



A Critical Account of the Place of Divine Relations in the Theology of Vladimir Lossky

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Vladimir Lossky has proven to be an influential theologian in the 20th century, shaping modern Orthodox theology and challenging Western thought. Key to his thought is how he interrelates the Trinity with apophaticism and the distinction he makes between the essences and energies of God. In doing so he critiques a Western view of the Trinity as found in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. Thus, given that he defines theology as complementary to mysticism, and since participation in the energies of the Trinity in deification is the goal of his theology, I shall engage in a critical account of whether his modern Orthodox Trinitarian theology enables him to express the reality of human participation in God or not. I note, as Rowan Williams does in an unpublished thesis, that when discussing the Trinity in Orthodox thought this appears to be ‘a doctrine which is the most radically inaccessible of all to the speculations of the discursive reason, the most totally given of dogmas’.¹ Thus I shall be looking closely at how Lossky’s ‘understanding of theology as “apophatic”... is the regulating rule in his trinitarian theology and the understanding of trinitarian categories, such as nature and person’, and how ‘it is also the lens through which he views the *filioque*’.²

The Trinitarian thought of Lossky and Aquinas

Lossky’s Trinitarian thought is best expounded in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. He posits relations in God as simply those of origin, based on Cappadocian theology, rather than Aquinas’ notion of relations of opposition which are developed from their origin. This is illustrated by Gregory Nazianzen who states ‘it is the name of the relation in which the Father stands to the Son, and the

¹ Rowan Williams, *The theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: an exposition and critique*, (University of Oxford. Faculty of Theology. Thesis (D.Phil.)—University of Oxford, 1975), p.85.

² Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God, Trinity, apophaticism, and divine-human communion*, (Notre Dame: UNDPress, 2006), p.50.

Son to the Father. For as with us these names make known a genuine and intimate relation, so in the case before us too they denote an identity of nature between him that is begotten and him that begets'.³ Lossky develops this way of thinking in contrast to the thought of Thomas Aquinas as posited in his *Summa Theologiae*.

The key part of Aquinas that Lossky disagrees with is his use of the relations of opposition in regard to the relation of origins, used in affirming the *filioque*. In Aquinas, relations in God are based on movement within the divine nature, where the unity is affirmed as the principle of the Trinity, rather than the diversity of the *hypostases*. The four relations of opposition are that of fatherhood, sonship, spiration and procession. For 'all that exists in God is one with the divine nature. So then it is not by considering this unity we can draw the distinction between what is characteristic of this or that procession; rather in order to conceive the specific character of this or that procession we must consider the relatedness of one procession to another'.⁴ Thus Aquinas writes that 'although strictly speaking, relations do not originate or proceed from one another, nevertheless we take them as opposed because of the procession of one thing from another'.⁵ Thus for Aquinas, the relations of opposition guarantee the unity of the Trinity against seeing the persons as separate: distinction in God arises only through the relation of origin. However, a relation in God is not as an accidental entity in a subject, but is the divine nature itself; therefore it is something subsisting just as the divine nature does, hence 'divine person signifies relation as something subsisting',⁶ that is, relation is a hypostasis subsisting in the divine nature, and what is subsisting in the divine nature can be nothing other than the divine nature itself, namely divine substance (ST 1a 29 4). This depends on the unity of the divine substance, which Lossky critiques as representative of unity overriding diversity in the trinitarian relations.

LaCugna notes that 'Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of God is frequently held out as the paradigm instance of the separation of *theologia* from *oikonomia*',⁷ although I am going to suggest later that at first glance his account does not seem so different from the distinction between essence and energies. In fact, Lacugna affirms the idea that the relations in God are based on movement within the divine nature, as

³ [29:16] *The Theological Orations*, in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Hardy, (London: SCM Press, 1954), p.171.

⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas, ed. Gilby (London: Blackfriars, 1964-68), ST 1a 27:4.

⁵ ST 1a 28:3.

⁶ ST 1a 29:4.

