

Orthodoxy, Post-Modernity, and Ecumenism:
The Difference that Divine-Human Communion Makes
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When I was student at the University of Chicago, I attended David Tracy's course on "Postmodernity." During a break, he said to me, and I'm paraphrasing, "you know Aristotle, the Orthodox have a certain advantage-- they did not go through the well-known chain of events within the West, meaning the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernity, Post-modernity. And because of this, those within the tradition have the advantage of knowing what it is like to think like a tradition." As with many, many things that David Tracy said during my time at Chicago, it took me a while to fully understand what he was saying; with but a simple phrase, however, as he has done so often in his career, David Tracy provided an important hermeneutical key for understanding Orthodoxy's place within the cultural situation that is now called post-modernity.

In this essay I would like to expand on what I think David Tracy means by "thinking as a tradition," and do so in a way that clarifies an Orthodox Christian response to the post-modern situation. I will begin by offering a brief and select summary of contemporary Orthodox theology that will illustrate a remarkable consensus around the centrality of the principle of the realism of divine-human communion for theology. Orthodoxy is, in essence, a tradition of thinking on the realism of divine-human communion manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. It is this particular core of the tradition that will shape Orthodoxy's response to central questions of a present situation, even beyond post-modernity, and constitutes the singular, most important contribution that Orthodoxy can bring to ecumenical dialogue.

The Post-Colonial Context

In addition to ending the long reign of the Byzantine Empire, the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 silenced a long and vibrant intellectual tradition in the Orthodox Christian East, whose last notable theologian was Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). It would take nearly 400 years before a revival would occur in Russia, which is discernible in part with the establishment of the intellectual academies of the Russian Orthodox Church in various cities throughout Russia.

I speak of contemporary Orthodox theology in terms of “revival,” because it is often forgotten that much of the Orthodox Christian world after the thirteenth century was colonized either by the Mongols, the Ottoman Turks, or the Communists. Contemporary Orthodox theology is a post-colonial attempt to shed the “effective history” of oppression so as to reconstitute itself as an intellectual tradition that draws on its past in order to confront contemporary questions. The usual caricatures of Orthodoxy are clear manifestations of this forgetfulness: the mystical smells and bells form of Christianity; a hopelessly, male-dominated, androcentric and hierarchical vestige of a Christendom that is much vilified in theology today; a community that refuses to encounter the modern world in its stubborn adherence to ancient doctrinal formulations. A striking example of this forgetfulness is Friedrich Schleiermacher’s description of the Eastern Church as “torpid,” within which

the combination of knowledge about religion with a really scientific organization is almost entirely destroyed. But just because of this purely negative character there was the less to be said here about that Church, since it cannot be determined whether it will again step back more into connexion with the world’s intellectual intercourse, and so have the strength to elicit and develop within itself an antithesis analogous to the Western one.¹

The accusation that Orthodoxy never confronted modernity is most perplexing, because the obvious question is: how could Orthodox Christians engage modern currents of thought

¹ *The Christian Faith*, eds. H.R. MacKintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 101-02.

when the Ottoman Turks would not let them? It is true that the Ottomans did not occupy Russia, but the common opinion that Russian modernization was always a step behind the rest of Europe never takes into account the post-colonial effect of the nearly two-hundred year Mongol occupation of Russia. Most of the Orthodox world was under Ottoman Turkish oppression for over 400 years, up to the first decade of the 20th century. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople to this day still suffers from violations of its religious freedom by the Turkish government. The forgetfulness of this fact by most of the Christian world is exacerbated by the audacity of some scholars to describe the Ottoman Empire as tolerant.² “Tolerance” is not a word my grandmother would have used, who even though she was only nine years old when the Ottomans finally left her village, had vivid memories of their abuse. The fact that most Orthodox theology in Russia in the early 19th century, and in Greece in the twentieth century up to the 1960s, was primarily imitative of Protestant and Catholic dogmatic manuals can only make sense if one sees those contexts through post-colonial eyes. Soon after liberation, most Orthodox countries had to suffer through the tyranny of communism for most of the 20th century. As anyone who has suffered oppression knows—peoples of race, gender, color, and those who have suffered various kinds of domestic abuse—the oppressor’s shadow lingers long after liberation and much time is needed to recover any sense of authentic identity. Orthodox theology, as I will show, does not easily fit into the traditional Western divisions of history into the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern, since it is a post-colonial attempt to recover a tradition that was decimated through oppression, while simultaneously attempting to discern how to retrieve that tradition in the face of contemporary questions.

In this post-colonial situation, Orthodox Christianity stands in an unusual middle-position: it is often identified with the Christendom-like, male-dominated form of Christianity

² “The millet system of the Ottomans suggests another version of the imperial regime of toleration, one that was more fully developed and longer lasting” (Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* [New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1997], 17).

that most Christian theology today argues is irrelevant and possibly dangerous; yet, like many of the liberation theologies today, a close reading of contemporary Orthodox theology will reveal a similar complaint against traditional Western forms of theology, primarily the intellectualization of theology. Like so much of the liberation theologies today, contemporary Orthodox theology emphasizes the role of “experience,” especially the experience of union with God. There is a remarkable affinity between contemporary Orthodoxy theology and Latino and Latin American theologies on the relational notion of the person and the link between presence, symbol and sacrament. This affinity is especially evident if one compares Robert Goizueta’s *Caminemos con Jesus* and John Zizioulas’s *Communion and Otherness*. The place of Orthodox Christianity in the post-modern world is not quite as evident as might be expected. One thing is certain: contemporary Orthodox theology can only be rightly understood if one takes into account the post-colonial situation of Orthodox Christianity.

