

Archpriest Georges Florovsky (1893-1979)

## Creation and Creaturehood

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*“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, and thy walls are continually before me” (Isaiah 49:16).*



The world is created. That means: the world came out of nothing. That means there was no world before it sprang up and came into being. It sprang up and came into being together with time. Because when there was no world, there was no time. Because “time is reckoned from the creation of the heavens and the earth,” as St. Maximus the Confessor said.<sup>1</sup> Only the world exists in time in change, succession, duration. Without the world there is no time. And the genesis of the world is the beginning of time.<sup>2</sup> This beginning, as St. Basil the Great explains, is not yet time, nor even a fraction of time, just as the beginning of a road is not yet the road itself. It is simple and uncomposite.<sup>3</sup> There was no time; and suddenly, all at once, it began. Creation springs, *comes into* being, passes from out of non-being into being. It *begins* to be. As St.

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<sup>1</sup> Maximus the Confessor in *Lib. de div. nomin. schol.*, in V. 8., PG iv, 336.

<sup>2</sup> This relationship is vividly elucidated by Augustine, *De Genesi ad lit.* V. 5, PL xxxiv, 325: factae itaque creaturae motibus coeperunt currere tempora: unde ante creaturura frustra tempora requiruntur, quasi possint inveniri ante tempora tempora ... potius ergo tempora a creatura, quam creatura coepit a tempore; utrumque autem ex Deo; cf. *de Genesi c. manich.* I. 2 PL xxiv, 174, 175; *de Civ. Dei*, XI, t, PL xli, 321; quis non videat quod tempora non fuissent, nisi creatura fieret, quae aliquid aliqua mutatione mutaret; c. 322: procul dubio non est mundus factus in tempore, sed cum tempore; *Confess.* XI, 13, PL xxxii, 815-816 et passim. Cf. P. Duhem, *Le Système du Monde*, II (Paris, 1914), pp. 462 ff.

<sup>3</sup> St. Basil the Great in *Hexam.* h. 1, n. 6, PG xxix, c. 16.

Gregory of Nyssa says, “The very subsistence of creation owed its beginning to change,”<sup>4</sup> “the very transition from non-entity to existence is a change, non-existence being changed by the Divine power into being.”<sup>5</sup> This primordial genesis and beginning of change and duration, this “transi-

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tion” from void to existence, is inaccessible to human thought. But it becomes comprehensible and imaginable from its opposite. We always calculate time in an inverse order, back from the present, retreating into the depths of time, going backwards in the temporal sequence; and only secondarily do we think in terms of consecutive reckoning. And going backwards into the past, we stop at some determinate link, one which is calculated and calculable from within the series, with a clear consciousness that we have to stop. The very notion of the beginning of time is this necessity of stopping, is the very impossibility of an infinite regression into the past. It makes no difference whether we can or cannot compute this limit of retreat in terms of centuries or of days. The prohibition itself remains in full force. A first unit is absolutely postulated in the temporal series, before which there are no other links, no other moments of time, because there was no change, and no sequence whatever. It is not time that precedes time, but “the height of ever-present eternity” transcending duration *celsitudo semper praesentis aeternitatis*, as St. Augustine used to say. Time began. But there will be a time “when time shall be no more” “*oti chronos ouketi estin*” (Rev. 10:6). Change will cease. And according to St. John Damascene, “Time, after the resurrection, will no longer be numbered by days and nights; rather, there will be one day without evening.”<sup>6</sup> The temporal sequence will be broken; there will be a *last* unit in it. But this end and cessation of change does not indicate the abolition of what began with time, of what was and existed in time; it does not suggest a return or relapse into nothingness. There will be no time, but creation will be preserved. The created world can exist even not in time. Creation began, but it will not cease.<sup>7</sup> Time is a kind of line *segment*, with a beginning and an

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<sup>4</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa *Or. cath. m.*, \_ 6, PG xlv, c. 28; cf. St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.* I, 3, PG xciv, 796: for things whose being originated with a change [*apo tropês*] are definitely subject to change, whether it be by corruption or by voluntary alteration.”

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nyssa *De opif. hom.* c. XVI, PG xlv, 184; cf. *Or. cath. m.*, c. 21, PG xlv, c. 57: [“The very transition from nonentity to existence is a change, non-existence being changed by the Divine power in being”] (Srawley’s translation). Since the origin of man comes about “through change,” he necessarily has a changeable nature.

<sup>6</sup> St. John Damascene *De fide orth.* II, 1, PG xciv, c. 864. *Oude gar meta tèn anastasin hêmerais kai nyxin ho chronos arithmêsetai, estai de mallon mia hêméra anesperos.* The whole passage is of interest: *Legetai palin aiôn, ou chronos, oude chronou ti meros, hêliou phorâi kai dromôi meroumenon, êgoun di’ hêmêrôn kai nyktôn synistamenon, alla to symparektinomenon tois aïdiois synistamenon, alla to symparekteinomenon tois aïdiois, oion ti chronikon kinêma, kai diastêma.*

<sup>7</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or.* 29, PG xxxi, 89-81: *kai êrktai, ou pautetai.*

end. And therefore it is incommensurate with eternity, because time has a beginning. And in eternity there is no change, neither a beginning. The whole of temporality does not coincide

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with eternity. “The fullness of the times” (*omne tempus*) does not necessarily mean “always” (*semper*), as Augustine has pointed out.<sup>8</sup> Infinity or endlessness does not necessarily imply beginninglessness. And creation may be compared to a mathematical “bundle of rays,” halves of straight lines extending from their point of origin to infinity. Once brought out of nothingness and non-being, the world has in the creative fiat an immutable and final foundation and support for its existence. “The creative word is like an adamantine bridge upon which creatures are placed, and they stand under the abyss of the Divine Infinitude, over the abyss of their own nothingness,” said Metropolitan Philaret. “Because the word of God must not be imagined as like the spoken word of man, which, when it has been pronounced, straightway desists and vanishes in air. In God there is nothing of cessation, nothing of vanishing: His word proceeds but does not recede: “*The word of the Lord endureth for ever* (1 Peter 1:25).”<sup>9</sup> God “*Created all things, that they might have their being*” (Wis. Solomon 1:14). And not for the time being, but for ever did He create: He brought creation *into being* by His creative word. “*For He hath established the world, so that it shall not be moved*” (Ps. 93:1).

The world exists. But it *began* to exist. And that means: *the world could have not existed*. There is no necessity whatsoever for the existence of the world. Creaturely existence is not self-sufficient and is not independent. In the created world itself there is no foundation, no basis for genesis and being. Creation by its very existence witnesses to and proclaims its creaturehood, it proclaims that it has been produced. Speaking in the words of Augustine, “[It] cries out that it has been created it cries out that it did not create itself: [I] exist because I am created; and I was not before I came to be, and I could not issue from myself...” *clamant quod facta sunt. Clamant etiam quod seipsa non fecerint: ideo sumus, quia facta sumus; non eramus ante quam essemus, ut fieri possemus a nobis...*<sup>10</sup>

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By its very existence creation points beyond its own limits. The cause and foundation of the world is outside the world. The world’s being is possible only through the supra-mundane will of the merciful and Almighty God, “*Who calls the things that be not, to be*” (Rom. 4:17). But, unexpectedly it is precisely in its creaturehood and createdness that the stability and substantiality of the world is rooted. Because the origin from out of nothing determines the otherness, the “non-consubstantiality” of the world and of God. It is insufficient and inexact to say that things are created and placed *outside of God*. The “*outside*” itself is posited only in

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<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, XII, c. xv, PL XLI, 363-5.

<sup>9</sup> The Works of Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, “Discourses and Speeches,” vol. III (Moscow, 1877), p. 436, “Address on the Occasion of the Recovery of the Relics of Patriarch Alexey,” 1830.

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, XI, 4, PL xxxii, c. 812.

creation, and creation “from out of nothing” [*ex nihilo*] is precisely such a positing of the “outside,” the positing of an “other” side by side with God. Certainly not in the sense of any kind of limitation to the Divine fullness, but in the sense that side by side with God there springs up an *other*, a heterogeneous substance or nature, one different from Him, and in a certain sense an independent and autonomous subject. That which did not exist springs now up and comes forth. In creation something *absolutely new*, an extra-divine *reality* is posited and built up. It is precisely in this that the supremely great and incomprehensible miracle of creation consists that an “other” springs up, that heterogeneous drops of creation exist side by side with “the illimitable and infinite Ocean of being,” as St. Gregory of Nazianzus says of God.<sup>11</sup> There is an infinite distance between God and creation, and this is a *distance of natures*. All is distant from God, and is *remote* from Him not by place but *by nature*— *ou tôpo alla physei*— as St. John Damascene explains.<sup>12</sup> And this distance is never removed, but is only, as it were, overlapped by immeasurable Divine love. As St. Augustine said, in creation “there is nothing related to the Trinity, except the fact that the Trinity has created it” *nihilique in ea esse quod ad Trinitatem pertineat, nisi quod Trinitas condidit...*<sup>13</sup> Even on the most exalted heights of prayerful ascent and

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intimacy there is always an impassable limit, there can always be perceived and revealed the *living duality of God and creation*. “He is God, and she is non-God,” said Macarius “the Great” of the soul. “He is the Lord, and she the handmaid; He the Creator, and she the creation; He the Architect, and she the fabric; and there is nothing in common between Him and her nature.”<sup>14</sup> Any transubstantiation of creaturely nature into the Divine is as impossible as the changing of God into creation, and any “coalescence” and “fusion” of natures is excluded. In the one and only hypostasis and person of Christ the God-Man in spite of the completeness of the mutual interpenetration [*perichôrêsis eis allêlas*] of the two natures, the two natures remain with their unchanged, immutable difference; “without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the specific property of each nature being preserved.” *Oudamou tês tôn physeôn diaphoras anêrêmenes dia tèn henôsin, sôzomenês de mallon tês idiotêtos hekateras physeôs* (the *horos* of Chalcedon). The vague “*out of two natures*” the Fathers of Chalcedon replaced by the strong and clear “*in two natures*,” and by the confession of the double and bilateral consubstantiality of the God-Man they established an unshakeable and indisputable criterion and rule of faith. The real existence of a created human nature, that is, of an other and

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<sup>11</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or.* 38, *In Theoph.*, n. 7, *PG* xxxvi, c. 317.

<sup>12</sup> St. John Damascene, *De fide Orth.* I, 13, *PG* xcvi, c. 583 [Russian, I, 183].

<sup>13</sup> St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad lit.*, I, imp. c. 2: non de Dei natura, sed a Deo sit facta de nihilo... quapropter creaturam universam neque consubstantiali Deo, neque coaeternam fas est dicere, aut credere. *PL* xxxiv, c. 221.

<sup>14</sup> St. Macarius of Egypt, *Hom.* XLIX, c. 4, *PG* xxxiv. c. 816.

second nature outside of God and side by side with Him, is an indispensable prerequisite for the accomplishment of the Incarnation without any change in or transmutation of the Divine nature.

