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Romilo Aleksandar Knežević

NIKOLAI BERDYAEV
AND THE THIRD KIND OF NON-BEING

Probing the Abyss of Being



Novi Sad, 2025.

Contents

1. Introduction	7
2. Nikolai Berdyaev and the Perfection of an Imperfect God ...	13
3. Freedom: Created or Uncreated Sergius Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdyaev on the Creatio Ex Nihilo and the Third Kind of Non-Being.....	25
4. Nikolai Berdyaev and C. G. Jung On God's Need for Human Person	43
5. Outside of God: A Theanthropic Scrutiny of Nietzsche's Concept of Chaos and Berdyaev's Notion of the <i>Ungrund</i> ..	81
6. Social Freedom and Dignity of the Human Person According to Nikolai Berdyaev	95
7. C.G. Jung and the Book of Job: Human Responsibility for God's Knowledge of His Dark Side	109
8. Nikolai Berdyaev on Genius, Creatio ex Nihilo, and a Special New Type of Monasticism	123
9. Was There a Time Before the Big Bang? The Patristic Concept of God and Stephen Hawking's Proto-Singularity. .	137
10. Poet and Homo Theurgos	151
11. The Rose Has No Why.	159
12. Man—Priest or a Poet of Creation.	165
13. True Art Creates Eternity.	171
14. Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev by Romilo Aleksandar Knežević.	177
References	187
Note on the Author	196

1. Introduction

The most pressing challenge for contemporary humanity is to overcome the dual consciousness: the scientific belief in the impossibility of increasing the amount of world's energy and the religious conviction that the creation of the world cannot continue. In his seminal work *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916), the renowned Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev thus describes the predicament of contemporary humanity. In his uncompromising style, Berdyaev urges us to transcend two axioms—the foundational pillars of our dominant *Weltanschauung*.

Berdyaev recognizes that his identification of a convergence between scientific and religious consciousness in denying creativity may surprise many. Is it not widely accepted that religion and science are adversaries? Nonetheless, Berdyaev pushes his argument further. He contends that scientific consciousness is merely a secular extension of the religious denial of creativity. In other words, this understanding of the universe is a secular reflection of our conception of the theistic God. Berdyaev suggests a surprising affinity between God's omnipotence and perfection and the law of conservation of energy.

First, we must examine what the postulation of God's omnipotence implies. Second, what is the primary quality of God's perfection? When we claim that God is omnipotent, we mean that He is absolutely free. It follows that God is free because He is free to create. This refers not to any form of creativity but to *creatio ex nihilo*—creation without constraints. Divine perfection, conversely, implies that God is *actus purus*. Divine freedom, therefore, is identified with the freedom to create.

God is fully actualized, possessing no potentiality or unfulfilled possibilities. Due to His full actualization, God is also immovable and immutable. In Scholastic philosophy, movement and change are

considered signs of imperfection. Since God is perfect, it would be a *contradictio in adjecto* to suggest that He could become more perfect.

Consequently, we must conclude that God cannot create something new, as this would imply unfulfilled possibilities within God.

It seems that there is an incongruity between the concepts of omnipotence and perfection. If we maintain that God must be omnipotent and therefore free to create *ex nihilo*, He cannot be perfect. The history of philosophy seems to favour God's perfection over His omnipotence. The archetype of the static, unchanging, and self-sufficient Absolute, when adopted by science, was translated into the Law of Conservation of Energy.

This law states that the total energy in a closed system remains constant. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but it can be transformed from one form to another or transferred between objects or systems. The limitations of this law are evident, as it applies strictly to isolated systems where no energy is exchanged with the surroundings.

However, in open systems, energy can enter or leave, but the total energy of the universe is still conserved. If energy is conserved even in open systems, it seems that the difference between open and closed systems is only formal. How can a system be considered "open" if it contains the same amount of energy as a closed system?

A system can be considered open only if it is open to receiving more energy than exists in the closed system. In other words, an open system must exist outside of its closed counterpart. However, just as there is nothing outside of the perfect Absolute—since there can be no "other" for the Absolute—so there is nothing beyond the borders of the universe. The universe must be characterized as closed because the possibility of exchanging or augmenting energy with the "other" does not exist. Our universe is imagined as *actus purus*, just like the Absolute.

Many Christian thinkers believe that the concept of a liberated God freed Him from the constraints of pre-existent matter. Paradoxically, despite this liberation, God retains some characteristics of His pagan predecessor.

Indeed, He was omnipotent because nothing impeded His creativity, but He was still unable to create radical novelty, thus manifesting His freedom. Being devoid of any kind of non-being from which He could create, He was forced to create out of Himself—*ex Deo*. And since He was perfect, He could not produce anything new. In other words, creating out of Himself, He cannot create something that is not Himself. He cannot create His ontological other.

We often overlook that for God, freedom from external constraints is insufficient. Freedom is not only negative, i.e., it is not only freedom *from*. It must also be freedom *for*—God needs to be able to create an expansion and enlargement of being. Otherwise, His freedom is only formal and lacks content. Ultimately, Berdyaev's claim that Christianity has not fully revealed itself as a religion of freedom appears well-founded.

To attain freedom, as noted, Christian theology must overcome the religious and scientific consciousness that denies true creativity. More precisely, Christian theology must transcend the persistent Aristotelian and Scholastic notion of the Absolute that has profoundly shaped both forms of consciousness.

Put differently, Berdyaev stresses that we must surpass both the Platonic (*me on*) and the Christian (*ouk on*) non-being. Although he does not explicitly use the term, I argue that Berdyaev advocates for a new, third form of non-being. This form of non-being, which he sometimes calls “meonic freedom”, is suggestive of Platonic *me on*, and this is why he also uses the expression “uncreated freedom.”

Thus far, the notion of God's binarity, despite the fundamental doctrine of God's simplicity, has not been sufficiently recognized. Whenever we speak of God, we also speak of God's nature. If God encompasses both Himself and His nature, how can He be simple? What would be the point of mentioning His nature if it was not something distinct from Him? But if it is distinct, can we still speak of God's simplicity? Thus, God is simple only if His nature is in no way dissimilar from Him. If that is the case, there would be no reason to speak of God's nature. God cannot be *actus purus*—a fully

actualized being—or have a simple structure if He is to create a new ontological reality.

If we want to describe God as free in an ontological sense, which involves postulating that He is free because He can expand being, we cannot avoid positing a binary—rather than simple—structure of God’s being. We must introduce a *posse* in God’s being that stands in dialectical unity with His *esse*. God needs a potency from which He can bring forth new being.

This potency is what Berdyaev terms “uncreated freedom.” Why does Berdyaev call it “uncreated”? How can something uncreated exist alongside God? How can there be something that God did not create? Let us answer this question by asking: Is God’s nature created or uncreated? If we hold that God’s omnipotence requires Him to be the absolute creator of all that exists, we must accept that His divine nature is created. But to say that His divine nature is created is tantamount to arguing that God created His potency, i.e., that chicken came before the egg.

Potency is valuable precisely because it is charged with as-yet-unactualized possibilities. If all possibilities were eternally actualized, they would be actualizations and not potencies. Potency is what it is precisely because it is uncreated. However, it is not enough to say that there is potency in God. The Lurianic idea of *tzimtzum* is a good example. According to this concept, God contracts to create a space of freedom for humanity. Nevertheless, that this space of freedom is “in” God entails that *tzimtzum* is created by God.

At this point, Berdyaev introduces a major paradigm shift in the history of philosophy. If freedom is, metaphorically speaking, “in” God, this suggests that it is created by God. Since freedom is uncreated, the only logical conclusion is that it is *outside* of God. By making this seemingly minor metaphorical amendment and stating that freedom is outside of God, Berdyaev lays the foundation for an entirely new ontology, which I call the *binary ontology of uncreated freedom*.

This collection of essays addresses the following three questions. First, to what extent is Berdyaev’s idea of uncreated freedom innovative?

Second, does it have the potential to reform modern metaphysics and liberate it from Platonic and Neoplatonic ontology? Third, has it realized its potential?

Another major thinker whose work is scrutinized in this book is C. G. Jung. In his implicit metaphysics, particularly in *Answer to Job*, the Swiss thinker envisioned, much like Berdyaev, the advent of a new epoch, an epoch of the Spirit, whose central characteristic is the need that God has for the human person. Other shorter essays in this collection were also inspired by Nikolai Berdyaev. Finally, Taylor Scot Knight's review of my *Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev* is included at the end of this collection for further insight.

Belgrade, September 2025
Romilo Aleksandar Knežević

2. Nikolai Berdyaev and the Perfection of an Imperfect God

Nothing is particularly shocking in Nikolai Berdyaev's claim that Greek ontologism had a stifling influence on Christian theology.¹ But while most Orthodox thinkers would see results of this "stifling influence" only in Western theology, Berdyaev detects it also in the works of the Greek Fathers. Challenging the commonly accepted opinion, Berdyaev argues that the model of the true Christian spirit is not to be found in Medieval philosophy – which is enslaved by "Greek ontologism" – but in the theories of Romanticism.

"German metaphysics, as contrasted with Latin and Greek, was to see an irrational principle in the primary found of being, not reason, which floods the world with light as the sun does, but will, act. This comes from Boehme, and beneath the surface, his influence can be traced in Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer."²

Finally, in Berdyaev's view, it is Kant that has to be regarded as the founder of the philosophy of freedom. So, we have two contrasting traditions: firstly, the Greek one which starts with Parmenides and the Eleatic school and is later on embraced in the Middle Ages; secondly, the tradition of Heraclitus that, via Jacob Böhme (whom Hegel saw as the father of German Idealism) shapes the tradition of Romanticism.³ For the Greek tradition, the primordial is being,

¹ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, trans. R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 158.

² *Ibid.*, 111.

³ For Böhme's influence on Schelling and late Heidegger, see John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986). Caputo contends that it is a well-known fact that Schelling adopted Böhme's notion of the *Ungrund* in his *Philosophical Investigations on the Nature of Human*

ousia or *essentia*. For Böhme, it is an irrational principle, bottomless freedom or the *Ungrund*. The question is, can we unveil the thinking process that led to the notion of being, on the one hand, and to the idea of the *Ungrund*, on the other hand? The question is vital because these two discordant concepts create two radically different concepts of God and human being.

Being, *ousia*, *essentia*

Quest for the cognizance of being and, consequently, the construction of an ontology was the primary preoccupation of the ancient philosophers. The Greeks sought for the primordial.⁴ But their method did not allow them to reach the actual existent, which is beyond being. This is because pure being is an abstraction. “Is not being a product of objectification?”⁵

“Objectification” is one of the most important concepts used by Berdyaev. It denotes a method of searching for the ultimate truth that starts with an overly rational hypothesis. The first step in this quest is the postulation of divine perfection. As the primordial reality, being has to be perfect. As we see in Parmenides, being is necessarily one, immobile, and unchanging. From the notion of divine perfection inevitably follows the idea of God’s simplicity. That God is simple means that He is an *actus purus* - full actualization - which leaves no room for *posse* or anything apart from *esse*.⁶ If being is one, therefore, there is no non-being. Lack of movement in being, as we know, inspired

Freedom. Heidegger taught a lecture course on that important work of Schelling, which was published in 1971. Being a consistent anti-ontologist, Berdyaev, however, criticizes Heidegger for trying to build a new science of Being (*Fundamentalontologie*) derived from his phenomenological ancestry; see Nikolai Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*, trans. Katharine Lampert (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950), 99

⁴ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 91-92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 3, a. 4, ad. 1; see also Charles Herbermann, ed., “Actus Purus,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913).

Zeno's famous paradox about Achilles and the tortoise. This paradox may also serve as an allegory about human destiny in the world of being. No matter how hard he tried to accomplish the farcically achievable task of reaching the tortoise, Achilles will fail even if his attempts will continue eternally. Due to its perfection and immutability, the omnipotent being cannot move. Movement is a sign of imperfection and this is why Achilles is sentenced to perpetual moving without making any progress. What is the point of our fight to leave even the slightest trace on the surface of the ocean, when this ocean is unyielding in its perfection and self-sufficiency? Which of our actions makes at least a smallest sense when in its absolute self-sufficiency and perfection the primordial reality does not need us?

Aristotle tried to resolve the problem by introducing the theory of potency and act, but the question arises, what is the source of movement – potency or act? If we believe that act is a “pure act”, this indicates that the act is unchanging whereas potency is changeable. Mutability, however, signifies incompleteness.⁷ According to some Thomists, there is something more in immobility than there is in motion, for there is in immobility that which in movement only becomes.⁸

Berdyaev stresses, however, that we can start with a different postulation arguing that there is more in potency than in act, that movement contains more being than immovability. The problem with Aristotle's notion of potency is that, to be satiated with possibilities of newness, potency has to be imagined as an irrational, infinite, and bottomless non-being. This kind of dizzying infinity, however, must have looked unacceptable to the Greeks because it entailed that being is an endless and unpredictable current and change. It follows that the Aristotle's potency is not potent in the sense of being able to generate newness.

We need to assume, according to Berdyaev, that the source of potency is not an all-determining cause. In the noumenal world, cause does not determine the effect.

⁷ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 157.

⁸ *Ibid.*

“If we make use of the Aristotelian phraseology, we may put it that our world is full of potencies, possibilities, and energies, but the sources of these potencies reach back into the noumenal world to which our causal relations are not applicable.”⁹

In the world of noumena the “cause” does not necessarily determine the effect, which means that the so-called effect represents something new, an amplification in being.

Let us for a moment remind ourselves what is at stake here. As we know, Christian theology rejects ancient philosophy primarily because they failed to produce a picture of a free and omnipotent deity. The platonic deity is not free because, in the creative act, it must use coeternal Forms. Demiurge is free to combine the elements of the ever-present ideas but not to create new elements. Neither is the Neoplatonic vision of emanation a true creativity because it is a mechanical overflowing of the divine surplus. We need to note that God’s freedom is first and foremost identified with freedom of creativity. In a word, if God cannot create a new reality, He is not to be regarded as a true God.

George Florovsky notoriously denounced Russian religious philosophy for falling captive to Romanticism and German Idealism.¹⁰ As we have seen, however, Berdyaev maintained that the true Christian spirit rests not in Medieval philosophy, as it is commonly argued, but in the philosophy of Romanticism. He believed that in some of its vital aspects, the teaching of the Greek Fathers is not essentially different from that of the Latin theologians and the Scholastics. What Berdyaev had in mind is that both Greek and Latin theologians make the same mistake when interpreting the concept of divine perfection in a purely deductive and rationalistic manner. Berdyaev thought that Greek Fathers could not liberate themselves from the captivity of the objectified concept, of God who is *actus purus*. They argued that God

⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰ See Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology, in The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 5, pt. 1 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1979).

is perfect, but their view of perfection originates from the world of objectification. As we shall see shortly, Berdyaev thought that in the noumenal world divine perfection does not necessarily indicate divine simplicity. In other words, God *is* perfect but in a way that does not involve simplicity.

If it is true that the Greeks share Western ideas of divine perfection and simplicity, ideas inherited from the classical tradition, what is the fate of the project whose main goal was to replace ancient ontology? How can we hope to transcend Greek ontology if we are still endorsing two main pillars on which it rests – the ideas of divine perfection and divine simplicity? Obviously, at stake here is the fate of Christianity’s probably most important mission, that is, the mission to engender an idea of a free God, of a God who is free because nothing impedes His creativity.

“If being, shut in on itself and finished off, being in which no movement or change of any kind is possible, be regarded as reality, then the possibility of creative action must inevitably be denied. There is no creative act whatever except the one by which God made the world.”¹¹

There is only one creative act and that is God’s act of creation of the world. But if we admit that God is an *actus purus*, the world’s creation cannot be defined as a generation of absolute newness. Neither can we explain how God, who is potent-less, can perform even one act of creativity.

