; to say that it does not exist is to state pleonasm, at least unless we are trying awkwardly to express, in this way, the idea that nothing exists outside God; that, indeed, there is no such thing as “outside God”. Yet creation *ex nihilo* does mean just such an act producing something which is “outside of God” – the production of

⁸ OT, 51. See in this context the very relevant remarks of K. Barth, *Dogmatik im Grundriss*, Zollikon-Zürich 1947, pp. 57-58.

⁹ MT, p. 32. Of course, Islam, too, has an absolute concept of what is created in its *ex nihilo*, but if one remembers the Judeo-Christian roots of Islam (despite all the criticism it makes of it, claiming that both Judaism and Christianity have perverted the original Revelation) then one must recognise, that we remain essentially within the same vision of the world understood in terms of a creation that is not God (not to get into the further complexity of the often different interpretations of this basic given, or rather the consequences that follow from it, after all, the understanding of creation in its *ex nihilo* depends to a large extent on the conception of God as Creator according to the principle of *aggere sequitur esse*, hence creation seen through the lens of the Trinity is ultimately not fully the same as that seen from the perspective of Judaic or Islamic monotheism, bearing in mind also the differences between these monotheisms).

¹⁰ OT, p. 51.

¹¹ „If one remembers that οὐκ is a radical negation which, by contrast with the other adverb of negation, μή, leaves no room for doubt, and that is here used systematically against the rules of grammar, one can measure the total implication of the expressions: God has not created starting from something, but starting with what is not, from ‘nothingness’”, OT, p. 51.

an entirely new subject, with no origin of any kind either of the divine nature or in any matter or potentially of being external to God¹².

Lossky emphasises in this connection that to arrive properly at the revealed truth of creation out of nothing, an inverted apophaticism, a kind of *à rebours* apophaticism, is necessary¹³.

The absolute freedom of the creative act

Since the creative act is the result of the will and not the nature of God¹⁴, and therefore comes from His absolute freedom, upon which the existence of all created entities is grounded¹⁵, this inverted apophaticism of creation *ex nihilo* is therefore based on the apophaticism of the mystery of God Himself. In other words, the existence of anything “outside” God is founded solely on His will:

Creation is therefore a free act, a gratuitous act of God. It does not respond to any necessity of divine being whatever. Even moral motivations which are sometimes attributed to it are platitudes without importance: the God-Trinity is plenitude of love; It has no need of another to pour out Its love, since the other is already in It, in the circumincession of the hypostases. God is therefore creator because He wishes it thus: the name of creator is secondary in relation to the three names of the Trinity. God is eternally Trinity. He is not eternally creator, as Origen believed [...]¹⁶.

When Lossky emphasises that God is not eternally creator, as He is eternally Trinity, he is not concerned with any distinctions in the key of time-eternity or changeability-unchangeability, since they are adequate only from the perspective of created being, while the living God in His eternity transcends them, hence Lossky again appeals to apophatic optics¹⁷. This procedure is intended to indicate the absolute non-necessity of creation and the impossibility of apprehending it from the side of creation in a positive way, thus “from the place” of

¹² MT, 92. On the impossibility of any reflection on nothingness in the absolute sense, which annihilates all thought about it see OT, 54. The paradox of the impossibility of thinking and speaking about nothingness is encapsulated by M. Heidegger in a brief yet eloquent statement: “Das Nichts selbst nichtet”, *Was ist Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main 1986, p. 34.

¹³ Cf. MT, p. 91.

¹⁴ Cf. MT, p. 93.

¹⁵ MT, p. 93.

¹⁶ OT, p. 52-53.

¹⁷ Cf. OT, p. 63.

God “before creation”. Apophasis is an approach that preserves the unshakeable unconditioned Divinity of the God-Trinity as independent of whether creation is or is not. The God-Trinity is the God-Trinity, nothing is gained or lost as a result of the existence of creation or because of its absence. Creation, on the other hand, is radically in all its dimensions conditioned by being a creation, better: being created by the will of God. “The very being of God is reflected in the creation and calls it to share in His divinity. This call and possibility of responding to it constitute for those who are within creation the only justification of the latter”¹⁸.