Contemporary Orthodox Theology: A Tradition of Thinking on Divine-Human Communion

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, theological faculties were established in traditional Orthodox cities throughout Eastern Europe. A movement to return to more authentic forms of the Orthodox spiritual and theological traditions began in the late 18th century with the Slavonic translation of the *Philokalia* compiled by Nikodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809), which was followed by a series of Russian translations of Eastern patristic texts. The revival of the Orthodox intellectual tradition, however, is also indebted to individual thinkers who were not affiliated with the emerging theological institutions of higher learning in traditional Orthodox countries and who, in fact, were reacting to the theology emerging from these institutions. Although the theological academies throughout the Orthodox world did play an indispensable role in the revival of the Orthodox intellectual tradition, especially in their creative appropriation

of the *Philokalia* and in the production of translations of patristic texts, they were established on the models of German universities and much of the theological work produced by the faculty of these theological schools was considered primarily imitative of the Protestant and Catholic scholastic manuals.³

Early 19th-century Russia saw the emergence of an intellectual tradition which was simultaneously rooted in the Orthodox theological and liturgical tradition, but which also sought to engage the modern philosophical currents streaming into Russia, especially German Idealism. From this particular trajectory emerged what is referred to as the Russian school.⁴ The most well known and influential intellectual from the Russian school is Vladimir Sergeevich Soloviev (1853-1900), considered to be the father of Russian sophiology. Two ideas were central to Soloviev's thought: the humanity of God (*bogochelovechestvo*) and Sophia. The fact that both these concepts remained central to Russian religious philosophy allows Rowan Williams to claim, echoing Whitehead's remark on Plato, that "all subsequent Russian metaphysics is a series of footnotes to Soloviev."⁵ The concept of the humanity of God is related to the Orthodox dogmatic principle of the divine-human union in Christ. Soloviev, however, was far from a dogmatician. His philosophy attempts to express this Orthodox principle of the divine-human union in Christ in the categories of German Idealism, particularly the philosophy of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854). Although he appropriates the thought of Schelling, Soloviev's philosophy is a unique synthesis of the Orthodox affirmation of divine-human communion and German Idealism which attempts to critique the inadequacies of modern philosophies. The humanity of God forms the basis for Soloviev's attempt to conceptualize a God who is both transcendent and immanent to creation. For Soloviev, affirming the humanity

³ See Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006).

⁴ The best account of the Russian School is Paul Valliere's *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

⁵ *The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique* (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1975), 209.

of God means that creation is intrinsic, not extrinsic, to the life of God. God relates to creation from all eternity and creation exists in the life of God insofar as God's life is the reconciliation of all opposites: the material and the spiritual, freedom and necessity, finite and infinite. Creation is a movement of recovery of that original unity which is manifested in the God-man—Christ. Soloviev expresses this particular understanding of the God-world relation with the concept of Sophia and by so doing gives birth to the sophiological tradition of the Russian school. God is Sophia, which means that God eternally relates to creation and creation itself—created Sophia—is a movement of reconciliation toward divine Sophia.

As a result of the particular understanding of God's relation to the world that is implied in his sophiology, Soloviev had a higher estimation of secular knowledge than the more extreme Orthodox Slavophiles of his time. On the other hand, Soloviev was critical of the determinism and meaninglessness of the materialism of modern atheism. His sophiology was a *via media* between extreme ideas and currents of thought prevalent throughout the nineteenth century Russia: rationalism and materialism, freedom and necessity, modern atheism and Orthodox Slavophile nationalism. The identification of the humanity of God with Sophia allows Soloviev to affirm that all of created reality reflects the divine Sophia, and is the movement of created Sophia toward the unity of all in God, which is divine Sophia.

Although the thought of the Russian school bears the stamp of Soloviev's sophiology up until Revolution of 1917, it would be Sergei Nikolaeivich Bulgakov (1871-1944) who would advance the most sophisticated development of Soloviev's thought. Bulgakov was more conversant than Soloviev with the Eastern patristic tradition and his sophiology is expressed explicitly in the idiom of the traditional theological dogmas and categories of the Orthodox tradition. Bulgakov was a convert from Marxism to Orthodoxy and was eventually ordained in 1918. After being exiled from Russia, in 1925 he became the co-founder and first Dean of St.

Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. Bulgakov was active in the ecumenical movement and was one of the most prominent spokespersons of Orthodoxy to the Western world.

The most developed form of Bulgakov's sophiology appears in his dogmatic trilogy, *On Divine Humanity*.⁶ Bulgakov follows Soloviev in identifying the humanity of God with Sophia and affirms the core meaning of Soloviev's sophiology— God is always the God for 'me', i.e., for creation. God's being is not dependent on creation, nor is God exhausted in God's relation to creation; God's being, however, is such that God *is* the God who creates and redeems creation. Bulgakov would affirm the distinction between the world which God relates to from all eternity and the created world, but it is impossible for humans to think of God as not eternally relating to the world.

Unlike Soloviev, Bulgakov's sophiology is more explicitly trinitarian and appropriates the traditional trinitarian language. Sophia is identified with the *ousia*, but as such, *ousia* comes to mean much more than that which the persons of the Trinity possess in common. God in God's being exists as the creator and redeemer of the world. *Hypostasis* does not simply indicate that which is particular in the three persons of the Trinity. The divine Sophia does not exist monistically but as Trinity. For Bulgakov, the relations between the persons of the Trinity are best understood in terms of *kenosis*, as a movement of self-giving and self-receiving that has the capacity to overflow and reflect itself in the creation of the world. This kenotic movement is the source of and is reflected in the world, especially in the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. Anticipating later liberation theology, Bulgakov argues that the crucifixion of Christ reveals the kenosis of each of the persons of the Trinity, which includes the co-suffering of the Father with the Son. Always participating in the divine Sophia, the world as created Sophia is moving

⁶ All three volumes, *The Lamb of God*, *The Comforter*, and *The Bride of the Lamb*, have been translated and published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

toward the unity of all in God's life, which is given in and made possible by the *kenosis* of the Son and completed by the Holy Spirit.

The mark of German idealism, particularly the philosophy of Schelling, is evident on Bulgakov's theology, but equally as evident is his embeddedness within the Orthodox patristic and dogmatic tradition. Like Soloviev, his own understanding of the God-world relation allows him to have a more positive estimation of non-theological disciplines. Moreover, Bulgakov identified problems within the patristic tradition, which the resources of German Idealism could assist in resolving. The fathers did not have the last word for Bulgakov, and as they used the philosophical categories of their time, so must theology today make use of the modern philosophy to continue to extract the implications of the divine-human communion in Christ.

