

THE THEOLOGY OF PERSONHOOD

A STUDY OF THE THOUGHT OF

CHRISTOS YANNARAS

by R.D. WILLIAMS

(now, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY)

published in "Sobornost" No.6, Winter 1972, pp. 415-430

This article will be devoted chiefly to an examination of Christos Yannaras's doctoral thesis presented to the University of Salonika ("The Ontological Content of the Theological Notion of Personhood", Athens, 1970), a remarkable essay in "theological personalism". Those of us familiar with the work of the late Vladimir Lossky, especially his various studies of the significance for Christian theology of the Chalcedonian distinction between "nature" and "person", will recognise familiar themes in Dr. Yannaras's book, though here they are given a philosophical grounding, of great subtlety and sophistication, which would have been somewhat alien to Lossky's general style of doing theology. Indeed, Lossky's near-Barthian hostility, during most of his career, to secular philosophy makes it very hard to assess the extent to which, consciously or unconsciously, he utilised motifs from his philosophical contemporaries: there are times when a reader of Lossky (especially of his work in the early '50's)[i] will catch some quite pronounced echoes of Merleau-Ponty, even of Sartre; but one can hardly doubt that Lossky would have repudiated indignantly any suggestion of "influence". This consideration gives Dr. Yannaras's work an added interest for the student of Lossky: a glance at the bibliography shows us Lossky (represented by the "Theologie mystique", and the posthumous collection, "A l' Image et a la Ressemblance de Dieu") side by side with Heidegger, Husserl and Sartre. What Dr. Yannaras has attempted, in fact, is a synthesis of what may loosely be called the Greek patristic tradition (conceived of as including Palamas and other mediaevals) and modern phenomenological thought. An earlier work ("The Theology of the Absence and Ignorance of God", Athens 1967; now available in a French translation)[ii] provided a basis for this in a comparison between the Byzantine apophatic tradition, and the confrontation with "Nothing" in the philosophy of Heidegger: this study also made extensive use of Nietzsche, and attempted to present the "Death of God" and existential nihilism as a logical and inevitable growth from the rationalism of the Western theological tradition. It is a highly provocative work, and one may, I think, legitimately object to the vast sweep of its generalisations; but it is undeniably a very significant essay in what does appear to be genuinely an alternative theological language to that which has become customary in the Latin tradition and its offshoots. I hasten to add that the fact that it is an alternative does not automatically guarantee its superiority: in assessing Dr. Yannaras's work, as in assessing that of other Eastern theologians, it is important not to be hypnotised by sheer novelty into suspending our critical faculties.

On the whole, the present work seems less determined in its expression by a desire to present a sharp contrast to "Western" theology: Aristotle is quoted fairly frequently as a spokesman for "classical metaphysics", but Latin theologians are hardly ever referred to by name. The argument of the book is positive rather than controversial in character, and exhibits a remarkable integration of sources and authorities into the

body of the thesis: there are long sections devoid of footnotes or quotations, but no less rigorous and precise for that. However, I must register a complaint about the rather annoying repetition of “Leitmotif” phrases in Heideggerese “the potentiality for universal ek-static personal relatedness” (or variants of this wording)[iii] recurs time and time again. Granted that, for those with some acquaintance with Heidegger, it is the most exact statement possible of what is involved in the concept of “relation”, must it be used *every* time this concept is under review? Perhaps, however, this is simply the reaction of a mind acclimatised to the pedestrian phraseology of Anglo-Saxon philosophy to what appears to be Teutonic mystification. Certainly, the dialogue with Heidegger is the main them of the whole work; and it might be of some interest and value to compare Yannaras’s use of Heidegger with Rahner’s[iv]. On a superficial examination, they would appear to have a good deal in common; but a detailed study of this lies outside the scope of the present paper (and the abilities of the author!).