Creation understood in this way is not found in other religions or metaphysical systems, whose doctrines can, with great simplification, be reduced on this point to two views: some form of demiurgic shaping of the world from primordial building blocks, or some variant of the divine process¹⁹. The Christian faith, therefore, sees the creative act as “a work which has had a beginning; and a beginning presupposes

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¹⁸ Cf. OT, p. 53. In this context Damascenus contrasts the volitional and temporal creation of the world with the eternal birth of the Word in God, which is an act of nature, cf. Joannes Damascenus, *De fide orthodoxa*, I, 8, PG 94, 813 A. Losski is aware of the difficulty of thinking of creation as a completely free act, especially in the context of contamination by sin: “If the idea of creation as a totally free act embarrasses us, it is because our thought, being vitiated by sin, identifies liberty and license. God therefore seems to us a whimsical tyrant. But if for us liberty, when it does not adhere to the laws of creation within which we find ourselves, is an evil licence which disintegrates being, for God, who transcends creation, liberty is infinitely good: it gives rise to being. In creation, indeed, we recognize order, finality, love—all the very opposite of the license. The qualities of God, which have nothing to do with our dissolute pseudo-liberty, here manifest themselves”, OT, p. 53. Thus, Lossky seems to emphasise that when speaking of creation as founded solely on the will of God, this is not to be understood as if the divine will were separate from God’s other qualities, but the creative act is to be grasped in the entire integrity of God’s action. It is God who is the will, and not the will who is God – let us remember, at the same time, that according to our author, God is not defined-limited by His attributes, hence the will is situated in God at the level of energy, not nature, according to the patristic-palamic model, or in the case of Lossky, the neo-palamic model, which, while not recognizing the non-complexity, the simplicity of God, distinguishes “in” Him: Three Divine Persons, one divine nature and eternal, uncreated divine energies, eternal and uncreated divine glory, see MT, pp. 67-90. On this concept and its problematic nature in Lossky’s thought see A. Papanikolaou, *Divine energies or divine personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on conceiving the transcendent and immanent God*, “Modern Theology” 2003, Vol. 19, pp. 357-385.

¹⁹ See OT, 51-52.

a change, the passage from not-being into being”²⁰. Hence, the divine *creatio* itself also defines the mode of existence of creation:

The creation is thus, by virtue of its very origin, something which changes, is liable to pass from one state into another. It has no ontological foundation either in itself (for it is created from nothing), nor in the divine essence, for in the act of creation God was under no necessity of any kind whatever. There is, in fact, nothing in the divine nature which could be necessary cause of the production of creations: creation might just as well not exist. God could equally well not have created [...]”²¹.

However, creation, which is ultimately the realisation of God’s will²², in spite of its contingency and non-necessity, began and will never cease to exist, and death and decay are not to be seen as annihilation – the perpetuity of God’s Word and the immutability of his will are the guarantee of the permanence of creation²³. While the creation of the world is not a necessity, after all the God-Trinity might not have created the world, for the creation appears as a created necessity of existence, and of existence forever, as a result of God freely making it so²⁴. In this, Lossky perceives, “the positive meaning of divine gratuitousness appears to us”. Interpreting this gift in terms of the poet’s generosity, and seeing in God the “Poet of the heavens and of the earth”, he points to a poetic way of understanding the mystery of creation, according to which to create is to call into existence that which is new, to take the risk of novelty, the apogee of which is the creation by God’s freedom of a new and different freedom²⁵. However, this novelty of creation cannot be seen as adding something to the fullness of God. It is necessary in this case to resort to analogical thinking, which takes into account the simultaneity of similarity and difference, for the creation

²⁰ MT, p. 93. It should be borne in mind that the category of ‘beginning’ in relation to creation, which presupposes a temporal optic, as well as speaking in a spatial way of the creature being ‘next to’ God, should be interpreted apophatically, in the knowledge that they bear the stamp of created conditions, after all, time and space are the dimensions of creation, creation exists in a temporal-spatial way, while God remains transcendent in relation to them – see OT, pp. 58-63.