Sophiology did not survive in any influential form past Bulgakov. Its demise is partly due to the explicit refutation of sophiology by Orthodox thinkers in the Russian Diaspora whose own understanding of Orthodox theology would come to be known as the Neo-patristic school. Although this school has roots in the translations of the Eastern patristic texts in Russia, it is most associated with Georges Florovsky (1893-1979) and Vladimir Nikolaeivich Lossky (1903-58). Both Florovsky and Lossky were part of the 'Sophia Affair' in 1935—the accusation of Bulgakov's theology as heretical by both the Moscow Patriarchate and what would become known as the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. During the time of the Sophia Affair, Florovsky was professor of Patristics at St. Sergius, and would later serve as Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, NY (founded 1938). Florovsky framed the debate with Russian sophiology in terms of the relation between theology and philosophy. For Florovsky, theology must be rooted in the language and categories of the Eastern patristic texts. He coined the phrase 'neo-patristic synthesis,' but such a synthesis must

retain the Hellenistic contours of patristic thought. Florovsky argued that any attempt to de-Hellenize the language of the fathers would only distort their theology and divide the church.

Vladimir Lossky was also a part of the Russian émigré community in Paris, but he was never affiliated with St. Sergius.⁷ For Lossky, much like Bulgakov, the divine-human union for Christ is the starting point for theological thinking about God. Insofar as this union is one between two opposites, between what is God and what is not God, it is beyond the grasp of human reason whose capacity for understanding is restricted to created reality. While human reason functions on the basis of the law of non-contradiction, the Incarnation demands that theology be antinomic—the affirmation of the non-opposition of opposites. Theology's function is to give expression to the divine-human communion in Christ, which reveals the antinomic God—the God who is radically immanent in Christ and whose very immanence reveals God's radical transcendence. Its purpose is not to attempt to resolve the antinomy through reason but to stretch language so as to speak of the divine-human communion in Christ in such a way that guides one toward true knowledge of God, which is mystical union with God beyond reason. Theology is apophatic, by which Lossky means two things: that language is inadequate to represent the God beyond all representation and that true knowledge of God consists in experience of God and not in propositions rooted in human logic.

The affirmation of the God who is beyond being yet radically immanent to creation is the basis for the essence/energies distinction. The (hyper)essence of God refers to God's transcendence, while the energies refer to God's immanence and are the means for communion with God. True knowledge of God consists in participation in the energies of God, which are uncreated. The crystallization of the essence/energies distinction can be traced to Gregory Palamas. Lossky, together with Florovsky and John Meyendorff (1926-92), presented the

⁷ For an overview of Lossky's theology, see my *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

essence/energies distinction as uniquely characteristic of and central to Orthodox theology. Its centrality is affirmed by virtually every twentieth-century Orthodox theologian, including the most famous outside of Russia and Greece, the Romanian Dumitru Staniloae (1903-93), and it is the reason why Orthodox theology today is often referred to as Neo-palamite. The distinction was also used in polemics against neo-scholastic understandings of created grace. For Lossky, the truth of the essence/energies distinction lies in its antinomic character: it expresses the transcendent and immanent God without attempting to resolve the antinomy.

In addition to the essence/energies distinction, there is an additional antinomy which is foundational for theology: God as Trinity. For Lossky, the revelation of God as Trinity is a “primordial fact” given in the Incarnation. The goal of theology is not to explain how God is Trinity but to deconceptualize philosophical categories in order to express the antinomy. The patristic categories of *ousia* and *hypostasis* are given in the tradition in order to express what is common and incommunicable in God as Trinity. The trinitarian categories, however, also provide the foundation for an understanding of personhood that is defined as irreducible uniqueness to and freedom from nature. Salvation as the event of mystical union through participation in the divine energies means a realization of true personhood in which the human person is irreducible to the common human nature, and thus unique, but also free in transcendence from the limitations of human nature to experience what is other than creation—the God beyond being. For Lossky, this mystical experience of God occurs through union with the deified nature of Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Lossky was also a vehement opponent of the *filioque*, which he interpreted as the natural result of the rationalization of the doctrine of the Trinity.

At this point, I stop my cursory history of contemporary Orthodox theology to address one relevant question: did Orthodox theology respond to Modernity? It should be clear to all

that the Russian school is in, in fact, an Orthodox response to modernity. A wider reading in Russian philosophy and theology during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would reveal two things: the stamp of Soloviev and an engagement with the same questions that were central to modern philosophical and theological currents of thought.⁸ There is also one discernible feature evident in this response to modernity, particularly in the thought of Soloviev and Bulgakov: it is rooted in the traditional Orthodox principle of divine-human communion. It is the case that the Russian school was drawn more to the German Idealism of Schelling; but, I would argue that such an attraction stems from the fact that there was a greater affinity between the conceptualization of the union of the God-world relation in German Idealism and the Orthodox principle of divine-human communion than between the latter and the Neo-Kantian emphasis on the divide between God and the world. The sophiology of the Russian school was never a wholesale appropriation of German Idealism; aspects of the thought of Schelling, in particular, were appropriated while the whole of his thought was critiqued on the Christological principle of divine-human communion. Even the appropriation of a modern philosophical idiom was justified on the basis of the principle of divine-human communion, the logic being that since God's presence pervades all of creation, then even so-called 'secular' knowledge is able to reflect the truth about God.

The debate between the Russian and the neo-patristic schools is often cast in terms of contrasting attitudes toward tradition.⁹ The Russian school is portrayed as rooted in yet going beyond tradition as it attempts to bring Orthodoxy into an engagement with the modern world through a creative reconstruction of traditional dogmatic formulas; the neo-patristic school is described as wedded to classical dogmatic language and resistant to reinterpretations. This particular way of looking at the debate can be misleading if the narrative does not also include

⁸ See V. V. Zenkovsky's *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953).

⁹ See Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, esp. 373-403.

the fact that the Russian school and the Neo-patristic school agree on one essential point: the principle of divine-human communion. I would argue that the core of the debate is not about the role of tradition within theology, but about the implications of the principle of divine-human communion for conceptualizing the God-world relation.