It may be as well, at this point, to attempt a summary of Dr. Yannaras’s argument. He begins by noting the relational element in the Greek *πρόσωπον* (person), the aspect of *πρός* *ωπός*, the existence of person only over-against, in relation to someone or something; “We know being as presence (*παρουσία*), not essence (*ουσία*)[v], we cannot know “Being-in-itself” as *such*. Our acts of knowing, then, are not merely intellectual, they are an orientation of our personhood in *relation*, the outgoing openness to other realities which Heidegger calls “ek-stasis”. The reality or unreality of entities depends on their relatedness or not-relatedness to persons; personhood, then, is the “horizon” (*ορίζων* in Greek means “that which determines or defines”) upon which all beings manifest themselves, and so it may be said to have a “universal” character. Personhood is not a part of human nature, it defines nature, it is the “ontological starting-point” for understanding nature. Not that it is (in Sartre’s sense) the “source” of existence: rather, existence is to be perceived only *in* persons. One consequence of this is that we cannot properly conceive of God as a “First Cause”, external to His effects: if He is personal, we must see Him as creative energy relating to creation in the present, establishing communion between Himself and His creatures. Another consequence is that any idea of the image of God as residing in a “part” of man must be abandoned: the person is a unity, not merely a synthesis (as in the Aristotelean system), the body is not a component in man, it is his mode (*τρόπος*) of existence, the manifestation to the outside world of the “energies” of his nature, that through which personal presence or absence may be apprehended. The image of God is the whole man; and it is the whole man who enters into relation with God. He may know God by way of “absence”, that is, he may know him through the manifestation of His energies in creation (as one “knows” the absent artist through his work); or he may know Him as personal presence, as Christ in the Church. Outside the Church, only the former way is possible; yet even here, the absence is personal, the absence of someone, and so it is painful. Within the Church, this experience is familiar to the man of prayer — hence the *πένθος* (“compunction”, “lamentation”) associated in the East with the ascetic life.

The emergence of beings into personal relation can thus be seen as an emergence into order, unity, the formation of a *cosmos*, in fact: Anaximander was essentially right in comparing cosmic order with moral and social order. Contemporary science has abandoned any crude notion of absoluteness or necessity in physical “laws”, and has stressed indeterminacy and asymmetry in things: the concept of a closed and regular system governed by immutable laws is as untenable as the concept of an “Unmoved Mover” as the first term of such a system. Both alike are based on an objectification of reality which scrupulously avoids the personal. The cosmos much now be seen as “a universal harmony in an infinity of indeterminate distinctions”,[vi] a manifestation of personal being in a set of unique, unrepeatable realities.

The awareness of this multiplicity as a harmonious set leads us to the apprehension of universal objective “beauty”, of “reason” (*λόγος*) in creation, to the person of the Logos, in fact, manifested through life-giving energy, the Spirit.

Our categories of space and time are dependent on the ideas of personal presence and absence, also. The “personal dimension of space” appears in awareness of personal absence, where “distance” has nothing to do

with “geometrical”, objectively measurable space: we are dealing with a non-objectified, *relational* space. This experience of absence, as Sartre makes clear,^[vii] is tragic, it is “agony”; yet at the same time, it presupposes and establishes the possibility of relation to an authentic reality. Thus Heidegger can speak^[viii] of death as a phenomenon of life, a final personal revolt against the constant failure to achieve authentic personal relation in “geometric” space: “Death is the apophatic definition of personhood.^[ix] Similarly, time is to be regarded as the recognition of outgoing (“ek-static”) relation as *change*, not as an external computation of movement, but as a dimension of relation itself, a part of the *being* of things. In our experience, however, awareness of continuity is awareness of “corruption”, of movement towards death; so that again death appears as, in some way, the vehicle of the possibility of “total” relationship, because it manifests the finally limited character of merely individual, “atomistic” existence. In human life, we are aware of personal energy as “enduring”, as extending individuality into totality, outside the limits of temporal succession and death: this is what we experience through the work of art, a communion with the artist unconditioned by the circumstances of his or our individual historical circumstances, an awareness of *presence*. So the relation of man to the cosmos which we measure as “time” has its real end beyond time, limitation, corruption, death, in a duration of presence. And at this point, we may introduce the Person of the Logos again, as the person to Whom *all* realities are “present”, in this sense, and Who is present in all realities (as the artist is in his creation). The presence is made experienced reality in the sacraments of the Church; which is why we may speak of the establishment of a “liturgical time” in the Church, the union of past, present, and future in the presence of the Word—the Kingdom of God, eternal life—which gives us the ground for a faint apprehension of the “time” of the Holy Trinity, which is eternity, the measure of *perfect* personal communion.

“Logos” is therefore never merely a detached statement, but is an attitude, an involvement in “what there is”; it is at the same time a gathering up of diverse elements in a universal (because personal) unity, and a definition of the distinct modes in which this unity exists. It is the medium through which things are manifested to, brought into relation with the person: the uniqueness of the word is the uniqueness of the relation it “names” (the uniqueness of the work of art). The word reveals personhood through the outgoing creative “energies” of nature, nature’s capacity to show itself as personal. We are again led to the theological notion of a cosmic personal Word, establishing the reality of all things in relation to the Person of God. The “expressive energy”^[x] of the human word reveals the cosmic Word, and reveals Him as a second partner in a “dia-logical” relation, the encounter of two persons in outgoing reciprocity, *κοινωνία*.

