Orthodoxy concerning the being of God is not a luxury for the Church and man: it is an essential necessity.¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1 The Irrelevance of the Trinity

It is becoming fashionable to describe the revival of interest in the Trinity as a 'renaissance'. However, it is a sad indictment of the Christian church that a return had been desperately needed for some considerable time. 'Many people view the theological doctrine of the Trinity as a speculation for theological specialists, which has nothing to do with real life.'² And yet the doctrine of Trinity would seem to be both part of the bedrock of our faith and something characteristically and distinctively Christian.³ No doubt the concentration on abstract metaphysics has been largely to blame for this: is the Trinity really nothing more than an attempt to explain impossible mathematics?

The question of God's internal nature is not a puzzle needing to be solved but rather a doctrine in need of re-application to every culture and age of Christianity. Such is the preoccupation of contemporary Trinitarian writers, of whom Zizioulas is only one.⁴ His is a particular re-application, and a vital one, for what distinguishes his work is its rigorous application of the doctrine of the Trinity into the contemporary problem of the dissolution of personhood in Western society.

2. 'Being as Communion'

Ontology is not the central tenet of Zizioulas' writings; rather, it is personhood that forms the centre and primary concern. He works through the implications of understanding the Trinity as 'Being as Communion', that is, as being-in-relation. 'Only in communion can God be what God is, and only as communion can God be at all.'⁵ In contrast to the Western idea that personhood can be defined in reference to the individual in isolation,⁶ Zizioulas sees that it is only 'in relation' that true identity can be found. 'Being a person is basically different from being an individual or "personality" in that the person cannot be conceived in itself as a static entity, but only as it relates to.'⁷ A further
contrast to the Western approach is typified in the statement that ‘particularity [individuality] is to be understood as causative and not derivative in ontology’. The nature of God’s being is communion, and therefore the nature of our being is communion.

But what is the basis, the ground, for communion? Zizioulas finds this not in the substance, but in the person of the Father. He is the ‘cause’ of communion. This concept of communion finds expression in the term ekstasis: a derivative word used as a contrast to the idea of hypostasis. ‘Stasis (being “as it stands”, as it is “in itself”) is realised within personhood both as ek-stasis (communion, relatedness) and as hypo-stasis (particularly, uniqueness). Thus ekstasis refers to the outward motion in personhood, that aspect that is directed towards others. Being is not restricted but ‘in its ekstasis breaks through boundaries in a movement of communion’. Communion finds expression in love:

Love is not an emanation or ‘property’ of the substance of God . . . but is constitutive of his substance, i.e. it is that which makes God what he is, the one God. Thus love ceases to be a qualifying property of being and becomes the supreme ontological predicate. Love as God’s mode of existence hypostasizes God, constitutes his being. Through love, persons exist in ekstatic relationship. Elsewhere he states: ‘we must speak an ontology of love as replacing the ontology of ousia, i.e. we must attribute to love the role attributed to substance in classical ontology.’ Love not only constitutes God’s being, it also constitutes our being.

Freedom and necessity are other elements of vital importance to Zizioulas’ thesis. Human beings have no choice in their existence: born of our parents we have no freedom in our ‘biological hypostasis’, our bodily physical existence. Such ontological restriction and necessity, however, is overcome in the ‘ecclesial hypostasis’. It is baptism that brings about the ontological change into this new hypostasis, this new being-in-relation, that allows us to exist in freedom and ekstatic expression towards other persons. Thus, it is only in the church, in incorporation into Christ, that human beings can find their true expression as persons restored to the imago Dei.

3. Aim and Structure of this Essay

This sketch of Zizioulas’ wider concerns cannot hope to do justice to him. The aim of this essay is to evaluate the presuppositions that underlie his ontology. At a few points in his writings he claims Patristic support for his ideas, in particular from the Cappadocian Fathers, but also with references to Athanasius and Maximus the Confessor. Yet it soon becomes clear that there are significant differences between ancient and modern Greek thought.

The major differences focus around the question of the basis of unity in the divinity, to which there are two aspects. First, what meaning is to be attached to ousia—how did the Cappadocian Fathers use it? What precisely were they trying to say through it? As Hanson emphasises in the title of his book, The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God, the early centuries are characterised by an investigation of the most satisfactory way to describe what can and what cannot be known of God. Second, what role did they find for the hypostasis of the Father—is he the cause of the Trinity, or only one among equals? Is there economic or ontological subordination, or neither? But as these differences are considered, a further question will need to be addressed: To what extent must contemporary re-applications of the Trinity adhere to the teachings of the past centuries if they are to be valid?

The essay falls into two main sections. §II will look at the Cappadocian Fathers, aiming to present the ontology they formulated through two central questions: Are the ousia and the hypostases understood as abstract ideas or as concrete entities? and What are the relationships between the hypostases? In §III attention is directed at Zizioulas. The Patristic support he claims for his teaching will be considered through the central question: What does it mean to say that God is being-in-relation? §IV will evaluate Zizioulas’ presentation.

II. THE ONTOLOGY OF THE CAPPADOCEAN FATHERS

1. The Situation they Inherited

The situation directly prior to the work of the Cappadocian Fathers was one of extreme confusion due mainly to the lack of agreement on the understanding of various terms. Both orthodox and heterodox authors were using the same terms, but with different meanings, resulting in everyone being suspected of heresy! Confusion centred especially on the meaning of the word hypostasis: should it be used to refer to the ‘oneness’ or the ‘threeness’ of God? It was with the intention of resolving this problem that the Council of Alexandria was convened in AD 362. The letter sent by Athanasius and the other bishops present at this Council illustrates exactly the situation that the Cappadocians took up and makes, therefore, a convenient starting point for this survey.