“The official theology which regards itself as orthodox denies that man is a being with a capacity to create. The capacity of creation belongs to the Creator alone who is *pure act*, and the creature is incapable of it. But if the existence of potency, and that means of all movement, in God, the Creator, is denied, we

¹¹ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 159.

are obliged to deny to God the possibility of creativeness, for the creation of what is new is due to potency.”¹²

God is perfect but pays the price of His perfection by being unable to create and actualize His freedom. Following this logic, we meet a paradox: despite of being imperfect, human beings are able to create and be free.

“But man, on the contrary, the creature as he is, is capable of creation, since there is potency in him, he is not actualized to the point of losing the possibility of movement and change. The possibility of accomplishing a creative act, of disclosing change and newness, is due to imperfection.”¹³

Classical theology seems to argue that divine icon, *autoexousion* or the capacity of absolute self-determination, i.e., the most precious trait of human beings is the sign of imperfection and the presence of non-being. The teaching on *actus purus* “makes the idea of the creation of the world meaningless and absurd.”¹⁴ The appearance of the created world was not a revolution of newness in God’s inner life.

If God is perfect, there is no potency in Him. However, the possibility of creativity depends on the existence of potency. So, had He been perfect and without potency, God wouldn’t have been capable of creating. Nothing comes out of the perfect. *Ex perfecto nihil fit*. Or at least, nothing new comes out of the perfect. If we wish, therefore, to conceive of the possibility of creativeness we would need to reinterpret the concept of perfection. This is what Berdyaev does when he stresses that God is perfect by being imperfect. God is perfect because of the imperfect presence of potency and non-being in His structure. This is the paradigm shift he introduces and for which, apart from Böhme, he credits Hegel.

¹² Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 159. (*emphasis mine*).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

It was Hegel, argues Berdyaev, who introduced a new element into the concept of being:

“He introduced the idea of non-being, nothingness, without which there is no becoming, no emergence of what is new. Being itself is empty and the equivalent of non-being. *The initial fact is being - non-being, unity, being and nothingness. Being is nothingness, indeterminate and unqualified being...* Truth is in the transition from being to nothingness, and from nothingness to being. Hegel wants to put life into numb and ossified being. He seeks to pass from the concept to concrete being.”¹⁵

Hegel transits from the concept to a concrete being by acknowledging the ontological nature of the concept itself. This means that the concept is being, but being filled with interior life.

“Identity’, says Hegel, is a definition of only simple, immediate, dead being, whereas contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality. It is only in so far as nothingness has within itself its contradiction that it has movement and attains a state of wakefulness and activity. Dialectic is real life.”¹⁶

Berdyaev also praises Vladimir Soloviëv who, under Hegel’s influence, made a valuable distinction between being and existent. In Soloviëv’s view, being is the predicate of the existent, which is the subject. Berdyaev argues that the real subject of philosophy ought not be being in general, but that to whom being belongs, and that is the concrete existent, i.e., that which exists. He reminds us that it is not true to say that being is, because it is only the existent that is. Being tells that something *is* but does not say *how* it is. Being has two different meanings. It means that a particular thing is and also means that which is. The second meaning has to be discarded because being appears both as subject and predicate. But in fact, being is predicate only.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

“Being is the common, the universal. But the common has no existence and the universal is only within that which exists, in the subject of existence, not in the object. The world is multiple, everything in it is individual and single. The universally-common is nothing but the attainment of the quality of unity and commonness in this plurality of individualities.”¹⁷

God’s freedom together with the destiny of the new, Christian ontology depends on God’s capacity to create. We have to admit, therefore, that God’s perfection and God’s freedom are incompatible. The essential purpose of creation is to achieve freedom, not only divine but also freedom of the creature. If by creating the world God did not add anything new to His being, the world is not free because freedom is about “absolute ontological otherness”.¹⁸

Ontological philosophy, stresses Berdyaev, is not a philosophy of freedom, because freedom cannot have its source in being and be determined by being. So, we need to decide, whether we accept the primacy of being over freedom or the primacy of freedom over being. Most philosophical schools are under the sway of essentialist determinism, but that kind of philosophising is the result of objectification.¹⁹ We can either continue to deny the existence of non-being, acknowledging our failure to bestow freedom to God and the world; or we can decide to be open for paradigm shifts and explore the mysterious world of non-being.

Non-being that saves being

Berdyaev believed there was a real genius in Böhme’s teaching of the *Ungrund*. Unlike the Greek and Latin deductive methods, Böhme’s experience of the *Ungrund* came through a vision. Böhme was among the first to depart from Greek intellectualism and Scholastic philosophy.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

¹⁸ See John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 11.

¹⁹ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 104-105.

The German mystic reveals an interior life within the Deity itself, an eternal birth of God and a self-begetting. He warns us that the denial of this theogonic process is a denial of the life of the Godhead. According to Böhme's vision, and similarly to Heraclitus, the life of the world is permeated by fire. Fire is the primordial element in which a battle between light and darkness, between good and evil is waged. The tragic character of life is due to the *Ungrund* or bottomless abyss, primordial freedom that is before being.²⁰ From this point of view, being, which is perfect and simple, appears to be nothing but congealed freedom, a fire that has lost its power.

“Being is congealed freedom, a fire that has been smothered and has cooled: but freedom at its fountain-head is fiery. This cooling of the fire, this coagulation of freedom is objectification. Being is brought to birth by the transcendental consciousness (...)”²¹

Berdyaev claims that the world and human beings are not in the least what they look like to the majority of professional metaphysicians, who are entirely concentrated on the process of knowing. It is only a few of them, in Berdyaev's view, who have broken through towards the mystery of existence, academic philosophers least of all.

The *Ungrund* is nothingness, “the groundless eye of eternity”, but at the same time it is an indeterminate will and freedom. This nothingness is not an abstract entity, it is a will and hunger for something – “*Ein Hunger zum Etwas*”.²² The hunger for freedom and the baseless will for something has to be quenched. Fire sparks in the darkness and the light begins to shine. Nothing becomes something and groundless freedom brings forth nature.²³

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

²² Jacob Böhme, *Aurora: Morgenröte im Aufgang (1612) and Ein gründlicher Bericht or A Fundamental Report (Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620)*, trans. and ed. Andrew Weeks (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2013), HGC, 4:120–121; 2.1:8.

²³ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 107.

For Böhme, chaos, or freedom, is the root of nature. The *Ungrund* is an irrational principle in which darkness and liberty are always correlative and coinhering.

“For the first time perhaps in the history of human thought, Böhme saw that at the basis of being and superior to being lies groundless freedom, the passionate desire of nothing to become something, the darkness in which fire and light begin to kindle into flame. In other words, he is the father of metaphysical voluntarism which was unknown alike to mediaeval thought and to the thought of the ancient world.”²⁴

This kind of understanding of the fundamental nature of freedom “would have filled both Greek philosophers and mediaeval scholastics with horror and alarm”, maintains Berdyaev. Transcendental will and passion can reveal a world beyond being before it is rationalized and objectified. Then, we see being in its true nature as a congealed passion. Primary passion rests in the depth of the world but it becomes fixed by self-interest. The world of passion is transformed into the struggle for survival. What is needed, argues Berdyaev, is a new passion and a new passionate will to dissolve the world of necessity and bring forth the world of fiery freedom. Berdyaev asserted that “such a passionate will can be set aflame on the summits of consciousness when all other inquiries of reason are fulfilled. This original passion Berdyaev calls “messianic”. This is the fire that Christ promised to give to the world and wished that it might be kindled. It is present in our thoughts when we think creatively grasping that the battle of the opposites, of being and non-being, is the face of reality that transcends being. This is what Hegel realized in the realm of logic.”²⁵

“But the flaming fiery basis of the world, to which man rarely break through because of their dull prosaic everyday life and to

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

which men of genius do break through, gives rise to suffering. Suffering may ruin men, but there is depth in it, and it can break through the congealed world of day-to-day routine (...)"²⁶

Berdyaev explains that fire is a physical symbol of spirit. This fire, the idea of which we find in Heraclitus, Böhme, and Dostoyevsky among others, is both in cosmic life and in the depths of human being. In Böhme, the fire is manifested as longing of nothingness to become something; in Nietzsche, as the dionysiac will to power, in Bergson as *élan vital*... Fiery nature of the world is of necessity related to horror and despair, as in Pascal and Kierkegaard, and yet, horror and despair are not the final truth about the human being and the world.²⁷

"The primary reality, the original life is a creative will, creative passion, creative fire (...) *Man's answer to the call of God should have been a creative act, in which the fire was still conserved.* But the fall of man had as its result that the only possible response took the form of law."²⁸

Berdyaev thought that creative passion is preserved in us even in our state of fallenness. In the depths of our being is hidden the passion for love and sympathy, for knowledge and the creation of a new world through the poetic name-giving. In us also resides a creative passion for beauty and power of expression, for justice and taking control of nature, and a general creative passion for a vital exulting impulse and ecstasy.²⁹ True joy, in Berdyaev's view, is to be experienced solely in creative ecstasy.

"Only in the white heat of creative ecstasy, when none of the divisions and differentiations into subject and object had yet

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113-114. (emphasis mine).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

arisen, did I experience moments of fulfilment and joy. Creative *works* are within time, with its objectifications, discords and divisions, but the creative *act* is beyond time: it is wholly within, subjective, prior to all objectification.³⁰

As we remember, at stake here is the Christian attempt to create an image not only of a free God, but also of the free human being. In this case, freedom is identified with *autoexousion*, i.e., with creative freedom. God is free because He can create radical newness, which is human person. Human person is free because it is created according to the divine icon, which is *autoexousion* or creative freedom. Self-sufficient and perfect being cannot create newness. The emergence of newness is possible only if in the basis of being we postulate a baseless and infinite non-being. A non-being is infinite only if it is not created by being. Only freedom that, in Berdyaev's words, is "outside of God" - only uncreated freedom - can provide infinite foundation for freedom defined as the power to create out of nothing.

³⁰ Berdyaev, *Dream*, 220.

3. Freedom: Created or Uncreated Sergius Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdyaev on the Creatio Ex Nihilo and the Third Kind of Non-Being

There are two reasons why Christian theology introduces the concept of the absolute nothing into its doctrine of creation. These two reasons are closely intertwined. Firstly, unlike platonic non-being, the absolute nihil is not eternally coexistent with God and it does not limit His creative freedom. We notice that God's freedom is identified with the freedom to create. What does it mean to create?

Platonic non-being represented a necessity. To create, therefore, means to be able to overcome every form of necessity. How do we define necessity? Necessity is the existence of a given reality that prevents us from creating newness in being. The concept of the absolute nothing, therefore, needs to provide an ontological ground for the creation of the absolute novum. God is free insofar as He can create that, which is different from what already exists. This implies that He also needs to create something other than Himself. To be God's other means to be different from Him as well as to be new to Him. So, secondly, by empowering God to bring forth His other, the concept of the nothing also creates a possibility for ontological alterity of the world. But if we depict the "nothing" as the absolute nothingness, this would imply that there is another form of necessity for God - the necessity of His being which is incapable of providing room for the world.

Neither platonic relative non-being nor Christian absolute non-being could serve as the ground for divine and creaturely freedom. Can we imagine a third kind of non-being, nothing that would help us overcome the external necessity of the coeternal matter as well as the internal necessity of God's being?

Sergius Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdyaev, the authors I am quoting in this essay, agree that the apology of the world is inconceivable

on the level of monistic ontology, for which substance or ousia is the main category. They are aware that simultaneous communion and otherness between God and the world is imaginable only on the level of the person or hypostasis. As John Zizioulas writes, “It is a person that makes this possible because it is only a person that can express communion and otherness simultaneously...”¹

Bulgakov on the Nothing and Modal Freedom

A good example of the concept of modal freedom is to be found in the work of Sergius Bulgakov. During the last decade, we have been witnessing a renaissance of the scholarly interest in Bulgakov’s work.² There is little doubt that the Russian émigré theologian has been one of the most influential Orthodox thinkers, despite his somewhat controversial teaching of the Divine Sophia.³ So what is Bulgakov’s view of the “nothing” and is it capable of supporting the ontological alterity of the world?

In the Christian understanding of the relation between the world and God, it is first necessary, reminds us, Bulgakov, to exclude two opposites: pantheistic monism, on the one hand, and ontological dualism, on the other. For pantheistic monism, the world is self-enclosed

¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, edited by Paul McPartlan (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 29.

² This year Sergii Bulgakov’s Research Center, Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University, and Volos Academy for Theological Studies co-organised an international conference *Building the House of Wisdom*, which was hosted by Fribourg University in Switzerland. Some of the prominent Orthodox thinkers in the West, such as David Bentley Hart, for example, see traces of genius in Bulgakov’s work and rank him far above any other Russian thinker of the 20th Century.

³ Because of his teaching on the Divine Sophia and creaturely Sophia, some scholars would probably argue that Bulgakov is not the best representative of the Orthodox understanding of the “nihil”. I would contend, nonetheless - without further elaboration in this essay - that Bulgakov’s idea bears a strong resemblance to the Maximian concept of the logoi which, as Divine Sophia, are the part of God’s mind, but as creaturely Sophia are similar to the logoi that dwell in the created things.

and self-sufficient. This worldview is fundamentally atheistic because it denies the existence of a divine being that is above the world or in the world.⁴

Dualism, by contrast, is characterised by the recognition of the world's createdness. However, the world is not created by one creator but by two. The second divinity is sometimes described as the original mother-matter or Tiamat, or as a "place" for the world similar to Plato's chora. Chora is a space where the world finds its existence alongside God's absoluteness.⁵

Bulgakov stresses that it is legitimate and even inevitable to strive to find an ontological place for the world to protect it from the fullness of the divine being and to avoid pantheism.⁶ He explains that the idea of the creatio ex nihilo was introduced precisely in an attempt to distinguish ontologically God and the world.⁷ Are we to understand that the "nothing" has an ontological status independent from God? Can we say that the "nothing" is "something" in the sense of an autonomous ground for the world, for how else are we supposed to distinguish ontologically the world and God? Bulgakov's answer is negative.

There is no place and can be no place of its own or independent ground for the world which would belong to it alone. If there is such a place, it must be established by God, for there is nothing outside of or apart from God and that in this sense is not-God.⁸

The "nothing" should not be conceived as something existing before the creation of the world as its indispensable material, argues Bulgakov. The formula that the world was created out of nothing has, first of all, a negative meaning: no extra-divine ground for creation exists. According to Pseudo-Dionysios, reminds us, Bulgakov, God also created nothing. We can distinguish two kinds of "nothing": first,

⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride and the Lamb*, translated by Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI / Edinburgh: William B. Eerdmans Publishing / T&T Clark, 2002), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, (emphasis mine).

the precreaturely nothing or pure ontological zero, which is only a result of a logical deduction. Second, the ontic, creaturely nothing or me on, which permeates creation.⁹ The first kind of nothing is the ouk on or the absolute non-being of Christian theology used instead of the platonic me on or pre-existent matter. But this absolute non-being is a “pure ontological zero”, an abstract notion, which is a result of logical hypothesising and it does not exist.

“The nothing out of which the world is created is precisely a not-something, the pure not of ontological emptiness.”¹⁰ In other words, Christian theology has been claiming that the world was created out of a not-something, an absolute nothing that does not exist, instead of simply saying that the world was created out of God. Bulgakov acknowledges the legitimacy of striving to find a special place for the world, but only to conclude that such a place does not exist. He is, however, aware that if there is no ontological place for the world - there is no world.¹¹

Static and Dynamic Plane

Having escaped dualism, are we not returning to divine monism, which is the antipode of pantheistic monism? While the latter claims that all is the world and there is no supreme Being above the world, the former proclaims that all is God and that there could be no place for being outside of God. The solution, argues Bulgakov, is to transfer our inquiry “from the static to the dynamic plane.”¹² What is it that Bulgakov entails by the static and the dynamic plane?