What is created is outside of God, but is united with Him. The Fathers of the fourth century, moved by the Arian controversy to define the concept of creation in a clear and precise manner, stressed above all else the heterogeneity of the created and Creator in counter distinction to the “consubstantiality” of generation; and they corrected this heterogeneity with the dependence of creation upon the will and volition. Everything created, wrote St. Athanasius

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the Great, “is not in the least like its Creator in substance, but is *outside* of Him,” and therefore also could have *not* existed.<sup>15</sup> Creation “comes into being, made up from outside.”<sup>16</sup> And there is no similarity between that which bursts forth from nothing and the Creator Who verily *is*, Who brings creatures out of nothing.<sup>17</sup> Will and volition precede creating. Creating is *an act of will* [*ek boulêmatos*], and therefore is sharply distinguished from the Divine generation, which is an *act of nature* [*genna kata physin*].<sup>18</sup> A similar interpretation was given by St. Cyril of Alexandria. The generation is out of the substance, *kata physin*. Creating is an act, and is not done out of the creator’s own substance; and therefore a creation is heterogeneous to its creator.<sup>19</sup> Summarizing the patristic interpretation, St. John of Damascus gives a following definition: “Begetting means producing from the substance of the begetter an offspring similar in substance to the begetter. Creation, or making, on the other hand, is the bringing into being, from outside and not from the substance of the creator, an actor of something, entirely unlike [by nature].” Generation is accomplished “by a natural power of begetting,” [*tês gonimotêtos physikês*] and creating is an act of volition and will— *thelêseos ergôn*.<sup>20</sup> Creaturehood determines the complete dissimilarity of the creation and God, its otherness, and hence its independence and substantiality. The whole section of St. John is actually an elaborate rejoinder to arguments of Origin.

Creation is not a phenomenon but a “substance.” The reality and substantiality of created nature is manifested first of all in *creaturely freedom*. Freedom is not exhausted by the possibility of

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<sup>15</sup> St. Athanasius, *C. arian*, Or. 1, n. 20, PG xxvi, c. 53.

<sup>16</sup> St. Athanasius, *C. arian*. Or. 2, n. 2, PG xxvi, c. 152.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, *C. arian*. Or. 1, n. 21, c. 56.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, *C. arian*. Or. 3, nfl 60ss., c. 448 squ.

<sup>19</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus*, XV, PG LXXV, c. 276: *to gennêma... ek tês ousias tou gennôntos proeisi physikôs;— (to ktisma)... exôthen estin hôs allotrion*; ass. xviii, c. 313: *to men poiein energeias esti, physeôs de to gennan; physis de kai energeia ou tauton*.

<sup>20</sup> St. John Damascene *De fide orth.* I, 8, PG xciv, c. 812-813; cf. St. Athanasius *C. arian*. or. 2, n. 2, PG xxvi. He rebukes the Arians for not recognizing that *karpogonos estin autê hê Theia ousia*. The same expression is to be found in St. Cyril’s writings.

choice, but presupposes it and starts with it. And creaturely freedom is disclosed first of all in the equal possibility of two ways: to God and away from God. This duality of ways is not a mere formal or logical possibility, but a real possibility, dependent on the effectual presence of powers and capacities not only for a choice

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between, but also for the following of, the two ways. Freedom consists not only in the possibility, but also in the *necessity* of autonomous choice, the resolution and resoluteness of choice. Without this autonomy, nothing happens in creation. As St. Gregory the Theologian says, “God legislates human self-determination.”<sup>21</sup> “He honored man with freedom that good might belong no less to him who chose it than to Him Who planted its seed.”<sup>22</sup> Creation must ascend to and unite with God by its own efforts and achievements. And if the way of union requires and presupposes a responsive prevenient movement of Divine Mercy, “the ancient law of human freedom,” as St. Irenaeus once put it, is not undermined by this. The way of disunion is not closed to creatures, the way of destruction and death. There is no irresistible grace, creatures can and may lose themselves, are capable, as it were, of “metaphysical suicide.” In her primordial and ultimate vocation, creation is destined for union with God, for communion and participation in His life. But this is not a binding necessity of creaturely nature. Of course, outside of God there is no life for creation. But as Augustine happily phrased it, *being and life do not coincide* in creation.<sup>23</sup> And therefore *existence in death* is possible. Of course, creation can realize and establish herself fully only by overcoming her self-isolation, only in God. But even without realizing her true vocation, and even opposing it, thus undoing and losing herself, creation does not cease to exist. The possibility of metaphysical suicide is open to her. But the power of self-annihilation is not given. Creation is indestructible and not only that creation which is rooted in God as in the source of true being and eternal life, but also that creation which has set herself against God. “For the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:31), and shall pass. But the world itself shall not pass. Because it was created “that it might have being.” Its qualities and properties are changeable and mutable, and do change; but its “elements” are immutable. And

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immutable above all is the microcosm man, and immutable are men’s *hypostases*, sealed as they are and brought out of nothing by the creative will of God. Indeed, the way of rebellion and apostasy is the way of destruction and perdition. But it leads not towards non-being, but to death; and death is not the end of existence, but a *separation* the separation of soul and body, the separation of creation from God. In fact, evil “is not an entity.”<sup>24</sup> Evil has no “substance” it is

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<sup>21</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or. 45 in S. Pascha*, a. 28, *PG xxxvi*, 661.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 8, col. 632.

<sup>23</sup> St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad lit.*, I, 5, *PL xxxiv*, c. 250.

<sup>24</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or. XL in S. Baptism*, *PG xxxvi*, 424.

*anousion* according to St. John Damascene.<sup>25</sup> Evil has a negative and privative character, it is the absence and privation of true being. And at the same time, as St. Gregory of Nyssa says, in its very non-being it has its being”— *en tōi mê einai to einai echei*.<sup>26</sup> The root and character of evil is delusion and error. Evil, in the incisive phrase of one German theologian, is “a mythopoeic lie” [“eine dichtende Lüge”— F. Staudenmeier]. It is a kind of fiction, but a fiction loaded with enigmatic energy and power. Evil is active in the world, and in this actuality is real. Evil introduces new qualities into the world, as it were, adding something to the reality created by God, a something not willed and not created by God, although tolerated by Him. And this innovation, in a certain sense “non-being,” is in an enigmatic fashion real and powerful, “*For God made not death*” (Wis. Sol. 1:13), and nevertheless the whole creation is become subject to futility, and to the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:20-21). By sin death spread to all men (Rom. 5:12), and sin, being itself a fictitious innovation in the world, the spawn of the created will and of human devices, creates death and as it were sets up a new law of existence for creation, a kind of anti-law. And in a certain sense, evil is ineradicable. Yet, because the final perdition *in eternal torment* provoked by evil in “the resurrection unto judgment” does not mean total annihilation nor the total suppression of evil beings, it is impossible to ascribe to evil such anti-creative power which would overcome the creative power of God. By its devastation

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of being, evil does not wipe out being. And, such a devastated, distorted, deceitful, and false reality is mysteriously received into eternity, even though in the torments of unquenchable fire. The eternity of torments that will come upon the sons of perdition points out with a special urgency and sharpness the reality of creation as a second and extra-divine reality. It is provoked by a persistent though free rebellion, by a self-assertion in evil. Thus, as in becoming, so in dissolution as in holiness, so in perdition as in obedience, so in disobedience creation manifests and witnesses to her own reality as the free object of the divine decrees.

The idea of creation is alien to the “natural” consciousness. Classical, Hellenistic thought did not know it. Modern philosophy has forgotten it. Given in the Bible, it is disclosed and manifested in the living experience of the Church. In the idea of creation are juxtaposed the motif of the immutable, intransitory reality of the world as a free and active subject (more precisely, as a totality of interacting subjects) and the motif of its total non-self-sufficiency, of its ultimate dependence upon Another higher principle. And therefore any supposition of the world’s beginninglessness, the necessity of its existence, and any admission of its elimination are excluded. Creation is neither self-existent *being*, nor transitory *becoming*; neither eternal “*substance*,” nor illusory “*appearance*.” In creaturehood a great wonder is revealed. *The world also might not have existed at all*. And that which might not have existed, for which there are no inevitable causes or bases, does *exist*. This is a riddle, a “foolishness” for “natural” thought. And hence comes the temptation to attenuate and blunt the idea of creation, to replace it by other

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<sup>25</sup> St. John Damascene, *C. Manich* n. 14, PG xciv, c. 1597.

<sup>26</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurr.*, PG XLVI, 93 \_.

notions. Only by the contrary approach can the mystery of creation be clarified, by the exclusion and suspension of all evasive speculation and conjecture.

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## II

*God creates in perfect freedom.* This proposition is framed with remarkable precision by the “Subtle Doctor” of the Western middle ages, Duns Scotus: *Procedit autem rerum creatio a Deo, non aliqua necessitate, vel essentiae, vel scientiae, vel voluntatis, sed ex mera libertate, quae non movetur et multo minus necessitatur ab aliquo extra se ad causandum.* “The creation of things is executed by God not out of any necessity, whether of essence or of knowledge or of will, but out of a sheer freedom which is not moved much less constrained by anything external that it should have to be a cause.”<sup>27</sup> Even so, in defining God’s freedom in creation it is not enough to do away with crude conceptions of compulsion, of external necessity. It is obvious that we cannot even speak of any kind of external compulsion, because the very “outside” itself is first posited only in creation. In creation God is determined only by Himself. But it is not so easy to demonstrate the absence of any *internal* “necessity” in this self-determination, in the revelation of God *ad extra*. Here, the thought is beset by alluring temptations. The question may be put in this manner: Is the attribute of Creator and Sustainer to be considered as belonging to the essential and formative properties of the Divine Being? The thought of the Divine immutability may prevent us from giving a negative answer. Precisely so did Origen reason in his time. “It is alike impious and absurd to say that God’s nature is to be at ease and never to move, or to suppose that there was a time when Goodness did not do good and Omnipotence did not exercise its power.”<sup>28</sup> From the perfect extra-temporality and immutability of the Divine Being, Origen, in the words of Bolotov, draws the conclusion “that all His properties and predicates always belong to God *in a strict sense in actu, in statu quo.*”<sup>29</sup> Here, “always” for Origen has the meaning of “extra-temporal eternity,” and not only “the whole of tempo-

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ality.”— “Just as nobody can be a father without having a son, nor a lord without holding a possession or a slave,” reasons Origen, “so too we cannot even call God Almighty—Pantocrator if there are no creatures over whom he can exercise His power. For if anyone would have it that certain ages, or periods of time, or of Divine Omnipotence whatever he cares to call them elapsed during which the present creation did not exist, he would undoubtedly prove that in those ages or periods God was not Almighty but that He became Pantocrator afterward, that He became Almighty from the time when he began to have creatures over whom he could

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<sup>27</sup> ...Waddingi, IV, Paris, 1891. This whole discourse of Duns Scotus is notable for its great clarity and profundity. Duns Scoti questiones disputatae de rerum principio, quaestio IV, articulus I, n. 3 and 4,— *Opera omnia*, editio nova juata editionem.

<sup>28</sup> Origen, *De princ.* III, 5, 3. PG 327, English translation of G.W. Butterworth.