Initially, hypostasis had been synonymous with ousia, and therefore referred to the oneness of God (the three classic examples of this being Hebrews 1:3, the Nicaean Creed anathema, 22 and a letter from Athanasius). But, because of the use of the phrase ‘three hypostases’ (originated by Origen), there was confusion and counter-accusation: hypostasis could now be used to express either the oneness or the threeness of God.
Despite the acknowledgment by those present that neither opposing usages had heretical intentions, they did not clarify what meaning it was now to have. Even the that the faith confessed by the Fathers at Nicaea phrases, and that for the future they would prefer to be content to use Its language', still left the issue unresolved. Whilst the Nicaean Creed had acknowledged that there was One and Three, it had neglected the formulation of the relationship between them. The implication behind the quotation, however, is that the synonymous usage from the anathema should set the standard: one hypostasis (even though this meant that there was still no accepted word to express the threeness) should be the standard. One anathema set the standard: one hypostasis (even though this meant that there was still no accepted word to express the threeness) and that Gregory ascribed to the Council. Coming from his Origenistic background it was not surprising that Basil should have chosen Origen's formula for the Trinity as his starting point: one ousia, three hypostases. However, it is not enough simply to identify what terms were in use, and how they were enumerated, it is vital that the underlying meanings are also identified.

2. The Problem of Terminology

An underlying problem with Trinitarian terminology is whether it is abstract or concrete entities that are being dealt with. If God is described as 'one ousia' does this term indicate an abstract concept lacking any sort of physical reality, or is it something concrete? If at the same time God is described as 'three hypostases', and that all are agreed (bar the heterodox) that these are concrete realities, how then does this relate to the ousia if that is also concrete? And if the ousia is only abstract, then in what sense are the three unified?

These questions have been posed as stark alternatives simply in order to heighten the issues that confronted the Cappadocian Fathers on the problem of the Trinity. As they sought to develop the meaning of their chosen terms, these questions hindered their progress. The next two sub-sections consider the implications of their progress and how they achieved it. First, what elements did they draw from Greek philosophy? Second, what did they hope to gain from the use of analogies?

3. Greek Philosophy

Aristotelian understanding of ousia

Aristotle believed in an objectively real concept that was present in concrete objects. He named this 'secondary ousia' which, along with 'substratum', composed 'individual substance' (primary ousia)—the material of physical reality. Such a system, where physical reality was deemed to be composed of a variety of different materials (both abstract and concrete) was a clear possibility for Trinitarian explanations.

Modern authors used to assume that this had been applied to the Trinity to produce the following equation:

hypostasis = primary substance, and
ousia = secondary substance,

and that this, therefore, represented the ideal explanation of the early Church Fathers' view of the Trinity. However, more recent authors have rejected the idea that this equation had ever been used by the Cappadocian Fathers (although Hanson notes that Gregory's Epistle, 38 could be the sole exception). Stead goes further and questions the influence of Aristotle on any theologian at all.

It appears, therefore, that any attempt to use Aristotle's theory of primary and secondary ousia as an explanation of the Trinity must be treated with extreme caution.

Stoic concepts

Stoic ideas contrast with those of Aristotle. They taught that there was a common underlying substance that composed the material of all things, including the world and God. This substance they called ousia which, whilst capable of change in appearance, was not capable of change in quantity. This concept can be characterised by the word 'substratum'. Such a system leads inevitably to pantheism, and needed much modification before it could be of use for Christian ideas. However, the idea of an underlying concrete substance of which physical reality is composed has obvious use for the doctrine of the Trinity.

A different element of Stoic thought used by Christian authors was the system of four 'categories': substratum, quality, disposition, and relative disposition. This system enabled the Stoics to make a distinction between what an object is in itself (substratum and quality) and what it is by contrast to other objects (disposition and relative disposition). LaCugna notes the importance of this distinction for the Cappadocians: definition by relatives does not inform us about the nature/substance of an object but only its existence in definition to another object. Thus, the hypostases could be discussed without actually explaining God's ousia: in this way it was possible to maintain the inaccessibility of the ousia to human knowledge.

Another aspect of Stoic terminology to note is their distinction between what is common (koinon) and what is individual (idios). This contrast between properties belonging to a group or to specific examples is an important part of Basil's vocabulary, and will be discussed further below.
Summary
Greek philosophy taught a variety of ideas around the general area of concrete and abstract properties that provided theologians with inspiration for means of describing the Trinity. Hanson draws a contrast between Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, the former being Stoic influenced, the latter Aristotelian. This ascription may be over-dependent on his assessment of Epistle, especially given the uncertainties surrounding the authorship of this letter, but indicates the variety of sources the Cappadocians allowed to enter their thinking. However, as will be seen later, it must also be affirmed that they transformed what they received.

4. The Aristotelian Degrees of Unity and Analogies

Introduction
Aristotle identified a hierarchy of five different ways by which the degree or extent of unity between any two objects can be defined. Of these the latter three are the most important, since they were extensively used by many different Patristic authors for inspiration when discussing the unity of the Trinity. These three are unity by substratum, genus and species.

Unity by substratum
Oil and wine are related because each contains water as a constituent part. This is the favoured analogy of Augustine rather than the Cappadocians.

Unity by genus
A dog, a horse, and a man are all related because they are animals. A clear example of this analogy in use is provided by Basil. The distinction between ousia and hypostasis is the same as that between the general and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man. Just as three animals may be related because they are all mammals, so the three hypostases are related. This was a very common analogy and one that has occasioned much debate.

Unity by species
Peter and James and John are all related because they are all members of a single species: man. This analogy is clearly used by Gregory of Nyssa: Peter and James are both men who share a common substance—humanity. If John is added to them then the humanity is not increased, there is still only one humanity. Likewise, no matter how many hypostases are 'present', the common property—divinity—is not increased if another hypostasis is added.