The world relates to God not as equal to Him, not as a mode of being coordinated with Him, but as a heterogeneous mode of being. The world is created by God; it is His creation. The world’s existence is a special modality of being. This being is one; it is precisely the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² *Ibid.*

divine being. And for the world, there is no other ground, or “place” of being except this createdness by God, except this special mode of the divine being. And the fact that the world is created out of nothing means only that the world exists in God and only by God, for the world does not have in itself the ground of its being.¹³

Instead of a special place for the world, what Bulgakov offers is the problem of creation. Creation determines both the being of the world and its relationship with God - createdness is precisely this relationship.¹⁴

How do we overcome divine monism by moving from “the static to the dynamic plane”? How can the world be distinguished from God and prove that it has an ontological reason for its existence? Firstly, Bulgakov seems to be more concerned about preserving God’s absoluteness than establishing the world’s difference. We read this in the quoted paragraph, where Bulgakov writes that the world is not “equal” to God. Perhaps for its ontological otherness, the world does not need to be equal to God but simply to be different? Bulgakov answers that the world belongs to a heterogeneous mode of being; the world’s existence is a special modality of being. In other words, since there is only one being - divine being - the world can be different only in terms of the modality of that being. This in other words means that God created the world out of Himself. But to endow it with something of its own, He first created “nothing”. Consequently, out of this “nothing” God created the world.

Only the relative non-being, me on, exists. This nothing is included in the state of the relative being of creatures, in the context of this being, as a kind of half-shadow or shadow in the latter. In this sense, one can, following Pseudo-Dionysius, say that God also created nothing. And the analysis of the idea of creation necessarily includes this notion of the “creation of nothing” as a characteristic feature of the creative act.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44. (emphasis mine).

Bulgakov acknowledges that it is not possible to distinguish God and the world on the ontological plane, so he introduces the plane of modality. How is the inauguration of modality supposed to help us avoid divine monism? Not only that the world needs to be ontologically different, but it also must not be separated from God. How can we conceive of a simultaneous communion and alterity of God and the world? According to Bulgakov, this is possible only if we introduce the idea of creation and createdness. “Is the world created by God, or does it have its being and thus does not need to be created?”¹⁶

The idea of createdness was relatively alien to ancient philosophy.¹⁷ It plays no role in Plato’s theory of ideas. Ideas represent the world of the genuinely existent of which the world is a duplicate. In Bulgakov’s terms, the world of ideas is the Divine Sophia while the world is the creaturely Sophia, “the same ideas but submerged in nothing.” How can we overcome the ontological hiatus separating the ideal realm from the creaturely one without abolishing the possibility of communion? This is what Aristotle had in mind in his critique of Platonism.¹⁸ Platonism has no solution for this problem because the fundamental question of the connection of ideas and the world in God is not posed. In Plato, there is only Sophia, divinity without God. The problem, we shall see shortly, is that Sophia or divinity is an impersonal principle and it should be identified with the divine nature, while Bulgakov’s God is a Person. Bulgakov is saying that our problem cannot be resolved on the level of nature or substance, but only on the level of the person. The natural level is static, personal level is dynamic.

Aristotle understood that platonic ideas do not exist in things but above and outside of them, which made them only abstract shadows. To the extra-mundane ideas Aristotel opposes the same ideas but connected to the concrete things of the world as their entelechies or goal-causes. But the main problem with Aristotle’s philosophy, in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ In Plato’s *Timaeus*, of course, the idea of creation is present, but the creator is a demiurge and not God. *Ibid.*, 9

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Bulgakov's opinion, is that God and the world merge to the point of indistinguishability. Aristotle's system is marked by the limitations of antiquity. This means, firstly, that it does not contain the idea of creation and createdness; secondly, this system is essentially impersonalistic, since the lack of the idea of the person is generally absent from Hellenism. Aristotle describes God not as a Person but as the Prime Mover. "The unmoved mover is identical with the world, though it differs from the world in the mode of its being."¹⁹

Since Aristotle's prime mover is not a person, we can only speak of a causal relation between God and the world: God is the cause of the world and the world is God's effect. This idea was later adopted by Thomism. According to Bulgakov, however, if we bring the Personal God into play, the world is no longer God's effect but creation. We need to postulate the Personal God without whom Sophia is inconceivable because Sophia needs a personal mode of existence in order to be. But Sophia, as well as sophianicity, cannot be conceived outside of a relation to the One to whom this Sophia belongs as His self-revelation... i.e., to the Personal, Trihypostatic God. Divinity belongs to God, who has divinity and in this sense is divinity. But, in itself, divinity is not yet a personal God. Divinity is different from Him, although it is contained in Him, inherent in Him. But this connection of God and Sophia, without separation but also without identification (just as hypostasis and ousia are indivisible but not identical), was not known outside of revelation, in paganism... The chief defect... of Aristotle's religiophilosophical system lies in this identification of God with divinity or Sophia... Its main difficulty as well as its inconsistency consists in the fact that it is equally incapable of really connecting or distinguishing God and the world.²⁰

The primary problem of Aristotle's philosophy is that he identifies God with divinity, i.e., not with the hypostasis or personal principle but with ousia or (impersonal) being. Aristotle attempts to

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

distinguish God and the world, but he cannot achieve this because of the lack of the personal God who is connected to His world as the Creator with his creation. "It is precisely this connection that simultaneously unites and separates God and the world."²¹

The mystery of the person, therefore, becomes central to solving the problem of communion and otherness. John Zizioulas is also acutely aware of this as he explains that for the Fathers freedom was not only the origin of the world, but the being of God was a result of a free person, the Father. Since the source of the divine being is the Father's person, the unity of God was no longer in the one substance of God, but in the free person of the Father.²² "It is a person that makes this possible because it is only a person that can express communion and otherness simultaneously..."²³

Bulgakov on the Person

What is Bulgakov's concept of the person and exactly which quality of the person in his view allows for simultaneous expression of communion and otherness? We shall investigate this issue by looking into Bulgakov's critique of Thomism, which, in his view, is a continuation of the impersonal Aristotelian philosophy.²⁴ Just like Aristotle, Aquinas sees the relation between God and the world as the relation between cause and effect.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13. E. Gilson is making a subtle distinction between creation as an effect, to which has been accidentally added a certain similarity with its cause, and creation as analogue, which, in his opinion, is "much more than an effect." Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, translated by A. H. C. Downes (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 96. As Gilson explains, while the matter of *Timaeus* is simply informed by the Ideas in which it participates, the matter of the Christian theology receives its existence from God. The analogue, therefore, is different from the effect because it receives its existence and substantiality from its Creator. Gilson, *Spirit*, 96. Bulgakov's distinction between the effect and the creation is not fundamentally different from the doctrine of *analogia entis*.

²² Zizioulas, *Being*, 40–41.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁴ Bulgakov, *Bride*, 19.

Typically, Aquinas fails to describe this relation in terms of the Creator and creation. Again, Bulgakov repeats without further elucidation that this relationship is defined statically and not dynamically. We can guess that the relationship between the cause and effect is “static” because it is mechanical and, confined to the circle of the divine monism, fails to produce otherness.

God in the world, or the world in God, is a gradation of images of being in the descending or ascending perfection of different steps of being, depending on the degree of nonbeing or imperfection that is added in. God sees himself in himself, but he sees what is other to himself not in this other but in himself... The multiplicity of creaturely being results from its imperfection, defectus.²⁵

The purely pantheistic, Aristotelian definition of the relation between God and the world, continues Bulgakov, is further complicated by the introduction of the Christian doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*. These two ideas would not normally form natural unity, but Aquinas nevertheless unites when, defining creation, he uses the pantheistic term emanation.²⁶ Bulgakov also criticises Aquinas’ distinction between *Deus* and *Alia a Deo*, God and other than God. There is something in God that is “other” than God but at the same time belongs to Him. This could be only the Divine Sophia, argues Bulgakov, which is the self-revelation of God in himself.

At this point, we detect a major problem of Bulgakov’s theology. How can God’s self-revelation be something “other” than God? As the nonhypostatic Divinity, the Divine Sophia is a different name for God’s nature. This is clear because Bulgakov stresses that Divinity never exists without being hypostasized. “The distinction between *Deus* and *Alia a Deo*, therefore, refers to hypostasis and hypostatizedness, to God and Divinity.”²⁷ Identification of the divine nature with God’s self-revelation, however, is an apparent example of monism: God has to prove His absoluteness by dominating even His

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21. (emphasis mine).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

nature. Clearly, for Bulgakov, there can be nothing alongside God, not even His nature.²⁸ The existence of the divine nature non-domesticated by God would imply a potency that still needs to be actualised. But God, being perfect, must be fully realised, must be an *actus purus*. This is why Bulgakov cannot accept Aquinas' view of the never-realized possibilities in God.²⁹

To the idea of different and manifold possibilities in God, actualised and unactualised, we must oppose the idea of the uniqueness of the ways of God, a uniqueness that excludes all other, unactualised possibilities.³⁰

In summary, Bulgakov claims that God created His nature/Divine Sophia, which in creation is duplicated in the creaturely Sophia. But creaturely Sophia is not simply the reflection of Divinity, because this would be pantheism. To discriminate between two realms, Bulgakov introduces the "nothing" - the world is created out of nothing and the seeds of the Divine Sophia are planted into this "nothingness". What distinguishes the Divine Sophia from its creaturely counterpart is this "nothingness".

This schema creates immense confusion because, in the final analysis, the creaturely Sophia does not differ from God. Firstly, the "nothing" which is the origin of the creaturely Sophia is both created by God and from God and cannot be His other. Secondly, the Divine Sophia, Divinity or God's nature, is also created by God. So in the form of the Divine Sophia - which is His self-revelation - God is planting His seeds in the "nothing". But this "nothing" as created by

²⁸ A similar misconception of the notion of nature is visible in the work of John Zizioulas. It is one thing to say that nature needs hypostasis to be realised, but something completely different than nature, left on its own, does not possess an ontology of its own. If nature did not possess a potency as its ontological status, there would be nothing to be enhypostatised. John D. Zizioulas, "Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor," in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection*, edited by Bishop Maxim (Vasiljevic) (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2013), 101.

²⁹ Bulgakov, *Bride*, 22-25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

Him cannot be ontologically different from Him because this would create a bifurcation in being. Furthermore, what is the ontological status of the “nothing” created by God? Since it is God’s creation and does not co-exist with Him, we cannot identify it with the platonic me on. Neither could it be the ouk on or the absolute non-being because, as we have seen, to say that the world is created out of the absolute nothing is tantamount to claiming that God creates out of Himself.

Thirdly, Bulgakov does not explain how uncreated seeds of the Divine Sophia, once immersed into nothingness, become created seeds. For Bulgakov, this dialectic of uncreated and created seems to be happening on the level of nature. But nature is a non-relational category. Nature can only result in emanation, which precludes otherness. Since nature exists only as hypostasized, the problem of otherness needs to be transferred to the personal level.

Struggling with the same problem, Zizioulas concluded that, in its “terrifying ontological ultimacy”, the person needs to be “uncreated”, i.e., ontologically unique. In other words, we can claim that the person is created as long as this implies that it is not determined by God. It follows that the person is possible only if God creates it out of nothing, but it must not be determined by God. The person is conceivable only if God is the Person. But God can be the Person only if in the binarity of his structure He possesses something other than Him.

Bulgakov’s concept of the person is therefore unsatisfactory. He argues that the issue of otherness is resolved only on the dynamic or personal level, but his argument remains doctrinal. Bulgakov never explains theologically how the person achieves simultaneous communion and otherness.

Bulgakov was forced to deny the ontological freedom of the world and to substitute it with the concept of modal freedom. The idea of modal freedom is essentially monistic because it maintains that the world is God’s self-revelation in a different modality. Bulgakov is rejecting the cause/effect relationship between God and the world because it leads inevitably to the absorption of the second cause by the first cause.

A causal conception of the relation between God and the world does not leave a place for the being of the world and is not capable of justifying it... The world does not exist and therefore man with his freedom and his fate does not exist. There is, in general, nothing that differs from the first cause; the greyness of causal monism is triumphant.³¹

As a solution, Bulgakov suggests only a more subtle form of causation. In his attempt to break away with monism, he is employing new terms - Creator and creation. The difference between the cause and Creator is that Creator's productive act is not the mechanical causation of the world's being, but His going out of Himself and positing of the world as creaturely Sophia. The problem with the world's status in the scheme of causation is that the world does not have something of its own and is consequently absorbed by the first cause. But if we look carefully, the relation between Creator and creation terminates with the same outcome. As Bulgakov stresses, in the creation of the world, God repeats and doubles his being beyond the Divine Sophia in the creaturely Sophia. The creaturely Sophia nonetheless is not a second cause mechanically caused by a first cause. So, if the world is not a second cause, in what way is it different from it?

It is not, because the creaturely Sophia is only "the self-repetition" of the Divine Sophia.³² The fact that the creaturely Sophia has in itself "the force of the divine being", that "it abides in becoming as the true substance, the entelechy and the mover of the world", does not necessarily entail that it is ontologically different from God.³³ We could argue moreover that the idea of the Divine Sophia is even more consistently monistic than the platonic concept of the Ideas. By saturating the world in its totality, the Divine Sophia leaves no room for the autonomy of the creation, while the platonic *prima materia* at least has the power to resist the union with the ideas.

Although the creaturely Sophia is endowed with sophianicity and the capacity of self-perfection, this does not mean that it will

³¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

³² *Ibid.*, 222.

³³ *Ibid.*

ever cease to be God's self-repetition - God in a different modality. Indeed, Bulgakov replaces the concept of the first cause with the notion of Creator, but his Creator is not different from an impersonal substance. The main characteristic of impersonal, mechanical causation is that it can achieve only an ontological repetition.

We see how the ontology of the absolute non-being fails to accomplish its main mission and to overcome divine monism. Since ontology of the relative non-being ends in dualism and ontology of absolute non-being collapses in pantheism, perhaps our quest for the sufficient ontological ground of the world is inevitably a failure? Can we imagine a third kind of non-being on which simultaneous communion and otherness between God and the world is grounded; a third kind of non-being that, despite being other than God, does not create division? To do that, we need to make an ontological paradigm shift and depict God not as a monolithic *actus purus* but as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. When I say *coincidentia oppositorum* I imply that God's being is characterised by binary structure and the dialectical unity of the opposites - divine nature and Hypostatic God. To preserve nature's alterity, however, we cannot define it as God's self-revelation. Nature has to remain outside of God, as something uncreated. Nature is outside of God as uncreated freedom, but since God constantly draws otherness from nature's potency, it is possible to postulate that nature is also in God.

Berdyaev and the Problem of the Nothing

With his notion of uncreated freedom, Nikolai Berdyaev breaks with the tradition of classical ontology and offers a third kind of non-being. This third kind of nothing is supposed to provide for the ontological apogee of the world. The same motives are behind the Lurianic concept of *tsimtsum* or divine contraction, by which God leaves space of freedom for His creation. The Lurianic theory of God's contraction branched off in all possible directions: from Christian Kabbalah, via Jacob Boehme, German Pietism and German

Idealism, up through Levinas, Derrida, Harold Bloom and many others. Through Boehme and his concept of the Ungrund, the theory of *tsimtsum* reached Berdyaev.