²¹ MT, p. 93.

²² Cf. Gregorius Nyssenus, *In Hexaemeron explicatio apologetica*, PG 44, 69 A.

²³ Cf. MT, pp. 94.104.

²⁴ Cf. OT, p. 53.

²⁵ Cf. OT, p. 53. This refers to the creation of personal beings, angels and humans, in their relation to the whole cosmos. A special place is given here, however, to human beings, created in God’s image, in order, in cooperation with God, to attain God’s likeness and to bring with them the whole creation into a deifying union with the Creator.

does not exist except in God, in His creative will, which at the same time establishes it as different from God, as non-God, and therefore precisely as a creation²⁶. In other words:

Thus the whole dialectic of being and nothingness is absurd: nothingness has no existence of its own (it would anyway be contradiction *in adjecto*); it is correlative to the very being of creatures; the latter are founded neither in themselves nor in the divine essence, but uniquely on the will of God. Stability, permanency for the creation is therefore its relation to God. In relation to itself it amounts to nothing²⁷.

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The Trinitarian character of creation

Creation, being a free act rather than a natural outpouring similar to the eternal radiation of uncreated divine energies²⁸, is proper to the personal God-Trinity in His one will acting according to divine thought²⁹. Lossky emphasises that “creation is the work of the Trinity. The Credo names the Father ‘creator of heaven and earth’, the Son ‘He through whom all things were made’, the Holy Spirit ‘creator of life’ (ζωοποιόν). The will is common to the three, and it is this that creates: the Father can therefore not be creator unless the Son and the Spirit are also creators”³⁰. Although creation is the work of the whole Trinity, each of the Divine Persons participates in it in its own unique way, so that one can speak of a trinitarian co-creation in which both the infinite unity and the infinite diversity of the *mysterium Trinitatis* are revealed³¹. Lossky concludes: “Here we have the ‘economical’ manifestation of the Trinity: the Father operating by the Son in the Holy

²⁶ Cf. OT, pp. 54-55.

²⁷ OT, p. 54.

²⁸ Divine energies are often described using the metaphor of light, hence the reference to radiation – see MT, pp. 217-235; V. Lossky, *The Theology of Light in the Thought of St. Gregory Palamas*, in: ILG, pp. 45-69

²⁹ Cf. MT, p. 94.

³⁰ OT, p. 53; Council of Constantinople III states: “There is only one God and Father, from whom all things come, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and one holy Spirit, in whom all things are”, N.P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Volume One Nicea I to Lateran V*, Washington 1990, p. 114.

³¹ See OT, pp. 41-42; V. Lossky, *Apophysis and Trinitarian Theology*, in V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, J.H. Erickson, T.E. Bird (eds.), New York 1974 – further ILG, p. 16.

Spirit”³². It is on this ‘economic’ operation of the Trinity, in which the Son is referred to according to his function in the ‘economy’ as Word-Logos, that the Greek Fathers’ interpretation of creation according to Divine ideas is based.

Every created thing has its “logos”, its “essential reason”. [...] Nothing exists which is not founded on the Logos, the *raison d’être par excellence*. By It has everything been made; It gives to the created world not only the order signified by Its name, but its very ontological reality. The Logos is the divine hearth whence fly the creative rays, the “logoi” peculiar to the creations, these causative words of God which at once raise up and name all beings. Every being therefore has its “idea”, its “reason” in God, in the thought of the Creator who produces not through caprice, but with “reason” (and this is yet another meaning of Logos). Divine ideas are the eternal reasons of creations³³.

