

# Orthodox Soteriology: *Theōsis*

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## 1 Introduction

The doctrine of salvation (*sotēria, yishoua*) holds a central place in the life of every religion, especially Christianity. As McDaniel puts it:

Salvation is what Christianity is all about, the reason it is gospel: ‘good news of great joy’. It was for this – to bring salvation to the world – that the Word of God became flesh and was born in the city of David; for this that the true Lord of this world suffered on a cross and conquered death by his love; for this that the holy ministry was ordained, that through the sacraments and preaching the Holy Spirit might create saving faith.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Braaten affirms:

The whole of theology is inherently developed from a soteriological point of view, salvation is not one of the main topics, along with the doctrine of God, Christ, church, sacraments, eschatology and the like, it is rather the perspective from which all these subjects are interpreted.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, both the Eastern and the Western churches read the same Scriptures and share a common spiritual and theological heritage derived from the early church, yet there are significant differences between them concerning their approach to theology. Thus Benz considers that the West developed its theology along the lines of a legal relationship between God and mankind out of which came the doctrine of justification. This legal approach was further extended to ecclesiology, and particularly to the doctrine of the ministry, to the role of dogmatic definitions and of

1 M C D McDaniel ‘Salvation as Justification and *theōsis*’ *A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue* J Meyendorff and R Tobias edd (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1992) p 67

2 C E Braaten *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1983) p 63

canon law.<sup>3</sup> Whereas for the Eastern tradition theology is only a means towards an end, that is union with God, or *theōsis*. Consequently the emphasis lies not on developing positive theological systems, but on the mystical aspect of this union. The whole purpose of theological epistemology and ecclesial practice is to help the faithful to attain to deification.<sup>4</sup>

Bearing in mind this distinction between East and West, the purpose of this paper is to explain the Orthodox doctrine of salvation within the Greek patristic paradigm of revelation-deification as this is illustrated in the theological reflection of Vladimir Lossky. Much of this sounds strange to Western ears, both Protestant and Catholic, because the historical development of Western theology has been very different. Patience is therefore required to penetrate this strangeness, but that is a necessary prelude to any real understanding, dialogue or critique!

## 2 *Via Negativa* and *Via Positiva*

### 2.1 Historical Background

In addition to the historical and cultural circumstances which have separated the Eastern and the Western traditions since the early patristic period,<sup>5</sup> Zizioulas considers that, epistemologically, the differences

- 3 See E Benz *The Eastern Orthodox Church: Its Thought and Life* trans D Lewis (Garden City New York: Anchor Books 1963) pp 43-7. From an Orthodox viewpoint the Western Churches, both catholic and Protestant, have a similar theological frame of reference. A Khomiakov asserts in a letter to an English friend: 'All Protestants are Crypto-Papists . . . To use the the concise language of algebra, all the west knows but one datum *a*; whether it be preceded by a positive sign +, as with the Romanist, or with the negative sign -, as with the Protestants, the *a* remains the same' W J Birkbeck *Russia and the English Church* p 67. Cf T Ware *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1985) p 9
- 4 In practical terms this relation between revelation and deification is perfectly illustrated in the Christ-event. The sentence 'God made Himself man, that man might become God' sums up the essence of Christianity for the Eastern Church. See Irenaeus *Adversus haeresis* V; Athanasius *De incarnatione verbi* 54; Gregory of Nazianzus *Poema dogmatica* 10.5-9; Gregory of Nyssa *Oratio catechetica magna* 25. See also J Beck 'Divine Initiative: Salvation in Orthodox Theology' *Salvation in Christ* J Meyendorff and R Tobias edd p 106.
- 5 The historical circumstances during the period which followed the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) placed Byzantium in a pre-eminent and to some degree self-sufficient position, from which it was to develop a theological tradition. Byzantium maintained its Christological commitment to the Council of Chalcedon, and for several centuries kept bridges towards the West intact, in spite of all tensions, political and doctrinal. During this period, however, neither the councils nor the theologians would show particular interest in positive theological systems. According to Meyendorff, with few exceptions, the conciliar statements assume a negative form; they condemn distortions of the Christian truth rather than elaborate its positive content. The greater part of the theological literature was either exegetical or polemical, and in both cases the Christian faith was assumed as a given reality upon which one comments or which one defends, but which one does not try to formulate exhaustively. See J Meyendorff *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press 1974) p 3-5; *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1981) pp 40-1; J Pelikan *The Christian Tradition* vol 1 *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1971) pp 226-77.

between various theological trends go back to the time of Christianity's encounter with Jewish<sup>6</sup> and Greek<sup>7</sup> thought.<sup>8</sup> In affirming that Christ is the truth Christianity rejected both Jewish 'linear historicism'<sup>9</sup> and Greek *cosmological*<sup>10</sup> approaches to the question of truth.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, in its attempt to explain how Christ the truth can be simultaneously a historical and *transcendental* being the Church adopted Greek and Jewish categories, which, in turn, have influenced the development of either cataphatic or apophatic approaches to theology.<sup>12</sup> Generally speaking, the Eastern Church, borrowing primarily from Greek philosophy, has been principally concerned with those realities which are *beyond* history (the apophatic approach),<sup>13</sup> whilst the West, borrowing more from the Jewish tradition, is more conscious of the positive aspect of revelation, of all that it adds to the knowledge which man can acquire by natural reason (the cataphatic approach).<sup>14</sup> However, some Orthodox theologians are aware of the theological problems posed by a purely apophatic approach to theology, and consequently attempt to realize a synthesis between apophasis and cataphasis.<sup>15</sup>