Some Jewish scholars have recently argued about the radical novelty of this concept, perceiving it as a breaking point in the emergence of the modern intellectual world.³⁴ The questions they have asked about the significance of *tsimtsum* are also applicable in the case of uncreated freedom. To what extent is Berdyaev's uncreated freedom innovative? Does it have the potential to reform modern metaphysics and liberate it from the Neoplatonic tradition? Has it realized its potential?³⁵

Unlike impersonal causation, personal creativity generates a surplus in being. But to be able to enlarge being, the person needs to be in a dialectical union with bottomless and uncreated freedom. Berdyaev maintains, even at the beginning, before the formation of the world, there was the irrational void of freedom that had to be illuminated by the Logos. This freedom is not a form of being which existed side by side with the Divine Being... It is rather that principle without which being could have no meaning for God, and which alone justifies the divine plan of the world. God created the world out of nothing, but it would be equally true to say that He created it out of freedom. Creation must be grounded upon that limitless freedom that existed in the void before the world appeared. Without freedom, creation has no value for God.³⁶

Several points in this paragraph require our attention. Firstly, irrational freedom is different from platonic co-eternal non-being. Berdyaev wants to say that platonic nothing is a medium that does

³⁴ Agata Bielik-Robson and Daniel H. Weiss, "Preface," in *Tsimtsum and Modernity: Lurianic Heritage in Modern Philosophy and Theology*, edited by Agata Bielik-Robson and Daniel H. Weiss (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), xvi.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Preface, xvi. As for the similarities and differences between Uncreated freedom and *tsimtsum*, we need to leave this investigation for a future essay.

³⁶ Nicolas Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, translated by Olivier Fielding Clarke (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 165 (emphasis mine).

not allow for unhindered divine creativity. To be an endless medium, platonic nothing would need to rest on bottomless freedom. This idea, however, was absent from ancient philosophy because, for the Greeks, the world is eternally completed.³⁷ Secondly, primeval freedom is that principle without which the being of the world has no meaning for God and the principle that justifies the creation of the world. To be meaningful for God, the created being would need to be ontologically autonomous. Thirdly, God created the world out of nothing, but this is tantamount to saying that the world was created out of freedom. Nothing, therefore, is limitless freedom. Fourthly, Berdyaev argues that God is omnipotent in his relation to being. But God is not omnipotent in his relation to non-being.³⁸ In the beginning, was the Word, but in the beginning, also there was freedom. The latter is not opposed to the Word, for without it the Logos or the Meaning of the world does not exist...³⁹

Bulgakov's God is the creator of nothing, which He uses to create the world. But the essential difference between emanation and creation is that after the act of creation there must be more being than there was before. Berdyaev claims, The creative act does not create out of nature⁴⁰ of the creator ... but out of nothing... Every creative act, in essence, is the creation out of nothing: the production of new forces rather than the changing or re-arrangement of the old. In every creative act there is absolute gain, something added.⁴¹

Since in Bulgakov's creation nothing ontologically new is added to God, creation is not different from emanation and the Creator is not different from the mechanical first cause. But if God's creativity

³⁷ "Socrates, and the Greeks in general, recognized only the existence of the second kind of freedom, which come to us through reason, truth and goodness." *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁸ The first two sentences are missing from the English translation.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

⁴⁰ I take that here by "create out of nature" Berdyaev implies "to create out of God."

⁴¹ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, translated by Donald A. Lowrie (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2008), 128.

is not an augmentation of Being, how do we define it? If that which comes out of God does not make Him larger, it could only make Him smaller. Either creation is defined as expansion, or the distinction between creation and emanation is obliterated. Berdyaev argues, The doctrine of emanation does not know the creative act in God, and hence it does not know the creative act at all - only an outflow. For an emanational consciousness of God and the world, power flows out and is variously dispensed but does not increase. God flows out in His emanation into the world. In Plotinus Divinity is not diminished in its power by the fact that its rays emanate into the world. But a consistent doctrine of emanation must lead to a doctrine of the diminution of Divine power... Divinity is powerless to create a world, but it may become a world. And the divine power emanating into the world must necessarily be diminished and decreased.⁴²

Eradication of the difference between creation and emanation, we have seen, is due to the lack of the genuine concept of the person in Bulgakov's theology. The person has to be "uncreated" or created from uncreated freedom. The concept of the person is possible only if it is grounded on primeval freedom. Eradication of the difference between creation and emanation, we have seen, is due to the lack of the genuine concept of the person in Bulgakov's theology. The person has to be "uncreated" or created from uncreated freedom. The concept of the person is possible only if it is grounded on primeval freedom.

By contrast, Berdyaev is suggesting that God did not create the non-being and cannot claim power over it. So in the beginning there was God, but there was also freedom. This freedom is not opposed to God but is the source of His power to create his non-determined other - the person.

At this point, Berdyaev is adding one final stroke to his picture of the non-being. According to Boehme, this freedom is in God; it is

⁴² *Ibid.*, 131. (emphasis mine).

the inmost mysterious principle of divine life; whereas I conceived it to be outside of God.⁴³

This point is of paramount importance because it finally and unequivocally establishes uncreatedness and externality of freedom, without which ontological freedom is implausible. After we posit freedom outside of God, it is no longer possible to confuse Berdyaev's theory of uncreated freedom with the Lurianic *tsimtsum* and its ramifications. For Gershom Scholem, who deserves credit for bringing *tsimtsum* back to contemporary philosophy, *tsimtsum* is God's contraction or creation out of the void of nothing. In Scholem's view, by retreating into Himself and by positing a negative factor in Himself, God liberates creation.⁴⁴ However, there is no doubt that the void of freedom is created by God and therefore deprived of its alterity.

Conclusion

The reason why Christian theology introduces absolute nothing is to secure God's creative freedom. God is free if He can overcome givenness and create a newness in being. But Bulgakov stresses that to "create out of nothing" means that God creates out of Himself. Thus, God can create only what is already given in Him. The notion of the person cannot rest on the ontology of the absolute non-being, which makes Bulgakov's God similar to the impersonal substance. We may conclude that introduction of the absolute nothing did not achieve its main goal.

Berdyaev's God does not create out of Himself but out of uncreated freedom. Berdyaev explicitly confirms uncreatedness of freedom by stressing that this freedom is outside of God. This is why God can break through the givenness of the world and create

⁴³ Nicolas Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950), 179. Nicolas Berdyaev, *Samopoznanie* (Moscow: Hranitel, 2007), 220.

⁴⁴ Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, edited by Werner Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 283. Cited in Bielik-Robson, "Preface," in *Tsimtsum*, 6.

an absolute newness. Ontology of uncreated freedom accomplishes its main goal and liberates God from givenness. This, in my view, confirms that the idea of uncreated freedom - the freedom that is outside of God - is fundamentally innovative and bestowed with the potential to revolutionise modern metaphysics.

4. Nikolai Berdyaev and C. G. Jung On God's Need for Human Person

Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own understanding!
- I. Kant

*To sail away from safe shores towards an unknown and yet undiscovered
continent from which no helping hands reach out.*
-N. Berdyaev

Anyone who takes the sure road is as good as dead.
-C.G. Jung

INTRODUCTION

Berdyaev's Mode of Thinking and Kant's View of the Enlightenment

In this essay I will compare some of the crucial aspects of the notion of the human person as outlined by Nikolai Berdyaev and C. G. Jung, focusing especially on the role personality plays in the transformation of God-image. The reasons to make a comparative study of Berdyaev and Jung are numerous.¹ However, probably the most important one is the idea that they share about the “need” God feels for human beings.

However, while Berdyaev hardly goes beyond mentioning that the meaning of God's “need” is that he longs to be enriched by humans, in his *Answer to Job* Jung offers a meticulous description of the transformation through which God-image passes depending on the human attitude towards Yahweh. For example, Yahweh's encounter with Job, according to Jung, corresponds to the moment of mid-life crisis in the development of the God concept.²

¹ The only monograph so far dedicated to a comparison of Berdyaev and Jung is Georg Nicolaus, C. G. Jung and Nikolai Berdyaev: *Individuation and the Person — A Critical Comparison* (London / New York: Routledge, 2011).

² Paul Bishop, *Jung's Answer to Job: A Commentary* (Hove, East Sussex; New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 81.

But before we continue with our scrutiny, we would like to say a few words about Berdyaev's mode of thinking, which is also a methodological model applied in this essay.

According to Paul Tillich, Berdyaev's mode of thought is the characteristic and most valuable contribution of the Eastern Church to the religious thinking of today.³ What is it that is so special about this mode of thought to incite Tillich's flattering assessment?

Tillich explains:

Berdyaev himself calls his type of thought "theosophy" and means by this *a free further development of ecclesial doctrines* in the spirit of speculative metaphysics and mystical intuition.⁴

Tillich's emphasis is obviously on the "free further development of ecclesial doctrines." This further development demands the possibility of free thinking. Berdyaev's "free thinking", Tillich tells us, entails methods of speculative metaphysics and mystical intuition. This means that unlike representatives of the Neo-patristic synthesis – namely, John Zizioulas – Berdyaev never calls for a return to the Fathers and never sets patristic works as an indispensable criterion of truth. Zizioulas, on the other hand, believes that "theology, without the Church Fathers as guides, ceases to be Orthodox theology."⁵ The very question "Neo-patristic synthesis or Post-patristic theology represents a false dilemma", since what is needed "is not to go beyond the Fathers but rather only to interpret them."⁶

Zizioulas, however, seems to be ignoring a simple hermeneutical fact that there are as many interpretations as there are interpreters and as many criteria of truth as there are interpretations. No outward

³ Paul Tillich, "Nikolai Berdiajew: Eine geistesgeschichtliche Würdigung," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band XII: *Begegnungen* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1971), 290ff.

⁴ *Ibid.* (emphasis mine).

⁵ John Zizioulas, "The Timeliness and Timelessness of the Neopatristic Synthesis," unpublished paper, Volos conference, *Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology*, June 2010.

⁶ *Ibid.*

or “objective” fact will ever be *per se* able to satisfy our quest for the unwavering truth since it first needs to be interpreted.⁷

It follows that to “think freely” for Berdyaev means to “have courage to use your own understanding”. The words we have just quoted belong to Immanuel Kant. In his famous essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* Kant argues that Enlightenment is “man’s emergence from the self-incurred immaturity.”

Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not a lack of understanding but a lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding!⁸

It seems that the method of the Neo-patristic synthesis betrays vestiges of “the self-incurred immaturity”, i.e., of the lack of resolution and courage to use understanding without any external guidance. If it is true that we should not go “beyond the Fathers” but should only interpret them, it follows that our interpretation can never – and *must* never – discover any flaws in the patristic texts. Nonetheless, had the works of the Fathers been flawless we would have had a *consensus Patrum*. But, unanimity between the Fathers exists only on the doctrinal level and not on the level of theology. In other words, they agree, for example, that God is One in three hypostases, but their interpretation of hypostasis is not identical.

According to Kant, dogmas and formulas, or mechanical instruments for rational use (or rather misuse) of his natural abilities and

⁷ In this sense, Zizioulas’s methodology belongs to the Platonic philosophy of the world or the object, and not the Kantian philosophy of the ego or the subject. Philosophy of the object, according to Berdyaev, is a “naïve realism”, which is the general outlook of the greater part of mankind. “Greek (Platonic) thought was directed to the object and it is German thought alone which has turned towards the subject.” Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, translated by R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 5.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment*, accessed via Evergreen State College PDF archive, 1.

gifts, are the ball and chain of man's permanent immaturity. Kant continues:

“And if anyone did throw them off, he would still be uncertain about jumping over even the narrowest of trenches, for he would be unaccustomed to free movement of this kind. Thus only a few, by cultivating their minds, have succeeded in freeing themselves from immaturity and in continuing boldly on their way.”⁹

Should an ecclesiastical synod, Kant asks, commit itself to a certain set of unalterable doctrines? In his view, this is quite impossible. He explains that a contract of this kind, “concluded with a view to preventing all further enlightenment of mankind forever, is absolutely null and void, even if it is ratified by the supreme power (...)”

One age cannot enter into an alliance on oath to put the next age in a position where it would be impossible for it to extend and correct its knowledge, particularly on such important matters, or to make any progress whatsoever in enlightenment. *This would be a crime against human nature, whose original destiny lies precisely in such progress. Later generations are thus perfectly entitled to dismiss these agreements as unauthorised and criminal.*¹⁰

For the enlightenment of this kind, all that is needed is freedom, reminds us Kant. Moreover, the freedom in question is the most harmless form of all freedom since what it entails is only the public use of one's reason in all matters. And, “the public use of man's reason must always be free for it can alone bring about enlightenment among the men.”¹¹

Kant stresses that it is impermissible to agree to a permanent religious constitution that no one might publicly question. In his view, this would abolish a phase in man's upward progress, making it detrimental for ensuing generations.¹²

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3. (emphasis mine).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

As if unmistakably following the *sapere aude* precept of the Enlightenment, Berdyaev does not only see a few minor imperfections in the patristic teachings; he brazenly and explicitly warns against the restoration of the Christianity of the Fathers. In his view, the writings of the Fathers lack true anthropology.

In this lies a grave danger for our epoch, the danger of the restoration of the Christianity of the Fathers, which has no true anthropology. Such a restoration might play into the hand of the spirit of the Antichrist. When religious consciousness leaves an empty place, it is filled by the spirit of the Antichrist. Religious demeaning and oppression of man lead to a false over-estimation of himself that finally destroys him.

Following the method of free further development of doctrines, the Russian philosopher, while keeping some of the assets from the patristic period, introduces new traits. The common denominator of all these qualities is the indispensable role that the person plays in the life of God. However, Berdyaev never attempts to give a more detailed account of the human input to God's life. This is exactly why Jung is so important for our research because what he has to offer is precisely a minute description of all the phases in the transformation of God-image.

Berdyaev's Concept of Personality

As his initial step towards a description of God as an infinite personality, Berdyaev borrows Nicholas of Cusa's words that God is a *coincidentia oppositorum*. The qualities that are irreconcilable from a rationalistic point of view find themselves in God in perfect harmony. But perfection usually implies immobility. If something is perfect it follows that it does not need to struggle to attain more perfection. Such a striving would be suggestive of imperfection. The argument of the theological and metaphysical doctrine of the absolute immobility of God seems to be reasonable. Yet Berdyaev rejects this as sheer rationalism. Precisely because of the divine perfection, in God absolute rest is inseparably interwoven with absolute motion. God's perfection

does not entail immobility. God is spirit and life. If something is a living being or personality,¹³ this according to Berdyaev means that it possesses the capacity for an infinite origination of newness.

As seen, Berdyaev argues that liberty is associated with what is infinite. Since infinity exists only in a personal form, i.e., as a concrete personality, we may conclude that liberty is always related to an infinite person. An infinite person is infinite and free because she is capable of a limitless generation of the unprecedented. Berdyaev describes freedom as the capacity to create out of nothing, that is, to create things that were formerly non-existent. Personality and freedom, life and spirit are inconceivable if the appearance of totally new realities is impossible.

Berdyaev believes that infinite personality cannot exist if we understand it as a windowless monad as was the case with Leibnitz. For Leibnitz monad is a simple substance, “it is closed, shut up, it has neither window nor doors,” explains Berdyaev. Personality, on the other hand, is in a constant encounter with infinity. Berdyaev adds, for personality, however, infinity opens out, it enters into infinity, and admits infinity into itself; in its self-revelation, it is directed towards an infinite content.”¹⁴

Since personality is not a closed monad we can conclude that in Berdyaev’s vision personality cannot exist in isolation.¹⁵ It has to be “directed towards an infinite content. Infinite content for a personality could only be other infinite personalities. Once we break with an image of God as a lifeless substance and see him as a limitless spirit

¹³ I argue that Berdyaev uses these two terms as synonyms.

¹⁴ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, translated by R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 22; idem, *O rabstvye i svobodye chelovyeka* (Paris: YMCA-Press), 20.