The special “place” occupied by the Son-Logos in the work of creation arises, on the one hand, from his specificity as the Second Person of the Trinity, and, on the other hand, from his eternally divinely willed Incarnation³⁴, which is the summit of the deifying union of Creator and creation while preserving their distinctness³⁵ and, at the same time, in the Holy Spirit, the space of participation in that union

³² MT, p. 100. “In the order of the economic manifestation of the Trinity in the world, all energy originates in the Father, being communicated by the Son in the Holy Spirit [...]. Thus is it said that the Father creates all things by the Son in the Holy Spirit”, MT, p. 82. With reference to the Fathers, Lossky recalls the distinction between ‘theology’, whose subject is the Trinity in itself, and ‘economy’, which concerns its relation to creatures. According to this view, the divine uncreated energies, thus existing independently of the creation of the world, belong to the “theology”, while at the same time, by the will of God and not in the manner of natural eternal radiation, they belong to the “economy”, moreover, it is they who constitute it, or rather the Trinity present in them, cf. MT, pp. 81-82.

³³ OT, p. 56.

³⁴ See MT, pp. 136-139; see also V. Lossky, *Redemption and Deification*, in: ILG, pp. 98-99.

³⁵ According to the formula of the Council of Chalcedon, describing the relationship between the divine and human natures in Christ by means of four negations: “no confusion, no change, no division, no separation”, N.P. Tanner (ed.), *Decree of the Ecumenical Councils. Volume One Nicea I to Lateran V*, Washington 1990, p. 86. Interestingly, St. Maximus the Confessor, cited by Lossky in this context, made the Chalcedonian definition the basic metaphysical structure of reality and built his worldview on it – see H.U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus des Bekenntners*, Ensiedeln 1961. In Lossky, there is a reference to the first edition of von Balthasar’s 1941 book. See V. Lossky, MT, p. 99, note 1.

for the whole of creation³⁶. It must be remembered that this is possible and happens through the eternal, uncreated Divine energies in which the Trinity, inscrutable in its essence, is realistically and completely divinely present to its creation³⁷, whose “ideas” are found in the Son-Logos (not in the creations!), but at the level of energy – thus conditioning the various modes of participation in the energies³⁸ and not at the level of the essence of God- otherwise, the creation could not be a deificated, yet creation for ever, directly identical with God.

Thus, the apophaticism of creation appears to be founded on the apophaticism of the source Trinitarian antinomy³⁹, existing eternally in a wholly uncomposed manner simultaneously in the essence and outside the essence, and thus in the energies; the apophaticism of creatology is founded on the apophaticism of Trinitarian theology⁴⁰; and the whole of Christianity and its theology on the apophatically understood vocation of creation to union with God, to deification, to *theosis* of the Greek Fathers⁴¹.

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Creation in the perspective of *theosis*

Referring to the concept of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Lossky adopts a hierarchical vision of creation, according to which all

³⁶ See K. Kupiec, *Pneumatologicznie ukierunkowana chrystologia Vladimira Losskiego*, “Analecta Cracoviensia” 1985, Vol. 17, pp. 267-279.

³⁷ The Trinity is realistically present both in and beyond its essence and thus in eternal energies, cf. MT, p. 73; V. Lossky, *The Vision of God*, New York 1983, p. 157. They are the eternal, uncreated radiation of nature’s superabundance, and its creative presence, yes, accomplished in energies that are both in and out of all, is the result of God’s will, not the natural radiation of energies. The act of creation founds the relationship between the Divine energies and that which is not God in an entirely free manner, thereby establishing it and thus creating the creation, cf. MT, pp. 73-75.89 “This will has created all things by the energies in order the created being may accede freely to union with God in the same energies”, MT, pp. 89-90. The Eastern tradition, according to Lossky, places all the attributes of God, and thus also His will, precisely at the level of energies, cf. MT, pp. 80-81.

³⁸ Cf. MT, pp. 94-97. Lossky, referring to St. John Damascene, refers to them as “thought-will” or “volitional thought”, cf. MT, p. 94; see Joannes Damascenus, *De fide orthodoxa*, I, 10, PG 837 A.