⁷ Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us*, (USA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p.145.

according to Thomas, real relations in God are based on action, that is, activity immanent in God, not actions outside God such as creation. Thus the divine persons are distinguished by the two processions, being begotten and being spirated, which produce four real relations: (fatherhood, sonship, spiration, procession).⁸

However, although LaCugna argues that this stress on action in God is welcome and his links between the economic and immanent Trinity are helpful, she maintains that unlike her, he emphasises the immanent rather than economic Trinity, as ‘names pertaining to the Trinity derive from God’s nature, not from God’s self-revelation in the economy. The names Father, Son, and Spirit express not God’s relation to the creature but intradivine relations’.⁹

Starting from this unity rather than from the hypostases and their origin is contrary to the methodology of Lossky. For, as Gregory Nazianzen, from whom Lossky takes much of his trinitarian thought, says, the *ousia* ‘no man ever yet has discovered or can discover’,¹⁰ and this is why ‘the begetting of God must be honoured by silence . . . it was in a manner known to the Father who begot, and to the Son who was begotten. Anything more than this is hidden by a cloud, and escapes your dim sight’.¹¹

Thus Lossky claims that

the only characteristic of the hypostases which we can state to be exclusively proper to each, and which is never found in orders, by reason of their consubstantiality is thus the relation of origin. Nevertheless, this relation must be understood in an apophatic sense. It is above all a negation, showing us that the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit, that the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit; that the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Otherwise to regard it would be to submit the Trinity to a category of Aristotelian logic, that of relation. Understood apophatically, the relation of origin describes the difference but nevertheless does not indicate the manner of the divine processions.¹²

However, there may be not such a great disagreement on terminology between Thomas and Lossky after all. Williams offers:

a final note on the detail of Thomas’s argument: as is well-known, he defines the divine persons as ‘subsistent relations’, a term that has puzzled many modern theologians. It derives from the vocabulary of Augustine, but Thomas gives it a more precise technical twist,

⁸ LaCugna, p.154.

⁹ LaCugna, p.157.

¹⁰ [28:17], *The Theological Orations*, p.147.

¹¹ [29:8], *The Theological Orations*, p.165.

¹² Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), pp.54-5.

so much so that a not very sympathetic Eastern Orthodox commentator, Vladimir Lossky, can accuse him of simply identifying person with relation, and thus evacuating any content for the persons as real agents.¹³

Although it could be said that Lossky should take a more apophatic view of Aquinas' theology, as Rowan Williams suggests, stating that 'the language of subsistent relations is simply a way of saying that the actual reality of the "essence" (what it's like to be God) is nothing other than the threefold pattern of relation that we begin to grasp if we put together the history of revelation and the logic of considering God's life as "intellectual", in some sense self-aware.'¹⁴

This leads into Lossky's critique of the *filioque* as he prefers relations of origin that are not tied to relations of opposition, for according to him even if relations of opposition are based on relations of origin, they are intended to show opposition in the nature of the one God. For Lossky, this involves seeing the Godhead as one essence/substance rather than 3 distinct hypostases. In this subordination of the persons to the substance Lossky sees a loss of the place of the Father as the source of the Trinity, losing the monarchy of the Father and thus affecting the generation and procession of the Son and Spirit. Lossky states that

the Greeks saw in the formula of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son a tendency to stress the unity of nature at the expense of the real distinction between the persons. The relationships of origin which do not bring the Son and Spirit back to the unique source, to the Father – the one as begotten, the other as proceeding – become a system of relationships within one essence: something logically posterior to the essence.¹⁵

Furthermore, he sees this as a sign that 'the West had already lost the true idea of the Person of the Holy Spirit, relegating Him to a secondary position by making Him into a kind of lieutenant or deputy of the Son'.¹⁶

Thus for Lossky, in Western thought the hypostatic characteristics (paternity, generation, procession) are swallowed up in the essence where 'the principle of unity within the Trinity, these relationships, instead of being characteristics of the hypostases, are identified with them'.¹⁷ This Lossky sees as unnecessary, as 'these two persons are

¹³ Rowan Williams, 'What does love know? St Thomas on the Trinity', *New Blackfriars*, 2001, Vol.82 (964), pp.260-272, p.267.