¹⁵ Zizioulas entertains a similar understanding of personality as a relational being. “The person cannot exist in isolation. God is not alone; he is communion.” John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, edited by Paul McPartlan (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 166. However, Zizioulas’s concept of the identity of divine persons does not entail infinity. Without infinite divine personalities, it is not possible to conceive of divine freedom like Berdyaev’s.

and life, movement and action, it follows that the genuine God ought to be personality. And since personality needs an infinite content, that is, needs another infinite personality, we have to conclude that genuine divine freedom is plausible only if God is more than one person.¹⁶ This is why Berdyaev addresses a very severe critique of any form of monotheism that does not envisage God as the Trinity. Berdyaev even sees such monotheism as a form of idolatry. He argues, ‘a naturalist attitude towards God, conceived of as a metaphysical transcendent Being, an immobile Substance, represents the latest form of idolatry in the history of the human spirit. Monotheism can indeed be a form of idolatry.’¹⁷

From his categorical rejection of non-Trinitarian monotheism, it is obvious that Berdyaev did not think that the oneness of God is incompatible with the three divine Hypostases. He firmly believed that in the revelations of spiritual life the Three form perfect unity without losing their particularity. In the life of the spirit, there is no room for antithesis between unity and multiplicity.

Unity is not opposed to multiplicity as to some exterior reality, for it penetrates the latter and creates its life while at the same time leaving it as multiplicity. “I am in my Father, ye are in me, and I in you... It is on this victory over the outsideness and extrinsicity¹⁸ [*vnepolozhmost*] of the one and the many that spiritual life is based.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann has grasped this point of Berdyaev’s thought. Moltmann writes: “Anyone who denies movement in the divine nature also denies the divine Trinity. And to deny this is really to deny the whole Christian faith. For according to Berdyaev, the secret of Christianity is the perception of God’s triune nature, the perception of the movement in the divine nature which that implies, and the perception of the history of God’s passion which springs from this. Christian faith is the experience of the boundless freedom of which this is the source.” Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 45.

¹⁷ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 23; idem, *Filosofiya svobodnogo duha* (Moskva: Hranitel, 2006), 43.

¹⁸ We could also translate this term as ‘exteriority’ or ‘outsideness’.

¹⁹ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 17. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 37.

The Trinitarian nature of God, claims Berdyaev, is only unacceptable for rational thought.²⁰ Moreover, rational thought has a natural inclination towards monism: “Reason, without the illumination of faith, tends naturally towards monism or dualism, and the mythological character of the Christian Trinity is an offence to the reason, which is too ready to see in it a form of polytheism.”²¹

Like Gregory Palamas,²² Berdyaev talks about the inner life of the Trinity being principally characterized by love and longing between the divine persons.²³ The internal relationships between the hypostases of the Trinity are dynamic and are revealed as concrete life.²⁴ A Monotheistic God could only love Himself. But the flow of

²⁰ “Berdyaev asserts that the Trinitarian doctrine cannot be derived from the law of identity, ‘the main law of reason.’ The law of identity expresses the fallen and limited order of nature as opposed to the order of freedom. The doctrine of the Trinity, on the other hand, implies belief in the realm of infinite existence. Such existence is unconstrained by the law of identity. The Trinitarian doctrine ‘is sanctioned not by the law of logic, but by the law of logos, and can be grasped only by intuitive rather than by discursive thinking.” Michael Aksionov Meerson, *The Trinity of Love in Modern Russian Theology* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1998), 107.

²¹ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 17. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 37.

²² See chapter Two in Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, *Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev*, (Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2020).

²³ Sergius Bulgakov gives credit to Berdyaev for emphasizing the humanity of God in biblical representation. “To reduce all this [God’s emotions] to anthropomorphism is to close one’s eyes to Divine reality and to replace the fiery words of Holy Scripture with the scholasticism of seminarians.’ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 133.

²⁴ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 192. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 229. Berdyaev was well aware, in his own words, that “when we approach this mystery we find ourselves on a razor edge and it is very easy to fall from it in either direction; a fall which the Church calls heresy.” *Ibid.*, 192. However, he believed that all forms of heresies are indications of a rationalistic approach to the divine mysteries, of thinking that does not allow for antinomy in thinking about God. It is reason without illumination that produces heresies, concurrently condemning supra-rational thinking as heretical. “Heretical doctrines are always rationalizations of spiritual experience because they regard as the whole truth what is only partially true. The mystics of Christianity do not make this mistake. They put forward the most daring ideas which alarm the

limitless life is possible only between divine persons that are equal in dignity. The Father begets the Son out of God's longing for intra-divine eros, and "it is the Son, born from all eternity, equal in dignity to the Father, Who responds to the divine aspiration of the loving subject and the loved object."²⁵

Berdyaev grounds his vision of the unity in God, not on the unity of the divine nature or the monarchy of the Father. The oneness in God is a result of personal intra-Trinitarian *eros* and longing in which none of the Hypostases is in subordination.

The antithesis between the one and the many has its origin in space, time, and matter, which are simply the result of the Fall and the separation from God. Spiritual life is lived outside time, space, and matter... In spiritual life and experience, there is given to me the interior unity of my destiny as well as that of the world, and God Himself."²⁶

To recapitulate: I have started this section by asking about Berdyaev's concept of divine freedom. I have cited Berdyaev's analysis of the main divine characteristics as 1) spirit, 2) life, 3) freedom, 4) action, 5) movement, and 6) infinity, concluding that divine freedom is bound up with the infinite potential of the spirit. I have also established a central place for Berdyaev's concept of infinity in his understanding of freedom. Furthermore, I have argued that in Berdyaev's consistently personalistic view infinity exists not as an abstract category, but as a concrete personality. For Berdyaev, personality is a dynamic living being that implies the capacity for the infinite generation of newness. Freedom is bound up with the infinite potential of the spirit, meaning that freedom is identified with an infinite personality. Personality, on the other hand, is infinite insofar as it produces total newness. From

minds of average people and appear sometimes even more extravagant and more contrary to our accustomed faith than the teaching of heretics." *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 198. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 235.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 37–38. Although in this paragraph Berdyaev talks on an anthropological level, it is possible by way of analogy to apply his view in the framework of the inner life of God.

this point of view, we have a better comprehension of Berdyaev's description of freedom as the power to create out of nothing.

Berdyaev's Notion of Human Personality

Berdyaev's entire vision of human personality and human freedom, as well as his vision of God, rests upon the human capacity to create radical excess in being. This is why most of Berdyaev's critics who were not comfortable with his concept of the "external" *Ungrund*, had to reject Berdyaev's teaching of the human person.²⁷ At this point, we need to establish the main tenets of Berdyaev's vision of human personality.

The Main Principles of Berdyaev's Concept of Personality

Firstly, 1) we can reach the meaning of the creation of the human only if we grasp the inner life of the Divine Being.

Traditional affirmative theology has been closely confined within rational concepts and that is why it has been unable to grasp the *inner life of the Divine Being, solely in which the creation of the world and man* (that is to say, the attitude of God towards His other self) *can be understood*.²⁸

Berdyaev is saying here that there is a strong parallel between the reasons why God is the Trinity – why the Father begets the Son and spires the Spirit - and the creation of the human. Although the human person is created, God needs her almost in the same way as the Father needs the other two Hypostases.²⁹ The problem is that at

²⁷ See Bogdan Lubardić, *Nikolay A. Berdjaev između Ungrund-a i Oca* (Beograd: Brimo, 2003), 78–83. Lubardić argues that Berdyaev's anthropology betrays "neo-humanistic tendencies." *Ibid.*, 78. Also George Seaver, *Nicolas Berdyaev: An Introduction to His Thought* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 15; M. A. Vallon, *An Apostle of Freedom* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960), 197.

²⁸ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 190; idem, *Filosofija*, 227.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 210. Idem, *Filosofija*, 249. Berdyaev is aware that due to the limitations of human language it is difficult to express the exact character of God's "need" for man. He writes, "in the depths of spiritual experience there is revealed not only

this point Berdyaev's thought is imprecise. It is not the inner life of the Trinity that enlightens our understanding of the creation but, as we shall see, the creation of the person explains the relations between the divine Hypostases. Berdyaev never elucidates explicitly why the Father needs the Son. To say, as Berdyaev does, that the Father longs for the Son because of His love for His Son is a tautology. As I have argued drawing from Rowan Williams, the source of the intra-trinitarian *eros* lies in the irreducible character of the personal otherness of the Trinity. To abolish the "eternal difference" between the persons would be, as Williams observes, to abolish the love itself.³⁰

This first principle of human personality leads secondly to 2) Since God needs his creature, the traditional concept of creation has to be rejected.³¹ Berdyaev claims, "rationalistic and exoteric religious thought is obliged to maintain the cruel idea that God created the world capriciously, without necessity, and entirely unmoved from within."³²

If the creation was not necessary for God, not only the world and the person, but the entire creation is without significance and is going to perish, contends Berdyaev.³³ To secure a genuine basis

man's need of God but also God's need of man. But clearly, the word 'need' here is an inexact expression, as indeed are all human terms when applied to God."

³⁰ Rowan Williams, "The Theological World of Philokalia," in *The Philokalia: Exploring the Classical Texts of Eastern Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 117.

³¹ Maximus the Confessor teaches that, although the human being is a microcosm and mediator within creation, the person is not created out of necessity for God nor as part of God's interior life. Rather, God remains utterly immovable, while movement belongs only to creatures. The purpose of creation is for creatures to find rest in God's immobility — a rest that paradoxically takes the form of perpetual striving (ἐπέκτασις). This striving is one-directional: creatures move toward God, but God does not move toward them. See Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* 22:73–81; *Ambigua* 7, *Patrologia Graeca* 91:1069A–1077B.

³² Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 190. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 227.

³³ It is clear that for Berdyaev we cannot ground human freedom solely on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, that is, on the doctrine according to which the creation of the world was not an act of necessity. If God creates freely, His creation, according to Patristic teaching, also possesses freedom and is even 'equal of honour'

for human liberty, argues Berdyaev, we need to see the mystery of the creation “as the interior life of the Divine. What Berdyaev tries to say here is that we can grasp what human freedom is only if we understand that we are intrinsically connected with the life of the Trinity.³⁴ That is, it seems that Berdyaev argues that it is impossible to avoid monophysitism if God creates the human without “necessity” for him. “This mystery,” contends Berdyaev, “is the need which God feels for His other self, of one who loves and is beloved, which is realizable within the Trinity in Unity, which exists both above, and below, in heaven, and on earth.”³⁵

Berdyaev claims that the theological doctrine in which God created the human for His glory is not only degrading to us but degrading to God as well. Berdyaev notices a striking fact that any doctrine that debases the creature also debases God.³⁶ He is aware that it is against the generally accepted Christian view of God to claim that God is in need, or that He experiences longing or desire.³⁷ According to the traditional

(ὁμοτιμος). Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, ed., *A Greek Patristic Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 209–210.

³⁴ This is one of Berdyaev’s most fundamental principles, without which his concept of Godmanhood remains incomprehensible, and I shall return to it later.

³⁵ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 191. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 227.

³⁶ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 39. Idem, 35.

³⁷ For a different view of the patristic position about divine passibility and impassibility see Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). In his book, Gavrilyuk argues that the ‘picture of an essentially impassibilist account of God in patristic theology... is incorrect.’ According to patristic teaching, observes Gavrilyuk, God deliberately accepted all the consequences of his incarnation, including suffering and death. *Ibid.* 20. However, he also points out that ‘in the contemporary theological climate impassibility is so universally presented in an unfavourable light that it is quite often ignored that the notion of unrestricted divine passibility is also fraught with many difficulties.’ He emphasizes that not all human emotions may be ascribed to God. *Ibid.* pp. 5-6. As an illustration of a passibility that is not necessarily incompatible with God, I shall quote a passage from Origen: ‘He [the Saviour] came down to earth in pity for the race of men. By our affections He was affected, before He was affected by the sufferings of the cross and condescended to take our flesh upon him. Had he not been affected, He would not have entered into association with the life of men. First He is affected; then He comes down and

view, if God longs for something or someone, this implies two things: first, that God's being is mutable and mobile. Second, God is imperfect. Moreover, this position, which was mainly influenced by Parmenides and the philosophic school of Elis,³⁸ claims that the Absolute, as a perfect being is immobile and self-sufficient.³⁹ Berdyaev believes that this understanding is a product of objectification, an invention of our rational consciousness that thinks on a natural level. Only in the natural world does rest exclude motion, and this is so because natural reasoning is confined to the laws of Aristotelian logic. Nevertheless, clarifies Berdyaev, God is *coincidentia oppositorum*, and in God absolute rest is inseparable from absolute motion.

is seen. What is that affection whereby on our account He is affected? *It is the affection of love.* The Father Himself, too, the God of the Universe long-suffering, and of great compassion, full of pity, is not He in a manner liable to affection? Are you unaware that, when He orders the affairs of men, He is subject to the affections of humanity? The Lord thy God bear with thy ways as if a man should bear with his own son. God then bears with our ways, just as the Son of God bears with our affections. *The Father is not impassible, without affections.* If we pray to Him, He feels pity and sympathy. He experiences an affection of love. He concerns himself with things in which, by the majesty of His nature, He can have no concern, and for our sakes, He bears the affections of men.' *Selection from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen*, transl. R. B. Tollinton (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, New York and Toronto, The Macmillan Co., 1929), VII, pp. 15-16.

³⁸ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 192; idem, *Filosofiya*, 229.

³⁹ Zizioulas sees God's self-sufficiency as a form of "closed ontology." On this point, he cites Eric Lionel Mascall, who describes classical Greek thought — both Platonic and Aristotelian — as committed to the idea of "closed" natures: "[For all Greeks] everything had a nicely rounded off nature which contained implicitly everything that the being could ever become... What Greek thought could not have tolerated... would have been the idea that a being could become more perfect in its kind by acquiring some characteristic which was not implicit in its nature before."

Eric Lionel Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 246, cited in John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 70n11.

According to a popular reading of Parmenides, besides being complete and unchangeable, the One is also eternal and timeless. See John Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 62.

Berdyayev also argues that we should break with our concept of perfection as an abstract, immobile, and static substance.⁴⁰ God is not substance, God is life, contends Berdyayev. God's longing for His other, and His creation of the other, is not a manifestation of divine insufficiency, but precisely a sign of the superabundance of His plenitude and perfection.⁴¹

Now we need to ask, what is the actual attribute of God's perfection? If we understand what divine perfection is this will explain that divine longing does not necessarily entail God's imperfection. The question is related to the point previously made, i.e., that God's need for, and creation of, the human does not involve insufficiency. Divine yearning for his other, it appears, is not a deficiency precisely due to the character of the divine act of creation. God's genuine power and perfection are hidden in the features of His creative act. God's creative act, on the other hand, justifies God's longing for His other, because this action brings into being a very special kind of creature, i.e., the human personality. Due to the very character of the human personality, God's longing for his created other is not a sign of insufficiency, but quite contrary, it is a testimony of His perfection and His freedom. In other words, God's perfection and freedom are in His power to create the human personality.

The question about divine perfection is important for us because it sheds light on Berdyayev's concept of the human person. I shall seek to elucidate what divine perfection is by analyzing God's works. The reason for this is quite simple. Probably the best way to evaluate any personality is by looking into that personality's works.⁴²

⁴⁰ While Greek religion spoke of the ultimate reality as personal, philosophy endeavoured to purify the concept of deity from anthropomorphism. For this purpose, philosophy used the methods of natural theology, deducing the concept of deity from the notion of perfection, since nothing less than perfection is appropriate for God (the method of *theoprepes*). Sanders, *Historical*, 61.

⁴¹ Berdyayev, *Freedom*, 191. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 228.