³⁹ See M. Płóciennik, *The Source Antinomy of the Mystery of the Trinity as the Foundation and Hermeneutical Key of Christian Apophaticism in the View of Vladimir N. Lossky*, “Verbum Vitae” 2023, Vol. 41/3, pp. 713-734.

⁴⁰ V. Lossky, *Apophasis and Trinitarian Theology*, in: ILG, pp. 13-29.

⁴¹ Cf. MT, p. 9.

creations, though analogous to their mode of existence and therefore to their potentialities, by virtue of the creative act participate by divine will in divine ideas – “acts of wills”, “located” at the level of eternal divine energies⁴². It is clear that we are dealing here with an understanding of creation in the context of the central idea of *theosis*, hence Lossky writes: “Thus all creations are called to perfect union with God. The notion of creation in Dionysius is so close to that of deification that it is hard to distinguish between the first state of creations and their final end, union with God”⁴³. However, this first state must not be equated with the final state, but must be seen as an impermanent and embryonic form of perfection for two reasons: firstly, because of the unfulfilled freedom of the creation, which must attain union through cooperation in fulfillment of the idea-will of God⁴⁴; secondly, because of the limited, changeable, dynamic and yet transgressive nature of created beings, which have their end outside themselves, in God, who alone is beyond all movement and change, being an infinitely fulfilled “being”⁴⁵.

The question must be raised at this point as to how this approach is to be properly understood? After all, on the one hand, Lossky points out that the Divine energies are in everything, and thus, as it were, by virtue of the creative act, or rather in it, creations receive a share in the existence of the Trinity in its eternal energies, which is also, after all, their ultimate goal, and, on the other hand, it turns out that this share in the Divine energies is not, after all, this ultimate deification, and the creation must only strive for it. Although it seems that we are dealing here with an aporetic relationship between the Divine energies, i.e. uncreated grace and the creation, Lossky emphasises that any distinction between the original state of the creation and the state of participation in the divine energies is artificial, since it acquaints us with the fact that we are dealing with the totality of the process of becoming of created entities destined to become like God⁴⁶. Lossky also states that

⁴² Cf. MT, pp. 96-97; see Dionysii Areopagitae, *De coelesti hierarchia*, III, 3, PG 3, p. 168.

⁴³ MT, p. 97.

⁴⁴ Cf. MT, p. 97.

⁴⁵ Cf. MT, pp. 97-98.

⁴⁶ Cf. MT, p. 101. Even sin and the consequent need for redemption must be seen within this integral process-plan of God, yes, not as a part of it, but as an aberration, a negative side of it, arising from the free choice of personal creations, which, however, at most affects its further course and the means to bring it

the Eastern tradition knows nothing of “pure nature” to which grace is added as a supernatural gift. For it, there is no natural or “normal” state, since grace is implied in the act of creation itself. The eternal determination of the divine Counsel, the divine ideas cannot really be made to correspond with the “essences” of things which are postulated in the so-called natural philosophy of Aristotle and of every other philosopher whose experience reaches only to nature in its fallen state. “Pure nature”, for Eastern theology, would thus be a philosophical fiction corresponding neither to the original state of creation, nor to its present condition which is “against nature”, nor to the state of deification which belongs to the age to come. The world, created in order that it might be deified, is dynamic, tending always towards its final end, predestined in the “thought-wills”. These latter have their centre in the Word, the hypostatic Wisdom of the Father who gives expression to Himself in all things and who brings all things, in the Holy Spirit, towards union with God. For there is no “natural beatitude” for the creation, which can have no other end than deification⁴⁷.

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about, but not to alter the primacy of its very nature and the end to which it aims, that is, the universal deification of creation as the one fulfillment which Divine Love desires for its creations and which is to be realized through the wholly voluntary union of personal beings, angels and men, and through them the whole cosmos with God – cf. OT, 110-111; see also V. Lossky, *Redemption and Deification*, in ILG, 97-110.