However, the capacity for this sort of relatedness is a possibility, not an automatically realised necessity: we must reckon with the fact of human *fallenness*, the empirical fact that man exists in a state of “atomistic” self-consciousness, connected to other such consciousnesses solely in virtue of a shared objective relation to the “world”, or to “absolute reality”. The idea of Being is thereby reduced to that which exists, opposed to that which does *not* exist—Nothing (*Μηδέν*, Sartre’s “Neant”): nothingness is, as it were, introduced into the definition of Being, as a possibility; the possibility of the universality of Being-as-relation is denied. There are only individual entities existing in “distance” (*απόστασις*) from the whole: mutual absence is the basic ontological category, Being is identified with Nothingness. Hence the problem in contemporary art and philosophy of “one-dimensional man”, existing in alienation, in the absence of relation: the reality of the person is wholly obscured, and there is thus nothing to bridge the gulf between the individual and the whole, the mass. Yet we can only understand this “fall” as a *personal* decision, the result of the ability of freedom to deny itself, to subordinate itself to “nature”. We are bound to presuppose some degree of awareness of our impotence, awareness of failure, and thus of the possibility of something different. Nothingness, then, is not an empty concept, known only as the opposite of existence, it is a personal experience of the absence of relation: and the necessity (“ontological”, not conceptual) of the universal second person again appears. Man experiences a divine call, an invitation to enter into relation, and so to become truly personal: personhood is known as response to the invitation of the Divine Person, its “truth” is to be found outside the mere “givenness” of finite

facts. In this invitation, this outgoing of personal energy, the unknowable Divine essence becomes known as content of person (not known “in itself”): the mode of God’s being is personal communion.

What we are talking about is the *perfect* revelation of personhood; and so we must say that God does not “emerge” into personhood, He *is* personal. And since fullness of personal being-in-communion is beyond singularity and duality, we are right to think of Him as Trinity: in our relation to God, our response to His call, we apprehend His energy as triadic, and, at the same time, as kenotic: each Person “witnesses” to the others in continual *περιχώρησις*. This personal energy is the foundation of finite, created personhood: the Godhead “comes out of” Its Essence, in free exercise of will, to establish a new reality possessed of the power of standing-over against God in personal freedom, the capacity to affirm or to deny God’s call. To deny it is to be condemned to “atomic” individuality, the condition in which “Hell is other people”, when “every ‘other’ is a direct confirmation of the failure of the person to deny... the fragmentation of nature into self-sufficient individuals”[xi]. And it is this which the Church asserts that Christ has overcome, not simply by “volitional” response to God’s call, but by the union of the Divine and human natures: the possibility is opened to man of existing as truly personal nature, being-in-communion. This change in nature is conveyed to us through the Sacraments, but it should not be seen as in any way an obliteration of created freedom: rather is it the attainment of true freedom by ongoing “conversion” (*μετάνοια*). And so the experience of “Nothing” is revealed finally as a confirmation not only of human freedom but also of the personal reality of God: Christ’s descent into Hell is “the transformation of Nothingness, of the abyss of human failure, into a triumph for the love and benevolence (*φιλανθρωπία*) of God.”[xii]

If God is personal *κατ’ ουσίαν*, we cannot speak of Him in ethical terms as they are normally employed, since the concept of an ethic presupposes a *fall*. Morality properly considered is the measure of a person’s “fullness of personal existence”, existence in communion, and, as we have seen, God is not *becoming* personal, as we are, He *is* the fullness of personal existence. This means that morality is intimately related to Being, it is an ontological idea: a failure to consider it ontologically leads to the idea of some absolute division between “principles” of good and evil, a dualism in creation. The identification of Being with the “Idea of the Good” is really nothing other than a vast absolutisation of concepts; and talk of good as not being “for” anything or anyone reduces it to a purely intellectual abstract, unconnected with the business of life in communion or relation. We must refuse to give an ontological content to the concepts of “good” and “evil” (paradoxically, this always leads eventually to a “socialised” utilitarian idea of good): the refusal of the Eastern theological tradition to allow ontological reality to evil implies a complete rejection of the dualism, distinguishing not good and evil, but Being and Nothing, life and death, affirming morality as a mode of personal being. *Μετάνοια* is a conversion of man’s *whole* being from failure to be what he *is* (from sin, which is again a mode of being) into true personhood: the experience of sin is not primarily an experience of the violation of law, but an experience of Nothing, as existence-in-isolation, the “outside” (*εκτός*) of communion. We may say, therefore, that morality and ontology are identical (Heidegger points to the original Greek meanings of *ἦθος δαίμων*, “God”, in Heraclitus, “place of residence” in Homer and Herodotus —both ideas connected with “modes of being”), and that an individually orientated ethic inevitably involves an ontology based on encapsulated individual entities. “Ontological morality” for the Christian, however, is an affirmation of personal freedom in the fullest sense, presupposing an ontology of personal, relational existence, being-in-communion, the dialogue of God with man.