⁴² According to Berdyayev, personality presupposes an immutable but ever-developing identity. Although a personality is supposed to constantly develop and create itself, each of that personality's manifestations bears a unique and per-

God's perfection should become apparent if we examine his best work. What is God's best creative achievement? Berdyaev's answer is, "[...] the idea of man is the greatest divine idea."⁴³ In stating this, we can establish the third principle of human personality according to Berdyaev. Thirdly : 3) human personality is God's most valuable piece of work. We could even assume that God would have created even more accomplished beings had this been, so to say, "necessary", and not only "necessary", but also "possible".⁴⁴ I shall explain shortly how this daring idea can be justified.

sonal seal. "The form of personality is integral, it is present as a whole in all the acts of personality, personality has a unique and unrepeatable form. Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 23; idem, *Raspoznanie samosti i cheloveka* (Moskva: Hranitel, 2006), 22.

⁴³ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950), 209. Idem, *Samopoznanie* (Moskva: Hranitel, 2007), 263; Berdyaev expresses the same idea in *Freedom and the Spirit*, but due to his poetic and non-systematic way of writing, his outline is less clear. That is, instead of saying that the idea of man is the greatest divine idea, Berdyaev uses the adjective 'primordial' [osnovnaya]: "The primordial divine idea is the idea of man. idem, *Freedom*, 234.

⁴⁴ The standard Patristic view on this issue, with some dissenting voices, is that human nature, due to its dual, bodily and spiritual composition, occupies a lower level than angelic nature. For Greek authors who contend man's superiority to the angels, see among others: Macarius of Egypt, *Homiliae Spirituales* XV.22, 43 (PG 34:449–821); Anastasius of Sinai, *Quaestiones et Responsiones* 78 (PG 89:708A–B); Gregory Palamas, *Capita Physica, Theologica, Moralia et Practica* 63 (PG 150:1165C–D), cited in Georgios Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 19.

However, in *Capita* 27 (PG 150:1140A), Palamas affirms the superiority of angels. See also Kallistos Ware, "The Human Person and the Greek Fathers," in *Persons and Personality*, ed. Arthur Peacocke and Grant Gillett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1987), 216.

Ware observes that it is precisely because of its mixed character that human nature can play the role of a microcosm — uniting the spiritual and bodily realms, and helping to spiritualize the material world. Thus, "if not at the summit of the created order, [human nature] is certainly at the centre." He adds: "An angel does not reflect and hold together in his person the entire creation, and so cannot serve as a microcosm. This is a role fulfilled only by a human. Our human nature, precisely because it is mixed, is more complete than the angelic, and by its greater complexity, it also possesses richer potentialities." Ware, *ibid.*, 200.

According to Berdyaev, the human is the best of God's realizations. Berdyaev also adds that "the primordial idea in man is the idea of God, which is the theme of humanity, just as man is the theme of God."⁴⁵

From these two statements, it follows that out of the entire creation only the human is created in the divine image and likeness. This being so, we have to accept Berdyaev's contention that the human is the greatest divine idea since it would be simply impossible to conceive of anything "greater" than the being created in God's image. Was it "possible" for God to create something more perfect than His image?

Furthermore, the dignity of the human, the significance of *imago Dei*, and consequently the perfection and power of God, are in the human capacity to create the idea of God. This contention needs elucidation. Berdyaev certainly did not mean to say that one creates God in an anthropomorphic way. Berdyaev claims, I argue, that one is capable of producing an "idea" about God that does not diminish divine superabundant perfection, that is, that does not abolish divine transcendence. To "create an idea" about God means moreover that one can cognize God, i.e., that for us God is both transcendent and immanent. This is possible only on the condition that human cognitive faculties are illuminated and that they, in a paradoxical manner, transcend themselves. Berdyaev writes:

Cognizance of God involves a passage through the revolution of consciousness, through spiritual enlightenment that changes the very nature of human reason. The enlightened and illuminated reason is a reason of a different kind, belonging neither to this world nor to this age. God is immanent in the reason when it is enlightened, illuminated, and spiritually integrated."⁴⁶

Arguably, the only criterion by which one might assert human superiority over angels is the capacity to create radical newness. If this capacity belongs uniquely to the human, then — despite his dual nature — man may be placed above the angels.

⁴⁵ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 197. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 234.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 73. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 97.

If we are capable of cognizing God, it follows that Berdyaev does not see *imago Dei* simply as a metaphorical term. The human being is indeed created and yet endowed with the capacity to transcend its createdness. Hence the human is potentially God by grace, that is, designed both as a microcosm and microtheos. If God creates His other who is God by grace, we cannot say that God's longing for His other is a sign of imperfection.

In summary: in seeking to define human freedom, we have looked into divine freedom, i.e., into its archetype without which human liberty is inconceivable. Freedom, holds Berdyaev, is related to infinity and infinite potentialities of spirit.⁴⁷ Infinity exists only in personal form, thus freedom is connected to an infinite personality. Personality, on the other hand, is infinite insofar as it can create infinitely radical newness. Thus Berdyaev defines freedom as the power to create radical ever-newness. In God's case, radical newness *par excellence* is human personality. What are the essential traits of the human personality based on which we see ourselves as microcosms and microtheos? Berdyaev writes, "created beings do not create personality – personality is created only by God,"⁴⁸ which leads us to establish the fourth principle of human personality according to Berdyaev. Fourthly, 4) only God creates personality. In other words, personality is such a mysterious and powerful mode of being that only God can create it. Why is personality such a unique and powerful being? Although human personality cannot create another personality, it has the capacity, argues Berdyaev, to generate hitherto non-existent values, a hitherto non-existent upsurge into truth, goodness and beauty. Human personality can create the super-worldly pleroma or fullness

⁴⁷ "The category of infinity is, for Berdyaev, a symbol of the mystery of existence that refuses to be locked into any closed and finite form, however perfect. The Böhmean symbol of the *Ungrund*, which is the eternal freedom itself, is a symbol of that infinity that transcends all finite forms..." Nikolaus, *Jung*, 115.

⁴⁸ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. D. A. Lowrie, ed. B. Jakim (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 142. Idem, *Smysl tvorchestva: Opyt opravdaniia cheloveka* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1991), 176.

and completeness of being.⁴⁹ Thus only God can create a being that is an existential centre with an inexhaustible and limitless capacity to engender newness. Personality is a living creature that at the bottom of its identity possesses a boundless source of ever-new life.

Moreover, I claim that Berdyaev's fifth principle of human personality is that, fifthly, 5) personality implies identity. Although Berdyaev does not use the term "identity" itself it is apparent that his concept of personality implies it. He writes, for instance, about the "unchanging" in personality, about the "unity" of persona, "personality is the unchanging in change, unity in the manifold."⁵⁰ Berdyaev understands that personality cannot be conceived solely as that which is unchanging or exclusively as that which is changing. However, it is exactly the combination of the two that accounts for the dynamic character of personality.

It strikes us unpleasantly, alike if there is the unchanging in man and not change, and if there is change and not the unchanging; if there is unity and not the manifold, or the manifold and not unity. Both in one case and the other the essential qualitiveness of personality is disclosed.⁵¹

In contrast to Zizioulas, who claims that personality is *schesis* - moreover, that personality is created by *schesis*⁵² - Berdyaev claims that there must be an identity before a relationship; otherwise, there would be no one to create a relationship.⁵³

Personality must construct itself, enrich itself, fill itself with universal content... But for this, it must already exist. There must originally exist that subject which is called upon to construct itself.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, *Meaning*, 143. *Idem*, *Smysl*, 176.

⁵⁰ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 22. *Idem*, *Raspoznanie*, 21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² See Zizioulas, *Communion*, 60–61.

⁵³ Not only Zizioulas, but also the theology of open theism fails to address the issue of identity, both in the divine and the human context. For example, in Pinnock et al., *Openness*, already cited in this chapter, the concept of identity is absent.

Personality is at the beginning of the road and it is only at the end of the road... Personality has a unique, unrepeatable form, *Gestalt*.⁵⁴

By creating human personality, God creates an identity that is different from the identities of the divine Hypostases. I argue that the true character of the divine creation out of nothing is observed in the first place in God's power to engender a radically new identity. God's supreme creation out of nothing is the creation of human personality and identity. The miracle of God's creative act is that He creates living beings with the following features:

a) Although created and dependent upon God, at the same time they are also able to act as autonomous beings, that is, as free and autopoietic (self-making) beings. Berdyaev explains, "personality determines itself from within ... and only determination from within and arising out of freedom, is personality."⁵⁵ Although human personality is created, it possesses the capacity for autonomous self-determination.

b) Despite their created nature, each personality has a unique identity, an identity whose uniqueness can never be eradicated. Berdyaev stresses that "personality is indestructible."⁵⁶ Yet, this does not imply that personality is coeternal with God as if God was not its Creator. Personality can be coeternal with God and still be God's creation because God conceived it out of time. Realized personality always transcends time.

⁵⁴ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 23. Idem, *Raspoznanie*, 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 26. Idem, *Raspoznanie*, 24.

⁵⁶ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 23. Idem, *Raspoznanie*, 22. This is in stark contrast with Zizioulas who, in my opinion, confuses the terms "identity" and "person." Zizioulas concludes that identity can cease to exist: "When you are treated as nature, as a thing, you die as a particular identity. And if your soul is immortal, what is the use? You will exist, but without a personal identity..." Zizioulas, *Communion*, 166. Even if one is treated as a thing it does not follow that one loses one's identity, for how can one lose something that was created and given to him as one's eternal identity? When one is treated as a thing or treats others in the same manner, one's identity is used in a wrong way and is not fulfilled as a personality.

c) Identity is infinite; it could serve as a source of limitless growth and development. “For personality, however, infinity opens out, it enters into infinity, and admits infinity into itself,” writes Berdyaev.⁵⁷

If we apply to God the difference between negative and positive freedom, we shall observe that God is not free merely because He is not determined by any external limitation – which would only be negative freedom – such as pre-existing matter, space or ideas. God is free because He can create the miracle of human personality and identity – and that is positive freedom – which, although created, is also autonomous and endowed with the power to enrich God’s life.⁵⁸

Human identity, despite its createdness, is endowed with autonomy, indestructible uniqueness, and infinity. I argue therefore that according to Berdyaev, God’s freedom is in His capacity to create a microtheos. From God’s idea about humans, we could draw an asymmetrical analogy between divine and human freedom. If divine freedom is in God’s power to create human personality as His “greatest idea”, it follows that human freedom ought to be asymmetrically similar to the divine. Asymmetry in this case is due to our createdness. Due to our createdness, firstly a) one cannot create radically new things without a medium; secondly b) one cannot create another personality. Nevertheless, what one can create is still so fundamentally new that one’s creation enriches divine life. This is what Berdyaev implies when he says that the person is a microtheos.

For Berdyaev, Godmanhood is a primordial religious phenomenon. As a consequence, in theologising, we should start neither from God nor from the creature, but from the God-Man. Thus, the same principle should be applicable in the case of time and eternity. In order to reach the truth about the relation between time and eternity we need to start thinking from theanthropic time-eternity or what Berdyaev

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁸ By “God”, here I mean God in his personal form.

designates as meta-history.⁵⁹ Without such a concept of time, the hypostatic union of the divine nature and the human nature, as well as the idea of Godmanhood is unsustainable.⁶⁰ If Christ was walking amongst us as a human without ceasing to be God, then He must have been living in a theanthropic time-eternity or a meta-history. If Christ has ascended into the Father's bosom both as God and as the perfect Human, then time in the form of theanthropic time-eternity has its place in the Trinity. Since we are created in the divine image and as such are able to participate in the divine life, the creation of the human personality must have taken place in meta-history or theanthropic time-eternity, which are synonyms for the traditional term eternity.⁶¹ We have arrived at the sixth characteristic of human personality: Sixthly: 6) the human was created in theanthropic meta-history or "eternity".

Although in patristic texts we find a description of the person as a microtheos I believe that Berdyaev goes further than the Fathers. This is related to his understanding of the person as the "absolute existential centre", not only in her relation to the world but also in her relation to God.⁶² That which is by the inner logic of its being capable of being the absolute existential centre cannot serve as a means for some higher purpose. Although according to Berdyaev, the existence of human personality is preconditioned by the existence of the divine

⁵⁹ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 211. Berdyaev distinguishes three forms of time: cosmic, historical, and existential. Cosmic time is calculated by mathematics on the basis of movement around the sun; this time is circular. Historical time is divided by mathematics into decades, centuries, and millennia. Since no event in historical time is repeatable, this time is linear. Existential time depends upon our experience and cannot be calculated. It is symbolised by the point and the movement in depth. Existential time is akin to eternity. Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 206–207.

⁶⁰ 'Human historical destiny within time is not closed, but open to the transcendent, which may at any point enter into time. Nowhere is this eruption more dramatic than in the incarnation of the God-Man.' Nicolaus, *Individuation*, 118.

⁶¹ 'But it is absolutely impossible to conceive either of the creation of the world within time or of the end of the world within time. In objectified time there is no beginning, nor is there any end, there is only an endless middle. The beginning and the end are in existential time.' Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 207; idem, *Smysl*, 180.

⁶² Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 26. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 24

Personality, it would be incorrect to claim that God is the person's end and the person merely a means to that end. As Berdyaev says, "man as personality cannot be a means to God as Personality."⁶³

Rather than being consummated in her relationship with God, a human personality stands vis-à-vis God as an inexhaustible and ever-new existential centre.

Human Personality as an Absolute Existential Centre

Berdyaev makes yet another assertion that is seemingly in contradiction with divine supremacy. He claims that the person is "an absolute existential centre." He states, "God exists if man exists. When a man disappears, God will also disappear... Angelus Silesius says, "I know that without me God could not endure for a moment. Were I brought to nought He would yield up the Ghost for lack (of me)."⁶⁴

Renowned contemporary Russian mystic Sophrony Sakharov observes that his death involves the death of everything that his consciousness encompasses, including the Creator Himself. Drawing from his experience Sakharov writes, "the fact that with his [person's] death the whole world, even God, dies is possible only if he, of himself, is in a certain sense the centre of all creation."⁶⁵

We could add that if with our death even God dies, human personality is not only the centre of all creation but stands as such also in her relation to God.

We have arrived at the next feature of human personality according to Berdyaev; seventhly: 7) human personality is the "absolute

⁶³ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 39. Idem, *Rabstvo*, 35.

⁶⁴ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 194. Idem, *Filosofiya*. As I have already argued in the Introduction, one of the meanings of the death of God is the multiplication of life. Intro, 8. God's death implies the descending of the Son of God into the original void of freedom. Berdyaev, *Freedom*. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 165. By descending into meonic freedom, the New Adam empowers and resurrects human nature without acting as nature's determining cause.

⁶⁵ Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 1988), 12–13.

existential centre” of all creation and also in its relation to God. Is this contention in contrast with God’s supreme power? Again, no. Whenever Berdyaev talks about the person as a radical existential centre, he always does so concerning God and not the Godhead. What Berdyaev argues is that, if we die, God also dies, but this does not involve Godhead.⁶⁶ Yet, in the primal void of the divine Nothingness [of Godhead], God and creation, God and man disappear, and even the very antithesis between them vanishes. “Non-existent being is beyond God and differentiation. The distinction between the Creator and creation is not the deepest that exists, for it is eliminated in the divine Nothingness that is no longer God.”⁶⁷

As a summary of the seventh characteristic of human personality, we recall that the “birth” of God, since it takes place in eternity, is a synchronic process resulting from divine Nothingness and primaeval will. The theogonic process also involves cosmogonic and anthropogonic processes; the latter is in fact at the very heart of the theogonic process. Although created, in terms of the inexhaustiveness of her identity, the person becomes an equal dialogical partner with God. As such, the person stands before God as another existential centre over whose freedom God has no power. The creature experiences herself as an existential centre with whose death everything, including God, dies.⁶⁸

These seven features of human personality are not everything that Berdyaev has to say about the question of human freedom. These seven characteristics are the seven layers of personality intertwined in mutual interaction. They make possible the full realization of human freedom. Nonetheless, one actualizes the completeness of one’s

⁶⁶ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 194. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 291.