- 6 See J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* (London: Darton Longman and Todd 1985) p 68; 'Preserving God's Creation' *King's Theological Review* XII (1989) p 2; J Barr *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: OUP 1961) pp 34-8.
- 7 See E R Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press 1951); F C Copleston *A History of Philosophy* vol 1 (Garden City NY: Doubleday 1962); W D Ross *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1951); J H Randall *Aristotle* (New York: Columbia University Press 1960); J Zizioulas 'Preserving God's Creation I' *King's Theological Review* XII (1989) p 2; 'Human Capacities and Human Incapacities: A Theological Exploration of Personhood' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975) p 403; *Being as Communion* p 69.
- 8 J Zizioulas 'Preserving God's Creation I' *King's Theological Review* XII (1989) p 2; see also M Hengel *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and of the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* trans J Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1976) pp 10-57.
- 9 By 'referring to Christ as the Alpha and Omega of history, the New Testament has transformed radically the linear historicism of Hebrew thought, since in a certain way the end of history in Christ becomes *already* present here and now' J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* pp 70-1.
- 10 In affirming that the historical Christ is the truth, 'the New Testament hurls a challenge to Greek thought, since it is in the flow of history and through it, through its changes and ambiguities, that man is called to discover the meaning of existence' J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* p 71.
- 11 Zizioulas lists six different approaches to the question of truth during the patristic era: the 'Logos' approach; the Eucharistic approach; the Trinitarian approach; the 'Apophatic' approach; the Christological approach; the approach through the 'Eikon'. See J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* pp 72-101.
- 12 J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* pp 71-2
- 13 Apophatic theology perceives revelation not only as the basis for all theological knowledge, but first and foremost as a foretaste of the world to come, a vision which causes man to desire to go 'beyond' his rational limitation, contemplating upon divine mystery diffused, as it were, through a dark cloud. See V Lossky *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke & Co 1973) pp 7-22.
- 14 See C S Calian *Icon and Pulpit* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1968) pp 44-6.
- 15 D Staniloae *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* vol 1 (Bucharest: IBM al BOR 1978) pp 114-16

## 2.2 Basic Presuppositions

Both apophatic and apophatic-cataphatic methods operate within a framework that is accepted by the entire Orthodox Church. The following three presuppositions are particularly relevant for theological epistemology.

First, the Triune God is the 'ultimate reality' or the 'source of all being'.<sup>16</sup> From an epistemological perspective this presupposition identifies 'ultimate truth' with the being of God. Gregory of Nazianzus affirms: 'the Father is He who is True, the Son is the Truth, and the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the first presupposition identifies the 'object' of knowing. Second, God is *transcendent* in his nature and *immanent* in his manifestation,<sup>18</sup> and consequently, he is at the same time knowable and unknowable.<sup>19</sup> The way in which the otherness and the relatedness between God and creation is conceived actually circumscribes not only the extent of God's knowability but also the content of this knowledge. Third, creation's meaning and purpose are realized in its response to God's economic movement.<sup>20</sup> The mode in which human beings, as part of the creation, respond to God, determines the way of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> However, according to the predominance of Jewish or Greek

- 16 D Staniloae *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1980) pp 109-17; V Lossky *In the Image and Likeness of God* J H Erickson ed (Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1985) pp 13-43
- 17 Gregory of Nazianzus *Oratio XXIII (De Pace III)* ll PG XXXV 1164 A
- 18 Christianity held to the biblical view of radical difference between God and the world. See G J Vogel 'Philosophia I. Studies in Greek Philosophy' *Philosophical Texts and Studies* 19:1 (1970) pp 397-416; J Zizioulas *Human Capacity and Human Incapacity* pp 401-47.
- 19 Lossky explains this paradox by pointing to the dogma of creation *ex nihilo* as a free act of the will of God: *Orthodox Theology* (Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1978) pp 51-4. See also G D Dragas 'St Athanasius on the Holy Spirit and the Trinity' *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches* vol 2 T F Torrance ed (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press 1993) pp 39-58.
- 20 The capacity of creation to respond to God is described in the Eastern Patristic writings either by referring to the 'images of the world' as the thoughts of God (Gregory of Nazianzus *Carm theol IV de mundo* V 66-7 PG 37 421) or to the relation between *Logos-logoi* (Maximus the Confessor *Ambigua* 7 PG 91 1081C). A central role in creation's response to God has been assigned to man. Gregory of Nazianzus affirms: 'In my quality of earth, I am attached to life here below, but being also a divine particle, I bear in my breast the desire for a future life' (Cf V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 70). Zizioulas affirms that if Christianity excludes the assumption that the world has in its nature something *naturally* common with God's nature, the only other alternative for a link between God and creation is man as *Imago Dei*, or as 'the Priest of Creation': J Zizioulas 'Preserving God's Creation. Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology. II' *King's Theological Review* XII (1989) p 45. See also J Zizioulas 'Human Capacity' in *SJT* 28 (1975) p 403. See also D Staniloae *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* vol 1 (Bucharest: IBM al BOR 1978) p 10; J Meyendorff *Byzantine Theology* pp 132-6; V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* pp 51-70.
- 21 Although there are different (or even contradictory) interpretations of the *syntagma* 'the image and the likeness of God' in Orthodox anthropology, there is nevertheless agreement that its basic meaning underlines man's openness toward God and the *task* of man in the whole of creation. See J Meyendorff *Byzantine Theology* pp 138-49.

influences, these presuppositions are used to support either a 'historical'<sup>22</sup> or an 'eschatological'<sup>23</sup> approach to theological epistemology.<sup>24</sup> Thus, when history is taken into account as the context in which God reveals himself, categories such as language, Scripture and Tradition occupy a central place. Alternatively, when the emphasis is laid upon a direct encounter with God beyond historical realities the categories of essence, energies, mystical experience and the like, receive a prominent place.