I hope I may be pardoned for having set out Dr. Yannaras’s argument at some length, but I think a briefer summary would do it less than justice. An adequately detailed examination of it is really beyond the scope of this article, but I propose to select a few points of significance for discussion, in an attempt to relate the book to the wider background of Eastern theology in general, and, to a lesser extent, to certain aspects of Western theology. I have already remarked on the points of contact between Yannaras and Lossky, and I think it is worth commenting a little further on this. Students of Lossky will be aware of two parallel models for a

“personalist ontology” in his work, the Chalcedonian nature-person schema, and the essence-energies distinction of Gregory Palamas: both are intended to guard against a static essentialism, a cosmos of enclosed substances incapable of acting upon one another. However, there seems at times to be something of a gulf between the two models in Lossky’s writings: the Palamite scheme clearly poses some difficulties in a Trinitarian context, since the temptation is to contrast an *impersonal* essence with *personal* energies, and thus to put the Persons of the Trinity on the same plane as the energies (as I think Pseudo-Denys does). Now indeed Palamism is not so simple as that, and the Palamite certainly *can* state his distinction intelligibly in a Trinitarian scheme; but I am not sure that Lossky always succeeds in doing so, and I suspect that, finally, it is the nature-person distinction which is of more central importance to his theology.[xiii] What Dr. Yannaras has brilliantly succeeded in doing is to integrate these two models in a synthesis which clearly distinguishes “nature”, “person”, and “operation”, but which demonstrates the close interrelation of the three. As a model for Trinitarian theology (including a theology of the *operationes, Trinitatis ad extra*) it is, in many ways, admirable; but, later on, I should like to question its usefulness for Christology.

Dr. Yannaras very frequently refers to “ek-static” relationship as something essentially “pre-conscious” (*προσυνειδησιακή*); and his examination of the implications of this marks something of an advance from Lossky’s very definite emphasis upon the importance of “consciousness” in personal relation. Although Lossky grants that person is by no means identical with consciousness and that “la conscience n’est plus limitée comme sujet connaissant et agissant”,[xiv] he is equally emphatic that inter-personal union “ne peut être non plus inconsciente.”[xv] Consequently, he asserts that the characteristically “Western” (so he considers it) experience of the “Night of the Spirit”, and the idea of “passive purgation” in St. John of the Cross are wholly alien to the spirituality of the Christian East, because they deny the free *personal* co-operation of man in the work of salvation, leaving him in darkness and ignorance while God proceeds to purify man’s nature. Now it is not difficult to show that Lossky’s account of Western, especially Carmelite, spirituality is in very many respects seriously misleading, reflecting a fundamental misunderstanding of the terminology and presuppositions especially of St. John of the Cross; but the point I wish to make is that Dr. Yannaras recognises –as Lossky does not- that the “experience of the absence of God” is by no means the same thing as the “absence of the experience of God”. Dr. Yannaras’s exposition of the experience of personal absence as establishing the possibility of total authentic communion by a sort of *via negativa* is, I would suggest, very close to the Carmelite tradition; and his connexion of this with the Eastern ascetical tradition, with the idea of *πένθος* in the Fathers, provides a most valuable bridge between the two “schools” (can one really call them that?) of spirituality. Of course, a very great deal depends upon what meaning one gives to “consciousness”: Lossky probably has a considerably less “intellectual” (or even perhaps “conceptual”) idea of it than Yannaras, and it is hard to see why he should reject the idea of a consciousness of personal absence.[xvi] It is words like “consciousness”, one often feels, which bedevil the study of theology, because there is nothing easier (and nothing more fatal) than to assume that all theologians using such a word mean roughly the same thing by it; but that is another story.