<sup>29</sup> V.V. Bolotov, *Origen’s Doctrine of the Holy Trinity*, St. Petersburg, 1879, p. 203.

exercise power. Thus God will apparently have experienced a kind of progress, for there can be no doubt that it is better for Him to be Almighty than not to be so. Now how is it anything but absurd that God should at first not possess something that is appropriate to Him and then should come to possess it? But if there was no time when God was not Almighty, there must always have existed the things in virtue of which He is Almighty; and there must always have existed things under his rule, over which He is their Ruler.”<sup>30</sup> In view of the perfect Divine immutability, “it is necessary that the creatures of God should have been created from the beginning, and that there should be no time when they were not.” Because it is inadmissible to think that, in time, God “would pass from inaction to action.” Hence it is necessary to recognize “that with God all things are without beginning and are co-eternal.”<sup>31</sup>

It is not simple or easy to escape from Origen’s dialectical nets. In this very problematic there lies an incontestable difficulty. “When I think what God was Lord of from eternity, if creation be not from always,” exclaimed Augustine, “I fear to affirm anything.” *Cum cogito cuius rei dominus semper fuit, si semper creatura non fuit, affirmare aliquid pertimesco...*<sup>32</sup> Origen complicated his question by his inability to extricate himself completely from time as change.

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Together with the sempiternal and immobile eternity of the Divine Being, he imagined an endless flow of ages which had to be filled. Furthermore, any sequence in the Divine predicates appeared to him under the form of real temporal change; and therefore, having excluded change, he was inclined to deny any sequence at all to, or interdependence among, those predicates taken as a whole; he asserted more than the mere “co-eternity” of the world with God; he asserted the necessity of the Divine self-disclosure *ad extra*, the *necessity* of the revelation and out-pouring of Divine goodness upon the “other” from all eternity, the *necessity* of the eternal realization of the fulness and of all the potentialities of Divine power. In other words, in order to comply with the notion of the Divine immutability, Origen had to admit the necessity of a conjointly ever-existent and beginningless “not-I” as a corresponding prerequisite to and correlative of the Divine completeness and life. And here is the ultimate sting of the question. *It was also possible that the world might not have existed at all* possible in the full sense of the word only granted that *God can also not create*. If, on the other hand, God creates out of necessity, for sake of the completeness of His Being, then the world must exist; then it is not possible that the world might not have existed. Even if one rejects the Origenistic notion of the infinitude of real past time and recognizes the beginning of time, the question remains: Does not *at least the thought of the world* belong to the absolute necessity of the Divine Being?

We may assume that the real world came into being together with time, and that “there was when it was not,” when there was no temporal change. But the image of the world, does not *this* remain eternal and everlasting in the Divine knowledge and will, participating immutably and

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<sup>30</sup> Origen, *De princ.* I, 2, 10, PG 138-9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, *Nota ex Methodic Ol. apud Phot. Bibl. cod.*, 235, sub linea, n. (40).

<sup>32</sup> St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, XII, 15, PL XLI, c. 36.

ineluctably in the fulness of the Divine self-knowledge and self-determination? On this point St. Methodius of Olympus had already put his finger, against Origen, stressing that

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the Divine All-Perfectness cannot depend on anything except God Himself, except on His own nature.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, God creates solely out of His goodness, and in this Divine goodness lies the only basis of His revelation to the “other,” the only basis of the very being of that “other” as recipient and object of this goodness. But should we not think of this revelation as eternal? And if we should— since God lives in eternity and in unchangeable completeness— would not this mean that in the final analysis “the image of the world” was present, and conjointly present, with God unchangingly in eternity, and moreover in the unalterable completeness of all its particular predicates? Is there not a “necessity of knowledge or will?” Does not this mean that God in His eternal self-contemplation also necessarily contemplates even *what He is not*, that which is not He, but other? Is God not bound in His sempiternal self-awareness by the image of His “Non-I” at least as a kind of possibility? And in His self-awareness is He not forced to think of and to contemplate Himself as a creative principle and as the source of the world, and of the world as an object of and participant in His good pleasure? And on the other hand, over the whole world there lies imprinted the Divine seal, a seal of permanence, a reflection of the Divine glory. The Divine economy of the world, the unchanging and immutable Providence of God, conveys— to our vision— perfect stability and wise harmony and also a kind of necessity. This vision hinders our understanding and apprehension of the claim that the world also might not have existed. It seems we cannot conceive the world as non-existing without introducing a kind of impious *fortuitousness* or *arbitrariness* in its existence and genesis, either of which is contradictory and derogatory to the Divine Wisdom. Is it not obvious that there must be some kind of sufficient cause for the world, *cur sit potius quam non sit*? And that this cause must consist of the unchangeable and sempiternal will and command of God? Does it not follow that once the world is impossible

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without God, God also is impossible without the world? Thus the difficulty is only shelved, but not solved, if we limit ourselves to the chronological beginnings of the actual existence of the world, since, in this case, the *possibility* of the world, the *idea* of the world. God’s design and will concerning it, still remains eternal and as though con-jointly everlasting with God.

And it must be said at once that any such admission means introducing the world into the intra-Trinitarian life of the Godhead as a co-determinant principle. And we must firmly and uncompromisingly reject any such notion. The idea of the world, God’s design and will concerning the world, is obviously *eternal*, but in some sense *not co-eternal*, and *not conjointly everlasting* with Him, because “distinct and separated,” as it were, from His “essence” by His *volition*. One should say rather that the Divine idea of the world is eternal by *another kind* of eternity than the Divine essence. Although paradoxical, this distinction of types and kinds of

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<sup>33</sup> St. Methodius, *De creatis*, apud *Phot. Bibl.* col. 235, PG cii, c. 1141.

eternity is necessary for the expression of the incontestable distinction between the *essence* (*nature*) of God and the *will* of God. This distinction would not introduce any kind of separation or split into the Divine Being, but by analogy expresses the distinction between *will* and *nature*, the fundamental distinction made so strikingly explicit by the Fathers of the fourth century. The idea of the world has its basis *not in the essence, but in the will of God*. God does not so much have as “think up” the idea of creation.<sup>34</sup> And He “thinks it up” in perfect freedom; and it is only by virtue of this wholly free “thinking up” and good pleasure of His that He as it were “becomes” Creator, even though from everlasting. But nevertheless He could also not have created. And any such “refraining” from creation would in no way alter or impoverish the Divine nature, would mean no diminution, Just as the very creation of the world does not enrich the Divine Being. Thus by way of opposites we can come close to an under-

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standing of God’s creative freedom. In a sense, it would be “indifferent” to God whether the world exists or not— herein consists the absolute “all-sufficiency” of God, the Divine autarchy. The absence of the world would mean a kind of subtraction of what is finite from the Infinite, which would not affect Divine fulness. And conversely, the creation of the world would mean the addition of what is finite to the Infinite, which in no way affects Divine plenitude. The might of God and the freedom of God must be defined not only as the power to create and to produce but also as the absolute freedom *not to create*.

All these words and presuppositions, obviously, are insufficient and inexact. They all have the character of negations and prohibitions, and not of direct and positive definitions; but they are necessary for the testimony to that experience of faith in which the mystery of Divine freedom is revealed. With a tolerable inexactitude, one could say that God is able to permit and tolerate the absence of anything outside of Himself. By such a presumption the whole immeasurability of the Divine love is not diminished, but on the contrary is thrown into relief. God creates out of the absolute superabundance of His mercies and goodness, and herein His good pleasure and freedom are manifest. And in this sense, one could say that the world is a kind of a surplus. And further, it is a surplus which in no way enriches the Divine fulness; it is, as it were, something “supererogatory” and superadded, something which also could not have existed, and which exists only through the sovereign and all-perfect freedom and unspeakable good pleasure and love of God. This means that the world is created and is “the work of” God’s will, *theléseôs ergôn*. No outward revelation whatever belongs to the “necessity” of the Divine nature, to the necessary structure of the intra-Divine life. And creative revelation is not something imposed upon God by His goodness. It is executed in perfect freedom, though in eternity also. Therefore it cannot be said that God *began*

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<sup>34</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or.* 45, n. 5, *PG* xxxvi, c. 629: *ennoei*; *Carm.* 4, *theol.* IV, *De mundo*, c. 67-68, *PG* xxxv II, 421.

to create, or “became” Creator, even though “to be Creator” does not belong to those definitions of Divine nature which includes the Trinity of Hypostases. In the everlasting immutability of God’s Being there is no origination whatsoever, nor any becoming, nor any sequence. And nevertheless there is a kind of all-perfect harmonic order which is partially knowable and expressible on the level of the Divine names. In this sense St. Athanasius the Great used to say that “to create, for God, is *secondary*; and to beget, *primary*,” that “what is of nature [essence]” is antecedent to “what is of volition.”<sup>35</sup> One has to admit distinctions within the very co-eternity and immutability of the Divine Being. In the wholly simple Divine life there is an absolute rational or logical order [*taxis*] of Hypostases, which is irreversible and inexchangeable for the simple reason that there is a “first principle” or “source” of Godhead, and that there is the enumeration of *First*, *Second*, and *Third* Persons.<sup>36</sup> And likewise it is possible to say that the Trinitarian structure is antecedent to the will and thought of God, because the Divine will is the common and undivided will of the All-Holy Trinity, as it is also antecedent to all the Divine acts and “energies.” But even more than this, the Trinity is the internal, self-revelation of the Divine nature. The properties of God are also revelations of the same sort, but in their particular disclosure God is free. The unchanging will of God freely postulates creation, and even the very idea of creation. It would be a tempting mistake to regard the “thinking up” of the world by God as an “ideal creation,” because the idea of the world and the world of ideas are totally *in God*, *en tōi Theōi*, and in God there is not, and there cannot be, anything of the created. But this ambiguous notion of an “ideal creation” defines with great clarity the complete distinction between the necessity of the Trinitarian Being on the one hand and the freedom of God’s design— His good pleasure concerning creation on the other. There remains an absolute and irremovable distinction, the denial

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of which leads to picturing the whole created economy as made up of *essential acts* and conditions which disclose the Divine nature as though of *necessity*, and this leads to raising the world, at least the “intelligible world” [*kosmos noētos*] to an improper height. One might, with permissible boldness, say that in the Divine idea of creation there is a kind of contingency, and that if it is eternal, it is *not an eternity of essence*, but a *free eternity*. We could clarify the freedom of God’s design— His good pleasure— for ourselves by the hypothesis that this idea need not have been postulated at all. Certainly, it is a *casus irrealis*, but there is no inherent contradiction in it. Certainly, once God “thought up” or postulated such an idea, He had sufficient reason for doing so. However, one thinks that Augustine was right in prohibiting any

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<sup>35</sup> St. Athanasius, *C. arian. Or.* 2, n. 2, PG xxvi, c. 152— *deuteron esti to dêmiourgein tou gennan ton Theon,— pollōi proteron,— to hyperkeimenon tēs boulêseōs.*

<sup>36</sup> Of. V. V. Bolotov, “On the Filioque Question, III: The significance of the sequence of the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity according to the view of the Eastern Fathers,” *Christian Readings [(Khristianskoe Chtenie)* Russian], 1913, Sept., pp. 1046-1059.

search for “the cause of God’s will.”<sup>37</sup> But it is bound by nothing and preordained by nothing. The Divine will is not constrained by anything to “think up” the world. From eternity, the Divine Mind, rhapsodized St. Gregory the Theologian, “contemplated the desirable light of His own beauty, the equal and equally perfect splendor of the triple-rayed Divinity... The world-creating Mind in His vast thoughts also mused upon the patterns of the world which He made up, upon the cosmos which was produced only afterwards, but which for God even then was present. All, with God, lies before His eyes, both what shall be, and what was, and what is now.... For God, all flows into one, *and all is held by the arms of the great Divinity.*”<sup>38</sup>

“The desirable light” of the Divine beauty would not be enhanced by these “patterns of the world,” and the Mind “makes them up” only out of the superabundance of love. They do not belong to the splendor of the Trinity; they are postulated by His will and good pleasure. And these very “patterns of the world” are themselves a surplus and super-added gift or “bonus” of Him Who is All-Blessed Love.