### 2.3 V Lossky: Mystical Epistemology and *Theōsis*

2.3.1 *Epistēmē* and *Gnōsis*: There are, Lossky argues, two routes to human knowledge. The first, *epistēmē*, operates with searching and reasoning and is characteristic of scientific and philosophical epistemology. This approach allows for limited knowledge of some 'properties' of those 'objects' that can be observed, and by analysing these properties one can form concepts. However, following Basil,<sup>25</sup> Lossky argues that:

There will always remain an 'irrational residue' which escapes analysis and which cannot be expressed in concepts; it is the unknowable depth of things, that which constitutes their true, indefinable essence.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, when speaking about knowledge of God, *epistēmē* is totally inadequate due to 'the radical lack of correspondence between our mind and the reality it wishes to attain'.<sup>27</sup> Hence, any philosophical discourse about God becomes pure speculation.<sup>28</sup> Theology therefore has to follow a

22 The 'historical' approach is devoted to *tradition* and to continuity with the apostolic church. V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 29; *I Clement* 42:1-2; 44:1-2 (*ANCL* vol I pp 36-9); J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* pp 172, 176-8

23 The 'eschatological' approach influenced by Platonic and Neo-Platonic categories is concerned with the way in which here and now the Church encounters the *beyond* history, the ultimate reality. V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* pp 27-9; J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* pp 171-208

24 J Zizioulas *Being as Communion* pp 171-208

25 St Basil *Adv Eunomium* I i c 4 *NPNF* 2nd ed vol VIII pp 123-4; *Ad Amphiloichium* Epist 234 *NPNF* 2nd ed vol VIII p 274

26 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 33

27 V Lossky *In the Image* p 13

28 'The philosophy which speculates on God starts . . . from an idea . . . The philosopher raises himself to an idea from another idea or from a group of generalizing facts according to an idea. For certain philosophers, the search for God corresponds to an inherent necessity in their thought: God must exist so that their conception of the universe may be coherent. There follows the search for arguments to demonstrate the existence of this necessary God – whence these "proofs of the existence of God", "proofs" which the theologian can well do without.' Further, the inadequacy of philosophical approach to knowing God is illustrated by the fact that each philosopher rises to his own concept of absolute. 'The God of Descartes is the mathematician's God: to justify the innate ideas of mathematical truth . . . For Leibnitz, God is necessary to justify the pre-established harmony between our perception and reality . . . there must be a supreme Monad in which the monads converge and order themselves . . . [Kant] needs the idea of God in the moral sphere . . . The God of Bergson is a God of creative evolution . . . the God of Aristotle is the unmoved mover postulated by the existence of movement . . .' V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* pp 18-19.

different way, described by Lossky as the way of *gnōsis*. *Gnōsis* is not the result of human endeavour, but a divine gift received through a revelatory encounter.<sup>29</sup> This encounter initiated by God takes the form of ‘I-Thou’, where Thou is ‘the living God of the Bible, the Absolute, certainly, but a personal Absolute’.<sup>30</sup> In this revelatory encounter, God affirms himself to be at the same time immanent and transcendent, and in the dialectic of transcendence and immanence God is both knowable and unknowable.<sup>31</sup> What is knowable, however, is not the product of human rational endeavour but a free gift of God, which is appropriated by faith, which is man’s ‘participatory adherence to the presence of Him who reveals Himself’.<sup>32</sup> In addition, whilst all theological knowledge is based upon revelation, it is not an end in itself. Rather, the purpose of revelation (*gnōsis*) is deification (*theōsis*).<sup>33</sup> In order to explain the relation between *gnōsis* and *theōsis*, Lossky introduces two pairs of concepts: *katabasis* and *anabasis*; and *oikonomia* and *theologia*.<sup>34</sup>

2.3.2 *Oikonomia* and *Katabasis*: *Oikonomia* describes God’s movement manwards, which is a movement of descent (*katabasis*).<sup>35</sup> However, Lossky makes a clear distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia*: ‘economy is the work of the will, while Trinitarian being belongs to the transcendent nature of God’.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, *katabasis* is not a way of knowledge, but only the means whereby ‘essential goodness, natural sanctity, and royal dignity flow from the Father, through the Only-Begotten, to the Spirit’.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Lossky argues that in the very immanence of his economy, which leads to the incarnation, God remains unknowable.<sup>38</sup>

29 ‘Authentic *gnōsis* is inseparable from charisma, an illumination by grace which transforms our intelligence. And since the object of contemplation is a personal existence and presence, true *gnōsis* implies encounter, reciprocity, *faith* as a personal adherence to the personal presence of God who reveals Himself.’ V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 13

30 V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 27

31 V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 31

32 Faith is, according to Lossky, not a psychological attitude, a mere fidelity but ‘an ontological relationship between man and God, an internally objective relationship for which the catechumen prepares himself, and through which baptism and chrismation are conferred upon the faithful: gifts which restore and vivify the deepest nature of man’: *Orthodox Theology* p 16. This faculty to respond to divine presence, which exists in a ‘mortified’ state even when man is separated from God as a result of sin, is ‘vivified’ by the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of baptism and chrismation. Once vivified, ‘Faith as the ontological participation included in a personal meeting is therefore the first condition for theological knowledge’: *Orthodox Theology* p 17.

33 See V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 9; Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* v; Athanasius *De incarnatione verbi* 54; Gregory of Nazianzus *Poema dogmatica* 10 5-9; Gregory of Nyssa *Oratio catechetica magna* 25

34 See V Lossky *In the Image* pp 15, 97.

35 V Lossky *In The Likeness* pp 15-16. Here Lossky follows the teaching of St Basil in his *Treatise on the Holy Spirit*.

36 V Lossky *In the Image* p 15

37 V Lossky *In the Image* p 16

38 V Lossky *In the Image* p 15

2.3.3 *Theologia* and *Anabasis*: In order to know God, one has to follow the way of *theologia*, which is *gnōsis* ‘of God considered in Himself, outside of His creative and redemptive economy’.<sup>39</sup> Following Pseudo-Dionysius,<sup>40</sup> Lossky affirms that *gnōsis* is a way of a spiritual ascent (*anabasis*) beyond all perceptive and rational faculties ‘in order to be able to attain in perfect ignorance to union with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge’.<sup>41</sup> Following the Greek Fathers’ exegesis of Moses’ ascent to meet God on the mountain,<sup>42</sup> Lossky affirms that the content of *gnōsis* which one acquires when going *beyond* everything that exists and arriving at the extreme height of the knowable, is in fact no knowledge but, rather, a ‘mystical union with God’,<sup>43</sup> described by Pseudo-Dionysius as ‘knowing nothing’.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, due to the fact that, in contrast with *epistēmē*, *gnōsis* surpasses human intellectual capacities, the purpose of this way is not to develop a positive theological system but to attain union with God (*theōsis*). Yet even if *gnōsis* is knowledge beyond words, in order to be communicated it has to be translated into theological language and subsequently organized, more or less, into a system. This leads us, in turn, to the distinction between apophatic and cataphatic theologies.