To leave Lossky aside for the moment, and to move into the very different sphere of British philosophy of religion: a recent issue of “Theology”[xvii] contained a paper by Professor John Macquarrie entitled “God and the World: One Reality of Two?”, and a comment on this paper by Mr. Brian Hebblethwaite of Queen’s College, Cambridge. Dr. Macquarrie suggests that without dispensing with the idea of transcendence, it is time that we began to think of the God-world relation as “in some respects” symmetrical or reciprocal: this position, sometimes described as “pantheism”, particularly characterises “those theologians who have been influenced by such philosophers as Alexander, Whitehead, Bergson, Heidegger.”[xviii] He goes on to suggest some possible models for the expression of such a relation. Mr. Hebblethwaite’s comments are extremely interesting in the light of Dr. Yannaras’s book: Professor Macquarrie, he says, “is constantly inclined to identify God’s immanence with some structural aspect of the created world... The reason seems to be that, for Macquarrie, traditional theism has posited a purely *external* relation between God and the world, which fails to do justice to

the intimacy and involvement which biblical religion attributes to the living God in his dealings with the world"... But at least one might think that a doctrine of *creation* is better expressed in terms of an external relation between God and the world, without prejudice to God's further involvement in his creation. The old theology distinguished between the inter-trinitarian processions and the *operationes Trinitatis ad extra*; and it is hard to see how one can abandon some such distinction and yet retain the concept of creation."^[xix] What Mr. Hebblethwaite is objecting to is any attempt to solve the problem of the God-world relation, the problem of the action of the infinite in and upon the finite, by making the relation internal to God (or internal to the "world", depending upon one's point of view), "And you'll agree, as I expect, that he was right to so object." Yet, as he admits, "externality" is a notion which has acquired "pejorative connotations when predicated of the relation between God and the world";^[xx] one cannot help feeling that Professor Macquarrie's plea for a recognition of genuine reciprocity is justified (I do not think that the term "symmetry" is really very helpful here). And it seems to me that at this point Dr. Yannaras's synthesis of Heidegger and Palamas provides a possible solution. The most cursory reading of the book will impress upon the reader that one of Yannaras's central concerns is to establish that the relation between God and man is personal and reciprocal, a relation of *communion*, a "real" (as opposed to a logical) relation: thus far, he is as much Heidegger's pupil as is Macquarrie. However, precisely by underlining that it is a communion of *persons*, and therefore a confluence of personal energies, he succeeds in avoiding any notion of the "involvement" (in Macquarrie's sense) of the Divine Essence in the finite world: the energies of God, manifesting the Person of the Word, create and preserve the world, and are fully involved in it, there is no "external" relation in question, nor any identification of the Divine Essence with a causal abstraction. But it is only in this personal "mode" that we can apprehend the Essence of God at all: we do not and cannot know It in Itself, but only as content of the Persons of the Trinity, it is not and cannot be "involved" in creation except through the outgoing of personal energy, in Itself It remains beyond all finite being. The personal energies freely "come out of" the unapproachable, transcendent Essence, so that the relations *ad extra* established by the energies are not internal (in the sense of "natural" or "necessary") to the Essence. So (as Lossky would no doubt have delighted to point out) the Eastern theological tradition, here as elsewhere, proposes a satisfactory *via media* whereby Western theology may escape from a choice between two ultimately unacceptable alternatives.

It is, as I have said, a *possible* solution; not necessarily an adequate one, though, because its validity depends upon the validity of the whole essence-energies schema. Plainly this is far too large a question to embark upon in detail here, but it may be worthwhile to raise one or two issues which seem to be of some importance. In the first place, I am never quite certain what Dr. Yannaras (and his predecessors in the East) are saying about the incomprehensibility of the Divine Essence. There are times when Orthodox theologians seem to be asserting this simply because *all* essences (considered as Aristotelean individual essences) are incommunicable and imparticipable,^[xxi] and therefore (since knowledge involves some sort of participation of knower in known) unknowable. Whereas at other times, the Divine Essence is held to be unknowable because it is Divine, and therefore beyond the capacity of the finite mind. These two approaches –need I add?– are not incompatible, but I think it is helpful to recognise that they are different. The trouble with the first approach is that inevitably it tends to make God a member of a class of essences, *closed* essences: and the theological problem then is to think of something in God which is "not-essence" and therefore not incommunicable and enclosed. The result is the classical statement of Palamism, which encounters severe difficulties in reconciling this distinction with the doctrine of the absolute simplicity of God. The latter approach, however, leaves the door open to a more open-minded notion of essence: Aquinas, who is just as ready as any Easterner to assert the incomprehensibility of God, succeeds in avoiding a system of closed essences by *revising* the Aristotelean notion of essence,^[xxii] so that *ens* or *esse*, the "essence-in-its-act-of-existing" is seen as primary. On this basis, it is possible to assert a real communication with the Divine Essence *in actu*, while still denying that, even in the Beatific Vision, a finite intellect can *comprehend* the Essence, can know It as It knows Itself.^[xxiii] Thus, we continue to affirm that essences are not "interchangeable": "*participate* in this context never means to have part in another entity"^[xxiv] This would be absurd, as it would necessarily presuppose an abstraction of the

entity (*essentia*) from its act of existing (*ens*), which is metaphysically impossible if we are speaking of actual essences. Yet we can also maintain real, “existential” communication, mutual accessibility, between essences as they *in actu*: we are not making any awkward division between “essence” and “not-essence” in a thing, rather are we defining the mode in which essences exist.