For Lossky, who contributed to the Sophia Affair a pamphlet, *The Debate on Sophia (Spor o Sofii)*, which he produced for the Brotherhood of St. Photius, and which rejected Bulgakov's attempt to unite certain aspects of German Idealism to dogmatic theology, the debate with sophiology was not primarily about the relation between theology and philosophy; it was about conceptualizing the transcendent and immanent God. Both Bulgakov and Lossky agree that divine-human communion is not simply the goal of the Christian life, but the very presupposition, the first principle, in all theological thought. The essence/energies distinction, central to Lossky's thought, especially in his critique against neo-scholasticism, also constitutes Lossky's response to Bulgakov's sophiology. The attributes of God, such as Sophia, are identified with God's energies, and not with God's essence, since the latter is beyond all being, and, thus, unknowable. Lossky also argues that the logic of apophaticism, of affirming the incomprehensibility of God's essence, requires a strict division between *theologia*, or knowing God in Godself, and *oikonomia*, knowing God as God relates salvifically to the world. To think of God as eternally relating to the world, as Bulgakov does, is to transgress this apophatic boundary and to negate the otherness between the world and God which is the very basis for a divine-human communion based on love and freedom. Lossky's fear is that any attempt to philosophically justify the principle of divine-human communion, which is what he sees in neo-scholasticism and Russian sophiology, ultimately forgets that the only justification is the actual experience of union with God.

Bulgakov would not disagree with Lossky that the highest form of knowledge of God is *theosis*; however, for Bulgakov, the God who creates so as to bring the created into communion with Godself is the God who is eternally free to create in such a way, and as such, eternally relating to creation. For Bulgakov, one cannot think God without thinking creation, and vice versa. This leads to a much less suspicious and more positive appraisal of the role in theology for philosophy and all the non-theological disciplines. Philosophy has its own integrity and reveals truths about being human. Theology does not appropriate those truths to validate the principle of divine-human communion; but, it cannot ignore those truths in its never-ending attempt to interpret the realism of divine-communion in Jesus Christ.

Despite their differences on the interpretation of the principle of divine-human communion, it is important to see that they are both in full agreement that any response to modernity must be rooted in the Orthodox principle of divine-human communion. This consensus makes the labels of ‘modern’ for Bulgakov and ‘traditionalist’ for Lossky inaccurate; both would claim that the traditional Orthodox affirmation of divine-human communion in Christ is non-negotiable, and is the basis upon which to both assess and critique modern intellectual currents. Bulgakov and Lossky would essentially agree that nothing in modern thought can compel Orthodox theology to abandon its central claim: God has created the world for communion with God, which is effected in the person of Jesus Christ. The disagreement is over the implications of this claim for the particular questions and challenges faced by the Christian tradition in the modern period.

To continue with the brief history of contemporary Orthodox theology, the work of Lossky and Florovsky would have a significant influence on a group of young theologians in Greece in the 1960s, most notably Nikos Nissiotis (1925-86), Christos Yannaras (1935-) and John Zizioulas (1931-). Elements of Lossky’s theology, such as apophaticism, the

essence/energies distinction, and the theology of personhood are evident in Yannaras's major work, *Person and Eros* (1970). The most influential of these theologians is John Zizioulas, who synthesized the Eucharistic theology of Nicolas Afanasiev (1893-1966) and Alexander Schmemmann (1921-83) with the theology of personhood of Lossky via Yannaras. Zizioulas was a student of Florovsky when the latter was a professor of Harvard; he also taught dogmatics at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, MA (founded 1938), before taking a permanent position at the University of Edinburgh.

Zizioulas, like Bulgakov and Lossky, would affirm the principle of divine-human communion as the starting point of all theology, but unlike Lossky's emphasis on the ascetical, mystical ascent to God, Zizioulas would argue that the experience of God is communal in the event of the Eucharist.¹⁰ According to Zizioulas, early Christians experienced the Eucharist as the constitution of the community as the eschatological Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. This experience of Christ in the Eucharist is the basis for the patristic affirmation of the divinity of Christ and the Spirit and, hence, of the affirmation of God as Trinity. Zizioulas's emphasis of the experience of God in the *hypostasis* or person of Christ has several implications. First, it is a noticeable break with the virtual consensus in Orthodox theology on the use of the essence/energies distinction for expressing Orthodox understandings of salvation as the experience of the divine life. Second, it is the foundation for what Zizioulas calls an "ontological revolution," insofar as it reveals God's life as that which itself is constituted in freedom and not necessity. If the Eucharist is the experience of God, and if such an experience is for created reality the freedom from the tragic necessity of death inherent to created existence, then God exists as this freedom from necessity, even the necessity of God's nature, since God gives what God *is*. The freedom of God from the necessity of God's nature is the meaning of the patristic assertion of the monarchy of the Father—the Father 'causes' the Son and the Spirit and

¹⁰ For an overview of Zizioulas's theology, see *Being with God*.

in so doing, constitutes God's life as Trinity through a movement of freedom and love. With the doctrine of the Trinity, for the first time otherness, relation, uniqueness, freedom, and communion become ontologically ultimate. This understanding of divine-human communion in the life of the Trinity through the *hypostasis* of Christ also grounds Zizioulas's theology of personhood. Person is an *ecstatic* being—free from the limitations of created nature; and an *hypostatic* being—unique and irreducible to nature. This freedom and irreducibility is only possible in relation to God the Father through Christ by the Holy Spirit, because it is only in eternal relations of love that one is constituted as a unique and free being, i.e, a person. Zizioulas maintains the building blocks of Lossky's theology of person, but with an emphasis on relationality and in a decidedly non-apophatic approach. Zizioulas's theology of personhood is the organizing principle for this theology and it is evident in his theology of ministry, his ecclesiology and in his theology of the environment.