Cappadocian attitude to the analogies
The Cappadocians put only limited trust in analogies: they often were the first to point out the inadequacies of such methods. This is not surprising, because any analogy can go only so far as an explanation before a particular aspect of it becomes entirely inappropriate. A good example of this problem is that of the analogy of three men sharing the one substance, referred to earlier. The problem with it is this logic:

Since Peter + James + John = three men, then Father + Son + Spirit = three Gods.

Gregory discusses this problem extensively, arguing (correctly) that the word 'man' has a double meaning, being able to refer to both the individual and the common. However, no amount of arguing that only the second understanding should be used with this analogy will convince us, for the first will always intrude. The analogy has encountered a limitation.

It was exactly this problem that persuaded Augustine in favour of the analogy of substratum. Basil, however, in his correspondence with Apollinaris, rejects both the 'unity by substratum' and the 'unity by genus' as open to misunderstanding. This is because genus could have a Platonic (and thereby undesirable) understanding, and substratum could imply a (Stoic) pre-existent ousia independent of the hypostases.

What is easily overlooked is the fact that the Cappadocian Fathers used many different analogies, not all of them drawn from philosophy, and never felt themselves restricted to any one in particular. The importance of these analogies is that they provide further evidence of the way the Cappadocians conceived the relative abstract/concrete relationship between ousia and hypostasis, besides providing an invaluable means of illustrating the relationship between the two.

5. The Meaning of the Cappadocian Terminology

Ousia: concrete being
The material surveyed can be formulated into two different approaches. The first, often described as Neo-Nicaean, makes a distinction between the ousia as abstract-being (Aristotelian view) and hypostasis as concrete-being; whilst the second approach treats both ousia and hypostasis as concrete-being. The Cappadocians adhered to the second: ousia was viewed as concrete being, a 'single undifferentiated substance, identically expressed in each of the Three Persons'. The analogies were then used to demonstrate how two concrete substances could be related together in some way.

But this is not to say that they were somehow limited by the ideas in Greek Philosophy for, as was previously stated, the Cappadocians changed and developed what they received. They moved beyond the controversy that raged over the correct understanding of the Nicaean Creed—that if the term ousia was interpreted in Aristotelian terms of
primary ousia it led to modalism/Sabellianism; and if via either second­
ary ousia or Stoic ousia then both implied tetratheism.\textsuperscript{49} The ousia is so
totally bound up with the hypostases that it is only by relating the two
that the Cappadocian understanding of them can be perceived. Their
attitude can be summed up this way:

As applied to the being and persons of the deity ... prosòpon,
hypostasis and ousia all equally denote single concrete entities. To
the Greeks, God is one objective Being, though He is also three
objects.\textsuperscript{50}

The relationship between ousia and hypostasis
The heart of Cappadocian Trinitarian theology is now reached. By
concentrating on the possible derivations and meanings of the termino­
logy there has been the dangerous implication that the ousia and the
hypostases are effectively unrelated to one another. Nothing could be
further from the truth, for it is not possible to discuss God's nature using
only the one or the other. It is only together that these two terms can
inform us of anything meaningful about God.

Gregory of Nazianzus was well aware of the inseparability of the
hypostases and the ousia: 'No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am
illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish
them than I am carried back to the One.'\textsuperscript{51} But nor should we conceive
of any rift between hypostasis and ousia:

Beholding the glory in Father, Son and Holy Ghost, [a reflective
student's] mind all the while recognises no void interval wherein it
may travel between Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for there is
nothing inserted between them.\textsuperscript{52}

Or again,

For it is in no wise possible to entertain the idea of severance or
division ... but the communion and the distinction apprehended
in them are, in a certain sense, ineffable and inconceivable, the
continuity of nature being never rent asunder by the distinction of
the hypostases, nor the notes of proper distinction confounded in
the community of ousia.\textsuperscript{53}

An oft-quoted passage from Prestige summarises how it is only together
that the three hypostases constitute one ousia:

The whole unvaried substance [ousia], being incomposite, is
identical with the whole unvaried being of each person ... the
individuality is only the manner in which the identical substance is
objectively presented in each several person.\textsuperscript{54}

The Cappadocian Fathers, however, never confounded or confused the
ousia and the hypostases: ousia cannot exist without the hypostases but
represents what is common, whilst hypostasis represents what is proper
and distinct. This is clearly seen in two quotations from Basil, where he
draws on the Degrees of Unity:

The distinction between ousia and hypostasis is the same as that
between the general and the particular; as, for instance, between
the animal and the particular man. Wherefore, in the case of the
Godhead, we confess one ousia or substance so as not to give a
variant definition of existence, but we confess a particular hypostasis,
in order that our conception of Father, Son and Holy Spirit
may be without confusion and clear.\textsuperscript{55}

And elsewhere, 'ousia has the same relation to hypostasis as the
common has to the particular.\textsuperscript{56} The distinction between ousia and
hypostasis was defined as their 'mode of being' (tropos tês hyparxeos):
the Son is begotten, the Spirit is the one who proceeds, and therefore
the Father becomes the unbegotten.\textsuperscript{57} This idea can be explained
through a quotation from Gregory of Nyssa:

If one were to ask a husbandman about a tree, whether it were
planted or had grown of itself ... would he by that answer declare
the nature of the tree? Surely not; but while saying how it exists he
would leave the question of its nature obscure and unexplained.\textsuperscript{58}

Discerning the difference between a planted tree and one that sprang up
from a seed blown by the wind does not enable us to identify whether
the tree is an oak or ash.

The similarity to the Stoic (and Aristotelian) concept of relation is
apparent here. When the differences between the hypostases in terms of
their 'modes of being' are enumerated no comment is made about the
substance. Nor is the how by which this occurs explained; that remains
a mystery inaccessible to us. God's very substance cannot be known, it is
only the hypostasis that is known.