¹⁴ Williams, p.268.

¹⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p.57.

¹⁶ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, (NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p.103.

¹⁷ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p.57.

distinguished by the different mode of their origin: the Son is begotten, the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the Father. This is sufficient to distinguish them'.¹⁸ He continues 'as St. Thomas was later to write: "Persona est relatio", inner relationship of the essence which it diversifies. It can scarcely be denied that there is a difference between this Trinitarian conception and that of Gregory Nazianzen with his "Thrice-repeated Holy, meeting in one ascription of the title Lord and God"'.¹⁹ However, as Williams notes, this is not actually what Aquinas is saying, for 'Aquinas nowhere says *Persona est relatio* (as Lossky alleges) . . . his discussion in S.T., I.29, iv turns upon whether *persona* refers to the divine nature or not, and he concludes that . . . in discourse about God, "person" designates something distinct by virtue of relation of origin and subsisting as a really distinct hypostasis of the divine nature'.²⁰ For Aquinas, person 'signifying' relation has an apophatic quality to it that you would think Lossky would welcome. Furthermore, Lossky's objection might be answered by rooting both the diversity and reality of the persons in movement within the divine nature. Nevertheless, does this fundamental misunderstanding of Aquinas' theology invalidate Lossky's criticisms?

As stated above, Lossky fears that this emphasis on the unity exists at the expense of the monarchy of the Father, for 'the Greek Fathers always maintained that the principle of unity in the Trinity is the person of the father . . . he lays down their relations of origin – generation and procession – in regard to the unique principle of Godhead. This is why the East has always opposed the formula of *filioque* which seems to impair the monarchy of the Father'.²¹ However, like LaCugna, Williams sees Aquinas' Trinitarian thought as emphasising the dynamic action within the unity of God, for

God loves God, loves what is understood in the eternal Word, loves the always pre-existing self-giving of the Father . . . God is a movement towards God, God's wanting of God so that God may be fully and blissfully God, may enjoy the 'natural good' proper to divine nature.²²

This is taken from Aquinas' remarks that 'what proceeds in God as love does not proceed as Begotten or Son, but rather as Spirit. This word implies vital movement and impulse, in the sense that man is said to be driven or impelled by love to do this or that'.²³

Williams notes that for Lossky it is

¹⁸ Lossky, p.55.

¹⁹ Lossky, p.57.

²⁰ Williams, *The theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky*, p.150.

²¹ Lossky, p.58.

²² Williams, 'What does love know?', p.265.

²³ ST 1a 27:4.

bad enough that the persons should be thus reduced to relations; worse still that these should be relations of opposition, relations of logical opposition and mutual exclusiveness between two terms. What is left of the pattern of purely personal relations between all three persons, dependent upon the “self-transcending” love of the Father in His “monarchy”?²⁴

However, in the light of his own analysis of relations in Aquinas, Williams judges that the thought of Lossky is in fact ‘a profoundly reactionary, regressive approach. It fails to advance beyond the homousios of Nicaea, remaining on the level of discourse about substantial unity’²⁵, whereas in Aquinas his ‘interpretation of persona represents a very important advance in terminological precision, decisively removing the ambiguities associated with a term like hypostasis’.²⁶

Thus, Williams states that Lossky’s complaint about the scholastic understanding of hypostasis

is largely invalidated by the fact, which he ignores, of the greater terminological complexity and precision of Latin theology, which allowed Aquinas to distinguish clearly between hypostasis in its common Greek metaphysical or ontological sense (meaning atomon), and hypostasis in its theological (Trinitarian and Christological) usage, and to begin to make explicit the latent “personalist” corollaries of this latter usage. The understanding which emerges is one which does allow for a measure of real trinitarian pluralism.²⁷