39 V Lossky *In the Image* pp 15-16. The appropriate methods for *gnōsis* are contemplation and silence; contemplation because it is ‘an exit to the state of a future age, a vision of what is beyond history, a projection of eschatology into the instant’, and silence because it ‘constitutes the language of the world which is coming’: V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 14.

40 See P Spearritt *A Philosophical Enquiry into Dionysian Mysticism* (Bödingen: Rotex-Druckdienst 1975) pp 173-82; R F Hathway *Hierarchy and Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1969).

41 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 27; Pseudo-Dionysius *The Mystical Theology* I 1 1000A Pseudo-Dionysius *The Complete Works (CW)* trans C Luibheid (London: SPCK 1987) p 135.

42 Ex 19 and 20:18-21

43 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 28

44 ‘It is not for nothing that the blessed Moses is commanded first to purification and then to depart from those who have not undergone this. When every purification is complete, he hears many-voiced trumpets. He sees the many lights, pure and with the rays streaming abundantly. Then, standing apart from the crowds and accompanied by the chosen priests, he pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents. And yet he does not meet God himself, but contemplates, not him who is invisible, but rather where he dwells. This means, I presume, that the holiest and the highest of these things perceived with the eyes of the body or the mind are but the rationale which presupposes all that lies below the Transcendent One. Through them, however, his unimaginable presence is shown, walking the heights of those holy places to which the mind at least can rise. But then he [Moses] breaks free of them, away from what he sees and is seen, and he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. Here renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.’ Pseudo-Dionysius *The Mystical Theology* I 3 1000C-1001A *CW* pp 136-67

## 2.4 Apophatic and Cataphatic Theologies

2.4.1 Cataphasis: Corresponding to the two movements, of God toward men (*katabasis*) and of man towards God (*anabasis*), Lossky affirms that there are two approaches to theology: cataphatic and apophatic.<sup>45</sup>

Cataphatic theology, or positive theology, leads us to some knowledge of God, albeit in an imperfect way.<sup>46</sup> Affirmative theology begins with the loftier, more congruous comparisons and then proceeds 'down' to the less appropriate ones;<sup>47</sup> or, as Lossky explains, 'a descent from the superior degrees of being to the inferior'.<sup>48</sup> However, if cataphatic theology follows a downward path, one may ask how the human mind can ever reach the loftier places?

- 45 Lossky borrows this distinction from Pseudo-Dionysius and John of Damascus. See Pseudo-Dionysius *The Mystical Theology* I 997 A-V, 1048 B CW pp 135-41; John of Damascus *De fide orthodoxa* I 4 NPNF 2nd ed vol IX p 34.
- 46 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 25. Similarly, John of Damascus asserts that 'All that we can say cataphatically concerning God does not show forth His nature but the things that relate to His nature . . . God does not belong to the class of existing things; not that He has no existence, but that He is above all existing things, nay even above existence itself. For if all forms of knowledge have to do with what exists, assuredly that which is above knowledge must certainly be also above essence; and, conversely, that which is above essence will also be above knowledge' John of Damascus *De fide orthodoxa* I 4.
- 47 The imperfection of positive theology resides in both its method and content. Methodologically, argues Dionysius, 'when we made assertions we began with the first things, moved down through intermediate terms until we reached the last things' Pseudo-Dionysius *The Mystical Theology* II 1025B CW p 138. Likewise, the cognitive content has a descending character due to the link between concepts and the 'level' of theological reflection. 'In the earlier books my argument travelled downward from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied with every stage of descent': Pseudo-Dionysius *The Mystical Theology* III 1033C CW p 139.
- 48 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 28. Here Lossky draws heavily from Pseudo-Dionysius who, in his *The Mystical Theology*, claims that he had analysed this way of theologizing in other writings (some of which were either lost or are fictitious). Thus, Dionysius reminds us that in *The Theological Representations* positive theology begins with God's oneness and proceeds down into the multiplicity of affirming the Trinity and the Incarnation. See *The Mystical Theology* III 1032D-1033A CW pp 138-9.

His *The Divine Names* affirms the more numerous designations for God which come from mental concepts such as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God. See *The Mystical Theology* III 1033A CW p 138.

*The Symbolic Theology* 'descended' into the still more pluralized realm of sense perception and its plethora of symbols for the deity such as 'the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and of the ornaments he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the symbolic representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The Symbolic Theology*': *The Mystical Theology* III 1033A-1033B CW pp 138-9.



Pseudo-Dionysius responds by asserting that positive theology originates in the Scriptures which contain the divine truth revealed by God in his manward movement of economic descent.<sup>49</sup> However, the concepts or the words of Scripture do not describe God as he is in himself since he is always beyond everything that exists. For Pseudo-Dionysius in the words of Scripture:

the Transcendent is clothed in the terms of beings, with shape and form on things which have neither, and numerous symbols are employed to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supra-natural simplicity.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Lossky argues that whilst God reveals himself (intelligible attributes)<sup>51</sup> as wisdom, love and goodness his nature remains unknowable in its depths and therefore our concepts must be always prevented from being enclosed within their limited meaning.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Lossky, following Gregory of Nyssa, argues that 'the ladder of cataphatic theology' which discloses the divine names drawn primarily from Scripture is not intended to become rational concepts whereby our minds construct 'a positive science of the divine nature', but is rather images or ideas intended to guide us for contemplation of that which transcends all understanding.<sup>53</sup>

3.4.2 Apophasis: Lossky affirms that man's proper response to the economy in which God reveals himself in creating the world and becoming incarnate is to confess the transcendent nature of the Trinity in an ascent of thought according to the way of apophatic theology.<sup>54</sup> On the

49 'Let us therefore look as far upward as the light of the sacred scriptures will allow, and, in our reverent awe of what is divine, let us be drawn together toward the divine splendour. For, if we may trust the superlative wisdom and truth of scripture, the things of God are revealed to each mind in proportion to its capacities; and the divine goodness is such that, out of concern for our salvation, it deals out the immeasurable and infinite in limited measure': Pseudo-Dionysius *The Divine Names* I 1 585B-588A *CW* p 49.