In order to understand the place of Orthodox Christianity in the postmodern world, there are at least three aspects from the thought of the post-1960s generation of Greek theologians that are relevant: first, the continuity with the neo-patristic school and the virtual absence of any trace of the Russian school; second, the general audience for this generation of theologians is primarily other Christian theologians and traditions; third, the appearance of postmodern concepts and themes, such as difference, otherness, particularity, desire, without any substantial engagement with some of the icons of postmodern thought, such as Foucault, Derrida, and Kristeva. What emerges in this post-1960s generation is an Orthodox theology with striking affinities with post-modern thought, developed, however, primarily in conversation with other Christian theologies and not with post-modern classics, and which extends the tradition of consensus on the Orthodox principle of divine-human communion, in continuity primarily with the neo-patristic school while self-consciously rejecting the Russian school.

Orthodox Responses to Post-Modernity

Two contemporary Orthodox theologians have directly addressed the question of the relation between Orthodoxy and post-modernism: Christos Yannaras and David Bentley Hart. Yannaras belongs to the post-1960s generation of Greek theologians who were influenced by the neo-patristic thought of Florovsky and Lossky. He was instrumental in spearheading the critique of the imitative theological style of the pre-1960s generation of Greek theologians. The influence of Lossky is especially evident in Yannaras's emphasis on the centrality of apophaticism in theological discourse. In 1967, Yannaras wrote a book which was recently translated in English under the title of *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*.¹¹ In this book, Yannaras attempts to argue for a revival of Dionysian apophaticism via Heidegger's critique of the Western philosophical and theological tradition as "onto-theological." A similar move that received much attention was made by Jean-Luc Marion in *God without Being* first published in French in 1982. Since the publication of *God without Being*, Marion and Jacques Derrida have engaged in a debate about the nature of apophaticism, ontotheology and post-modernity, which is indicative of the clear affinities between apophatic and post-modern understandings of the nature of language.¹² It is clear, however, that fifteen years before Marion, Yannaras argued for the priority of apophaticism in theological discourse based on Heidegger's judgment of traditional philosophical and theological discourses as ontotheological.¹³ In some sense, Yannaras was ahead of his time and his emphasis on apophaticism in theology can be interpreted as a kind of post-modern theology before the explosion of post-modern thought.

¹¹ See my review of this book in *Modern Theology* 23:2 (2007), 301-04.

¹² For an account of this debate, see Arthur Bradley, "God *sans* Being: Derrida, Marion and 'A Paradoxical Writing of the Word *Without*,'" *Literature and Theology* 14:3 (2000), 299-312.

¹³ Acknowledged, as far as I know, only by Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5.

Yannaras more directly engages post-modern thought in a book first published in Greece in 1993 and recently translated under the title, *Postmodern Metaphysics*. Yannaras argues that one can detect in ‘post-Newtonian physics’ a recourse to an apophatic language in an attempt to describe what exceeds language. Post-Newtonian physics also hints at an ontology whose constitutive features are relationality, personal otherness, and existence understood dynamically as a mode (*tropos*) rather than as substance (*ousia*). Though Yannaras is quick to argue that “a metaphysical interpretation and understanding cannot be a result of the scientific study of the world . . . the language of contemporary physics . . . liberates and ‘validates’ other modes of cognitive access to the cosmic fact.”¹⁴ An example of an “other mode of cognitive access” for Yannaras is the personal encounter with a work of art, which yields a knowledge of “personal otherness” that is simultaneously “an experience of *relation*.”¹⁵

This engagement with “post-Newtonian” physics has one central point in common with Yannaras’s earlier work on Heidegger: both make possible an ontology that is implied in the Eastern Christian affirmation of divine-human communion, and expressed in its most succinct form in the doctrine of the Trinity. For Yannaras, post-modern critiques of modern rationalism and of bourgeois individualism resonate with aspects of Eastern Christian thought, particularly its emphasis on knowledge as experience and on relational notions of personhood. Post-modern buzz words like otherness, difference, particularity, relationality, desire are all central to a relational ontology that is inscribed in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Yannaras is not saying that post-modern thought validates Eastern Christian thought; rather, there is a tone of vindication in Yannaras’s work in his critical appropriation of post-modern thought. It is modern philosophical and theological intellectual currents that Yannaras sees as inimical to Eastern Christian thought. Post-modern thought has revived ideas, themes and concepts that were

¹⁴ *Postmodern Metaphysics*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004) 112 and 115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-13.

always central to Eastern Orthodox Christianity but marginalized by modern philosophy and theology. Yannaras would clearly argue, however, that post-modern notions of otherness, difference, particularity, relationality and desire only work within a trinitarian ontology.

David Bentley Hart's more direct engagement with post-modern thought in *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* is similar to Yannaras's but more explicit in its critique of post-modern understandings of difference. Like Yannaras, Hart affirms the post-modern critique of modern rationalism. Lest there be any doubt, he states, "the West at long last awakes from the nightmare of philosophy, even the last ghosts of the Enlightenment reason having been chased away, to discover and rejoice in the irreducibly aesthetic character and ultimate foundationlessness of 'truth.'"¹⁶ Hart analyzes the thought of many of the post-modern icons, such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, and Foucault only to conclude that "the discourses we tend to recognize as critically postmodern, however little else they may share, all come sooner or later to depend upon one or another account of the 'unrepresentable.'"¹⁷ These accounts of the unrepresentable, far from being an overcoming of metaphysics, are themselves, according to Hart, a metaphysics of immanence that prioritizes all that traditional metaphysics excluded as the ontological—change, becoming, absence, i.e., difference. Insofar as post-modern notions of the unrepresentable reject any notion of transcendence, difference, the condition for the possibility of which is the original difference of the unrepresentable, is possible only through negation and, hence, through violence. Ironically, post-modern thought essentializes difference as violence, and in the end offers nothing more than the choice of either being "saved from violence by violence, or else by withdrawal (which is death)."¹⁸ Post-modern thought is

¹⁶ *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

a mystical faith in the reality of the veil, an immanent metaphysics. And the only moral effort permitted by such a faith takes the form of paradox and tragedy. However one phrases the matter, this much is certain: insofar as the 'postmodern' is the completion of the deconstruction of metaphysics, it usually depends upon one immense and irreducible metaphysical assumption: that the unrepresentable *is*; more to the point, that the unrepresentable (call it *differance*, chaos, being, alterity, the infinite . . .) is somehow truer than the representable (which necessarily dissembles it), more original, and qualitatively *other*: that is, it does not differ from the representable by virtue of a greater fullness and unity of those transcendental moments that constitute the world of appearance, but by virtue of its absolute difference, its dialectical or negative indeterminacy, its no-thingness.¹⁹