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In this very good pleasure of His will to create the world the infinite freedom of God is manifest.

So St. Athanasius says, “The Father creates all, by the Word, in the Spirit,”<sup>39</sup>— Creation is a common and indivisible act of the All-Holy Trinity. And God creates by *thought*, and the thought becomes deed— *ktizei de ennoôn, kai to ennoêma ergou hyphistatai*, says St. John Damascene.<sup>40</sup> “He contemplated everything from before its being, from eternity pondering it in His mind; hence each thing receives its being at a determinate time according to His timeless and decisive thought, which is predestination, and image, and pattern— *kata tên thelêtikên autou achronon ennoian, hêtis esti proorisimos kai eikôn kai paradeigma.*”<sup>41</sup> These patterns and prototypes of things that are to be constitute the “*pre-temporal and unchangeable counsel*” of God, in which everything is given its distinctive character [*echarakteirizeto*] before its being, everything which is preordained by God in advance and then brought to existence— *hê boulê autou hê proaiônios kai aei hôsautôs echousa.*<sup>42</sup> This “counsel” of God is eternal and unchanging, pre-temporal and without beginning— [*anarchos*]— since everything Divine is immutable. And this is the *image of God*, the second form of the image, the image turned

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<sup>37</sup> St. Augustine, *De div. quaest.* qu. 28, *PL* XLVI, c. 18: nihil autem majus est voluntatis Dei; non ergo ejus causa quaerenda est.

<sup>38</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Carm. theol.* IV— De mundo, v. 67-68, *PG* XXXVII, 421; *kosmoi typous...*

<sup>39</sup> St. Athanasius, *Ad Serap. Ep.* III, n. 5, *PG* xxvi, c. 632.

<sup>40</sup> St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.* I, 2, *PG* xciv, c. 865; St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or.* 45 in *S. Pascha*, n. 5, *PG* xxxvi, c. 629.

<sup>41</sup> St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.*, I, 9, *PG* xciv, c. 837.

<sup>42</sup> St. John Damascene *De imagin.*, I, 10, *PG* xciv, c. 1240-1241.

towards the creation.<sup>43</sup> St. John Damascene is referring to Pseudo-Dionysius. These creative patterns, says the Areopagite, “are creative foundations pre-existent together in God, and together compose the powers that make being into entities, powers which theology calls predestinations, Divine and beneficent, decisions which are determinative and creative of all things extant, according to which He Who is above being has preordained and produced all that exists”— *Paradeigmata de phamen einai tous en Theôi tôn ontôn ousiopoious kai eniaiôs proüphestôtas logous, hous hê Theologia proorismous kalei, kai Theia kai agatha thelêmata, tôn ontôn aphoristika kai poiêtika, kath’ hous ho Hyperousios ta onta panta*

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*kai proôrise kai parêgagen.*<sup>44</sup> According to St. Maximus the Confessor these types and ideas are the Divine all-perfect and everlasting thoughts of the everlasting God— *noêseis autoteleis aïdioi tou aïdiou Theou.*<sup>45</sup> This eternal counsel is God’s design and decision concerning the world. It must be rigorously distinguished from the world itself. The Divine idea of creation is not creation itself; it is not the substance of creation; it is not the bearer of the cosmic-process; and the “transition” from “design” [*ennoêma*] to “deed” [*ergon*] is not a process within the Divine idea, but the appearance, formation, and the realization of another substratum, of a multiplicity of created subjects. The Divine idea remains unchangeable and unchanged, it is not involved in the process of formation. It remains always outside the created world, transcending it. The world is created *according to the idea*, in accordance with the pattern it is the realization of the pattern but this pattern is not the subject of becoming. The pattern is a norm and a goal established *in God*. This distinction and distance is never abolished, and therefore the *eternity of the pattern*, which is fixed and is never involved in temporal change, is compatible with temporal beginning, with the entering-into-being of the bearers of the external decrees. “Things before their becoming are as though non-existent,” said Augustine, *utiquae non erant*. And he explains himself: they both were and were not before they originated; “they were in God’s knowledge: but

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*; c. 1340: “The second aspect of the image is the thought of God on the subject of that which He will create, that is, His pre-eternal counsel, which always remains equal to itself; for the Divinity remains unchangeable and His counsel is without beginning” [*deuteros tropos eikonos, hê en tõi Theôi tôn hyp’ autou hepomenôn ennoia, toutestin hê proaiônios autou boulêsis, hê aei hôsautôs echousa*].

<sup>44</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divin. nomin.* V, n. 8, *PG* III, c. 824; cf. c. VII, n. 2, c. 868-869.

<sup>45</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia in liberus de divine nominibus in cap. V 5*, *PG* iv, c. 31; cfr. n. 7... Cf. n. 7, c. 324A: In the cause of all things, everything is preconstituted [*proürestêken*], as in an idea or prototype; n. 8, c. 329A-B: *hoti poiêsîn autotelê aïdion tou aïdiou Theou tèn idean, êtoi to paradeigma phêsi*. In contrast to Plato, who separated the ideas or God, Dionysius speaks of “images” and “logoi” in God. Cf. A. Brilliantov, *The Influence of Eastern Theology on Western Theology in the Works of Eriugene* (St. Petersburg, 1898), pp. 157 ff, 192 ff.

were not in their own nature” *erant in Dei scientia, non erant in sua natura*.<sup>46</sup> According to St. Maximus, created beings “*are images and similes of the Divine ideas*,”<sup>47</sup> in which they are “participants.”<sup>48</sup> In creation, the Creator realizes, “makes substantial” and “discloses” His knowledge, pre-existent everlastingly in Himself.<sup>49</sup> In creation there is projected from out of nothing a new reality which becomes the bearer of the Divine idea, and must realize this idea in its own becoming. In this context the pantheistic tendency of Platonic ideology and of the Stoic theory of “seminal

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<sup>46</sup> St. Augustine, *De Genesi: ad l.t.*, I, V, c. 18, *PL* xxxiv, c. 334; cf. *De Trin.*, I, IX, c. 6 vel s. n. 9, *PL* XLII, c. 965: *alia notitia rei in ipsa se, alia in ipsa aeterna veritate*; cf. *ibid.*, I, VIII, c. 4 vel s. n. 7, c. 951-952. See also *De div. qu.*, 83, qu. 46, n. 2., *PL* XL, c. 30: *ideae igitur latine possumus vel formas vel species dicere... Sunt namque ideae principales formae quaedam, vel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, quae ipsae formatae non sunt, ac per hoc aeternae ac semper eodem modo sese habentes, quia in divina mente continentur. Et cum ipsae neque oriantur, neque intereant; secundum cas tamen formari dicitur omne quod oriri et interire potest, et omne quod oritur et interit.*

<sup>47</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor. *Lib. de div. nom. schol.*, vii, 3, *PG* iv, 352: *ta gar onta... eikones eisi kai homoiômata tôn deiôn ideôn... hôn eikones ta tês ktiseôs apotelesmata..*

<sup>48</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Lib. de div. nom. schol.*, V, 5, *PG* iv, 317; *hôn metechousin*.

<sup>49</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor. *De charit.*, c. iv, c. 4, *PG* xc, c. 1148: *tên ex aïdiou en autôi ho Dêmiourgos tôn ontôn prouparchousan gnôsin, hote eboulêthê, ousiôse kai proebaletô*; *Lib. de div. nom. schol.*; IV, 14, *PG* iv, 265. One must also take into consideration different aspects of the image as described by St. John Damascene, *De imag.* II, 19, *PG* xciv, 1340-1341: The first aspect of the image is natural, *physikos*— the Son. The second image is the pre-eternal counsel— *en tôi Theôi*. The third aspect is man, who is an image by imitation: —*ho kata mimêsin hypo Theou genomenos*— since one who is created cannot have the same nature as He who is not created. In this passage St. John Damascene perceives the likeness of man to God in the fact that the soul of every man consists of three parts; cf. *Fragm.*, *PG* xcv, 574. By indicating difference of natures in God and in man, the divine nature of the eternal ideas of His counsel is emphasized. The notion of “image” received its final definition only during the Iconoclastic period, especially in the writings of St. Theodore the Studite. He connects the possibility of having icons with the creation of man according to the image of God. “The fact that man is created according to the image and likeness of God indicates that making icons is to some extent a divine occupation” (St. Theod. Stud. *Antirrh.* III, c. 2, 5, *PG* xciv. St. Theodore follows here the ideas of *Areopagitica*. In this case it is enough to mention that St. Theodore underscores the indissoluble connection between the “image” and the “proto-image,” but makes a sharp distinction between them in essence of nature. Cf. *Antirrh.* III, c. 3, 10, col. 424: “The one is not separate from the other, except in respect to the distinction of essences” [*tês ousias diaphoron*]. Cf. K. Schwartzlose. *Der Bilderstreit* (Gotha, 1890), pp. 174 ff.; the Rev. N. Grossou, *St. Theodore the Stylite, His Times, His Life, His Works* (Kiev, 1908), Russian, pp. 198 ff.; 180 ff.; A. P. Dobroklonsky, *St. Theodore the Studite*, Vol. I (Odessa, 1901 [1914]), Russian.

reasons” [*spermatikoi logoi*] is altogether overcome and avoided. For Platonism the identification of the “essence” of each thing with its Divine idea is characteristic, the endowment of substances with absolute and eternal (beginningless) properties and predicates, as well as the introduction of the “idea” into real things. On the contrary, the *created nucleus* of things must be rigorously distinguished from the *Divine idea* about things. Only in this way is even the most sequacious logical realism freed from a “pantheistic flavor; the reality of the whole will nevertheless be but a created reality. Together with this, pan-logism is also overcome: The thought of a thing and the Divine thought-design concerning a thing are not its “essence” or nucleus, even though the essence itself is characterized by *logos*, [*logikos*]. The Divine pattern in things is not their “substance” or “hypostasis;” it is not the vehicle of their qualities and conditions. Rather, it might be called the *truth of a thing*, its *transcendental entelechy*. But the truth of a thing and the substance of a thing are not identical.<sup>50</sup>

### III

The acceptance of the absolute creatureliness and non-self-sufficiency of the world leads to the distinguishing of two kinds of predicates and acts in God. Indeed, at this point we reach the limit of our understanding, all words become, as it were, mute and inexact, receiving an apophatic, prohibitive, not a cataphatic, indicative sense. Nevertheless, the example of the holy Fathers encourages a speculative confession of faith. As Metropolitan Philaret once said, “We must by no means consider wisdom, even that hidden in a mystery, as alien and beyond us, but with humility should edify our mind towards the contemplation of divine things.”<sup>51</sup> Only, in our speculation we must not overstep the boundaries of positive revelation, and must limit ourselves to the inter-

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pretation of the experience of faith and of the rule of faith, presuming to do no more than discern and clarify those inherent presuppositions through which the confession of dogmas as intelligible truths becomes possible. And it must be said that the whole structure of the doctrine of faith encourages these distinctions. In essence, they are already given in the ancient and primary distinction between “theology” and “economy.” From the very beginning of Christian history, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church endeavored to distinguish clearly and sharply those definitions and names which referred to God on the “theological” plane and those used on

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<sup>50</sup> A penetrating and thorough investigation of the problem of ideas is given by a noted Roman Catholic theologian, F. A. Staudenmaier, *Die Philosophic des Christentums*, Bd. I (the only published), “Die Lehre von der Idee” (Gieszen, 1840), and also in his monumental work *Die Christliche Dogmatik*, Bd. III, Freiburg im Breisgau 1848 (recently reprinted, 1967).