50 Pseudo-Dionysius *The Divine Names* I 4 592B *CW* p 52

51 These intelligible attributes of God characteristic to positive theology are analysed by Pseudo-Dionysius in *The Divine Names CW* pp 49-131.

52 'Certainly God is wise, but not in the banal sense of a merchant or a philosopher. And His limitless wisdom is not an internal necessity of His nature. The highest names, even love, express but do not exhaust the divine essence. They constitute the attributes by which divinity communicates itself without its secret source, its nature, ever becoming exhausted, or becoming objectified beneath our scrutiny. Our purified concepts enable us to approach God; the divine names enable us in some sense even to enter Him. But we can never seize His essence, else He would be determined by His attributes; but He is determined by nothing and that is precisely why He is personal': V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 33.

53 See Gregory of Nyssa *Con Eunom* PG XLV 939-41; V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 40.

54 V Lossky *In the Image* p 15. 'The negative way of the knowledge of God is an ascendant undertaking of the mind that progressively eliminates all positive attributes of the object it wishes to attain, in order to culminate finally in a kind of apprehension by supreme ignorance of Him who cannot be an object of knowledge': *In the Image* p 13.

lower steps there are images drawn from the material objects least calculated to lead spirits inexperienced in contemplation into error. It is indeed more difficult, argues Lossky, to identify God with stone or with fire than with intelligence, unity, being or goodness. What seems obvious at the beginning of the ascent, that ‘God is not fire, He is not stone’, becomes less and less obvious as one attains to the height of contemplation, when one has to affirm that ‘God is not being, He is not good’.<sup>55</sup> At each step of ascent one has to guard oneself against the danger of making these loftier images or ideas ‘an idol of God’. Once the heights have been attained, speculation gradually gives place to contemplation, knowledge to experience, ‘for, in casting off the concepts which shackle the spirit, the apophatic disposition reveals boundless horizons of contemplation at each step of positive theology’.<sup>56</sup>

Consequently, apophatic theology refuses any attempt to form concepts about God and to organize them in a systematic construct according to human ways of thought. On the contrary, by pointing to mystical union with God, apophatic theology is ‘an existential attitude which involves the whole man . . . a criterion: the sure sign of an attitude of mind conformed to truth’.<sup>57</sup>

However, if negative theology begins by denying the appropriateness of the human mind and language to knowing God, then one may enquire concerning the role of the Scriptures and dogmas, since these are themselves expressed in concepts.

To answer this question, Lossky borrows from Gregory Nazianzus’ metaphorical interpretation of Moses’ ascent on Mount Sinai, and affirms that there are different levels in theology, each appropriate to differing capacities of human understanding which reach up to the mysteries of God.<sup>58</sup> In this multi-level theological construct the words of Scripture and

55 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 40

56 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 40. Negative theology, far from being a purely intellectual exercise involves a mystical experience, an ascent towards God, and Pseudo-Dionysius argues that even though one attains to the highest peaks accessible to created beings, the only rational notion which one can have of God is that of His incomprehensibility. *The Mystical Theology* p 38

57 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 39

58 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* pp 40-1. Gregory of Nazianzus writes: ‘God commands me to enter within the cloud and hold converse with Him; if any be an Aaron, let him go up with me, and let him stand near, being ready, if it must be so, to remain outside the cloud. But if any be a Nadab or an Abihu, or of the order of the elders, let him go up indeed, but let him stand afar off . . . But if any be of the multitude, who are unworthy of this height of contemplation, if he be altogether impure let him not approach at all, for it would be dangerous to him; but if he be at least temporarily purified, let him remain below and listen to the voice alone, and the trumpet, the bare words of piety, and let him see the mount smoking and lightening . . . But if any be an evil and savage beast, and altogether incapable of taking in the matter of contemplation and theology, let him not harmfully and malignantly lurk in this den amongst the woods, to catch hold of some dogma or saying by a sudden

of dogma serve primarily as starting and guiding points in an ever ascending process of contemplation which has as its final goal deification.<sup>59</sup> Thus, concludes Lossky, theology will never be abstract, working through concepts, but contemplative, raising the mind to those realities which pass all understanding.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, in his union with God, man is not dissolved into an impersonal reabsorption into the divine nature as in the ecstasy of Plotinus, 'but has access to a face-to-face encounter with God, a union without confusion according to grace'.<sup>61</sup> However, the question of union with God, and of mystical experience in general, raises the issue of the accessibility and/or inaccessibility of God's nature. What does it actually mean to say that human beings become 'partakers of divine nature'?

In order to explain the nature of mystical union with God, Lossky borrows from Palamas the ineffable distinction between three aspects of God's being: (a) the permanently unnameable and imparticipable divine essence (*ousia*); (b) the three divine Persons (*hypostases*) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and (c) the uncreated energies (*energeiai*) or divine operations, forces proper to and inseparable from God's essence, in which he goes forth from himself, manifests, communicates and gives himself.<sup>62</sup> Mystical union with God according to essence is impossible; if the creature *could* participate in the divine essence, the creature would be God, *homoousios* with God. Only the three Persons are united to each

spring . . . but let him stand yet afar off and withdraw from the moment, or he shall be stoned': Gregory of Nazianzus *Oratio XXVIII (theologica II) 2 NPNF 2nd ed vol VII p 289.*

Gregory Nazianzus' interpretation of Moses' ascent appears to suggest a stratification of the community concerning the accessibility to loftier heights of contemplation, and Lossky attempts to correct it by arguing that the negative way is not 'an esoteric teaching hidden from the profane; nor is it a gnostic separation between those who are spiritual, psychic or carnal, but a school of contemplation wherein each receives his share in the experience of the Christian mystery lived by the Church': V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 41.