Nikolaus, *Individuation*, 125.

⁶⁷ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 194. Using Whitehead’s terminology, this would mean that in the divine Nothingness the antithesis between God’s conceptual nature and derivative nature disappears.

⁶⁸ Every man is potentially ομφαλός or umbilical of the world. Alfred K. Siewers, *Strange Beauty; Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 43.

freedom only when one “activates” the final trait of his personality. Berdyaev writes that due to the created identity’s infinity, the person is capable of limitless growth. Limitless growth is thus another key feature of human personality according to Berdyaev; eighthly: “Man is a being who surmounts and transcends himself. The realization of personality in man is this continuous transcending of self.”⁶⁹

The eighth attribute is closely linked to Berdyaev’s definition of freedom as the power to create radical newness. If we agree with this understanding of freedom, it follows that the human active - and mutually enriching - interaction with God is the crown of our freedom. This is why for Berdyaev the highest form of freedom is the “freedom” of the eighth day of creation. “God expects from man the highest freedom, the freedom of the eighth day of creation...”⁷⁰

Conclusion

For Berdyaev the only genuine theodicy is contingent upon anthropodicy. The true “defense” of the human is the apology of human freedom. And one is free only if one can enrich the divine life. Thus Berdyaev defines freedom as the power to create radical newness.

In searching for the foundation of human freedom, Berdyaev borrows the concept of the *Ungrund* from the German mystic Jacob Böhme. However, unlike Böhme, Berdyaev places the *Ungrund* “outside” of God. The *Ungrund* is positioned “outside” of God but this is because it is regarded as God’s nature. Since this kind of freedom is not controlled by God Berdyaev calls it uncreated or meonic freedom. The existence of uncreated freedom is the first precondition of genuine human freedom and personality.

Based on meonic freedom Berdyaev builds his theory of human personality. Despite Berdyaev’s unsystematic presentation of the topic, the eight essential characteristics of human personality can be derived. Each of the eight features provides a certain quality crucial for

⁶⁹ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 29. Idem, *Rabstvye*, 26.

⁷⁰ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 158. Idem, *Smysl*, 191.

the fulfilment of human freedom. The main features are: 1) There is a parallel between the origination of the Son and the Spirit and the creation of human personality. Theogony implies anthropogony. 2) God is in “need” of man. The conventional concept of Creation has to be rejected. 3) Human personality is God’s most valuable creation, more valuable even than that of the angels. 4) Although the person can create radical novum, only God can create personality. 5) Personality is not simply a relationship but implies identity. Identity is infinite. Without an identity, there would be no one to create a relationship. 6) Personality was not created in what is conventionally called time but in meta-history or theandric time-eternity. 7) Personality is the supreme existential centre not only vis-à-vis creation but also concerning God. 8) Personality is the continuous transcending of oneself according to the uniqueness of one’s identity; personality ought to be unique and not comply with rules. God wants human beings to participate in the continuous creation of the world. Each personality is capable of bringing forth radical uniqueness and thus bringing newness to the divine life. This is the task that God expects from each human being.

C. G. Jung and the Notion of Human Personality

Unlike the first part of the essay, the second one will not try to give an extensive analysis of Jung’s concept of the person (which, just like Berdyaev’s, is rather complex). Instead, it will focus on what we believe is, in Jung’s view, the most important quality of human personality. Berdyaev talks about this feature when he argues that the person is a part of the inner life of the Divine Being.⁷¹ In other words, the life of God is ontologically united with the life of the human being.⁷²

⁷¹ Idem, *Freedom*, 190. Idem, *Filosofiya*, 227.

⁷² It should be stressed right from the start that Jung never attempts in making an intrusion into the sphere of metaphysics. As a psychologist, what he has in mind when speaking about “God” is, in fact, the archetype of God or “God-image”. See for example *Jung on Christianity*, selected and introduced by Murray Stein, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1999), 103.

Jung's book *Answer to Job*⁷³ represents probably the clearest example of this conclusion. Unlike Berdyaev, however, Jung is keen not only to discern a person's exact capacity that makes it valuable for God but also to show in what way is God precisely being transformed depending on the person's reactions. One could argue that in this respect if compared to Jung, Berdyaev's thought remains somewhat abstract. Berdyaev certainly believed that there is a strong interdependence between God and human beings and that, moreover, God expects humans to continue the creation of the world. However, unlike Jung, when talking about God he never uses a term similar to "transformation";⁷⁴ neither he speaks about divine "individuation" as a result of human behaviour.⁷⁵ Thus, firstly, we shall focus on the most important asset of the human person, an asset that makes the person so precious to God. Secondly, we shall follow the actual act of God's transformation as it is provoked by Job's reactions.

Job and the superior knowledge of God

As we remember from the Old Testament story, Job is responding to God's "dark deeds" that, in quick succession, follow one another: robbery, murder, bodily injury with premeditation, and denial of a fair trial.⁷⁶ Jung, therefore, wonders if there could be a deeper motive for Yahweh's conduct, "some secret resistance against Job."⁷⁷

It is just possible that something in this background will gradually begin to take shape as compensation for Job's undeserved suffering – something to which Yahweh, even if he had only a faint inkling

⁷³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Answer to Job*, translated by R. F. C. Hull (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 87.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Edward F. Edinger, *The New God-Image: A Study of Jung's Key Letters Concerning the Evolution of the Western God-Image* (Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications, 1996), 81.

⁷⁵ "(...) The life of Christ represents the process of individuation." Edward F. Edinger, *The Christian Archetype; A Jungian Commentary on the Life of Christ*, (Inner City Books, Toronto, 1997), 15.

⁷⁶ Bishop, *Jung's*, 96.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

of it, could hardly remain indifferent. Without Yahweh's knowledge and contrary to his intentions, the tormented though guiltless Job had secretly been lifted to a superior knowledge of God which God himself did not possess.⁷⁸

We understand that Job has a "superior knowledge" of God, a knowledge that even God himself did not possess. The superior knowledge Jung has in mind is Job's capacity to see God's "back", i.e., a region in the divine being unapproachable for God. Consequently, if God cannot see his "back", this means that He is only partly aware of his nature. God, therefore, is mainly unconscious.⁷⁹ "If the Creator were conscious of Himself, he would not need conscious creatures..."⁸⁰

On the other hand, due to his moral behaviour – his undeserved suffering and long endurance – Job is privileged to see God's back. This is something that has never happened before in the history of the world. Both for Yahweh and Job it is crucial to be aware of God's dark side since this could give us a glimpse into the mystery of the origin of evil.

A mortal man is raised by his moral behaviour above the stars in heaven, from which position of the advantage he can behold the back of Yahweh, the abysmal world of "shards".⁸¹

To behold Yahweh's back or the "abysmal world of 'shards'" means to see God's inner antinomy. In the later cabalistic philosophy, the "shards" are ten counterpoles to the ten *sefiroth*, which are the ten stages in the revelation of God's power. Shards represent the forces of evil and darkness, which have a separate and real existence.⁸² Yahweh is unjustly treating Job because humanity possesses the only thing that God does not: *consciousness*. God sees Himself through

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Edinger, *New*, 88.

⁸⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, *Dreams, Memories, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Fontana Press, London, 1995), 371.

⁸¹ Jung, *Answer*, 22.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 22 n8.

the eyes of human consciousness and this is the only way He can become acquainted with his “shadow” (to use the vocabulary of analytic psychology). The situation is not an easy one. God realizes what power is hidden in consciousness, but at the same time, he is trying to hide Job from himself. He is afraid of encountering his dark side and wishes to remain unconscious.

Privatio boni and the reality of evil

In Jung’s understanding, evil is not an “absence of good”. Evil is ontologically real, it belongs to God’s unconscious and dark side. Jung explicitly rejects the doctrine of *privatio boni*. For him, “evil is as real as good, God is as dark as He/She is light, and the doctrine of evil as *privatio boni* is a convenient rationalisation of the ego-dominated Christian theological tradition.”⁸³ While calling Goethe a “prophet” because he was aware of evil’s universal power, he could not forgive him for having dismissed Mephistopheles “by a bit of jiggery-pokery”. “For me, that was too theological, too frivolous and irresponsible, and I was deeply sorry that Goethe too had fallen for those cunning devices by which evil is rendered innocuous.”⁸⁴

Jung does not want to fall for “cunning devices” of this kind. For him, the split in God’s wholeness is unquestionable.

Nothing can take away from the concept of divine wholeness. But unbeknownst to all, a splitting of that wholeness ensued; there emerged a realm of light and a realm of darkness. This outcome, even before Christ appeared, was prefigured, as we may observe *inter alia* in the experience of Job or the widely disseminated Book of Enoch... In Christianity, too, this metaphysical split was perpetuated: Satan, who in the Old Testament still belonged to the intimate entourage of Yahweh, now formed the diametrical and eternal opposite of the divine world. He could not be uprooted.⁸⁵

⁸³ Jung, *Christianity*, pp.14-15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁵ Jung, *Memories*, 365.

Jung maintained that theology does not take the reality of the unconscious seriously enough and in this sense it is irreverent.⁸⁶ One might add that theology behaves like Yahweh, who wishes to remain unconscious.⁸⁷ Jung sees theological doctrines and rituals as the products of the “ego’s understanding”, which means they are rationalization of the original religious experiences. Original religious experiences, on the other hand, are an eruption of the unconscious. Jung believed that the raw data from the unconscious – dreams, visions, and synchronicities – are more likely to give a real picture of God than theology. This is also valid for the so-called “heretical” teachings, which are repressed thoughts representing the ego’s “shadow” and “personal unconscious”. “Absolute dogmas” only betray one-sidedness and defensiveness, acting as a barrier against the further eruption of the unconscious in the form of new revelations. It follows, oddly enough, that while connecting them to those aspects of God that are safe and controllable, *religions protect people from God*.⁸⁸ Jung stresses that as long as one is harboured within a church or a set

⁸⁶ Idem, *Christianity*, 16. In this sense, theology seems to be representative of the contemporary cultural consciousness, which “has not yet absorbed into its general philosophy the idea of the unconscious and all that it means, even though modern man has been confronted with this idea for more than half a century. The assimilation of the fundamental insight that psychic life has two poles still remains a task for the future.” Idem, *Memories*, 193.

⁸⁷ Although Berdyaev does not embrace the doctrine of *privatio boni* in its classical interpretation, his view of the origin of evil differs from Jung’s. Berdyaev is trying to avoid both monism and dualism. Monism, explains Berdyaev, must end in the denial of evil, whereas dualism sees the origin of evil in another being existing side by side with the divine. A logical dualism has to admit the existence of an evil deity. According to dualistic theories, evil has an independent and ontological source. In monism evil finally disappears whilst in dualism, it appears as a force apart from God. The origin of evil, Berdyaev stresses, is hidden in the unfathomable irrationality of freedom, in pure possibility. But when Berdyaev claims that evil “has no ontological ground” he is not advocating a theory similar to *privatio boni*. He is trying to say that evil originates in the *Ungrund* that in itself conceals the possibility both of evil and good. Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 164–165. We shall devote a separate study to the comparative analysis of the origin of evil in the works of these two thinkers.

⁸⁸ Jung, *Christianity*, 16.

of doctrines one is spared the dangers of the unmediated religious experience. As Edinger argues, the development of the Church serves to protect the individual from the assault of a personal encounter with the *numinosum*. The Church does not expect - and seems to *a priori* reject - any new or individual revelations.⁸⁹ Jung explains:

The man who is not particularly bold... will... thank God that the Holy Spirit does not concern himself with us overmuch. One feels much safer under the shadow of the Church, which serves as a fortress to protect us against God and his Spirit. It is very comforting to be assured by the Catholic Church that it "possesses" the Spirit...⁹⁰

When Jung, therefore, speaks about "consciousness" what he has in mind is not just a simple self-awareness. Consciousness is vital because it penetrates the darkness of the unconscious. It gives us an unfiltered and non-refined image of God's antinomical nature with evil as a real, ontological threat. So to answer the question "whence evil" one would need to become aware that God is only - partially conscious.⁹¹

This age-old question [whence evil] is not answered unless you assume the existence of a [supreme] being *who is in the main unconscious*. (...) Such a model would explain *why God has created a man* gifted with *consciousness* and why He seeks His goal in him.⁹²

This old question, Jung contends, has been given no answer by the Christian world, while Origen's thoughtful suggestion of a possible redemption of the devil was rejected as a heresy. And today, "we

⁸⁹ Edinger, *Jungian*, 128. Karl Barth, the Swiss Calvinist theologian believed, similarly to Jung, that God is autonomous and free. "But for Barth, the Biblical revelation is final and complete. For Jung, ever the psychologist, much of the God-image is still unconscious and will be further revealed as time goes on." Jung, *Christianity*, 11.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Edinger, *Christian*, 129.

⁹¹ Quoted in Edinger, *Edinger*, *New*, 88. Berdyaev might agree with Jung on this point as long as it is stated not that God is unconscious but that, in the form of the Ungrund, God has an unconscious part. In other words, God is conscious that there is an unconscious part of his being.

⁹² Edinger, *New*, 88.

are compelled to meet that question; but we stand empty-handed, bewildered, and perplexed...⁹³

So firstly, consciousness is the power to behold the uncensored image of God; secondly, it is courage not to dismiss the reality of evil by some “jiggery-pokery” theological trick. Consciousness in this sense is directly related to the process of individuation.

Personality and individuation

As soon as one falls out of the limits of a conventional religious myth, one becomes a candidate for individuation.⁹⁴ Individuation is a process that takes place when one becomes conscious – and ready to accept – the mutability of God’s being and the ensuing possibility of new revelations. God as a *coincidentia oppositorum* – a dialectical union of consciousness and unconscious – is unpredictable.

The Word happens to us: we suffer it, for we are victims of a profound uncertainty: with God as *complexio oppositorum*, all things are possible, in the fullest meaning of the phrase. Truth and delusion, good and evil, are equally possible.⁹⁵

Created in God’s image, each one of us is similarly unpredictable.⁹⁶ Being so, we can also expect new revelations and radical turnovers in our lives. This, furthermore, means that progress on the path of individuation requires abandoning collective dogmas and, following Kant’s dictum, taking responsibility for one’s unique path and understanding. Edinger contends that “betrayal” is a theme of individuation because it is related to the phenomenology of the opposites.

Loyalty and betrayal are a pair of opposites. Loyalty to the future may require betrayal of the past or vice versa. In a sense, Christ

⁹³ Jung, *Memories*, 365. For Jung’s extensive dealing with the problem of the origin of evil, see idem, *Christianity*, especially pages 79-110.

⁹⁴ Edinger, *Christian*, 15.

⁹⁵ Jung, *Memories*, 373.

⁹⁶ “The *complexio oppositorum* of the God-image thus enters into man, and not as unity, but as conflict, the dark half of the image coming into opposition with the accepted view that God is “Light”. Jung, *Memories*, 366.

betrayed his collective Jewish heritage. *He was a heretic and therefore was punished as a traitor. This corresponds to the psychological fact that at a certain stage of development the individual may be obliged to betray collective loyalties to achieve individuation.* Later, the fruits of the “crime” may become a contribution to the collective.⁹⁷

We cannot receive the Holy Spirit unless we have accepted our individual life as Christ accepted his, including his loyalty to the future and a betrayal of the past – his being a “heretic”. Paul’s life followed the same pattern. An unexpected experience transpired to him while he was blindly pursuing his way of being loyal to the past. Jung regarded Paul’s path as a model for his own life.