<sup>51</sup> *Discourses and Speeches of a Member of the Holy Synod, Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow*, part 11, Moscow, 1844, p. 87: “Address on the Occasion of the Recovery of the Relics of Patriarch Alexey” (Russian).

the “economical.” Behind this stands the distinction between “nature” and “will.” And bound up with it is the distinction in God between “essence” [*ousia*] and “that which surrounds the essence,” “that which is related to the nature.” A distinction, but not a separation.

“What we say about God affirmatively shows us,” as St. John Damascene explains, “*not His nature, but only what is related to His nature,*” *ou tēn physin, alla ta peri tēn physin*,<sup>52</sup> “something which accompanies His nature” [*ti tōn parepomenōn tēi physeī*].<sup>53</sup> And “what He is by essence and nature, this is unattainable and unknowable.”<sup>54</sup> St. John expresses here the basic and constant assumption of all Eastern theology: God’s essence is unattainable; only the powers and operations of God are accessible to knowledge.<sup>55</sup> And as matters stand, there is some distinction between them. This distinction is connected with God’s relation to the world. God is knowable and attainable only in so far as He turns Himself to the world, only by His revelation to the world, only through His economy or dispensation. The internal Divine life is hedged by “light unapproachable,” and is known only on the level of “apophatic” theology, with the exclusion of ambiguous and inadequate definitions and names. In the literature of the ante-Nicene period, this distinction not seldom had

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an ambiguous and blurred character. Cosmological motives were often used in the definition of intra-Trinitarian relations, and the Second Hypostasis was often defined from the perspective of God’s manifestation or revelation to the world, as the God of revelation, as the Creative Word. And therefore the unknowability and inaccessibility were assigned primarily to the Hypostasis of the Father as being un-revealable and ineffable. God reveals Himself only in the Logos, in “the spoken Word” [*logos prophorikos*], as “in the idea and active power” issuing forth to build creation.<sup>56</sup> Connected with that was the tendency to sub-ordinationism in the ante-Nicene

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<sup>52</sup> St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.*, I, 4, PG xciv, 800.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 9, c. 836.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 4, c. 797.

<sup>55</sup> For a survey of this question see I. V. Popov, *The Personality and Teachings of the Blessed Augustine*, Vol. I, part 2 (Sergiev Posad, 1916, and *Lichnost’ i Uchenie Blazhennago Avgustina*), pp. 350-370 ff. (Russian).

<sup>56</sup> In the words of Athenagoras, *Legat.* c. 10, PG vi, c. 908: *en ideai kai energeiai*. Cf. Popov, pp. 339-41; Bolotov, pp. 41 ff.; A Puech, *Les apologistes grecs du II<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère* (Paris, 1912). On Origen, see Bolotov, pp. 191 ff. From the formal aspect, the distinction between “essence” and “energies” goes back to Philo and Plotinus. Nevertheless, in their view God receives his own character, even for Himself, only through His inner and necessary self-revelation in the world of ideas, and this “cosmological sphere” in God they named “Word” or “Mind.” For a long time the cosmological concepts of Philo and Plotinus retarded the speculative formulation of the Trinitarian mystery. In fact cosmological concepts have no relation to the mystery of God and Trinity. If Cosmological concepts must be discarded, then another problem appears, that of the relationship of God to the world, indeed of a free relationship. The problem is relationship in the conception of the “pre-eternal counsel of

theological interpretation of the Trinitarian dogma. Only the Fathers of the fourth century obtained in their Trinitarian theology the basis for an adequate formulation of God's relation to the world: the whole entire and undivided "operation" [*energiāi*] of the consubstantial Trinity is revealed in God's acts and deeds. But the single "essence" [*ousia*] of the undivided Trinity remains beyond the reach of knowledge and understanding. His works, as St. Basil the Great explains, reveal the *power and wisdom of God, but not His essence itself*.<sup>57</sup> "We affirm," he wrote to Amphilochius of Iconium, "that we know our God by His energies, but we do not presume that it is possible to approach the essence itself. Because although His energies descend to us, His essence remains inaccessible." And these energies are multiform, yet the essence is simple.<sup>58</sup> The essence of God is unfathomable for men, and is known solely to the Only-begotten Son and to the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup> In the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, the essence of God is "the Holy of Holies, closed even to the Seraphim, and glorified by the three Holies that come together in one Lordship and Godhead." And the created mind is able, very imperfectly, to "sketch" some small "diagram of the truth" in the infinite ocean of the Divine entity, but based not upon what God is, *but upon what is around Him* [*ek tôn peri auton*].<sup>60</sup> "The Divine essence, totally

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inaccessible and comparable to nothing," says St. Gregory of Nyssa, "is knowable only through His energies."<sup>61</sup> And all our words concerning God denote not His essence but His energies.<sup>62</sup>

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God." On Philo see M. D. Muretov, *The Philosophy of Philo of Alexandria in its Relation to the Doctrine of St. John the Theologian on the Logos*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1885); N. N. Gloubokovsky, *St. Paul the Apostle's Preaching of the Glad Tidings in its Origin and Essence*, Vol. I\_ (St. Petersburg, 1910), pp. 23-425; V. Ivanitzky, *Philo of Alexandria* (Kiev, 1911); P. J. Lebreton, *Les origines du dogme de la Trinité* (Paris, 1924), pp. 166-239, 570-581, 590-598; cf. excursus A, "On the Energies," pp. 503-506. Cf. also F. Dölger, "Sphragis," *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alterhums*, Bd. V, Hf. 3-4 (1911), pp. 65-69.

<sup>57</sup> St. Basil the Great, *C. Eun.*, I, II, 32, *PG* xxix, 648; cf. St. Athanasius, *De decret.*, n. II, *PG* xxv, c. 441: "God is in all by His goodness and power; and He is outside of all in His own nature [*kata tēn idian physin*]."

<sup>58</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Ad Amphil.*, *PG* xxxii, 869, A-B.

<sup>59</sup> St. Basil the Great, *C. Eun.*, I, I, n. 14, *PG* xxix, 544-5; cf. St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or.* 28, 3, *PG* xxxvi, 29; *Or.* 29, col. 88B.

<sup>60</sup> St. Gregory Nazianzos, *Or.* 38, in *Theoph.*, n. 7, *PG* xxxvi, 317.

<sup>61</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Cant. cant.* h. xi, *PG* xlix, 1013 B; *In Phalm.* II, 14, *PG* xliv, 585; cf. V. Nesmelov, *The Dogmatic System of St. Gregory of Nyssa* (Kazan, 1887), pp. 123 ff.; Popov, pp. 344-49.

<sup>62</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Quod non sint tres dii*, *PG* xlv, 121B: "We have come to know that the essence of God has no name and it is inexpressible, and we assert that any name, whether it has come to be known through human nature or whether it was handed to us through the Scriptures, is an

The Divine essence is inaccessible, unnameable, and ineffable. The manifold and relative names referring to God do not name His nature or essence but the attributes of God. Yet the *attributes of God* are not just intelligible or knowledgeable signs or marks which constitute our human notion of God; they are not abstractions or conceptual formulae. They *are energies, powers, actions*. They are real, essential, life-giving manifestations of the Divine Life real images of God's relation to creation, connected with the image of creation in God's eternal knowledge and counsel. And this is that which may be known of God— *to gnôston tou Theou*— (Rom. 1:19). This is, as it were, the particular domain of the undivided but yet “many-named” Divine Being, of the Divine radiance and activity— *hê Theia ellampsis kai energeia*, as St. John Damascene says, following the *Areopagitica*.<sup>63</sup> According to the Apostolic word, “the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His *everlasting power and Godhead*” (Rom. 1:20) [*hê te aïdios autou dynamis kai Theiotês*]. And this is the revelation or manifestation of God: “*God hath shewed it unto them*” (Rom. 1:19) [*ephanerosen*]. Bishop Sylvester rightly explains in commenting on these Apostolic words: “The invisible things of God, being actually existent and not merely imaginary, become visible not in a kind of illusory way, but certainly, veritably; not as a mere phantom, but in His own eternal power; not merely in the thoughts of men, but in very fact the reality of His Divinity.”<sup>64</sup> They are visible because manifested and revealed. Because God is present everywhere, not phantasmally, not in remoteness, but really present everywhere “which art in all places, and fillest all things, the Treasury of good things, and Giver of life.” This providential ubiquity (dif-

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interpretation of something to be understood of the nature of God, but that it does not contain in itself the meaning of His nature itself. On the contrary, no matter what name we give to the very essence of God, this predicate shows something that has relation to the essence [*ti tôn peri autên*]. Cf. *C. Eunom.* II, *PG* xlv, c. 524-5; *De beatitud.*, *Or.* 6, *PG* xlv, 1268: “The entity of God in itself, in its substance, is above any thought that can comprehend it, being inaccessible to ingenious conjectures, and does not even come close to them. But being such by nature, He who is above all nature and who is unseen and indescribable, can be seen and known in other respects. But no knowledge will be a knowledge of the essence;” *In Ecclesiasten*, h. VII, *PG* xlv, 732: “and the great men speak of the works [*erga*] of God, but not of God. St. John Chrysostom *Incompreh. Dei natura*, h. III, 3, *PG* xlvi, 722: in the vision of Isaiah (vi, 1-2), the angelic hosts contemplated not the “inaccessible essence” but some of the divine “condescension,” — “The dogma of the unfathomability of God in His nature and the possibility of knowing Him through His relations towards the world” is presented thoroughly and with penetration in the book of Bishop Sylvester, *Essay on Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. I, (Kiev, 1892-3), pp. 245 ff.; Vol. II (Kiev, 1892-3), pp. 4 ff. Cf. the chapter on negative theology in Father Bulgakov's book, *The Unwaning Light* (Moscow, 1917), pp. 103 ff.

<sup>63</sup> St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.*, I, 14, *PG* xciv, 860.