- 59 'This contemplation of the hidden treasures of the divine Wisdom can be practised in varying degrees, with greater or lesser intensity; whether it be a lifting up of the spirit towards God and away from creatures, which allows his splendour to become visible; whether it be a meditation on the Holy Scriptures in which God hides Himself, as it were behind a screen, beneath the words which express the revelation . . . whether it be a dogma of the Church or through her liturgical life; whether, finally it be through ecstasy that we penetrate to the divine mystery, this experience of God will always be the fruit of that apophatic attitude which Dionysius commends to us in his *Mystical Theology.*' V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* pp 41-2

60 V Lossky *The Mystical theology* p 43

61 V Lossky *Orthodox Theology* p 32

62 See Gregory Palamas *Capita physica, theologica, moralia, et practica* 79 PG 150 1173B; 111 PG 150 1197A; *Triads* III 1 26 in *Gregory Palamas. The Triads* J Meyendorff ed trans N Gendle (New York: Paulist Press 1983) p 607.

other in the divine essence.<sup>63</sup> Union with God according to *hypostasis* is proper to the Son alone.<sup>64</sup> Union with God according to energy is a *real* participation of creature in the divine life.<sup>65</sup> It is true that by postulating this distinction between essence, person, and energies, Palamas (and Lossky) was attempting to hold together two claims: first, that *theōsis* is real, and second, that God remains totally *other*. However, such a distinction raises both ontological and economic problems. Ontologically, in spite of the Palamites' claims to the contrary, this distinction within the being of God runs the risk of compromising the principle of the 'unity and simplicity' of the divine essence.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, it raises the question of the ontological status as well as the intra-Trinitarian role of each category (aspect) of God's being.

On the economic level the main problem is to maintain a Trinitarian soteriology, that is, a personal relation with God, whilst affirming that God communicates himself through non-*hypostatic* beings such as the uncreated energies.

### 3 Observations

Whilst Palamite theology can be approached from different perspectives, in this section we will concentrate primarily on those aspects which are related to *theōsis* from the perspective of theological epistemology and ecclesial practice.

- 63 'If we were able at a given moment to be united with the very essence of God and to participate in it even at the very least degree, we should not at the moment be what we are, we should be God by nature. God would then no longer be Trinity, but "of myriads of hypostases"; for He would have as many hypostases as there would be persons participating in His essence': V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* pp 69-70.
- 64 'Even though we share the same human nature as Christ and receive in Him the name of sons of God, we do not ourselves become the divine hypostasis of the Son by the fact of Incarnation. We are unable, therefore, to participate in either the essence or the hypostases of the Holy Trinity': V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 70.
- 65 V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 71
- 66 To affirm that God's energies interpose between God's essence and the creation leads to the conclusion that there is a duality in God; a 'lower' part in which one can participate, and an 'upper' part that is totally inaccessible. Or, from another perspective, the idea that within God there are two distinct realities can lead (if pressed toward its logical conclusions), to the implication that there are two gods related to each other in some mysterious way. Meyendorff dismisses both charges arguing that for Palamas 'in virtue of the simplicity of His being, God is wholly and entirely present both in His essence and in His energies' and on the other side, 'no multiplicity of divine manifestations could affect the unity of God, for God is beyond the categories of whole and parts and while in His essence always remaining unknowable, reveals Himself wholly in each energy as the Living God': J Meyendorff *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1974) pp 125-6. See also G Palamas *Triads* III 1 23; C M LaCugna *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper 1991) p 188; C Lialine 'The Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas on Divine Simplicity, Its Experimental Origin and Practical Issues' *ECQ* 6 (1945-1946) pp 266-87.

The first aspect concerns the place of the divine *hypostases* in relation to both *ousia* and *energeia*. Whilst Palamas argues that each energy is a personal, self-communication of God to creation, the energy is not itself hypostatic. Since the divine *ousia* is totally uncommunicable, and the divine *hypostases* self-communicate only through the energies, it follows that the divine Persons occupy a kind of intermediary level between essence and energies.<sup>67</sup>

Secondly, from a Trinitarian perspective, by arguing that the divine essence is unknowable and imparticipable, Palamas has reified the divine *ousia* altogether beyond the divine Persons. Williams argues that the idea of an:

absolutely transcendent divine interiority can be secured only at the cost of orthodox trinitarianism: once *ousia* has been 'concretized' into a core of essential life, it will inevitably take on some associations of superiority or ontological priority.<sup>68</sup>

This represents a significant shift from the ontology set up by the Cappadocians who argued that God's *ousia* exists as Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>69</sup>

Thirdly, concerning the distinction between *hypostasis* and *energeiai*, Lossky affirms that 'the Son and the Holy Spirit are, so to say, personal processions,' whilst 'the energies are natural processions'.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, God has two modes of being: in his essence and in his energies.<sup>71</sup> Further, following the Greek Fathers,<sup>72</sup> Lossky affirms that God is fully present in each ray of the divine energies but not according to his substance, or his

67 C M LaCugna *God for Us* p 186

68 R D Williams 'Philosophical Structures of Palamism' *ECR IX* 1-2 (1977) pp 27-44 (here p 34)

69 See C M LaCugna *God For Us* pp 66-8.

70 The energies 'as outpourings of the divine nature 'which cannot set bounds to itself, for God is more than essence', represent God's mode of being outside his inaccessible essence. V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 86

71 None of these modes of being is determined by his divine economy because even if creatures did not exist, God would none the less manifest himself beyond his essence; the uncreated energies proceed from and manifest forth the nature from which they are inseparable, just as the rays of the sun would shine out from the solar disk whether or not there were any beings capable of receiving its light. V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* p 74