Hart adds that "if the world takes shape against the veil of the unrepresentable, is indeed given or confirmed in its finitude by this impenetrable negation, then the discrimination of peace from violence is at most a necessary fiction, and occasionally a critical impossibility; as all equally *is*, and power alone sustains the game of the world, violence is already present in all 'truth,' though all truthlessness too--sadly or joyously--is violence."²⁰

Postmodern thought, according to Hart, contains the seed for the subversion of its account of difference. This seed is in its critique of rationality and its affirmation of the rhetorical and aesthetic, or the rhetorical as aesthetic. It is not a critique of Christianity, as Nietzsche thought, to affirm the priority of the aesthetic, because beauty, Hart argues, is at the heart of the Christian understanding of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The proper Christian response to post-modern accounts of difference is simply the claim that the Christian understanding of difference is more persuasive because it is more beautiful. Christian difference is not about violence but peace. The difference that is inscribed in finite being is not the result of a more original unrepresentable difference, but of the trinitarian difference, of the unity-in-difference of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The plenitude of God's trinitarian being is the precondition for constituting creation as gift. The ontological divide between God and the created other is the precondition for distance to result in real difference that is an event of

¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰ Ibid., 91.

communion that bridges the divide. Difference as divine-human communion does not totalize the other, but lets the other simply be other. Difference that hardens into distance is a result of violence; the distance that is transformed into real difference is an event of peace realized by the prior gift of God's love for the created other. As Hart puts it: "the Trinity's perfect act of difference also opens the possibility of the 'ontico-ontological difference,' as the space of the gift of analogous being, imparted to contingent beings who, then, receive this gift as the movement of an ontic deferral . . . The distance between God and creation is not alienation, nor the Platonic *chorismos* or scale of being, but the original ontological act of distance by which every ontic interval subsists, given to be crossed but not overcome, at once God's utter transcendence and utter proximity."²¹ In the end, for Hart, it comes down to a choice between two competing narratives of difference that cannot be adjudicated. For Hart, Christians must stand confident in the persuasiveness and beauty of their narrative of the divine-human communion effected in the person of Jesus Christ. In the battle between the "New Nietzsche" and the Christian narrative of divine-human communion, "[t]he most potent reply a Christian can make to Nietzsche's critique is to accuse him a defect of sensibility--of bad taste. And this, in fact, is the last observation that should be made at this point: Nietzsche had atrocious taste."²²

In the brief history of contemporary Orthodox theology that I have offered, one can trace a line of influence from Soloviev to the post-1960s generation of Greek theologians. The Neopatristic theologians did reject the Russian Sophiologists, but even this rejection forms part of a singular history. David Hart's work does not fit easily into this trajectory—he is neither a neopatristic theologian nor retrieving Russian sophiology. In fact, both Lossky and Yannaras may gasp at Hart's affirmation of thomistic notions of analogy, which they judge as antithetical to Dionysian apophaticism. Hart, however, stands within this trajectory in one very important way:

²¹ Ibid., 193-94.

²² Ibid., 125.

the ground of his theology, its very presupposition is the realism of divine-human communion. In essence Hart is arguing, much like Yannaras and Zizioulas, that post-modern concerns with difference, otherness, particularity, relationality and desire are only secured through an affirmation of the principle of divine-human communion. In the centrality of the principle of divine-human communion, Hart's response to post-modernity mirrors that of Bulgakov's and Lossky's response to modernity.

Orthodoxy, Post-modernism and Ecumenism

In what is now a classic essay in its own right, David Tracy discusses three different responses to the present situation: the (late) modern, the antimodern and the postmodern. Toward the end of the essay, Tracy concludes that though Christian theology can agree and retrieve elements of each of these trajectories, it does not easily fit into any of them. As Tracy puts it, “nowhere in all this conflict of interpretations among moderns, anti-moderns, and post-moderns does a full Christian theological naming of the present as interruptive eschatological time before the living God occur.”²³ In my brief history of contemporary Orthodox theology, I have tried to show how Orthodox thought does not easily fit into either the modern or post-modern trajectories, nor is it easily categorized as a fossilized form of the pre-modern. Orthodox theologians have consistently responded to both modern and postmodern theological and philosophical currents united around a shared consensus on the fundamental principle of the realism of divine-human communion. Nothing within modern or postmodern thought has convinced Orthodox Christians to surrender what is at the heart of their tradition—that God has created the world so as to effect a communion between God and the world. No matter how one interprets the central questions in the postmodern situation, whether they are on epistemology, subjectivity, or pluralism, the Orthodox response will continue to be shaped by the fundamental

²³ *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 18.

presupposition of the realism of divine-human communion. Their differences notwithstanding, no Orthodox theologian would dispute the centrality of this principle and this consensus over the past two centuries, which I would argue extends back to the patristic period, illustrates what David Tracy meant by “thinking as a tradition.”

Yannaras’s and Hart’s attack on modernity as fundamentally a mistake may lead one to categorize their theologies as anti-modern. The anti-modern camp, associated with such theologians and philosophers as Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, often speaks about the incommensurability between Christian and modern philosophical discourses. This position often results in the wholesale rejection of modern thought. Hart and Yannaras share elements of this anti-modern trajectory, rejecting in particular the modern attack of pre-modern forms of knowing, modern rationalism and the excesses of modern individualism; whether they fit neatly into the anti-modern camp is ambiguous.