Summary
The large number of quotations in this section is deliberate: it is better
to let the Cappadocian Fathers speak for themselves and to reduce
commentary to the minimum. They were unfaid to express the
differences between each hypostasis but sought a balanced concept of
God as 'divided indivisibly and united in division. The Godhead is One
in Three and the Three are One'.\textsuperscript{59} The basis of unity is the ousia, whilst
the hypostases are real distinctions expressed in their 'modes of being',
or relations one to another. Prestige sums this up as: 'God is one object
in Himself, and three objects to Himself.\textsuperscript{60}
6. The Father as the Cause of the Trinity

The preceding discussion has presupposed that the standard Trinitarian formula used by the Cappadocian Fathers was ‘one ousia, three hypostases’. The assumption has also been that there was an absolute equality of the different hypostases. But, whilst the Cappadocian Fathers did insist on an absolute ontological equality of the hypostases, they had to, and did, also acknowledge a sense in which the hypostases were not equal functionally. The economy of salvation reveals a certain ‘order’ (taxis) of the hypostases, but the theology affirms that only a full equality of substance between each Person will safeguard against slipping into ontological subordinationism. Several statements can be found, however, that imply a more significant role for the hypostasis of the Father in contrast to the other hypostases, and it is to these statements that we now turn.

It was the teaching of Eunomius that raised the issue of cause (the question of how the Son and the Spirit came to be). His understanding of the word ‘Ungenerate’ (as applied to the Father) was that ‘God is from no one’ and that it was the property of the ousia. God is himself uncaused, but the cause of everything else which has come into being. Hence, since the Son has been generated from the Father he must be of a different ousia, and therefore the Son and Spirit ontologically subordinate to the Father.

The Cappadocians rejected this notion by stating that it was the Father who was the cause of the Son and the Spirit: cause must be located in the hypostasis, and particularly in the hypostasis of the Father. For example, Gregory declares:

God, who is over all, alone has, as one special mark of his own hypostasis, his being Father, and his deriving his hypostasis from no cause; and through this mark he is peculiarly known.

Or again,

The same principle applies to the Holy Spirit affecting only a difference in order (taxis). For as the Son is attached to the Father and the fact that he derives his being from him does not diminish his status (hyparxis) so the Holy Spirit holds to the Son who can be regarded as prior to the hypostasis of the Spirit in theory on the score of origin. So if the matter of origin is removed the Holy Trinity is in no way unsymmetrical with itself.

Lossky, however, sounds a warning note. At times, Gregory of Nazianzus’ stress on the Father as the source and Monarch is so great that he runs close to compounding the person of the Father and the Godhead. This is especially seen in the following quotation:

The Three have one Nature (physis)—God. And the union is the

Father, from whom and to whom the order of Persons runs its course, not so as to be confused, but so as to be possessed, without distinction of time, of will, or of place.

But running close is different to overstepping the mark. Any mention of cause is carefully circumscribed by the surrounding discussion. For instance, Gregory also states:

I should like to call the Father the greater, because from him flows the Equality and the Being of Equals, but I am afraid to use the word Origin, lest I should make him the Origin of Inferiors, and thus insult him by precedencies of honour.

He goes on to affirm that any ideas about cause that produce subordination of any sort are inadmissible because of the homoousios. It was within this context that any statements of cause were acceptable.

Whilst the Cappadocian Fathers varied the starting point of Trinitarian discussion, they were careful not to imply any supremacy of ousia over hypostasis or vice versa: ‘order does not affect the ousia.’ They also avoided emphasis: to speak of the one necessitated discussion of the other. As stated above, they were careful to balance the relationship between hypostasis and ousia. It is within this context that the statements about cause must be understood.

7. Summary

Basil’s teaching on the Trinity is conveniently summarised by Hanson:

Basil produced a doctrine of God as a single ousia with three distinct sets of recognizable properties or peculiarities, each set forming an authentically existing hypostasis, the whole bound together inseparably in a common ousia or nature, no hypostasis being subordinate to or less than the others, but the Second and Third deriving from the First as their source or ultimate principle.

There is a careful distinction here. The cause of the Logos and the Spirit is the hypostasis of the Father, but the basis of unity is the ousia. It is to this distinction that we will return when considering Zizioulas’ ontology.

III. ZIZIOULAS’ METAPHYSIC

1. Introduction: Being in Relation

Turning to Zizioulas requires a leap through sixteen hundred years of history. Yet this does not mean that he is totally divorced from the Cappadocian Fathers. Quite the opposite, for he stands in their wake as a Greek and Orthodox thinker. As an Orthodox theologian it is...
incumbent upon him to validate his own thoughts by demonstrating their continuity with the thought of the Fathers. It is at this point that problems occur for the contemporary Orthodox community—does he always correctly present the case as put by the Fathers?

Whilst claiming Patristic support, Zizioulas provides only minimal citations from the Greek Fathers: there are insufficient specific references to them that would enable us to evaluate the evidence for ourselves. It is essential, therefore, that close attention be paid to whatever support is given. Fortunately, Lossky appears to share similar ideas, and (whilst also not replete with references) he will allow a greater survey of the Greek Fathers than would otherwise have been possible.

As discussed in §I, the focus of Zizioulas’ thesis is personhood. He identifies the non-relational definition of ‘person’ prevalent in the West, a definition that has its origins in the emphasis on substance in Western Trinitarian theology. This emphasis had developed the idea that divine personhood is demonstrated in those who possess divine substance—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By extension, the human person is defined as one who possesses human substance. To be a person is simply to be, to exist.

Zizioulas challenges this notion of divine personhood. For him, to be in relation is not only an extra element in personhood, it is the dominant element. A person is defined primarily by his or her relations to other persons.

The focus of this section is personhood as ‘being in relation’. There will be a presentation of Zizioulas’ understanding of what the Cappadocian Fathers taught about ‘being in relation’, but of vital importance is an understanding of the meaning and use of the word person/prosopon itself, which will be considered first of all.