⁴⁷ MT, p. 101; see also, MT, p. 241. On the dynamism of creation see J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York 1974, pp. 132-134. In the statements cited above, Lossky refers to the Western Christian conception of the relation of nature and grace, as already indicated by the use of the term “natural happiness”, especially to the theory of so-called “pure nature” (*natura pura*). The Western doctrine of grace and its relation to created nature was shaped primarily as part of the Augustinian confrontation with Pelagianism and then in dispute with the thought of the Reformers. Its basic formula was: *gratiam supponit naturam*. Post-Tridentine scholasticism this co-relation of grace Post-Conciliar scholasticism relativised this co-relation of grace and nature in the form of the aforementioned “pure nature” theory, according to which grace is not something “necessary” for nature (yes, grace is not necessary for creation and is a free gift of God – this is what the founders of the “pure nature” theory wanted to emphasise, but on a par with its existence, the very fact of creation’s existence is gratuitous grace), for it could have been created even without grace, which means that the order of grace is merely an incidental superstructure for the natural order, having no *de facto* effect on the identity of nature. The extent of the influence of this dualism of nature and grace was significant and, in a sense, became the basis of Western modern theological thinking (the theory of “pure nature” can still be found in Pius XII’s 1950 encyclical *Humani generis*), the consequences of which are still evident today – in the dualism of nature and grace J. Milbank sees the basic foundation and assumption of modern theology, cf. *The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy*, in: J. Milbank, G. Ward, C. Pickstock, *Radical Orthodoxy. A New Theology*, London–New York 1999, p. 35. A significant contribution to the process

What is more: Lossky believes that, the Christian East thinks inside the “created – uncreated” distinction, where the latter corresponds to what Western Christianity understands by “supernatural”. According to Lossky, uncreated grace in this context is the God-Trinity eternally present in His uncreated energies, making Himself absolutely freely present to His creation in order to deificate it. The finalisation of the original – and only, despite redemptive modifications – plan of *theosis* can be, as Lossky claims, be summarised as follows:

“God shall be all in all”, or (looping at it in the other way around) created beings will become by grace what God is by nature, to cite the bold saying of St. Maximus. This is the dialectic of the dominion of God in

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of overcoming this dualism was made in particular by the *Nouvelle théologie* headed by Henri de Lubac, although his most important book on the subject, *Surnaturel. Études historiques*, Paris 1946, appeared even before *Humani generis*. However, representatives of one of the most interesting theological projects of recent years, Radical Orthodoxy, believe that de Lubac did not fully overcome the dualism of nature and grace because he did not draw definitive consequences from his insights – see J. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural*, Grand Rapids 2005 – and their thought seeks to address the shortcomings of his theology and to redefine the non-dual hermeneutic of the relationship between grace and nature by recognising their complete perichoreticity. On *Radical Orthodoxy* see J.K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy. Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, Grand Rapids 2004. In connection with the above issue, attention should certainly also be drawn to the numerous works of the Polish theologian A. Zuberbier on the subject – of particular merit is his demonstration of the post-Thomas genesis of the dualism of grace and nature, which has no place in Aquinas thought and invoking it in this approach is unauthorised, see A. Zuberbier, *Znaczenie wyrażenia “nadprzyrodzony” u św. Tomasza z Akwinu*, “*Studia Theologica Varsaviensia*” 1970, Vol. 8(2), pp. 61-90; *Nadprzyrodzoność działania ludzkiego w wypowiedziach Tomasza z Akwinu*, “*Studia Theologica Varsaviensia*” 1971, Vol. 9(1), pp. 327-357; *Bóg ponad wszelką naturę*, “*Studia Theologica Varsaviensia*” 1972, Vol. 10(1), pp. 91-112; “*Nadprzyrodzone*” i “*naturalne*” według Tomasza z Akwinu, “*Studia Theologica Varsaviensia*” 1973, Vol. 11(2), pp. 75-97. Also noteworthy is the synthesizing work by Zuberbier *Relacja natura – nadprzyrodzoność: w świetle badań teologii współczesnej*, Warszawa 1973, presenting the history of this issue in the West with an analysis of twentieth-century theological proposals by, among others, de Lubac and Rahner on this issue. An interesting account of the understanding of the relationship between grace and nature in the East and West is presented in E.L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being. Natural Theology Today*, Philadelphia 1971, pp. 217-250. In an ecumenical context it is worth seeing e.g. R. Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas Und Luther. Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, Göttingen 1997; A.N. Williams, *The ground of union. Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*, Oxford 1999.