It should by now be clear that this is not an irrelevant digression: the position we have arrived at is very close to that proposed by Dr. Yannaras, it seems, and once again he appears to have given us an invaluable link between East and West. Professor E. L. Mascall has suggested more than once that the essence-energies distinction is —at least in intention— parallel to the essence-existence distinction in St. Thomas;^[xxv] and not only do we find Dr. Yannaras coming to conclusions fundamentally very close to those of Professor Mascall, we even find a fairly clear identification of the “energies” with “existence” throughout (they are “the mode in which entities exist”, *εἶναι* a frequently repeated formula, and God is “revealed as personal existence”,^[xxvi] *υπαρκτικότης*, in the relation established by the energies). Dr. Yannaras quotes Palamas’s dictum that God did not say to Moses “I am Essence”, but “I am that I am”, “I am He Who Is”, *εγώ εἰμί ο ὢν*^[xxvii]; and it is precisely this “existentialist” point which Aquinas makes in his comment on the text from Exodus.^[xxviii] It is curious that Orthodox theologians (including Dr. Yannaras at some points in his book) persist in regarding Thomist thought as basically essentialist: there is a tendency either to assimilate the Angelic Doctor to Augustine and Anselm (Paul Evdokimov is inclined to do this), or to view him through the medium of late scholastic thought, or, worse, Cartesianism (Lossky is often guilty of this) in apparent oblivion of the copious expositions of Thomist existentialism provided by Gilson, Maritain, Mascall and others. And in this connexion, one may ask whether Dr. Yannaras’s strictures^[xxix] on the use of analogy in Western theology are really justified: if Professor Mascall is right in affirming the existential character of analogy in Aquinas,^[xxx] I think one might be able to state a doctrine of analogy giving a satisfactory degree of priority to the reality of God over the reality of man. Mascall’s suggestion^[xxxi] that the “energies” of Palamism are parallel not simply to Aquinas’s *esse* but to *analogia* as well seems to merit further examination (which I cannot give it in the present article, unfortunately).

The question of analogy brings us to a (brief) consideration of Dr. Yannaras’s methodology. I suppose this book would be classified by most Western readers as an essay in “natural theology”, though it is a natural theology with a Trinitarian sting in the tail: it is an attempt to show how personhood as we know it is grounded in Being, and so in God, and because we begin from a particular notion of personhood (existence-in-communion) we are obliged to postulate “internal” personal communion in God. And this, like any attempt to explicate the relation of finite to infinite, is inevitably an essay in *analogy*; which does not necessarily mean that we take finite existence as a starting-point which is “more real” or “more certain” than infinite existence. At one level, we are not “starting from” either the finite or the infinite pole, we are presupposing *both*; while at another level —as it is almost trivial to point out— of course we are beginning from finite existence, simply because we are finite existents. It is important not to confuse ontological priority with epistemological priority: when the late Austin Farrer said,^[xxxii] “This problem of analogy is in principle prior to every particular relation,” he was (as a reading of “Finite and Infinite” shows) very far from claiming any *real* priority for a knowledge obtained outside revelation; rather was he insisting, I believe rightly, that any talk about the content of a revelation necessarily requires some underlying theory of what it is that enables us to talk about a revelation as the revelation of *God*. It is only fair to add that there is a world of difference between Dr. Farrer’s brilliant essay in “voluntarist metaphysics” and Dr. Yannaras’s book: Farrer, in fact, represents precisely that intellectualist strand in Western theology which Yannaras condemns so frequently and strongly. What Dr. Yannaras —like some of the theologians of the Reformation— has done is to set the doctrine of analogy in the context of the *totality* of God’s action upon the world, so that we are not obliged to make a distinction in kind between our knowledge of God in creation and our knowledge in revelation: one is *απουσία*, the other *παρουσία*, but in both it is the same sort of relation with the Person of the Word that we apprehend. If one may so express it, Dr. Yannaras has “theologised” the concept of analogy very thoroughly. Though perhaps, in