2. Prosopon

History
Zizioulas does not identify who took ‘the momentous step of the identification of hypostasis with the term prosopon’. If prosopon was ‘foreign’ to the Eastern concept of ontology why should it have ever been incorporated? It is perhaps surprising to discover, given its importance to Zizioulas’ thesis, that it was actually the Western Latin Fathers who must take ultimate responsibility!

Webb identifies three stages in the process of accepting prosopon. The first was the use of persona by Tertullian. The second the translation problems illustrated in the following diagram:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Latin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ousia</td>
<td>essentia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>substantia</td>
<td>hypostasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persona</td>
<td>prosopon</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Substantia should have been used for hypostasis but was used instead for ousia (it being only later that the better translation essentia for ousia was adopted). In such a situation what word was to be used to translate hypostasis? This is the third stage: the idea in the West was to use Tertullian’s term, persona. However, the nearly literal translation for this was prosopon.

This confusing state of affairs was, of course, exacerbated by the fact that ousia and hypostasis were originally synonyms (as discussed in §II.1) and therefore were often both translated by substantia. This is the reason why the Eastern Trinitarian formula, ‘one ousia, three hypostases’, sounded to Western ears like ‘one substance, three substances’ and therefore implied Arianism or tritheism. On the other hand, the Western formula, ‘one substantia, three persona’, was totally wrong since prosopon was the favoured term of Sabellianism, a major problem for the East.

The Cappadocian Fathers display a variety of reactions to prosopon. In the space of only two years (AD 375–376) three different attitudes can be distinguished in Basil’s writings. Firstly, he demonstrates hostility to it; secondly, he can be careful to distinguish between the correct use and Sabellius’ use of hypostasis and prosopon (though hypostasis is still Basil’s preferred term); thirdly, he can use it favourably without also having to use hypostasis in the same sentence. Gregory Nazianzus maintains a more positive attitude, though occasionally being highly condescending towards the Western need for the word. Official recognition of the new synonymous meanings came at the Council of Constantinople (AD 382):

... believing also that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have a single Godhead and power and substance... in three most perfect hypostases, or three perfect persons.
Thus, prosōpon entered Trinitarian vocabulary and became the accepted term for the three.

Zizioulas' use of prosōpon
Zizioulas' concern is not on the history but on the effect this word had, asserting that prosōpon radically altered the basic ideas of Trinitarian reality.89 Whereas there had previously not been a relational term for use with the Trinity one was now introduced. The hypostases are not simply concrete realities but realities in personal relationship to one another.

Zizioulas devotes considerable attention to the background of prosōpon in both Greek and Latin thought.90 He delves into its origins as a Greek theatrical term and finds there significance in the general theme of tragedy: Man is doomed to failure in his struggle for 'identity', in the face of the maltreatment by the Gods. 'Identity' and 'personhood' are therefore unattainable, and Greek thought does not ultimately acknowledge the value of the person. The Latin use of persona was similar, but applied to the context of legal situations: one standing in the stead of another. This self-evidently relates to the Greek concept of one individual portraying another.

In sum, prosōpon meant a mask, a role, something additional to the substance of a human being that allowed 'the same man to enact more than one prosōpa' at a time.91 It is not surprising to find that Sabellius brought exactly this pre-Trinitarian meaning of prosōpon into his Trinitarian thought, nor that the East should reject prosōpon for this reason (as Zizioulas accepts).92

So far all this seems to be going against Zizioulas. His contribution is to demonstrate the concept of relation that underlies the use of the word: personhood was not seen as a function of substance. The linking of hypostasis and prosōpon in Trinitarian thought altered the meanings of both words so that personhood became the distinctive mark of beings that exist in relationship. By introducing a relational term the notion of communion/koinōnia appears at the heart of Trinitarian doctrine.93

Summary
Through his study of the origins and the use of the word prosōpon, Zizioulas has prepared the ground for an evaluation of his main thesis, 'being in relation'. With the coming together of a word from ontology (hypostasis) and another from 'sociology' (prosōpon) there was a revolution in ontological thought. The notion of personhood as something more than merely an individual entered and altered ontological definitions. Simply to possess divine (or human) substance was not proof of personhood: something totally different to the substance also needs to be recognised. This is the ability to be in relation.

3. Zizioulas' Presentation of the Cappadocians
In §II, the aim was to present the Cappadocian Fathers as they thought of themselves. The aim here is to see the Cappadocians through the eyes of sixteen hundred years of subsequent theological thinking, as they are presented by Zizioulas. His understanding of their teaching is at once distinctive and yet typically Greek, and focuses especially around the re-emphasising of different elements in their system, and especially the implications of the teaching that the Father is the cause of the Trinity.

Father as cause
In §II.6, cause was seen as a (minor) part of the Cappadocian scheme, integrated but without undue emphasis. Zizioulas, however, presents it as a much more central part, almost the lynchpin of their system! Frustratingly, neither he nor LaCugna provide Patristic support for this, and attention must turn to Lossky instead.94 What appears from his citations is a gradually increasing importance of the doctrine. The two Gregorys maintain cause alongside the emphasised ousia.95 With John Damascus, however, the situation has shifted even to the position of reversal: whilst the ousia is still retained, it is cause that is emphasised.

We do not speak of three Gods . . . but rather of one God, the holy Trinity, the Son and Spirit being referred to one cause.96

Father as basis of unity
The significance Zizioulas attaches to this increased emphasis on cause is apparent in this central statement around which he establishes his ontology.

Among the Greek Fathers the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological 'principle' or 'cause' of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the hypostasis, that is, the person of the Father.97

This makes a stark contrast to Hanson's conclusion quoted in §II.7. The idea of the Father as cause has been extended to incorporate the idea of the Father as the basis of unity. The ousia as the unity is specifically rejected.

Although Zizioulas makes no mention of it, he may be supporting this position with the 'generic' view of ousia.98 This emphasises an Aristotelian 'second ousia' understanding to a homoiou stos interpretation of the Nicaean Creed (i.e. that the Father and the Son are not of identical substance but of similar substance). The principle of unity, therefore, is not the ousia but the monarchy of the Father.