The ambiguous relation between Orthodoxy and modernity is further evinced in Orthodox rhetoric on democracy. This issue of Orthodoxy and democracy is especially acute since the fall of communism where the Orthodox churches in traditional Orthodox countries have been forced to face questions for the first time but without the intellectual resources, which were decimated during the course of both Ottoman and Communist occupation. In traditional Orthodox countries, one will find Orthodox church leaders issuing pro-democracy language while simultaneously spewing invectives against the excessive individualism of the West. One will also find Orthodox church leaders lending support to what appears to be anti-democratic initiatives, such as restrictions on religious freedom, mandatory religious education in Orthodox Christianity even for minorities within the country, or resistance to construction of mosques. The situation in Eastern Europe in particular is one where Orthodox churches are trying to figure out how to exist politically without an emperor. Orthodox Christians have a unique history insofar

as they lay claim to a proud imperial heritage in the Byzantine Empire, which provided the space for the development of their rich traditions, but are only now emerging from a half-millennium worth of oppression. Orthodox Christians have been the colonizers and the colonized, and are often returning to their imperial past to confront their post-colonial situation. I have argued elsewhere that the experience of the imperial past cannot adequately provide the resources to address contemporary questions.²⁴ The modern and postmodern situations are presenting questions to the Orthodox Churches that it never faced before in its history; one cannot seek specific answers in the past to questions that were never posed in that past.

The Orthodox response to the present situation is complicated by the lack of any institutional infrastructure that would allow the Orthodox churches to deliberate in a meaningful way on contemporary challenges and questions. This lack of infrastructure is a vestige of its imperial past, and after the disappearance of the emperors, both pro- and anti-Orthodox, the Orthodox churches have yet to develop a transnational, pan-Orthodox authority that would facilitate the meaningful deliberation as a global church on the present situation.²⁵ When I talk about a transnational authority, I am not necessarily alluding to a pope-like figure; such an authority could take many forms. Nor is it the case that the presence of such an authority would violate the Orthodox principle of conciliarity. Recent events, however, illustrate how impotent conciliarity can be without a transnational authority. As one example, a few years ago the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Greece had a dispute over the election of the next presiding bishop of Thessalonika. Reminiscent of its Byzantine past, the dispute was resolved

²⁴ See my "Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and Democracy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71:1 (March 2003), 75-98.

²⁵ On the absence of a transnational authority in Orthodoxy and its effects on the Orthodox experience in the United States, see my "The One Becomes the Many: Orthodox Christianity and American Pluralism" in *Orthodox Christianity in American Public Life: The Challenges and Opportunities of Religious Pluralism in the 21st Century*, Elizabeth Prodromou ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

only after the intervention of the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs of Greece, who brokered the solution that wasn't really a resolution.

I mention these institutional problems within Orthodoxy only to highlight the lingering effects of its imperial past--Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian, Ottoman and Communist. The lack of any global, institutionalized infrastructure on the part of the Orthodox Church has resulted in the absence of any meaningful deliberation on the contemporary challenges and questions confronting the Orthodox churches. One of those questions in the post-communist Eastern European situation is Orthodoxy's stance toward liberal, Western forms of democracy. It is only in the past 60 years that Orthodoxy has had to confront the question of what it means to be a church in a democratic, secularized space. There were very vibrant and substantive debates on transitions to democracy in Russia in the early part of the twentieth century, but these were tragically cut short by the Bolshevik Revolution. The lack of a transnational authority facilitating a meaningful deliberation on this new situation has resulted in confused, contradictory, anti-modern and anti-Western statements from Orthodox church leaders.

Even in the midst of this global institutional fragmentation, there is a remarkable, discernible unity among the Orthodox that is especially visible in its Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist has the power to dispel "all the cares of this world"²⁶ and focus one's attention on what is real in this world. This unity in the Eucharist reflects the consensus that exists among contemporary Orthodox theologians on the principle of divine-human communion, since the Eucharist itself is the event of such a communion. It is this shared faith in the realism of divine-human communion that must somehow shape the Orthodox response to the present situation. Returning to the issue of Orthodoxy and democracy, there are some, such as the Armenian Orthodox theologian and ethicist, Vigen Guroian, who would argue that Orthodoxy should never endorse any political arrangement, since such an endorsement would betray its prophetic

²⁶ From the Cherubik Hymn sung during the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

principle. I have argued, however, that the logic of the Orthodox understanding of divine-human communion realized in the Eucharist leads to the judgment of support for a democratic and secularized space over the prevailing options.²⁷ Support of democracy and secularization does not mean an endorsement of excessive individualism or ideological secularism. To those who question how Orthodoxy can support any form of thought in which God is not the object of intentionality, I would respond by referencing the prophetic and ironic caution throughout history that God's presence is often most manifest in spaces that appear in a superficial way to be godless.

I have discussed Orthodoxy's relation to democracy at length to illustrate the simple point that Orthodoxy's stance to modernity is not and should not be a wholesale rejection. I agree with David Tracy when he argues that although Christian theology does not easily fit into the three common namings of the present situation, it can recognize elements that are retrievable in each of these namings. The hermeneutical key for the Orthodox is the principle of divine-human communion, which, I would argue, allows Orthodox thought to recognize the genuine accomplishments of the modern period. The "truths" of modern intellectual currents were recognized by the Russian sophiologists, and perhaps the recent translations in English of Russian sophiology, especially Bulgakov's work, might reinfuse Orthodox theology with this particular sophiological spirit which for too long has remained dormant. Orthodox theology can learn from the sophiologists that many modern, human advancements are not necessarily incommensurable with Orthodoxy simply because they emerged, in part, from an attack on religion, but are, perhaps ironically, entailed within the logic of divine-human communion.

It is this very principle of divine-human communion which must also shape the Orthodox response to post-modern questions on epistemology, subjectivity and pluralism. I have already spoken of the affinity between postmodern thought and contemporary Orthodox theological

²⁷ See "Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and Democracy."

understandings of difference, otherness, particularity, relationality and desire. It is the singular achievement of contemporary theologians such as Lossky, Yannaras, Zizioulas and Hart to unpack the existential implications of the doctrine of the Trinity. Zizioulas, in particular, has shown that the Christian understanding of God as Trinity is much more than a simple affirmation that God is simultaneously one and three. For Zizioulas, Christians know that God is Trinity because of the experience of divine-human communion in the Eucharist, which is not simply a partaking of the body of Christ, but is the event of the resurrected body of Christ. The Christian affirmation of the divinity of Christ, crystallized in the fourth century, is at the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity. In the person of Jesus, God has become history; in the life of Jesus one witnesses, as Rowan Williams so elegantly puts it, “a humanity soaked through with divine life.”²⁸ It is this original trinitarian difference, not a difference whose primary presence is only an absence, that is the condition for the possibility of a difference that is created for communion.²⁹ That of God who becomes history, the Son of the Father, realizes and makes possible an eternal communion with God the Father which is effected only by that trinitarian difference which is faceless yet ever present and filling all things—the Holy Spirit. Personhood, for Zizioulas, *is* difference as particularity, but such a difference, if it is to be one of communion and not negations, is constituted in relations of love and freedom.