However, Williams also appears to claim that dialogue between the two understandings is difficult, as one would never appreciate the nuances of the other, for ‘in an important sense, it does not matter if Aquinas’s terminology is patient of an interpretation congenial to Lossky, since there remains a fundamental difference in what they regard as the proper starting-point for theology.’²⁸ For example, I suggest that if one starts from the three hypostases and sees relations as the consequences of having these three hypostases (as in Gregory Nazianzen’s analogies of three suns intermingled and Peter, Paul and James, and Gregory of Nyssa’s tract “On Not Three Gods”), the Trinity is subject to the same criticisms of insularity that Lossky lays at Western theology. The relations in Lossky’s theology are so focused on each other that they do not exist as a working out in the world but as that amongst each other; they do not lead to a greater capacity of openness in the world but instead turn back in amongst

²⁴ Williams, *The theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky*, p.135.

²⁵ Williams, p.136.

²⁶ Williams, p.152.

²⁷ Williams, p.154.

²⁸ Williams, p.155.

themselves. This leads to a greater division between the *theologia* and *oikonomia* than would be found in Western thought.

This has an impact on the *filioque*, for if there is a deep separation between God in Godself and God in the world, then the filioque could only apply to the latter. However, another important part of Lossky's critique is that 'the work of the life-giving Spirit is obscured by His supposed subordination to the Son, and the omnipresence of God's glory in His world is obscured by the rejection of the divine energies'.²⁹ The *filioque* for Lossky does three irredeemable things. It decreases the personalism of God; lessens the efficacy of the apophatic approach and does not operate with the divine energies. It removes devotion from theology, as Williams notes that for Lossky "Filioquisme" negates the apophatic attitude, and capitulates to the seductions of philosophy'.³⁰ Instead, having the Son being 'generated' and the Spirit 'processing' ensures that

the balance between the hypostases and the ousia is safeguarded. If the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father 'and from the Son' (*filioque*) as from one single principle, essential unity takes precedence over personal diversity, and the Persons become relations of the essence, differentiating themselves from one another by mutual opposition.³¹

In having this double procession

the unity of God is no longer a personal principle but an intellectual construct. Properly, the divine simplicity (itself a philosophical rather than a religious notion, and so of secondary importance) is a matter of the perfect unity of the Trinity in the monarchy of the Father: scholasticism, in refusing to distinguish between essence and energy, does away with the freedom of God, His capacity to "transcend His transcendence" and go out from His essence in relation.³²

I suggest, then, that Lossky's rejection of the *filioque* can only be properly considered in the wider context of the distinction between essence and energies, to which we now turn.

Essence and Energies

According to Lossky, in Orthodox theology, 'God manifests Himself by His operations or energies'³³ that are separate from God's essence which remains hidden in the cloud of unknowing. Lossky here relies on the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas, clarifying that 'essence and energies are not, for Palamas, two parts of God,

²⁹ Williams, p.132.

³⁰ Williams, p.132.

³¹ Lossky, *Image and Likeness*, p.88.

³² Williams, p.159.

³³ Lossky, *The Vision of God*, (NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p.78.

as some modern critics still imagine, but two different modes of the existence of God, within His nature and outside His nature; the same God remains totally inaccessible in his essence – and communicates himself totally by grace'.³⁴ In doing so he reveals the importance of tradition, again tracing his thought back to the Fathers, who 'affirmed from the beginning a distinction between God's unknowable essence and God's energies through which a real communion with God is possible.'³⁵ As Lossky states 'it was the need to establish a dogmatic basis for union with God which impelled the Eastern Church to formulate her teaching on the distinction between God's essence and His energies'.³⁶

This is part of the separation between God and the world, between the transcendent essence, as 'in creation the consubstantial Trinity makes itself known in the energies proper to its nature'.³⁷ These energies are 'the outpourings of the divine nature which cannot set bounds to itself, for God is more than essence. The energies might be described as that mode of existence of the Trinity which is outside of its inaccessible essence. God thus exists both in His essence and outside of His essence'.³⁸