<sup>64</sup> Bishop Sylvester, II, 6.

ferent from the “particular” or charismatic presence of God, which is *not everywhere*) is a *particular “form of existence” for God*, distinct from the “form of His existence according to His own nature.”<sup>65</sup> And furthermore this form is existentially real or subsistent it is an actual presence, not merely an *omnipraesentia operativa, sicut agens adest ei in quod agit*. And if we “do not particularly understand” (in the phrase of St. Chrysostom<sup>66</sup>) this mysterious omnipresence, and this form of the Divine Being *ad extra*, nevertheless it is indisputable that God “is everywhere, whole and entirely, all in all, as St. John Damascene said— *holon holikôs pantachou on,— holon en pasi*.<sup>67</sup> The life-giving acts of God in the world *are God Himself*— an assertion which precludes separation but does not abolish distinction.<sup>68</sup> In the doctrine of the Cappadocian fathers concerning “essence” and “energies” we find in an elaborate and systematic form the mysterious author of the *Areopagitica* that was to determine the whole subsequent development of Byzantine theology. Dionysius bases himself on the strict distinction between those “Divine Names” which refer to the intra-Divine and Trinitarian life and those which express the relation of God *ad extra*<sup>69</sup> But both series of names tell of the immutable Divine reality. The intra-Divine life is hidden from our understanding, is known only through negations and prohibitions,<sup>70</sup> and in the phrase of St. Gregory the Theologian “one who by seeing God has understood what he has seen, has not seen Him.”<sup>71</sup> And nevertheless God really reveals Himself and acts and is present in creation through His powers and ideas— in “providences and graces which issue from the incommunicable God, which pour out in a flooding stream, and in which all existing things participate,”<sup>72</sup> “in an essence-producing procession,” [*ousiopoion proodon*], in “a providence that works good things,” [*agathopoion pronian*], which are distinguishable but not separable from the Divine entity “which surpasses entity,” from God Himself, as St. Maximus the

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, II, 131.

<sup>66</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Hebr.* h-2, n. 1.

<sup>67</sup> St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.*, I, 13, PG xciv, 852.

<sup>68</sup> The Eastern patristic distinction between the essence and energies of God has always remained foreign to Western theology. In Eastern theology it is the basis of the distinction between apophatic and cataphatic theology. St. Augustine decisively rejects it. See Popov, pp. 353 ff.; Cf. Brilliantov, pp. 221 ff.

<sup>69</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *De div. nom.*, II, 5, PG iii, 641.

<sup>70</sup> Cf., for example, *De coel. hier.*, II, 3, c. 141.

<sup>71</sup> *Ep. I, ad Caium*, c. 1065\_.

<sup>72</sup> *De div. nom*; xi, 6, c. 956.

Confessor says in his scholia.<sup>73</sup> The basis of these “processions” and of the, as it were, procession of God in His providences out of Himself— [*exô heautu ginetai*]— is His goodness and love.<sup>74</sup> These energies do not mix with created things, and are not themselves these things, but are only their basic and life-giving principles; they are the prototypes, the predeterminations, the reasons, the *logoi* and Divine decisions respecting them, of which they are participants and ought to be “communicants.”<sup>75</sup> They are not only the “principle” and the “cause,” but also the “challenge” and beckoning goal which is beyond and above all limits. It would be difficult to express more forcefully both the distinction between and the indivisibility of the Divine Essence and the Divine energies than is done in the *Areopagitica*— *to tauton kai to heteron*.<sup>76</sup> The divine energies are that aspect of God which is turned towards creation. It is not an aspect imagined by us; it is not what we see and as we see it, but it is the real and living gaze of God Himself, by which He wills and vivifies and preserves all things— the gaze of Almighty Power and Superabundant Love.

The doctrine of the energies of God received its final formulation in the Byzantine theology of the fourteenth century, and above all in St. Gregory Palamas. He bases himself on the distinction between Grace and Essence, “the divine and deifying radiance and grace is not the essence, but the energy of God”— *hê Theia kai Theopios ellampsis kai charis ouk ousia, all' energeia esti Theou*.<sup>77</sup> The notion of the Divine energy received explicit definition in the series of Synods held in the fourteenth century in Constantinople. There is a real distinction, but no separation, between the *essence* or *entity* of God and His *energies*. This distinction is manifest above all in the fact that the Entity is absolutely incommunicable and inaccessible to creatures. The creatures have access to and communicate with the Divine Energies only. But with this participation

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<sup>73</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *De div. nom.*, I, 4, PG iii, 589; St. Max. Schol. in V 1; PG iv, 309: *proodon de tēn Theian energeian legei, hētis pasan ousian parēgage*; is contrasted here with *autos ho Theos*.

<sup>74</sup> *De div. nom.*, IV, 13, PG iii, 712.

<sup>75</sup> *De div. nom.*, V, 8, PG iii, 824; V, 5-6, c. 820; XI, 6, c. 953, ss. Cf. Brilliantov's whole chapter on the *Areopagitica*, pp. 142-178; Popov, pp. 349-52. The pseudo-epigraphic character of the *Areopagitica* and their close relationship with Neo-Platonism does not belittle their theological significance, which was acknowledged and testified to by the authority of the Church Fathers. Certainly there is need for a new historical and theological investigation and appraisal of them.

<sup>76</sup> Dionysius Areopagite, *De div. nom.*; IX, PG iii, c. 909.

<sup>77</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Capit. phys., theol. etc.*, PG cl, c. 1169.

they enter into a genuine and perfect communion and union with God; they receive “deification.”<sup>78</sup> Because this is “the natural and indivisible energy and power of God,”— *physiké kai achôristos energeia kai dynamis tou Theou*,<sup>79</sup> “it is the common and Divine energy and power of the Tri-Hypostatic God.”<sup>80</sup> The active Divine power does not separate itself from the Essence. This “procession” [*proïena*] expresses an “ineffable distinction,” which in no way disturbs the unity “that surpasses essence.”<sup>81</sup> The active Power of God is not the very “substance” of God, but neither is it an “accident” [*symbebêkos*]; because it is immutable and coeternal with God, it exists before creation and it reveals the creative will of God. In God there is not only essence, but also that which is not the essence, although it is not accident the Divine will and power His real, existential, essence-producing providence and authority.<sup>82</sup> St. Gregory

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. 75, PG cl, 1173: St. Gregory proceeds from a threefold distinction in God: that of the *essence*, that of the *energy*, and that of the Trinity of the Hypostases. The union with God *kat’ ousian* is impossible, for, according to the general opinion of the theologians, in entity, or in His essence. God is “*imparticipable*” [*amethekton*]. The union according to hypostasis [*kath’ hypostasin*] is unique to the Incarnate Word: cap. 78, 1176: the creatures who have made progress are united to God according to His energy; they partake not of His *essence* but of His *energy* [*kat’ energeian*]: cap. 92, 1168; through the partaking of God given grace they are united to God Himself (cap. 93). The radiance of God and the God-given energy, partakers of which become deified, is the grace of God [*charis*] but not the essence of God [*physis*]: cap. 141, 1220; cap. 144, 1221; Theoph. col. 912: 928D: cf- 921, 941. Cf. the Synodikon of the council of 1452 in Bishop Porphyrius [Uspensky]’s book. *History of Mt. Athos*, III, 2 (St. Petersburg, 1902), supplements, p. 784, and in the *Triodion* (Venice, 1820), p. 168. This is the thought of St. Maximus: *methektos men ho Theos kata tas metadoseis autou, amethektos de kata to mêden metechein tês ousias autou, apud Euth. Zyg. Panopl.*, tit. 3, PG cxxx. 132.

<sup>79</sup> Bishop Porphyrios, 783.

<sup>80</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Theoph.*, PG cl, 94l.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 940: *ei kai dienênoche tês physeôs, ou diaspatai tautês*. Cf. *Triodion*, p. 170; and Porphyrius, 784: “Of those who confess one God Almighty, having three Hypostases, in Whom not only the essence and the hypostases are not created, but the very energy also, and of those who say that the divine energy proceeds from the essence of God and proceeds undividedly, and who through the procession designate its unspeakable difference, and who through the undivided procession show its supernatural unity. .. eternal be the memory.” Cf. *ibid.*, p. 169, Porphyrius, 782— *henôsis Theias ousias kai energeias asygchyton... kai diaphora adiatatê*. See St. Mark Eugen. *Ephes. Cap. Syllog.*, apud W. Gasz, *Die Mystik des N. Cabasilas* (Greiszwald, 1849), App. II, c. 15, p. 221: *hepomenên... aei kai syndromon*.

<sup>82</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Cap.*, 127, PG cl, 1209: *oute gar ousia estin, oute symbebêkos*; p. 135, 1216: *to gar mê monon ouk apoginomenon, all’ oud’ euxêsin ê meiôsin êntinaoun epidechomenon, ê empoïoun, ouk esth’ hopôs an synarithmoito tois symbebêkosin... all’ esti kai hôs alêthôs estin, ou symbebêkos de estin, epeidê pantapasis ametablêton estin;... echei ara ho Theos kai ho ousia, kai ho*

Palamas emphasizes that any refusal to make a real distinction between the “essence” and “energy” erases and blurs the boundary between generation and creation both the former and the latter then appear to be acts of essence. And as St. Mark of Ephesus explained, “Being and energy, completely and wholly coincide in equivalent necessity. Distinction between essence and will [*thelésis*], is abolished; then God only begets and does not create, and does not exercise His will. Then the difference between foreknowledge and actual making becomes indefinite, and creation seems to be coeternally created.”<sup>83</sup> The essence is God’s inherent *self-existence*; and the energy is His relations towards the other [*pros heteron*]. God *is* Life, and *has* life; *is* Wisdom, and *has* wisdom; and so forth. The first series of expressions refers to the incommunicable essence, the second to the inseparably distinct energies of the one essence, which descend upon creation.<sup>84</sup> None of these energies is hypostatic, nor hypostasis in itself, and their incalculable multiplicity introduces no composition into the Divine Being.<sup>85</sup> The totality of the Divine “energies” constitutes His pre-temporal will,

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His design His good pleasure concerning the “other,” His eternal counsel. This is God Himself, not His Essence, but *His will*.<sup>86</sup> The distinction between “essence” and “energies” or, it could be

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*mê ousia kan eimê symbebêkos kaleito, tên Theian délonoti boulên kai energeian; Theoph. p. 298: tên de theatikên dynamin te kai energeian tou panta prin geneseôs eidotos kai tên autou exousian kai tên pronoiân; c.f. p. 937, 956.*

<sup>83</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Cap. 96, PG cl, 1181: ei... mêden diapherei tês Theias ousias hê Theia energeia, kai to poiein, ho tês energeias esti, kat’ ouden dioisei tou gennan kai ekporeuein, ha tês ousias estin... kai ta poiêmata kat’ ouden dioisei tou gennêmatos kai tou problêmatos;*; cf. *Cap. 97, 98, 100, 102; Cap. 103, 1192: ei tôi thelein dêmiourgei Theos, alla to pephykenai monon; c. 135, 1216: ei tôi boulesthai poiei ho Theos, all’ ouch’ haplôs tôi pephykenai, allo ara to boulesthai, kai heteron to pephykenai. S. Mark of Ephesus, apud Gasz., s. 217: eti ei tauton ousia kai energeia, tautê te kai pantôs hama tôi einai kai energein ton Theon anagkê: synaidios ara tôi Theôi hê ktisis ex aïdiou energounta kata tous hellênas.*

<sup>84</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Cap. 125, PG cl, 1209; St. Mark of Ephesus, apud Gasz., c. 14, s. 220; c. 9, 219: c. 22, 225: ei polypoikilos men hê tou Theou Sophia legetai te kai esti, polypoikilos de autou hê ousia ouk estin, heteron ara hê autou ousia kai heteron hê sophia; c. 10, 209.*