Given that there is a great deal of affinity between Eastern Christian notions of apophaticism and the doctrine of Trinity and postmodern notions of language and difference, the temptation would be great to use post-modern thought as means for validating Christian thought. David Hart, I think, however, is correct in asserting that Christians need to be more self-confident about the fact that their account of difference is simply more beautiful, and hence, more persuasive than the many post-modern variations. In his theology of the Trinity, Karl

²⁸ *The Dwelling of the Light* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), xvi.

²⁹ For Zizioulas’s recent reflections on difference and communion, see *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006).

Rahner argued that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the affirmation that God can become history without ceasing to be the immutable, triune God and that this very possibility *is* God's very being as the self-differentiated triune God. Responding to those who might claim that this sounds Hegelian, Rahner says, "[t]his we can and must affirm, without being Hegelians. And it would be a pity if Hegel had to teach Christians such things."³⁰ Echoing Rahner, I would say that it would be a pity if Derrida had to teach Christians about difference.

For Tracy, a Christian naming of the present "as interruptive eschatological time before the living God" is one that is dialectically mystical and political. The general perception in the Christian world is that the Orthodox tradition is a great resource for the mystical side of pole of this dialectic. There is, however, a rich tradition of attention to the 'political' in Orthodoxy, particularly in the rhetoric against poverty embodied in the sermons of John Chrysostom or the living examples of the Holy Fools of Russia. It is also evident in the writings of the Russian sophiologists, who, because of their more generous appraisal of the 'secular' based on their conceptualization of divine-human communion, were much more engaged with the cultural and the 'political' spheres. Two women of the Russian diaspora whose work reflects the Russian sophiological tradition continued this engagement with the political: Mother Maria Skobtsova³¹ with her work on social justice; and Elizabeth Behr-Sigel³² with her work on gender and the role of women within the Church. It is fair, however, to assert this 'political' trajectory within the Eastern Christian tradition is not the one most visibly represented today in the Orthodox churches. This judgment often does not take into account the effect of the Ottoman and Communist oppressions on the Orthodox churches; in the United States, it does not take into

³⁰ "On the Theology of the Incarnation," Theological Investigations, trans. Kevin Smyth, vol. 4, (Baltimore, Maryland: Helicon Press, 1966), 113-14, note 3.

³¹ See *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings*. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 2003. For a biography, see Michael Plekon, *Living Icons: Persons of Faith in the Eastern Church* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 59-80.

³² See her *The Ministry of Women in the Church*. Redondo Beach, California: Oakwood Publications, 1991.

account the fact that only now the Orthodox communities are moving beyond issues relating to preservation of national and ethnic identities.³³ It is becoming more evident that the new generation of church leaders, clerical and lay, in the Orthodox churches in the United States are shaping their communities to engage in social concerns. It is correct, however, to claim that the one of the greatest challenges for the Orthodox church is the recovery of this ‘political’ trajectory within the tradition. Participation in ecumenical organizations such as the NCCCUSA are opportunities to be reminded of this particular heritage in the Orthodox traditions, but also be challenged to bring this heritage into conversation with the present situation. In particular, the Orthodox tradition can learn from Latin American liberation theologians that the problem of poverty is not simply about the individual sins of pride and greed but involves systemic sin; the Orthodox can learn from Black and Feminist liberation theologies that the ‘political’ must be expanded to include issues of race and gender. Ecumenical gatherings presuppose conversation, which presupposes listening, which presupposes risk of a realized experience of recognition that leads to such statements as “I never thought of that,” or “that seems right.” To recognize that a particular prohibition or practice within a tradition needs change is not to surrender to an incommensurable language game; but is a form of prophetic self-critique that allows a community to examine whether it is being faithful to its own central principles.

For the Orthodox churches, the principle of divine-human communion is absolutely non-negotiable, in modernity, post-modernity and beyond post-modernity; it is also the most substantial contribution that it can bring to any ecumenical gathering—to constantly, almost incessantly remind the world that God has created the world for real communion with God which is effected in Christ and by the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy can also draw on its rich tradition to assert the priority of the mystical--the mystical and the political are not dialectically related to

³³ See the essays in Elizabeth Prodromou, ed., *Orthodox Christianity in American Public Life: The Challenges and Opportunities of Religious Pluralism in the 21st Century*, Elizabeth Prodromou ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

each other, as Tracy argued; but any authentic gain in the political is the realization of the mystical. The mystical cannot be reduced to the individual ascent to or manifestation of God, because any experience of the love of God must be embodied and manifested in particular relations. If sin is, in fact, systemic, then structural change that allows for the affirmation of each human being as a unique and irreplaceable child of God simultaneously manifests a greater participation of the world in the event of divine-human communion. To identify such structural change with divine-human communion is not to naively identify the Kingdom of God with earthly structures; rather, it affirms the Orthodox understanding of the world as sacramental, as imbued with the presence of God that is latent in the world and desiring to burst forth. The world is already participating in God's life and the challenge for humans is to create the kinds of relationships, both political and ecclesial, that would maximize the degree of participation of the world in God. To be Christian is to recognize and accept the paradoxical state of being which strives to realize the Kingdom on earth while always knowing that it is yet to come. The particular challenge for the Orthodox churches is to find a way in which the very heart of its tradition, the realism of divine-human communion in the person of Jesus Christ, is able permeate and shape its institutional structures so as to enable responses to 'political' questions that are faithful to all that is entailed in this principle of divine-human communion. Such faithfulness means working to create a world in which particularity, otherness, difference, relationality and freedom are the norm and reflect the glory of God, which is presence of God's love that is always striving to show itself.