The Father becomes the source, ultimate principle and cause of the Godhead, so that unity rests in him and not in the consubstantiality of the Three.99
It must be conceded here that Basil did indeed come from a 'homoousian' background, and that the Cappadocian emphasis on the triplcity of God meant that they did not deal fully with the _ousia_, but full appraisal of the generic view is delayed until §IV.2.

Several other comments on the _ousia_ should also be noted. There is the observation that even the substance became a relational category by virtue of the _homoousias_. To say that the Father and the Son are of identical substance is itself a definition of relation. It seems strange that Zizioulas does not here recognise the Cappadocian attitude that the _ousia_ is seen in and is defined by the _hypostases_. This leads Zizioulas into an observation on the notion of communion, noting that Basil 'prefers to speak of it in terms of the _communion of persons_: communion is for Basil an ontological category.

Can the _ousia_ be discarded? 'No', comes the unexpected answer. _Ousia_ is retained as the element of communion. The definition of _ousia_ that Zizioulas accepts is relational (as noted in §I.2.), but is only a very minor part of his ontology.

4. Conclusion

The focus of the difference between the Cappadocian Fathers and the modern Greek authors is clear: the basis of unity in the Godhead. In the face of the evidence surveyed in §II, which indicates that the Cappadocians believed that this lay in the _ousia_, the modern authors maintain that the Cappadocians believed it lay in the _hypostasis_, or Person, of the Father. This, it is claimed, establishes communion and relationship as the ultimate ontological category in God. 'Being is traced back not to substance but to a person.'

IV ASSESSMENT

It is not our purpose here to assess some of the larger implications of Zizioulas' method (though see §V below). The aim, rather, is to discuss specific issues of emphasis and ideas. The main element of assessment is to evaluate the ramifications of such a radical alteration in the role of the _ousia_.

1. The Pre-eminence of the Father

There are too many problems associated with the role being ascribed to the _hypostasis_ of the Father as cause of the Trinity for it to be uncritically accepted. Whilst it is valid to recognise a significant shift in position from Basil to John Damascus, it is too sweeping to state that 'the Greek Fathers _always_ maintained that the principle of unity in the Trinity is the person of the Father.' To do so is to ignore statements about the _ousia_ and its relationship to the _hypostases_, present even in John Damascus.

The primary danger is that the emphasis upon the Father will become so great that ontological subordination will result, despite several voices sounding a warning.

One would doubt, however, whether Augustine or any of those predecessors of his who stress equality, say Basil, would admit that a mere causal relation between the Father and the other persons does by itself constitute any kind of inequality between them.

There is no longer any suggestion that God is one simply by reason of the fact that the Second and Third Persons may in the last resort be resolved back into the First Person, since they derive their origin from him. The fact that now comes to be emphasised is that the Father is manifested in the Son and in the Holy Spirit wholly and without detraction. The Three Persons no longer lead back to a unity that is primarily found in one Person: they are in a real sense one in themselves.

To these must be added Gregory Nazianzus' reticence, as indicated in §II.7, 'to call the Father the greater.' Whilst Lossky cautioned against the idea of confounding the Godhead and the Father, neither he nor Zizioulas have adequately guarded against slipping into ontological subordinationism.

Guntot's comments are especially perceptive. He questions the basis of ascribing pre-eminence to the Father on the basis of cause since these relations are _mutual_. Communion is not based solely on the Father, but is a constituent part of the nature of the Son and the Spirit. A more balanced picture of cause must take account of the economy of salvation. Scripture reveals an 'order' ( _taxis_ ) of the Persons, but this does not imply the loss of ontological equality.

In sum, then, Zizioulas' stress on the Father as source and Monarch is so great that he has compounded the person of the Father and the Godhead. The Church Fathers successfully avoid both confounding the Godhead with the Person of the Father and subordination; Lossky and Zizioulas do not.

2. Attitudes to the _Ousia_

Zizioulas has a highly negative attitude to the possibility of any role for the _ousia_ in the Trinity. He notes with disdain the tendency of Western thought to start any discussion of the Trinity with the _ousia_ and never to achieve a true separation of the Three. This, he believes, gives pre-eminence to the _ousia_ as the 'ontological principle of God'. Gunton's work on Augustine would largely agree with this. Augustine worked with an essentially abstract Trinity, a God who is first and foremost One
and to whom the Three are somehow to be added. Yet Mascall has argued that Augustine is not as anti-relational as he has been presented. Augustine worked extensively from the Stoic/Aristotelian concept of relation; far from being concerned simply with the question of being and substance he was highly concerned with the interactions between the three. The infamous quotations—'[the Greeks] intend to put a difference, I know not what, between three persons'—has been overstressed and distorted from their context. Augustine worked extensively from the Stoic/Aristotelian concept of relation; far from being concerned simply with the question of being and substance he was highly concerned with the interactions between the three. The infamous quotations—'[the Greeks] intend to put a difference, I know not what, between three persons'—has been overstressed and distorted from their context. 117 There is also much against Harnack's theory of generic ousia. The rejection of Aristotelian influence (§II.3) and the doubts expressed on the analogies, and especially on the generic analogy (§II.4), have already been expressed and indicate the shaky foundation for this line of thinking. And whilst Zizioulas agrees with Harnack's conclusions, he does not give any indication of supporting a generic view of ousia.