72 See Pseudo-Dionysius *The Divine Name* II 649 A-652 A *CW* pp 66-7; Maximus the Confessor of Euthymius Zigabenus *Panoplia Dogmatica* III *PG* 136 132 A; Gregory of Nazianzus *In Theophaniam* (Oratio 38) 7 *PG* 36 317B; John of Damascus *De fide orthodoxa* I 4 *PG* 94 800 BC; Gregory Palamas *Capita physica* 143 *PG* 150 1220 D; 96 1189 B.

hypostases.<sup>73</sup> From an epistemic perspective the assertion that God manifests himself wholly in either mode of being (essence and energies), suggests that knowing God in one mode of existence means, by implication, knowing God in the other mode. Alternatively, if God's mode of being in his essence is different from his mode of being outside his essence (his energies) then the concept of God's privacy and God's inaccessibility makes sense, but that would imply that God does not equally reveal himself in the two modes of being.<sup>74</sup>

Fifthly, since the divine energies express what the Persons are (*enhypostatic*),<sup>75</sup> without being themselves Persons, the three divine Persons are removed a step back from the economy of salvation. Thus Palamas widens the gap between *theologia* and *oikonomia*.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, whilst God's relation to creation follows a certain Trinitarian order (*taxis*), that is, from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, in fact the office of each Person, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in particular,<sup>77</sup> fades into the background due to the fact that mystical union with God is realized through the energies which are

73 Lossky asserts: 'While distinguishing in God the three hypostases, the one nature and the natural energies, Orthodox theology does not admit any kind of "composition" in Him. The energies, like the persons, are not elements of the divine being which can be conceived of apart, in separation from the Trinity of which they are the common manifestation, the eternal splendour. They are not accidents of the nature in their quality as pure energies, and they imply no passivity in God. Neither are they hypostatic beings, comparable to the three Persons. It is not even possible to attribute any particular energy to any one of the divine hypostases exclusively': *The Mystical Theology* pp 79-80; see also p 74.

74 Meyendorff acknowledges that God does not manifest himself fully in every energy since his essence remains unknowable: 'The God of Christians, the God of the Scriptures, is a living God, but He is essentially transcendent to every creature. Even when He manifests Himself, He remains unknowable in His essence, for a revelation of the divine essence would bring God down to the level of creatures and make man a "God by nature". All revelation, all participation, all deification is, then, a free act of the living God, a divine energy. But God Himself does not totally identify Himself with that act; He remains above it, even while manifesting Himself wholly in it': J Meyendorff *Palamas* p 122.

75 'This, then, is properly an *enhypostaton*: that which is contemplated not in itself, nor in essence, but in a person (*hypostasis*):' G Palamas *Triads* III I 9. Leontius of Byzantium established the distinction between *enhypostasis* (personal union) and *anhypostasis* (impersonal union). Human nature is *enhypostasized* by the Logos because it is possessed, used, and manifested by the Logos. See C M LaCugna *God for Us* p 203 n 32.

76 LaCugna asserts that the symptom of the gap 'is that *ousia* and *energeiai* become subjects of predication apart from the divine persons': *God for Us* p 194.

77 Lossky considers that God both created and manifests his providence in creation through the divine energies. V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* pp 75-6. See also John of Damascus *De fide orth* I 13 *NPNF* 2nd ed vol IX pp 15-17. Such an approach runs the risk of confusing the energies with the hypostases of the Son or the Spirit. As a matter of fact, in patristic writings, the energies and the hypostases are not clearly differentiated, and consequently some of the Fathers confused the person of the Logos with the divine energies.

Cyril of Alexandria affirms that 'The operation of the uncreated substance is a kind of common property, while it is the proper possession of each Person, in such a way that it is thanks to the three hypostases that the operation belongs to each as a property of a perfect person. Thus, it is the Father who acts, but by the Son in the Spirit; the Son acts also, but as the power of the Father, inasmuch as He is from Him and in Him according to His own hypostasis. The Spirit also acts, for He is the all-powerful Spirit of the Father and the Son': *De Sancta Trinitate* VI PG 74 1056 A. According to Gregory of Nyssa 'the source of Power is the Father; the Power of the Father is the Son, the Spirit of Power is the Holy Spirit': *De Spiritu Sancto ad Macedonianos* 13 PG 45 1317 A.

Athenagoras called Christ the divine 'idea or energy' manifesting itself in creation: *Presbeia peri christianōn* 10 PG 6 908 B. Paul's saying about the invisible things of God, his eternal power and his divinity made visible since the creation of the world, has been interpreted sometimes as meaning the Logos, sometimes as the energies, the common operations of the Holy Trinity. St Basil interpreted the energies in this way, opposing them to the unknowable essence: *Epistle* 234 PG 32 869 AB. Pseudo-Dionysius speaks about the distinction between the 'superessence' as 'the secret mansions which are but seldom thrown open', and the processions beyond himself, his manifestations, which Dionysius calls virtues or forces (*dunameis*), in which everything that exists partakes, thus making God known in his creatures: *The Divine Name* 640 D-641 C; 680 A-684 D *CW* pp 61-2, 68-71; V Lossky *The Mystical Theology* pp 71-2.

Irenaeus affirms: 'for that which is invisible of the Son is the Father, and that which is visible of the Father is the Son': *Adv Haereses* IV vi 6 *ANCL* vol V pp 391-2. Similarly, Basil asserts: 'The Son shows forth in Himself the Father in His fullness, shining forth in all His glory and splendour': *Adv Eunomium* II 17 PG 39 605 B.

In fact, Lossky realises this danger when he affirms: 'The Son who renders visible the hidden nature of the Father is here almost identified with the manifesting energies': *The Mystical Theology* p 84. However, Lossky does not succeed in drawing a clear distinction between them. He affirms: 'In the energies *He is*, He exists, He eternally manifests Himself. Here we are faced with a mode of divine being to which we accede in receiving grace; which, moreover, in the created and perishable world, is the presence of the uncreated and eternal light, the real omnipresence of God in all things, which is something more than His causal presence – "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not" (John i, 5)': *The Mystical Theology* p 89.