However, this movement outward is distinct from what occurs within the Trinity as 'the Son and the Holy Spirit are, so to say, personal processions, and the energies natural processions. The energies are inseparable from the nature, and the nature is inseparable from the three Persons'.³⁹ Furthermore this is the only way in which humanity can know God, for 'this doctrine makes it possible to understand how the trinity can remain incommunicable in essence and at the same time come and dwell within us, according to the promise of Christ'.⁴⁰

As noted above, this distinction preserves the reliance on apophaticism within Lossky's theology. Lossky sees apophaticism as 'a way towards mystical union with God, whose nature remains incomprehensible to us'.⁴¹ He notes that regarding knowledge of God

in contemplating any object we analyse its properties: it is this which enables us to form concepts. But this analysis can in no case exhaust the content of the object of perception. There will always remain

³⁴ Lossky, p.157.

³⁵ Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Divine energies or divine personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizoulas on conceiving the transcendent and immanent God." *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (2003): 357-385. p.357.

³⁶ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p.71.

³⁷ Lossky, p.72

³⁸ Lossky, p.73.

³⁹ Lossky, p.86.

⁴⁰ Lossky, p.86.

⁴¹ Lossky, p.28.

an “irrational residue” which escapes analysis and which cannot be expressed in concepts; it is the unknowable depth of things, that which constitutes their true, indefinable essence. In regard to God, these reveal his energies which descend towards us yet do not draw us closer to his essence, which is inaccessible.⁴²

The importance of apophaticism within Lossky’s theology is that it is a key part of his methodology: ‘apophaticism . . . is, above all, an attitude of mind which refuses to form concepts about God’.⁴³ This is why Papanikolaou notes that ‘apophasis is never, for Lossky, a move in a conceptual game, bound up as it is with metanoia of the intellect, and indeed, not only of the intellect, bound up as it is with the metanoia of the whole human person’.⁴⁴ It is, as Chrestos claims ‘our refusal to exhaust knowledge of the truth in its formulations’.⁴⁵ As discussed below, this metanoia present in Lossky’s thought stands in contrast to what he perceives as the over-philosophising of Western thought, ‘to Lossky, the problem with the intellectualisation of theology is that it precludes *real* union with God, the goal of all theological discourse in the Incarnation’.⁴⁶ However, as Papanikolaou further notes ‘the problem for Lossky is that he does not have the conceptual apparatus to link his theological notion of person with his apophaticism, primarily because of the priority given to apophaticism in theological method’.⁴⁷

Papanikolaou sees further problems in Lossky’s apophaticism, as affirming an unknown essence, distinct from energies, undermines the argument for the monarchia and personality of the Father, and thus this hyperessence comes close to a western idea of prior unity of substance. Thus, if the distinction of essence from energies undermines the personality of the Father, it also undermines the difference in relations that Lossky wants to establish through reflections on origins, and thus a problem lies with Lossky’s objection to Aquinas’ attempt to comprehend the how as well as the why of the Trinitarian relations. Lossky

rejects any speculation on the “how” of relations in the Trinity for fear of making hypostatic diversity depend on some thing. Ironically, this rejection runs the risk of depersonalisation, the one thing Lossky sought to avoid. The Father as the source of the Trinity implies a rich

⁴² Lossky, p.33.

⁴³ Lossky, p.39.

⁴⁴ Williams, p.2.

⁴⁵ Giannaras Chrestos, *Elements of faith: an introduction to Orthodox theology*. (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1991), p.17.

⁴⁶ Papanikolaou, *Being with God*, p.29.