There are also problems with the idea that Basil prefers to speak of communion rather than of the ousia. It is too contentious to state that the passages referred to support this conclusion, for the context of Basil's comments is that of the illogic of attempting to number the Godhead. 118

For the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son... so that, according to the distinction of the Persons both are one and one, and, according to the community of the Nature, one. 119

The ousia is about more than the communion together of the hypostases. And to claim on the basis of four references (one of which cannot be traced) that Basil prefers communion to ousia is to ignore the evidence to the contrary. The following quotation should also be borne in mind when evaluating Cappadocian attitudes to communion:

The continuity of nature never being rent asunder by the distinction of the hypostases, nor the notes of proper distinction confined in the community of essence. 120

It is certainly a matter of deep regret that the basis of Eastern thought on the Trinity was lost to the West. But there is still much that can be gained from the Western line of the tradition. Zizioulas' attempt to remove ousia seems unnecessary.

3. Trithesim?

Kelly observes that the Cappadocian Fathers were often accused of tritheism. Such an accusation, however, overlooks their attitude to the ousia, which they stress is one, indivisible and concrete. They prefer not to number the Godhead at all, and resist the idea of adding the hypostases together. This, however, is exactly the way in which Zizioulas lays himself open to the same charge of tritheism: he does not have the same attitude to ousia. Even Gunton, who elsewhere is far from reticent in casting the evils of stressing substance, questions whether Zizioulas should reassert the homousion to avert this charge of tritheism. 124

4. De Deo Uno

The idea that 'the substance never exists in a "naked" state, that is, without hypostasis, without a "mode of existence" ', is a common enough notion in Trinitarian studies. It is designed to say that the ousia did not precede the hypostases: there was no temporal lapse between the existence of the Godhead and the individual persons, and that the persons are independent of the economy of salvation. Zizioulas, however, reaches a quite different conclusion from this: that God exists primarily in relationship. The three modes of being are said to owe 'not to the substance but to one person, the Father'. In support of this he cites Prestige, who observes that the mode of being 'may, at least in the case of the Second and Third persons, originally have contained a covert reference not merely to their existence, but to the derivation of their existence from the Parental arché'.

Yet it is also possible to affirm the opposite: that God has always existed in his unity. Both singleness and relationship have always been a vital factor in God's existence. With Rahner we would agree that the classic separation of the doctrine of God into two treatises was not only incorrect but also implied that the persons were 'added' to the ousia. It is also quite probably the case that later theologians made this mistake, but that does not mean that the ousia must be jettisoned.

5. Prosōpon?

The claim that the word prosōpon had such a devastating effect upon Trinitarian ontology as is claimed for it, is far from convincing. The Greek Fathers always seem to have had a strong sense of the relations between the Three. This came from their full incorporation of the economy: the Three were obviously in relation to each other simply by virtue of the biblical material. The Greek Fathers did not need a mere word, and one 'foreign' to their ontology at that, to teach them about relationship.

6. Summary

These criticisms force us to ask with Williams, 'who on earth says that the divine ousia has a causal relation to the persons of the Trinity?'
Zizioulas has simply overstated the case in his desire to downplay the *ousia*. Zizioulas states that there are two elements to a definition of personhood: 'to be' and 'to be in relation'. Whilst agreeing wholeheartedly with this (admittedly without discussion of it as such), some of the evidence adduced in its support is not above suspicion.

Firstly, *prosopon* does not seem to have been the relational term he claims it to have been. The Greek Fathers seem to have (grudgingly) accepted it as quibbling over syllables (whilst also carefully guarding against Sabellianism). Secondly, he has not proved that the basis of unity of the three, for the Cappadocian Fathers, was the *hypostasis* of the Father. Certainly the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit; of course the *ousia* was never without the *hypostases*. But his conclusion that the *hypostases* are ontologically pre-eminent to the *ousia* is impermissible. His entire attitude to the *ousia* is so negative that it is difficult to see that he can actually support the one *ousia*, three *prosopa* statement he quotes.

**V CONCLUSION**

1. Are the Cappadocians Normative?

The above survey has demonstrated the differences between Zizioulas and the Patristic Fathers, whom he claims to be in support of his thesis. Zizioulas is incorrect to state that the Cappadocians believed the basis of unity lay in the *hypostasis* of the Father, as the cause of the Trinity. Whilst acknowledging the Father's role as cause, the Cappadocians taught that the basis of unity was the *ousia*. Zizioulas may feel that the *ousia* has received too much emphasis in Western discussions of the Trinity, but he is incorrect to assert its lack of role for the Cappadocian Fathers; it had a major and central role for them.

This brings us to the point where the important question of §1.3 can be addressed: to what extent must contemporary re-applications of the Trinity adhere to the teachings of the past if they are to be valid? Even though the Cappadocian Fathers did not teach a unity based on the *ousia*, this does not seem to have been the relational term he claims it to have been. The Greek Fathers seem to have (grudgingly) accepted it as quibbling over syllables (whilst also carefully guarding against Sabellianism). Secondly, he has not proved that the basis of unity of the three, for the Cappadocian Fathers, was the *hypostasis* of the Father. Certainly the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit; of course the *ousia* was never without the *hypostases*. But his conclusion that the *hypostases* are ontologically pre-eminent to the *ousia* is impermissible. His entire attitude to the *ousia* is so negative that it is difficult to see that he can actually support the one *ousia*, three *prosopa* statement he quotes.

**The Trinitarian Ontology of John Zizioulas**

2. What Role for the Ousia?

What must be recognised are the huge difficulties for contemporary Christians in attempting to understand the *ousia*. Ordinary church members cannot be expected to wade through complex Greek philosophy before they can have an understanding of the Trinity. What is required is a re-expression of the Trinity to capture the aim of Cappadocian teaching about the *ousia* - the reality of the *prosopa* - whilst avoiding the Greek context and terminology that gave rise to these valuable ideas.

Certainly what is encouraging about recent Western studies is the move to reincorporate the economic Trinity as the central element of a doctrine of Trinity. With Rahner we must recognise the reality of a genuine Trinity in which things happened to the *Logos* that did not happen to the Father. There is a desperate need to reassert the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity, to work from the economic Trinity to demonstrate the personhood of God as communion. The emphasis on *ousia* has so skewed the understanding of the Trinity in the West that there has been great damage over many centuries.