<sup>85</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Theoph., PG cl, 929; 936; 941; St. Mark of Ephesus, apud Gasz., c. 21, s. 223.*

<sup>86</sup> Byzantine theology concerning the powers and energies of God still awaits monographic treatment, much the more so since the greater part of the works of St. Gregory Palamas are still in MSS. For the general characteristics and theological movements of the times, see Bishop Porphyry’s book, *First Journey into the Athonite Monasteries and Sketes*, part II, pp. 358 ff., and by the same author, *History of Mt. Athos*, part III, section 2, pp. 234 ff.; Archimandrite Modestus, *St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica* (Kiev, 1860), pp. 58-70, 113-130; Bishop Alexey, *Byzantine Church Mystics of the XIV Century* (Kazan, 1906), and in the Greek of G. H. Papamichael, *St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica* (St. Petersburg-Alexandria, 1911); cf. the Review of the book by J. Sokolov in the

said, between “nature” and “grace”— [*physis* and *charis*— corresponds to the mysterious distinction in God between “necessity” and “freedom,” understood in a proper sense. In His mysterious essence God is, as it were, “necessitated”— not, indeed, by any necessity of constraint, but by a kind of necessity of nature, which is, in the words of St. Athanasius the Great, “above and antecedent to free choice.”<sup>87</sup> And with permissible boldness one may say: God cannot but be the Trinity of persons. The Triad of Hypostases is above the Divine Will, is, as it were, “a necessity” or “law” of the Divine nature. This internal “necessity” is expressed as much in the notion of the “consubstantiality” as in that of the perfect indivisibility of the Three Persons as They co-exist in and intercompensate one another. In the judgment of St. Maximus the Confessor, it would be unfitting and fruitless to introduce the notion of will into the internal life of the Godhead for the sake of defining the relations between the Hypostases, because the Persons of the All-Holy Trinity exist together above any kind of relation and action, and by Their Being determine the relations between Themselves.<sup>88</sup> The common and undivided “natural” will of God is free. God is free in His operations and acts. And therefore for a dogmatic confession of the reciprocal relations between the Divine Hypostases, expressions must be found such as will exclude any cosmological motives, any relation to created being and its destinies, any relation to creation or re-creation. The ground of Trinitarian being is not in the economy or revelation of God *ad extra*. The mystery of the intra-Divine life should be conceived in total abstraction from the dispensation; and the hypostatic properties of the Persons must be defined apart from all relationship to the existence of creation, and only according to the relationship that subsists between Them-

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selves. The living relationship of God— precisely as a Triad— to the creation is in no way thus obscured; the distinction in the relations of the different Hypostases towards the creation is in no wise obscured. Rather, a fitting perspective is thus established. The entire meaning of the dogmatic definition of Christ’s Divinity as it was interpreted by the Church actually lay in the exclusion of all predicates relative to the Divine condescension which characterize Him as Creator and Redeemer, as Demiurge and Saviour, in order to understand His Divinity in the light of the internal Divine Life and Nature and Essence. The creative relationship of the Word to the world is explicitly confessed in the Nicene Creed— *by Whom all things were made*. And “things” were made not only because the Word is God, but also because the Word is the Word of God, the Divine Word. No one was as emphatic in separating the demiurgical moment in Christ’s action from the dogma of the eternal generation of the Word as St. Athanasius the Great. The

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*Journal of the Ministry of Public Education*, 1913, April-July issues. The Eastern distinction between essence and energy met with severe censure from Roman Catholic theology. Petavius speaks of it at great length and most harshly, Petavius, *Opus de theologicis*, ed. Thomas, Barri-Ducis (1864), tomus I, I, I, c. 12-13, 145-160; III, 5, 273-6.

<sup>87</sup> St. Athanasius, *C. arian. Or.* III, c. 62-63, *PG* xxvi.

<sup>88</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigu.*, *PG* xci, c. 1261-4.

generation of the Word does not presuppose the being— and not even the design— of the world. Even had the world not been created, the Word would exist in the completeness of His Godhead, because the Word is *Son by nature* [*huios kata physin*]. “If it had pleased God not to create any creatures, the Word would nevertheless be with God, and the Father would be in Him,” as St. Athanasius said; and this because creatures cannot receive their being otherwise than through the Word.<sup>89</sup> The creatures are created by the Word and through the Word, “in the image” of the Word, “in the image of the image” of the Father, as St. Methodius of Olympus once expressed it.<sup>90</sup> The creation presupposes the Trinity, and the seal of the Trinity lies over the whole creation; yet one must not therefore introduce cosmological motifs into the definition of the infra-Trinitarian Being. And yet one may say that the natural fulness of the Divine essence is contained within the Trinity, and therefore that the design— His good pleasure— concerning the world is a *creative act*, an operation of the will an abundance of Divine love, a gift and a grace. The distinction between the names of “God in Himself,” in His eternal being, and those names which describe God in revelation, “economy,” action, is not only a subjective distinction of our analytical thinking; it has an objective and ontological meaning, and expresses the absolute freedom of Divine creativity and operation. This includes the “economy” of salvation. The Divine Counsel concerning salvation and redemption is an eternal and pre-temporal decree, an “*eternal purpose*” (Eph. 3:11), “*the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God*” (Eph. 3:9). The Son of God is from everlasting destined to the Incarnation and the Cross, and therefore He is the Lamb “*Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world*” (1 Pet. 1:19-20), “*The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev. 13:8). But this “purpose” [*prothesis*] does not belong to the “essential” necessity of the Divine nature; it is not a “work of nature, but the image of economical condescension,” as St. John Damascene says.<sup>91</sup> This is an act of Divine love— *for God so loved the world....* And therefore the predicates referring to the economy of salvation do not coincide with those predicates by which the Hypostatic Being of the Second Person is defined. In Divine revelation there is no constraint, and this is expressed in the notion of the perfect Divine Beatitude. Revelation is an act of love and freedom, and therefore introduces no change into the Divine nature.<sup>92</sup> It introduces no change simply because there are no “natural” foundations for

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<sup>89</sup> St. Athanasius, *C. arian.*, II, 31, *PG* xxvi, c. 212: “It was not for our sake that the Word of God received His being; on the contrary, it is for His sake that we received ours; and all things were created... for Him (Col. i.16). It was not because of our infirmity that He, being powerful, received His being from the One God, that through Him as by some instrument we were created for the Father. Far be it. Such is not the teaching of the truth. Had it been pleasing not to create creatures, nevertheless the *Word was with God*, and in Him was the Father. The creatures could not receive their being without the Word, and that is why they received their being through Him, which is only right. Inasmuch as the Word is, by the nature of His essence, Son of God; inasmuch as the Word is from God and is God, as He Himself has said, even so the creatures could not receive their being but through him.”

<sup>90</sup> St. Methodius of Olympus, *Conviv.*, VI, I, *PG* xvii, c. 113.

<sup>91</sup> St. John Damascene, *C. Jacobitas*, n. 52, *PG* xciv, 144.

revelation at all. The sole foundation of the world consists in God's freedom, in the freedom of Love.

## IV

From eternity God "thinks up" the image of the world, and this free good pleasure of His is an *immutable*,

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unchangeable counsel. But this immutability of the accomplished will does not in the least imply its necessity. The immutability of God's will is rooted in His supreme freedom. And therefore it does not bind His freedom in creation, either. It would be very appropriate here to recall the scholastic distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*.

And in conformity with the design the good pleasure of God creation, together with time, is "built up" from out of nothing. Through temporal becoming, creation must advance by its own free ascent according to the standard of the Divine economy respecting it, according to the standard of the pre-temporal image of and predestination for it. The Divine image of the world always remains above and beyond creation *by nature*. Creation is bound by it unchangeably and inseparably, is bound even in its very resistance to it. Because this "image" or "idea" of creation is simultaneously the will of God [*thelêtiki ennoia*] and the power of God by which creation is made and sustained; and the beneficent counsel of the Creator is not made void by the resistance of creation, but through this resistance turns out to be, for rebels, a Judgment, the force of wrath, a consuming fire. In the Divine image and counsel, each creature— i.e., every created hypostasis in its imperishable and irreproducible form— is contained. Out of eternity God sees and wills, by His good pleasure, each and every being in the completeness of its particular destiny and features, even regarding its future and sin. And if, according to the mystical insight of St. Symeon the New Theologian, in the age to come "Christ will behold all the numberless myriads of Saints, turning His glance away from none, so that to each one of them it will seem that He is looking at him, talking with him, and greeting him," and yet "while remaining unchanged. He will seem different to one and different to another"<sup>93</sup>— so likewise out of eternity, God in the counsel of His good pleasure, beholds all the

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, *De fide orth.*, I, 8, c. 812.

<sup>93</sup> St. Symeon, *Biblos tôn êthikôn*, III— St. Symeon le Nouveau Theologien, *Traités théologiques et Ethiques* "Sources Chrétiennes," No. 122 (Paris, 1966), p. 414: *Enthen toi kai blepomenos para pantôn kai pasas blepôn autos tas anarithmêtous myriadas kai to heautou omma echôn aei atenizon kai ametakinêtôn histamenon, hekastos autôn dokei blepesthai par' autou kai tês ekeinou apolauein homilias kai kataspazesthai hyp' autou... allos allo ti deiknymenos einai kai diairôn heauton kat' axian hekastôi, katha tis estin axios...*

innumerable myriads of created hypostases, wills them, and to each one of them manifests Himself in a different way. And herein consists the “inseparable distribution” of His grace or energy, “myriadfold hypostatic” in the bold phrase of St. Gregory Palamas,<sup>94</sup> because this grace or energy is beneficently imparted to thousands upon myriads of thousands of hypostases. Each hypostasis, in its own being and existence, is sealed by a particular ray of the good pleasure of God’s love and will. And in this sense, all things are in God in “image” [*en idea kai paradeigmati*] but not by nature, the created “all” being infinitely remote from Uncreated Nature. This remoteness is bridged by Divine love, its impenetrability done away by the Incarnation of the Divine Word. Yet this remoteness remains. *The image of creation* in God transcends created nature and does not coincide with “the image of God” in creation. “Whatever description may be given to the “image of God” in man, it is a characteristic moment of his created nature— *it is created*. It is a “likeness,” a mirroring.<sup>95</sup> But above the image the Proto-Image always shines, sometimes with a gladdenning, sometimes with a threatening, light. It shines as a call and a norm. There is in creation a supra-natural challenging goal set above its own nature— the challenging goal, founded on freedom, of a free participation in and union with God. This challenge transcends created nature, but only by responding to it is this nature itself revealed in its completeness. This challenging goal is an aim, an aim that can be realized only through the *self-determination* and efforts of the creature. Therefore the process of created becoming is real in its freedom, and free in its reality, and it is by this becoming that what-was-not reaches fulfilment and is achieved. Because it is guided by the *challenging goal*. In it is room for creation, construction, for re-construction— not only in the sense of recovering, but also in the sense of generating what is new. The scope of the constructiveness is defined by the contradiction between the *nature* and the