The distinction between the hypostasis of the Son and the divine energies is further undermined by Lossky's argument that the divine energies 'are within everything and outside everything', and as such they penetrate 'the whole created universe, and are the cause of its existence. The light "was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not" (John i, 10)': *The Mystical Theology* p 89. In conclusion, Lossky himself is not sure as to where to place the energies, and consequently ascribes them a 'middle ground' between immanent and economic Trinity. 'The object of theology . . . is the eternal procession of the Persons; while their manifestation in the work of creation or of providence, the temporal mission of the Son and of the Spirit, pertains to the sphere of "economy". This is what several modern theologians have somewhat inexactly called the "economic Trinity". According to this division of the substance of Christian doctrine, the energies hold a middle place: on the one hand they belong to theology, as eternal and inseparable forces of the Trinity existing independently of the creative act; on the other, they also belong to the domain of "economy", for it is in His energies that God manifests Himself to the creatures': *The Mystical Theology* p 82.

impersonal.<sup>78</sup> In fact some Orthodox theologians became aware of this aspect. As Timiadis argues:

To a certain extent the dissatisfaction expressed at the use by the early Fathers of Aristotelian terms, and notably the desire to make less use of terms such as ‘essence’ and ‘energies’, is very understandable. Whatever arguments may be advanced in their favour, they still risk being misunderstood on account of their impersonal character. It might be better to use more intimate and personal expressions, such as ‘communion with the Holy Spirit’, more in line with those of the OT and more connected with the historical Jesus. All modern anxiety about the absence of personal communion in human life with God, could thus be overcome, reassuring man in his loneliness and anguish that he can be visited and sustained, not by vague, immaterial, heavenly forces, but above all by God’s personal intervention. A God who is reluctant to be with us, who sends us alternative powers and energies, contradicts the very sense of Christ’s Incarnation.<sup>79</sup>

Further, this essentialist theological language adopted by the apophatic theologians, argues Timiadis, undermines the revelatory office of the incarnate Son, in whom the human and the divine are united not in an ‘impersonal’ energetic encounter, but in a hypostatic union.<sup>80</sup>

Sixthly, since the divine energies are, by the will of God,<sup>81</sup> present in every aspect of creation, the view that one has to deny all that pertains to

78 Lossky affirms that the act of creation is not determined by the existence of the divine energies, but by a decision of the common will of the three Persons. See *The Mystical Theology* p 75.

If creation were to be organically linked to the divine energies, that would imply that creation becomes co-eternal with God because the natural processions are so. Yet in spite of the fact that the energies are not relational in themselves, Lossky affirms that they do enter in relation with creation as a result of the will of God. ‘The act of creation established a relationship between the divine energies and that which is not God, and constituted a limitation, a determination of the infinite and eternal effulgence of God, who thereby became the cause of finite and contingent being . . . the divine energies in themselves are not the relationship of God to created being, but they do enter into relationship with that which is not God, and draw the world into existence by the will of God’: *The Mystical Theology* p 89.

79 E Timiadis ‘God’s Immutability and Communicability’ *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches* vol 1 T F Torrance ed (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press 1985) pp 45-6

80 ‘The analogy of a circle sending out rays is not very sound, for the simple reason that it departs from the doctrine of *personal* hypostatic union so dear to the Cappadocians’: E Timiadis ‘God’s Immutability’ p 46.

81 Lossky establishes neither the ontologic status of the will of God nor the relation between the will and the energies within the being of God. He argues that the will has no intra-Trinitarian, but only economic functions: ‘It is the will—which, for the eastern tradition, never intervenes in the interior relationships of the Trinity, but determines the exterior activities of the divine Person in relation to the created order—which constitutes the difference between the two aspects’: *The Mystical Theology* pp 73, 85.



creaturehood in order to encounter God in a mystical union implies that God is not as fully present in his energies directed towards creation as he is in his energies which are not linked with the created order. Timiadis considers that this Neo-Platonic approach to union with God through his energies suggests that 'in descending to the world, the divine energies suffer a kind of veiling. Only those beings close to the upper sphere of the divine can feel God's presence'.<sup>82</sup>

Penultimately, the apophatic view of deification discloses a reductionist approach to anthropology. Thus, due to the fact that the perceptive and rational faculties are perceived as barriers in the way of deification, they have to be denied. Alternatively, in his attempt to construe a theological anthropology which would do justice to man as a relational being, Walker argues that:

(1) Persons have a culture: a person is always a person for someone or in relation to someone. (2) Persons cannot be said to be an asocial 'I'. (3) Persons cannot be said to be a socialised 'me' without reference to other socialised selves. (4) Persons have a language: communion is related to communication.<sup>83</sup>

Lastly, being influenced by the Platonic and Neo-Platonic categories, Lossky's theological epistemology finds no space for the manifestation of truth in historical realities and thus runs the risk of being historically 'disincarnated'. Moreover, as Timiadis affirms:

Exaggerated mysticism could lead to the conclusion that God is so far removed from humanity that desperate efforts are required to obtain his intervention. We are then far from the OT promise to make us God's people, the New Israel, the redeemed heirs of his Kingdom, endowed with Pauline *paresia*, brothers of one another by grace and bearers of the Spirit (*pneumatophoroi*) incorporated into Christ's Body and enjoying all the spiritual gifts that membership of the Church provides.<sup>84</sup>

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82 E Timiadis 'God's Immutability' p 47

83 A Walker 'The Concept of the Person in Social Science: Possibilities for a Theological Anthropology' *The Forgotten Trinity* A I C Heron ed (London: BCC/CCBI Inter-Church House 1991) pp 137-54 (here p 152). For a similar view concerning a holistic approach to *imago dei*, that is, which includes 'our embodiment as much as our intellect and "spirituality"': see C E Gunton 'Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of *Imago Dei*' *Persons, Divine and Human* C Schwöbel and C E Gunton edd (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1991) pp 47-61; G McFarlane 'Strange News from Another Star: An Anthropological Insight from Edward Irving' *Persons* C Schwöbel and C E Gunton edd pp 98-119.

84 E Timiadis 'God's Immutability' p 47