⁴⁷ Papanikolaou, p.92.

concept of person as freedom and love, one which Lossky himself attempted to clarify later in his career.⁴⁸

Lossky notes that this link between apophaticism and energies is impossible in any other theology, as ‘it became impossible for Roman Catholic theologians to admit the energetic manifestation of the Trinity as something not contradicting the truth of divine simplicity’.⁴⁹ However, the advantage is not always with Lossky, for Papanikolaou notes that

There is a confusion in Lossky’s doctrine of God which results from attempting to affirm simultaneously a transcendent and immanent God based on the essence/energies distinction, and a Triune God whose diversity is rooted in the *monarchia* of the Father. To affirm, as Lossky does, that one cannot speak of God in the realm of *theologia*, that God in Godself is shrouded in apophaticism, is, ironically, to continue to make “essence” language primary in Godtalk . . . one cannot speak of God as Trinity other than to express it as a “primordial fact”.⁵⁰

For Lossky the Western lack of apophaticism also ties into his dissatisfaction with the filioque as he ‘sees a peculiarly close link between the Holy Spirit and the divine energies. In the economy of grace, it is the Spirit who realizes in the created world the activity of God’.⁵¹ The crux of the matter for Lossky is that the essence of the Trinity should not be so open to our thought, the whole concept instead should be ‘a cross for human ways of thought. The apophatic ascent is a mounting of Calvary’,⁵² it should be experienced and participated in, not philosophised over as he sees it to be in Western theology. As Lossky states regarding the reasoning behind the filioque, ‘one has the impression that the heights of theology have been deserted in order to descend to the level of religious philosophy’.⁵³

Participation

Lossky sees western theologians as neglecting an important aspect of being a theologian. In the *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* Lossky speaks first and foremost of the importance of theology as mysticism, for ‘the eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church’.⁵⁴ Thus ‘theology must be not so much a quest of positive notions about the

⁴⁸ Papanikolaou, p.70.

⁴⁹ Lossky, *Image and Likeness*, p.96.

⁵⁰ Papanikolaou, p.377.

⁵¹ Williams, *The theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky*, p.160.

⁵² Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p.66.

⁵³ Lossky, *Image and Likeness*, p.80.

⁵⁴ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p.8.

divine being as an experience which surpasses all understanding'.⁵⁵ This is especially important for the theologian, as 'no one who does not follow the path of union with God can be a theologian'.⁵⁶

Participation is more than a practice, it is as essential for Lossky's methodology as apophaticism is, for 'in the tradition of the Eastern Church there is no place for a theology, and even less for a mysticism, of the divine essence. The goal of Orthodox spirituality, the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven, is not the vision of the essence, but, above all, a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity'.⁵⁷ Thus Lossky's Trinitarian thought is impacted by participation as it becomes 'a theology of union, a mystical theology which appeals to experience, and which presupposes a continuous and progressive series of changes in created nature, a more and more intimate communion of the human person with the Holy Trinity'.⁵⁸ Yet, as noted above, we cannot participate in the essence of God, therefore the distinction between essence and energies is important here, for if we were to participate with God in God's essence, then we would become God, 'there would no longer be Trinity, but *murihypostatos* . . . for he would have as many hypostases as there would be persons participating in His essence'.⁵⁹ Therefore, we only participate in the energies, which are manifested through the work of the Spirit. This union is very different from the other unions with God that Lossky discusses, as 'the union to which we are called is neither hypostatic [Christ] . . . nor substantial [Trinity] . . . it is union with God in His energies, or union by grace making us participate in the divine nature, without our essence becoming thereby the essence of God'.⁶⁰

A correct theology, in Lossky's eyes, cannot escape from this, as

we *are* called to participate in the divine nature. We are therefore compelled to recognize in God an ineffable distinction, other than that between His essence and His persons, according to which He is, under different aspects, both totally inaccessible and at the same time accessible. This distinction is that between the essence of God, or His nature, properly co-called, which is inaccessible, unknowable and incommunicable; and the energies or divine operations, forces proper to and inseparable from God's essence, in which He goes forth from Himself, manifests, communicates, and gives Himself.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Lossky, p.38.