There is, however, a danger with the idea of returning to the economic Trinity: that of equating it so completely with the immanent Trinity that the latter could be regarded as superfluous. In the face of today's problems we are in greater, not lesser, need of a secure ontology; as the opening quotation demonstrates, Zizioulas also agrees...
with this. But a contemporary ontology need not be formulated with the vocabulary of previous centuries and theologians. Zizioulas’ aim is to establish a secure contemporary ontology by recognising the reality of the distinctions between the persons, its basis in communion and its foundation in the Scriptures. By doing this he has demonstrated a way out of the existential despair concerning the nature of personhood, that the early part of this century has saddled Western society with.

3. Conclusion

Zizioulas stands with other theologians who are re-assessing the doctrine of the Trinity and who are seeking to find new ways of making this meaningful to today’s society. Instead of being restricted by the contemporary Western theologians. Reservations have been expressed concerning the way Zizioulas reports formulations of the past, these theologians are attempting to return to trine of the Trinity and who are seeking to find new ways of making this meaningful to today’s society.

Endnotes

3 C.B. Kaiser, 'The Ontological Trinity in the Context of the Historical Religions', SIT 29 (1976), 301–310. His survey of ‘three’s in other religions concludes that only parallels can be found: ‘the economic relations . . . are not analogous or even comparable to cosmic hierarchies’ (309).
4 An extensive listing can be found in The Forgotten Trinity (London: British Council of Churches, 1989), 45–47.
10 Zizioulas, Being, 17.
11 Zizioulas (Being, 44, n. 40; ‘Human Capacity’, 408, n. 2) indicates that the idea comes from some of the mystical Greek writers but also appears in the writings of Heidegger.
14 Zizioulas, Being, 46, his italics.
15 Zizioulas, ‘On Being a Person’, 42.
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87 Greg. Naz., Or. 21.35 and 36.11.
89 Zizioulas, Being, 36-39.
90 Zizioulas, Being, 31-35.
91 Zizioulas, Being, 34.
92 Zizioulas, Being, 37.
93 Zizioulas, ‘Human Capacity’, 409; Being, 39.
94 LaCugna, God, 243-50; Lossky, Mystical, 58–63.
95 Greg. Naz., Or. 20.7 and 31.14 can be added to the passages discussed previously.
99 Hanson, Search, 696.
100 Prestige, observation (Patristic, 244), drawn particularly from Greg. Nyssa, Ep. 38.
101 Zizioulas, Being, 84.
102 Zizioulas, Being, 124, his italics. The reference is to Basil, De Spiritu Sancto, 18, but note the problems with this, discussed below in §IV.2 and n. 118.
103 Zizioulas, Being, 89.
104 Zizioulas, Being, 42, n. 37.
105 Lossky, Mystical, 58.
106 For example: ‘in the sense of the word agetotes the three absolutely divine subsistenses of the Holy Godhead agree: for they exist as one in essence’ (De Fide Orth. I.8).
107 Wolfson, Philosophy, 357–58.
108 Prestige, Patristic, 233.
109 Greg. Naz., Or. 40.43.
110 Lossky, Mystical, 59.
111 Gunton, Promise, 165.
112 Gunton, Promise, 166–67.
114 Gunton, Promise, passim, esp. ch. 5.
117 Zizioulas refers to Basil, De Spiritu Sancto, 18 and 68, as well as Ep. 52.3 and Con. Eun. II.12. The De Spiritu Sancto references are, however, not consistent with the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers edition.
118 John G.F. Wilks

44 Wolfson, Philosophy, 342–46.
46 LaCugna, God, 67.
47 Prestige, Patristic, 265.
48 Basil, Ep. 236.6, 125.1, and 214.4.
49 Wolfson, Philosophy, 336.
50 Prestige, Patristic, 235.
51 Greg. Naz., Or. 40.41.
54 Prestige, Patristic, 244.
55 Basil, Ep. 236.6.
56 Basil, Ep. 214.4.
57 Basil, Ep. 214.4; 236.6; Greg. Naz., Or. 29.2.
59 Greg. Naz., Or. 34.11.
60 Prestige, Patristic, 249.
61 Hanson, Search, 611–36; LaCugna, God, 55–66.
62 LaCugna, God, 62
64 Keith, ‘Our Knowledge of God’, 72.
65 Zizioulas, Being, 40; LaCugna, God, 245.
67 Greg. Nyssa, Con. Eunom. 1. 690, 691, cited by Hanson, Search, 729.
69 Greg. Naz., Or. 42.15.
70 Greg. Naz., Or. 40.43.
71 Prestige, Patristic, 249.
72 Hanson, Search, 729, n. 207.
73 Lossky, Mystical, 56.
74 Hanson, Search, 699.
76 Zizioulas, Being, 40; Gunton, Promise, 86–90.
78 Zizioulas, Being, 38; ‘Human Capacity’, 409.
80 Tertullian, Ad. Prax., 11, as cited by Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, 113.
81 This table does not present all the areas of confusion. W.G.T. Shedd comments, in his notes to the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers edition of Augustine's Trinitate, 92, n. 7, that substantia was later identified with essentia. This rendered Augustine's formula, ‘one essentia, three substantia’, meaningless, and led to the creation in the Middle Ages of the Latin term substantia, which K. Barth notes, in Church Dogmatics, Vol. 1.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God, trans. G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 413, relates to the Eastern understanding of hypostasis as mode of being.
82 Lossky, Mystical, 52.
83 These are not necessarily chronological.
86 Basil, De Spiritu Sancto, 45.

Note: The page contains a table that is not presented in this text format. It is referenced in the text as Table 1, which includes information on the works of various authors.
119 Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 45.
123 Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 44.
125 Zizioulas, *Being*, 41; see also 88.
126 Zizioulas, *Being*, 41.
131 Hanson, *Search*, 731, my italics.