Trinity of Persons, transcendent in His unknowable nature, immanent in His love⁴⁸,

thus emphasising the thoroughly apophatic character of deification⁴⁹.

Summary

Let us bring our considerations together at this point by recalling, yes, a somewhat longer excerpt from Lossky's most important work, *The Mystical Theology of Eastern Church*, which brilliantly synthesises the totality of what we have attempted so far to grasp in analytical form, that is, the apophatic character of Christian creatology. The divine, Trinitarian will on which the existence of creation is suspended

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for us is a mystery, for the will is a relationship with another, and there is nothing to which is "other" to God: creation *ex nihilo* is incomprehensible to us. We only know the will of God in so far as it is His relationship to the world which is already created; it is the point of contact between the infinite and the finite, and in these senses the divine "willings", are the creative ideas of things, the *logoi*, the "words". [...] Every created thing has its point contacts with Godhead; and this point of contacts is its idea, reason or logos which is at the same time the end towards which it tends. The ideas of individual things are contained within the higher and more general ideas, as are the species within a genus. The whole is contained in the Logos, the second person of the Trinity who is the first principle and the last end of all created things. Here the Logos, God the Word, has the "economic" emphasis proper to antenicene theology: He is the manifestation of the divine will, for it is by Him the Father has created all things in the Holy Spirit. When we are examining the nature of created things, seeking the reason of their being, we are led final to the knowledge of the Word, casual principle and at the same time end of all beings. All things were created by the Logos who is as it were divine nexus, the threshold from which flow the creative outpourings, the particular *logoi* of creations, and the centre towards which in their turn all created beings tend, as to their final. For creations, from the moment of their first condition, are separate

⁴⁸ V. Lossky, *Dominion And Kingship: An Eschatological Study*, in: ILG, p. 215. Love constitutes, in Lossky's view, one of the attributes of God, "located" at the level of energy rather than essence: "To say "God is love", "divine persons are united by mutual love", is to think of a common manifestation, the "love energy" possessed by the three hypostases, for the union of the Three is higher even than love. [...] In fact, God is not determined by any of His attributes; all determinations are inferior to Him, logically posteriori to His being in itself, in its essence", MT, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁹ See M. Płóciennik, *Teopoietyczno-apofatyczny charakter teologii w ujęciu Włodzimierza N. Łosskiego*, "Collectanea Theologica" 2023, Vol. 93/1, pp. 115-161.

from God; and their end and final fulfillment lies in union with Him or deification. Thus the primitive beatitude was not a state of deification, but a condition of order, a perfection of the creation which was ordained and tending towards its end⁵⁰.

The apophaticism of the mystery of creation, directed in its essence towards the attainment of divinatory fulfillment in the union of the Trinity in its energies, is at every stage of its existence a participation in the apophaticism of the mystery of Trinitatis, “in this sense all true theology is fundamentally apophatic”⁵¹. Perhaps this is particularly true of creatology, which is concerned precisely with the fundamentals, or rather the Fundamentals of the fundamentals, that is, with the God-Trinity Who, in His incomprehensibility, willed to call into existence from nothing “beside” Himself the non-God creations, so that in response to this gratuitous gift, embodied and mediated in Jesus and mediated in Jesus Christ, the God-One of the Trinity who became man/creation, became God by grace in the Holy Spirit and thus partakers of the Divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4), i.e. of the Divine eternal uncreated energies.

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