⁵⁶ Lossky, p.39.

⁵⁷ Lossky, p.65.

⁵⁸ Lossky, p.67.

⁵⁹ Lossky, p.70.

⁶⁰ Lossky, p.87.

⁶¹ Lossky, p.70.

Therefore ‘the doctrine of the energies, ineffably distinct from the essence, is the dogmatic basis of the real character of all mystical experience’.⁶²

So whilst for Lossky, participation in the energies ensures that the world and God are linked, through the deifying work of the Spirit as first defined in Gregory Nazianzen’s Theological Orations, there are issues with this train of thought. For if we participate only in the energies of God, is this not the same as preserving the sharp distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, between *theologia* and *oikonomia* that Lossky accuses Western thought of doing? For if there is this difference between economic and immanent Trinity, then participation is reduced to being only in the energies not the essence of God, then we are not really dealing with God when we speak of energies, not a conscious act within the world but an afterglow of the glory within the Trinity in itself, but in ‘that mode of existence of the Trinity which is outside of its inaccessible essence’,⁶³ the light from the three suns, to borrow an image, which does not exist ‘on account of creatures, despite the fact that it is through His energies, which penetrate everything that exists, that God creates and operates’.⁶⁴ They are in fact understood as ‘subsequent to the essence and are its natural manifestations, but as external to the very being of the Trinity’.⁶⁵ The concepts of Trinity, apophaticism, energies and essences and participation do not interrelate in Lossky’s thought perichoretically. Instead, there is too much distinction and separation in Lossky’s thought, between the immanent and economic Trinity due to the distinction between essences and energies, between us and God through apophaticism and the emphasis on participation still relies on this distinction between God and God, between essences and energies.

However, in Lossky’s theology he appears to want to have participation, apophaticism, essence and energies and a Trinity that is marked by diversity rather than unity. Yet this bifurcation between energies and essence prevents participation and the apophaticism entailed by this separation of the essence and energies means that we have a unity emphasized at the expense of the diversity, despite Lossky’s criticism of the filioque for doing the very same thing. The emphasis on the diversity means that the Trinity does not interrelate within itself as dynamically as it does in Aquinas’ thought. If Lossky had a more dynamic view of the trinitarian relations, and if there was not such a division between God in Godself and God as relating to the world, then that would enable greater participation in

⁶² Lossky, p.86.

⁶³ Lossky, p.73.

⁶⁴ Lossky, p.74.

⁶⁵ Lossky, p.81.

God based on movement within God, a movement of like to like. For all Lossky's emphasis on participation on our part, there is little talk about it in God, instead there is the view of the Trinity as absolute stability, for 'if the very foundation of created being is change, and the transition from non-being to being, if a creature is contingent by nature, the Trinity is an absolute stability'.⁶⁶

Thus, in examining these key parts of the theology of Vladimir Lossky, the role that the divine relations plays is supposed to facilitate these other doctrines, such as the distinction between essence and energies, apophaticism and participation, but from a close reading of the interrelation of these doctrines, I have to conclude that this is a Trinitarian theology that emphasizes the diversity of the persons of the Trinity whilst not sufficiently expressing their internal coherence. Such coherence might well be expressed through an idea of internal, relational movements within the one divine nature which Aquinas attempts to articulate with concepts of 'relations of opposition' and in the rather apophatic language of 'subsistent relations'. I should admit that in raising these criticisms I may in fact be doing what Lossky criticises certain theologians for doing, ignoring the deep-seated link between theology and mysticism, and thus whilst there is much to be discussed with regard to Lossky's Trinitarian thought, we may lose sight of the aim of Lossky's overall thought, which is not to systematize God, but to promote a deeper understanding of God and lead us to participate in the energies of the divine Trinity. However, I would conclude by saying that in order to worship God properly, one needs a healthy, consistent theology, and Lossky's Trinitarian formulations do not offer this.

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⁶⁶ Lossky, p.45.