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*goal*. In a certain sense, this goal itself is “natural” and proper to the one who does the constructive acts, so that the attainment of this goal is somehow also the subject’s realization of *himself*. And nevertheless this “I” which is realized and realizable through constructiveness is not the “natural” and empiric “I,” inasmuch as any such realization of one’s self” is a rupture— a leap from the plane of nature onto the plane of grace, because this realization is the acquisition of the Spirit, is participation in God. Only in this “communion” with God does a man become “himself;” in separation from God and in self-isolation, on the contrary, he falls to a plane lower than himself. But at the same time, he does not realize himself merely *out of himself*. Because the goal lies beyond nature, it is an invitation to a living and free encounter and union with God. The world is substantially different from God. And therefore God’s plan for the world can be

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<sup>94</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Theoph.*, PG cl. 941.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *apeikonisma* in St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hom. opif.*, PG xliv, 137. St. Augustine happily distinguishes and contrasts *imago ejusdem substantiae*, man. *August. Quaest. in heptateuch*, I, V, qu. 4, PL xxxiv, c. 749. For the most complete catalogue of the opinions of the Church Fathers on the “image of God” in Russian, see V. S. Serebrenikov, *The Doctrine of Locke on the Innate Principles of Knowledge and Activity* (St. Petersburg, 1892), pp. 266-330.

realized only by created becoming— because this plan is not a substratum or *substantia* that comes into being and completes itself, but is the standard and crown of the “other’s” becoming. On the other hand, the created process is not therefore a development, or not only a development; its meaning does not consist in the mere unfolding and manifestation of innate “natural” ends, or not only in this. Rather, the ultimate and supreme self-determination of created nature emerges in its zealous impulse to outstrip itself in a *kinêsis hyper physin*, as St. Maximus says.<sup>96</sup> And an anointing shower of grace responds to this inclination, crowning the efforts of the creatures.

The limit and goal of creaturely striving and becoming is divinisation [*theôsis*] or *deification* [*theopoiêsis*]. But even in this, the immutable, unchangeable gap between natures will remain: any “transubstantiation” of the creature is excluded. It is true that according to a phrase of St. Basil the Great preserved by St. Gregory the Theologian, creation “has been ordered to become God.”<sup>97</sup> But this

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“deification” is only communion with God, *participation* [*metousia*] in His life and gifts, and thereby a kind of acquisition of certain similitude to the Divine Reality. Anointed and sealed by the Spirit, men become conformed to the Divine image or prototype of themselves; and through this they become “conformed to God” [*symmorphoi Theô*].<sup>98</sup> With the Incarnation of the Word the first fruit of human nature is unalterably grafted into the Divine Life, and hence to all creatures the way to communion with this Life is open, the way of *adoption* by God. In the phrase of St. Athanasius, the Word “became man in order to *deify* [*theopoiêsê*] us in Himself,”<sup>99</sup> in order that “the sons of men might become the sons of God.”<sup>100</sup> But this “divinization” is acquired because Christ, the Incarnate Word, has made us “receptive to the Spirit,” that He has prepared for us both the ascension and resurrection as well as the indwelling and appropriation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>101</sup> Through the “flesh-bearing God” we have become “Spirit-bearing men”; we have become sons “by grace,” “sons of God in the likeness of the Son of God.”<sup>102</sup> And thus is recovered what had been lost since the original sin, when “the transgression of the commandment turned man into what he was by nature,”<sup>103</sup> over which he had been elevated in

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<sup>96</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigu.*, PG xci, c. 1093.

<sup>97</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Or.* 43, *In laudem Basil. Magni*, PG xxxvi, c. 560.

<sup>98</sup> St. Amphilochius, *Or.* I *In Christi natalem*, 4.

<sup>99</sup> St. Athanasius, *Ad Adolph.*, 4, PG xxvi, 1077.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, *De incarn. et c. arian.*, 8, c. 996.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, *C. arian.*, I, 46, 47, c. 108-109.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, *De incarn. et c. arian.*, 8, c. 998.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, *De incarn.*, 4, c. PG xxv, 104: *eis to kata physin epestrepen*.

his very first adoption or birth from God, coinciding with his initial creation.<sup>104</sup> The expression so dear to St. Athanasius and to St. Gregory the Theologian, *Theon genesthai*,<sup>105</sup> finds its complementary explanation in a saying of two other Cappadocian Saints: *omoiôsis pros ton Theon*.<sup>106</sup> If Macarius the Egyptian dare speak of the “changing” of Spirit-bearing souls “into the Divine nature,” of “participation in the Divine nature,”<sup>107</sup> he nevertheless understands this participation as a *krasis di’ holon*, i.e., as a certain “mingling” of the two, preserving the properties and entities of each in particular.<sup>108</sup> But he also stresses that “the Divine Trinity comes to dwell in that soul which, by the cooperation of Divine Grace, keeps herself pure— He comes to dwell

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*not as He is in Himself*, because He is incontainable by any creature but according to the measure of the capacity and receptivity of man.<sup>109</sup> Explicit formulae concerning this were not established all at once, but from the very beginning the impassable gulf between the natures was rigorously marked, and the distinction between the notions *kat’ ousian* (or *kata physin*) and *kata metousian* was rigorously observed and kept. The concept of “divinization” was crystallized only when the doctrine of God’s “energies” had been explicated once and for all. In this regard the teaching of St. Maximus is significant. “The salvation of those who are saved is accomplished *by grace and not by nature*,”<sup>110</sup> and if “in Christ the entire fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily *according to essence* then in us, on the contrary, there is not the fulness of the Godhead *according to grace*.”<sup>111</sup> The longed-for “divinization” which is to come is a *likeness by*

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*; *C. arian.*, II, 58-59, c. 272-3. Cf. N. V. Popov, *The Religious Ideal of St. Athanasius*, Sergiev Posad, 1903.

<sup>105</sup> For a summary of citations from St. Gregory see K. Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältniss zu den grossen Kappa-Doziern* (Tübingen and Leipzig, 1904), p. 166; cf. Also N. Popov, “The Idea of Deification in the Ancient Eastern Church” in the journal *Questions in Philosophy and Psychology* (1909, II-97), pp. 165-213.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Holl, 124-125, 203 ff.

<sup>107</sup> St. Macarius of Egypt, hom. 44, 8, 9, *PG xxxiv*; *allagênai kai metablêthênai... eis heteran katastasin, kai physin theian*.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Stoffels, *Die mystische Theologie Makarius des Aegyptars* (Bonn, 1900), pp. 58-61.

<sup>109</sup> St. Macarius of Egypt, *De amore*, 28, *PG xxxiv*, 932: *enoikei de ou kath’ ho estin*.

<sup>110</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Cap. theol. et. oecon. cent.*, I, 67, *PG xci*, 1108: *kata charin gar, all’ ou kata physin estin hê tôn sôzômenôn sôtêria*.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, *Cent*, II, 21, col. 1133.

grace, *kai phanômen autôi homoioi kata tên ek charitos theôsin*.<sup>112</sup> And even by becoming partakers of Divine Life, in the unity of love, by co-inhering totally and entirely with the whole of God, [*holos holôi perichôrêsas holikôs tôi Theôi*] by appropriating all that is Divine, the creature “nevertheless remains outside the essence of God”— *chôris tês kat’ ousian tautotêta*.<sup>113</sup> And what is most remarkable in this is the fact that St. Maximus directly identifies the deifying grace with the Divine good pleasure as regards creation, with the creative fiat.<sup>114</sup> In its efforts to acquire the Spirit, the human hypostasis becomes a vehicle and vessel of Grace; it is in a manner imbued with it, so that by it God’s creative will is accomplished the will which has summoned that-which-is-not into being in order *to receive those that will come* into His communion. And the creative good pleasure itself concerning each and every particular is already by itself a descending stream of Grace— but not everyone opens to the Creator and God Who knocks. Human nature must be freely discovered through a responsive movement, by overcoming the self-isolation of its

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own nature; and by denying the self, as one might say, receive this mysterious, and terrifying, and unspeakable double-naturedness for sake of which the world was made. For it was made to be and to become the Church, the Body of Christ.

The meaning of history consists in this that the freedom of creation should respond by accepting the pre-temporal counsel of God, that it should respond both in word and in deed. In the promised double-naturedness of the Church the reality of created nature is affirmed at the outset. Creation is *the other*, another nature willed by God’s good pleasure and brought forth from nothing by the Divine freedom for creation’s own freedom’s sake. It must conform itself freely to that creative standard by which it lives and moves and has its being. Creation is not this standard, and this standard is not creation. In some mysterious way, human freedom becomes

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, *Ad Ioannem cubic.*, ep., XLII, c. 639; cf. *Div. cap.*, I, 42, PG xc, 1193; *De charit.*, c. III, 25, c. 1024: *kata metousian, ou kat’ ousian, kata charin, ou kata physin, Ambigu.*, 127<sup>a</sup>: “being deified by the grace of the Incarnate God;” PG xci, 1088, 1092.

<sup>113</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigu.* 222: The goal of the creature’s ascension consists in this that, having united the created nature with the uncreated by love, in order to show them in their unity and identity— *hen kai tauton deixeie*— after having acquired grace and integrally and wholly compenetrating with the whole of God to become all that is God— *pan ei ti per setin ho Theos*— PG xci, 1038; cf. also Anastasius of Sinai *Hodêgos*, c. 2, PG lxxxix, c. 77: Deification is an ascension towards the better, but it is not an increase or change in nature— *ou mên physeôs meiosis, é metastasis*— neither is it a change of one’s own nature.”

<sup>114</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, 43 *Ad Ioann. cubic.*; PG xci, 639; “He has created us for this purpose, that we might become participants of the Divine nature and partakers of eternity’s very self, and that we might appear to Him in His likeness, by deification through grace, through which is brought about the coming-into-being [*he ousiôsis*] of all that exists, and the bringing-into-being and genesis of what does not exist— *kai hê tôn mê hortôn paragôgê kai genesis*..

a kind of “limitation” on the Divine omnipotence, because it pleased God to save creation not by compulsion, but by freedom alone. Creation is “other,” and therefore the process of ascent to God must be accomplished by her own powers— with God’s help, to be sure. Through the Church creaturely efforts are crowned and saved. And creation is restored to its fulness and reality. And the Church follows, or, rather, portrays the mystery and miracle of the two natures. As the Body of Christ, the Church is a kind of “plenitude” of Christ— as Theophan the Recluse says— “just as the tree is the plenitude of the seed.”<sup>115</sup> And the Church is united to Her Head. “Just as we do not ordinarily see iron when it is red-hot, because the iron’s qualities are completely concealed by the fire,” says Nicholas Cabasilas in his *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, “so, if you could see the Church of Christ in Her true form, as She is united to Christ and participates in His Flesh, then you would see Her as none other than the Lord’s Body alone.”<sup>116</sup> In the Church creation is forever confirmed

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and established, unto all ages, in union with Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>115</sup> Bishop Theophan (the Recluse), *Commentary on the Epistles of Sf. Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians* (Moscow, 1882), in Russian, pp. 112-113, to the Ephesians, I, 23.

<sup>116</sup> Nicholas Cabasilas, *St. ae liturgiae expositio*, cap., 38, PG cl., c. 452. (Russian version *Writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church concerning the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church* [St. Petersburg, 1857], p. 385.