one way, not thoroughly enough: one misses in the book any real integration of the idea of the Holy Spirit as illuminator, mediator of the knowledge of God (this, interestingly enough, is a far more prominent theme in Lossky's theology[xxxiii]) the Person through Whom "analogical" participation in God, participation in the Divine energies, becomes a reality here and now. (On this subject, much of the work of Professor T. F. Torrance is highly suggestive; I would refer particularly to his essay on "The Epistemological Relevance of the Spirit." [xxxiv]) In the light of all this, I feel that Dr. Yannaras is wrong to use the terms like "analogy", as he does, in a consistently negative and derogatory way, as if analogy necessarily involved a methodological doubt of non-finite reality. After some sixty pages mainly devoted to an essentially philosophical analysis of the structure of human personhood, the reader may well raise his eyebrows at a statement like this: "In the theology of the Christian East, we approach the reality of human personhood on the basis of the revealed Truth of the Person of God, in contrast to the theology of the West, which seeks the Truth about God analogically and anagogically, concentrating basically on the reality of man." [xxxv] And as to the use made of Heidegger's system and terminology throughout, one may be forgiven for wondering whether it is perhaps a little uncritical: it is reminiscent of the use made of Hegel by Russian theologians at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century; a writer in "Istina", introducing an article by Dr. Yannaras, [xxxvi] remarked on the possible danger of an "Hellenic Slavophilism", and this seems to me fair comment as dependence upon a particular system of secular philosophy is concerned.

It should be clear by now that Dr. Yannaras is far less of a "revelationist" than Lossky, and it is significant that he devotes very little space to Christology as such (as opposed to what might be called "Logology", the theology of the cosmic Word). As I have already indicated, I find his remarks on Christology [xxxvii] cryptic and rather unsatisfactory. The fall, we are told, [xxxviii] is a diminution of personal capacity for relation, it is not an "essential" change, an alteration in the underlying structure of human existence, except insofar as it means that "nature" has become incapable of *expressing itself* personally. [xxxix] We should expect to be told that Christ restores this power of "personal expression" to nature; but what does Dr. Yannaras mean by saying that the capacity for ek-stasis has, in Christ, become proper not merely to the person, but to the nature of man? If nature is, in any case, only capable of ek-stasis through the person, does this statement have any content? It is not difficult to see why Dr. Yannaras should feel obliged to make it: the great *betes noires* of Orthodox theology seem to be, on the one hand, any doctrine of man's total depravity (i.e. a radical obliteration of God's image in man by the Fall), and, on the other, any "moralistic" approach to soteriology, which neglects the ontological side of salvation, the restoration of man's nature. [xl] Obviously Yannaras is trying to state the Eastern position as fully as possible over against these distortions: but the soteriological passage on pp. 82-83 gives the impression (all the stronger for being so rare in the book) of being insufficiently carefully thought out. If Dr. Yannaras means that Christ, and man-in-Christ, are removed from the condition of "becoming" personal to a state of simply *being* personal, the state enjoyed by the Persons of the Trinity, have we not arrived at a sort of Monophysite position, in which human, finite nature as such has no real place? Clearly this is not at all what Dr. Yannaras means: but we do need a sharper distinction between the Union of the Trinity, the Hypostatic Union, and the Union of Grace. Here, I think, we have much to learn from Lossky, [xli] with his carefully worked-out theory of redemption as consisting in the restoration of nature in Christ and the *personal* realisation of this in the Holy Spirit, in Whom, by Whose indwelling, men become truly persons, truly human. This is a system which, I believe, does justice to both the primacy of God's action in salvation and the distinctness of human response. Now this is more or less implicit in what Yannaras says, but, again, I believe that a more positive pneumatology would have clarified matters.

The clue to Yannaras's Christological remarks may lie in his assertion [xlii] that the union of humanity and divinity in Christ is "not only volitional"; that is, we are to regard it as "natural" *as opposed* to volitional, and presumably should regard the communion of man with God in Christ as equally "natural" (a union of *φύσεις*) rather than volitional. This looks back to the venerable Byzantine doctrine of the absence of the "gnomic" or "dispositional" will in Christ: in the system of Maximus the Confessor, man has two wills,

“natural”, and “dispositional”, of which the latter is solely a consequence of the contingencies of human action after the Fall. Ideally, man exercises only a “natural” will, he wills to do only that which is an accord with his nature (as God’s image); but after the Fall, he can will this only at the result of moral decision between two alternatives which are, at one level, equally attractive. Only by good “habit” (*γνώμι*) does he choose the good. For Maximus, Christ has no gnostic will, but exercises natural will alone; so that one might conclude that the end of the redemptive process is for the saved man to exercise only such a will (one still needs a satisfactory doctrine of the indwelling of the Spirit to account for this). This, I think, is what lies behind Yannaras’s statements; to rephrase Maximus in Yannaras’s more usual terminology we may perhaps say that, “since the Fall,” man has been capable of ek-stasis, of genuine personal communion, only by conscious exercise of his will to escape “atomicity”. In Christ, the possibility of existence-in-communion which is *not* merely dependent on our continuing struggle against atomicity is established. There is still an ongoing *μετάνοια*;^[xliii] but what we are given is authentic personal freedom, freedom to *be* persons, freedom from the threat of existence-in-isolation. This seems to be what Yannaras means: but I, for one, should be grateful for an exposition, at some future date, of how this is to be related in detail to the Chalcedonian definition, and, indeed, to the general Byzantine tradition in Christology. The main points of contact are clear enough, and a fuller integration into the Eastern tradition certainly seems possible.

This has brought us into the sphere of Dr. Yannaras’s ethics and the identification of ethics with ontology. It occurs to me that it would be most interesting to compare this with Wittgenstein’s insistence that ethics should only be spoken of—indeed, are only intelligible—within the context of a total world-view: ethical belief and ethical practice are “forms of life” (modes of being?), we can begin to consider them only as they are seen to be a facet of a whole approach to living. Moral debate is debate about world-views.^[xliv] There is more to it than that, of course, and perhaps the differences are more significant than the parallels; but it is worth noting. Again, is Dr. Yannaras really fair to the “Platonic” tradition? The kind of Platonism proposed by, say, Miss Iris Murdoch in “The Sovereignty of Good” seems to me to have a certain amount in common with Yannaras’s outline, and not to deserve his sharper strictures on Platonism.^[xlv] However, an examination of all this would probably double the length of an already overlong essay, and I must leave it aside for now.^[xlvi]

In summary, it seems that Dr. Yannaras’s book is one of the most important theological studies to come from the Orthodox world in recent years. It often exhibits a certain degree of onesidedness in its argument, but is rarely actually polemical; and one might well concede that a measure of onesidedness is perhaps necessary to provoke Western readers to question the presuppositions of their own theology. It is a profoundly “traditional” theology, obviously rooted in the Fathers and in Byzantine theology; yet this very fact prompts me to ask how necessary to Dr. Yannaras’s case the explicitly Heideggerian framework is. Could this development and maturation of Lossky’s ideas have been successfully carried through without such heavy dependence on a particular system of secular metaphysics? I should be the first to grant that Christian faith has ontological corollaries, that in this sense it is “in search of a metaphysic”; but this is rather different from claiming *one* metaphysic as against all others as “the” Christian metaphysic. I doubt whether Yannaras would seriously claim this; and I hope it is not presumptuous to suppose that in future works from his pen we shall see a gradual diminution of dependence on Heidegger. Dr. Yannaras’s case can stand well on its own theological feet; Western theologians have much to lose by neglecting it.

[iii] E.g. μοναδική δυνατότης είναι έναντι των όντων (p. 17), η διάστασις της καθολικότητος, η εκστατική φορά του προσώπου (p.21), δυνατότης προσωπικής αναφοράς, προσωπικής σχέσεως (p.23), and so on.

[iv] It is interesting to note that Meyendorff (*Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 165-6) suggests some points of contact between Rahner and the Greek Patristic tradition.

[vii] *L'Etre et le Neant*, pp. 44 f.

[viii] *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 245-246; quoted, Yannaras, op. Cit. P. 44.

[xvi] C.f. P. Miquel ("La conscience de la grace selon Symeon le Nouveau Theologien", in *Irenikon*, XLII, 1969, pp. 314-342): "La secheresse l'absence et la nuit sont aussi des experiences : ce'st pressentir qu'il y a... une Presence qui ne se peut encore reveler, un Jour qui ne finira pas et dont on attend l'aurore" (p.342).

[xxi] C.f., in this context, Sherrard's assertion (*The Greek East and the Latin West*, p. 38): "We can conceive neither of the relationships of God to creation, nor of how all things participate in His divinity, except by distinguishing His entirely *simple, immutable, and incommunicable* Essence from His multiple and communicable powers and energies" (my italics). Surely, in a conservative Aristotelean system, the properties here enumerated would not be peculiar to the *Divine* Essence as such.

[xxxv] Yannaras, op. cit., p. 74.

[xxxvi] *Istina*, 1971, p. 130: the article (pp. 131-150) is on "La theologie en Grece aujourd'hui".

[xxxvii] See especially Yannaras, op. cit., p.82.

[xxxviii] *Ib.*; pp. 71-72.

[xxxix] For a parallel insistence that the Fall does not produce an alteration in man's *nature*, v. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, pp. 88-92.

[xl] See, for instance, Evdokimov, op. cit., pp. 93 ff.