As a young man, I concluded that you must obviously fulfil your destiny to get to the point where a *donum gratiae* might happen along. But I was far from certain, and always kept the possibility in mind that on this road I might end up in a black hole. I have remained true to this attitude all my life.⁹⁸

Like Christ, we become the “sons of God” fated to experience the conflict of the divine opposites represented by the crucifixion.⁹⁹ Receiving the Holy Spirit, Jung emphasised multiple times, requires not only something more than obedience to the Church but rather something the opposite. Receiving the Holy Spirit for him is a highly revolutionary fact which cannot take place until the ambivalent nature of the Father [and the similar nature of the human being] is recognized.¹⁰⁰ So when one walks the path of individuation, that is, when one lives one’s own life, one must take mistakes into a bargain.

⁹⁷ Edinger, *Christian*, pp. 82-83. (emphasis mine).

⁹⁸ Jung, *Christianity*, 61.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Edinger, *Christian*, 130. *Imitatio Christi*, as Jung understands it, is not about the literal imitation of Christ but the following of one’s unique path. However, “historical trends led to the *imitatio Christi*, whereby the individual does not pursue his destined road to wholeness but attempts to imitate the way taken by Christ.... That Buddha should have become a model to be imitated was in itself a weakening of his idea, *Imitatio Christi* was a forerunner of the fateful stasis in the evolution of the Christian idea.” Jung, *Memories*, 310. To “imitate Christ” in fact means to accept that we are all “gods” capable of creating a new world. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Edinger, *Christian*, 130.

There is no guarantee – not for a single moment – that we will not fall into error or stumble into deadly peril. We may think there is a sure road. But that would be a road to death. Then nothing happens any longer – at any rate, not the right things. Anyone who takes the sure road is as good as dead.¹⁰¹

Berdyaev would no doubt concur with Jung that “anyone who takes the sure road is as good as dead”, which is apparent from his encouraging the “virtue of living dangerously”.¹⁰² He deems that one cannot see the Coming Christ – which is tantamount to receiving the gift of grace – unless one reveals in himself “the creative image of man”. This “creative image” obviously corresponds to Jung’s process of individuation in which, by betraying the past, one searches for a still-non-existing future. It comes therefore as no surprise that one aspect of Berdyaev’s thought is described as a “spirituality of individuation”, which underlines the uniqueness of each person’s path. Creativity demands its form of asceticism and implies resistance to the subjection to collective norms: “It is concerned with finding what it is that I and only I can give to the world.”¹⁰³

Individuation is loyalty or, more precisely, “obedience” to one’s uniqueness. Individuation is obedience to being disobedient. To be unique means not to be ontologically determined, i.e., to have the power of absolute self-determination. This is conceivable only if God is imagined not as the *prima causa* or the *Summum Bonum*, but as the *coincidentia oppositorum*, a union of the conscious and the unconscious with whom everything, truth and delusion, good and evil, are possible. To be brave essentially means to leave safe harbours of conventional doctrines and to fearlessly derive all inevitable conclusions from the encounter with God’s dark side. Berdyaev stresses:

The Coming Christ will never appear to him who by his free effort has not revealed within himself... the creative image of man. Only the courage of free creativity will bring man to the Coming

¹⁰¹ Jung, *Memories*, 328.

¹⁰² Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 107.

¹⁰³ Nicolaus, *Individuation*, 153.

Christ... And if great obedience is needed for redemption, for creativeness there is needed great courage... In the spirit of obedience, we shall always see only Christ Crucified, only His aspect of Redeemer. We need the sacrifice of valour, the heroic courage to cast loose from all safe harbours. We must have the virtue of living dangerously... In this fearful freedom lies all the god-like dignity of man, and his dread responsibility. The virtue of accepting a dangerous position, the virtue of daring to do, is the basic virtue of the creative epoch. Only he who possesses these virtues will vision the Coming Christ: only to him will the mighty and glorified Christ come.¹⁰⁴

“To sail away from safe shores towards an unknown and yet undiscovered continent from which no helping hands reach out”¹⁰⁵ is what God, indeed, requires from us. Berdyaev stresses that the Coming Christ will reveal His creative mystery only to the one who himself does daring acts of creativity.¹⁰⁶ There should be a transfer of the religious centre of gravity from the clerically-protective to the prophetically-creative. In his view, not only Christian priesthood, but Christian prophecy must become life. A prophetic attitude cannot be an experience of passive expectations but of creative striving. We cannot passively await the coming of Christ, we must go toward Him. “The desire and expectation that God Himself should create what man ought to create is impious and displeasing to God.”¹⁰⁷

Although Berdyaev underscores that the passive religious consciousness is displeasing to God, he is not being unequivocal as to whether human activity is needed - and if it is, in what measure - for the transformation of God. Possibly only due to Berdyaev's syntax, but we have an impression that God evolves independently of his creature. Despite human actions, it is God who is revealing His creative mystery. On the one hand, Berdyaev stresses human activity: the coming

¹⁰⁴ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 108.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* “In his trial of human courage, God refuses to abide by traditions, no matter how sacred. In His omnipotence, He will see to it that nothing really evil comes of such tests of courage.” Jung, *Memories*, 57.

¹⁰⁶ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 108.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 335.

of Christ is connected with man's creative act; on the other hand, however, man is portrayed as a passive receptor of God's revelation: "Christ will never come in power and glory to men who are not creatively active – they will never see the second face of Christ: He will eternally turn toward them His crucified, tortured, and sacrificing face."¹⁰⁸

Nonetheless, Jung's description of the divine-human relationship is unambiguous: Job is the cause of God's transformation and, in this sense, it follows that *human is superior to Yahweh*. That this is so is confirmed by Yahweh's decision to incarnate as a human.

We remember that the only thing that is in humanity's possession, which God does not have, is *consciousness*. It is due to his consciousness that Job stands morally higher than Yahweh and that the creature has surpassed the Creator.

The creator sees himself through the eyes of man's consciousness and this is the reason why God had to become man, and why man is progressively gifted with the dangerous prerogative of the divine "mind".¹⁰⁹

Yahweh, therefore, chooses to raise himself above his earlier primitive level of consciousness. He does so by straightforwardly recognizing that man Job is morally higher than him and that therefore he has to catch up and become human himself.¹¹⁰ As Jung explains, Yahweh must become a man because he has done a man wrong.

He, the guardian of justice knows that every wrong must be expiated... Because his creature has surpassed him he must regenerate himself.¹¹¹

Contrary to the conventional interpretation of the Incarnation, it is Yahweh who needs to be atoned. By not yielding before the dreadful vision of Yahweh's dark side and by firmly believing in his innocence, Job provoked the birth of consciousness in Yahweh and Yahweh's decision to become human. Having become conscious, Yahweh realized that He has treated Job unfairly. Now, by incarnating

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Edinger, *New*, 88.

¹¹⁰ Bishop, *Jung's*, 52.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

He intends to regenerate Himself. Therefore, the raise and the differentiation of consciousness in Yahweh, for which He is indebted to Job, is the direct cause of the Incarnation.

Here we see a feature of the human person that does not figure in the work of Berdyaev, the feature that nevertheless could be considered as the ninth trait of the person. Thus, 9) due to the power of consciousness – or the dangerous prerogative of the divine “mind” – *the person is superior to the Creator*. Jung maintained that the human mind is a second world-creator,¹¹² to which we could add that the mind is also the God-creator.¹¹³ As he puts it concisely, if the Creator were conscious of Himself, He would not need conscious creatures.¹¹⁴ Therefore, “the meaning of... the service which man can render to God, [is] that light may emerge from the darkness, that the Creator may become conscious of His creation, and man conscious of himself.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² Jung, *Memories*, 371. See also, “Now I knew ... that man is indispensable for the completion of creation; that he is the second creator of the world, who alone has given to the world its objective existence, without which ... it would have gone on in the most profound night of non-being down to its unknown end. Human consciousness created objective existence and meaning, and man found his indispensable place in the great process of being.” *Ibid.*, 285.

Jung also uses the expression “the second cosmogony”. *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Jung contended that the main human task is to become conscious of the contents that press upwards from the unconscious, which he identifies with God’s abysmal world of shards (“When I do use such mythic language, I am aware that ‘mana’, ‘daimon’, and ‘God’ are synonyms for the unconscious”. *Ibid.*, 369.) Human destiny – for which Job is an excellent example – is to create more and more consciousness. By being courageous to behold Yahweh’s dark side, Job kindled a light in the divine darkness, forcing Yahweh to become aware of his ambivalent nature and eventually to incarnate as a human. “As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being. It may even be assumed that *just as the unconscious affects us, the increase in our consciousness affects the unconscious.*” *Ibid.*, 358. (emphasis mine). Similarly to Job who dared to see God’s back, Jung was brave enough to allow into his consciousness the vision of God who, in a bizarre and terrifying way, destroyed the Basel cathedral. See *Ibid.*, 56. “Why did God befoul His cathedral? That, for me, was a terrible thought. But then came the dim understanding that God could be something terrible. I have experienced a dark and terrible secret.” *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 371.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

Conclusion

As already stated, although it was depicted as a “spirituality of individuation”, Berdyaev’s theology remains equivocal when it comes to understanding the inner process of God’s transformation, the transformation which is related to His relationship with humans. Berdyaev’s wording leaves us with the impression that God evolves, but He does this independently from His creature. Finally, unlike Jung, Berdyaev never attempts to scrutinize some of the episodes either from the Old or the New Testament that would be an example of God’s individuation.

We may or may not agree with Jung’s conclusions. Berdyaev most probably would not feel comfortable, for example, with Jung’s claim that Yahweh was mainly unconscious, and he would certainly disagree with the ontological status that Jung ascribes to evil. There is no doubt that most Orthodox thinkers and believers would certainly reject some of Jung’s most important claims as sheer profanity. However, what cannot be denied is that the Swiss psychiatrist gives us a meticulous description of God’s evolution. Again, Jung is explicit that his approach is purely psychoanalytic and that his conclusions should not be taken as metaphysical statements. Could we, perhaps, if only for a very brief moment, be so bold as to entertain the possibility that Jung’s loyalty to Kant’s postulate about the unknowability of things-in-themselves is a likely contribution to theological methodology? Perhaps Jung believed that there is no unbridgeable chasm between the transcendent and immanent? What Jung is telling us is that we should start using psychological material – dreams, visions, and revelations – as precious evidence of what we can know about God. Jung warns us that theology does not take the unconscious seriously, to which we could add - *any longer*: theology does not take the unconscious seriously *any longer*. That it used to consider it seriously we know very well, for example, from the heavenly visits and dreams, revelations and visions of the Old Testament Patriarchs and prophets. However, while we consider their experiences as *revelations* – as

trustworthy sources of theologizing – today we don't permit the possibility of new revelations. This is because we believe in a precarious idea of the *actus purus*, of God who is revealed in His totality and has no more messages for humankind. But, even if we agreed that God's capacity for new revelations is not exhausted, we would still hesitate to consider today's sages and prophets as reliable witnesses for theology. That the spirit of Enlightenment dwelt in Berdyaev is clear from his conviction that the philosophers of German idealism are today's Holy Fathers. There are no "objective" revelations, stresses Berdyaev, adding that every revelation is a revelation to a *particular* person.

We deem that the people of the olden times are better than us – although the reliability of their authority rested largely upon the attestations of something so evasive as miracles! - that they are the only ones infallible while we are everything opposite. But this unfortunate idea paralyzes our thinking because it radically denies its legitimacy, which inevitably includes also the validity of the conclusion that the ancients are more reliable than us. So, we are caught in a *circulus vitiosus*. Perhaps we'd better altogether abandon thinking, and let time show us the truth?

That would be a grave mistake. Because, there is no such thing as "time" concluding. In Berdyaev's words, this is a naïve realism. Finally, Berdyaev insists: the person is not in time, but time is in the person. It is always a *particular* person making a valiant step towards making deductions, following Kant's dictum – *sapere aude!*

Abbreviations

Anast. Quaest.

CCSG

Gregor. Capit.

In Ezech.

Macar. Aeg. Hom.

PG

5. Outside of God: A Theanthropic Scrutiny of Nietzsche's Concept of Chaos and Berdyaev's Notion of the *Ungrund*

Nietzsche is the forerunner of a new religious anthropology. Through Nietzsche the new humanity moves out of godless humanism to divine humanism, to a Christian anthropology. Nietzsche is an instinctive prophet of the religious renaissance of the west.

- N. Berdyaev

In this paper I shall critically examine and compare Nietzsche's concept of chaos and Berdyaev's notion of the *Ungrund*, bearing in mind the ontological problem of human freedom in the context of the 'God after metaphysics' debate. Given the immense role the issue of liberty has played in the history of philosophy, it is surprising, lamented Paul Tillich, how little ontological investigation into the meaning of freedom is carried out by modern thinkers.¹

Nietzsche and Berdyaev introduced their respective concepts in trying to overcome the impasse of onto-theology caused by the view of God as *actus purus*. Chaos and the *Ungrund* stand for the idea of the *posse* reintroduced in our days by Richard Kearney. The primary cause of onto-theology, for Kearney, is the classic metaphysical tendency to subordinate the possible (*posse*) to the actual (*esse*).² I identify *posse* with Godhead, which is the first principle in God, the 'unapproachable intensity of his being' and the 'inexhaustible ground' from which everything originates. During the past centuries, rationalism has deprived God of this first principle. 'The power of the Godhead has disappeared'.³

¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Digswell Place: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd, 1968), 202.

² Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1.

³ Tillich, *Systematic*, 278.

But how does the posse as the inexhaustible ground manifest itself? If God-actus purus is fully actualised, then God-posse must be the infinite actualisation. 'The nature of life is actualisation, not actuality'.⁴ Life is the infinite actualisation of the inexhaustible ground. The ground is limitless because it is an abyss of potency or newness, which God could never domesticate. The principal trait of God's potency is that it allows for the creation of a living creature, and the creature is living insofar as it continues the augmentation of being. God is alive insofar as he can create the living being. God is posse because he can create the being capable of enriching him. Berdyaev reminds us that valuable theodicy depends on the ontological anthropodicy.

The old doctrine according to which God created man and the world, having in no respect any need of them and creating them only for His own glory, ought to be abandoned as a servile doctrine which deprives the life of man and the world of all meaning.⁵

The overcoming of onto-theology, therefore, requires a the-anthropic hermeneutical method. I have coined this expression drawing on Berdyaev's idea of God-humanity. This idea suggests that our philosophising should start neither from God nor the human being but the vision of God-humanity. Onto-theological thinking takes for granted a misbalance between the importance given to God and the human being. However, as Heidegger noted, 'one being always keeps coming to the fore in this questioning: the human beings who pose this question.'⁶

⁴ *Ibid.*, 272. Philosophers who hate the idea of Becoming are, in Nietzsche's words, 'monotono-theists'. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Antony M. Ludovici (London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2007), 17.

⁵ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Divine and the Human* (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2008), 7; idem, *Ekzistencialnaya dialektika bozhestvennogo i chelovecheskogo* (Moskva: Astrel, 2010), 360; Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Darmstadt: Otto Reichel Verlag, 1930), 11.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 4. See also Emmanuel

Nietzsche's ideas of freedom and chaos

For Levinas, Ricoeur, and Derrida, the totalitarian ontology that proceeds from the notion of God as *actus purus* is one of the leading causes of atheism.⁷ God's all-embracing causation means that the otherness of the 'I' is fused with the Totality of Being and, ontologically speaking, the creation of the world cannot be justified.⁸

So the 'Christian theme' by which Nietzsche was 'wounded'⁹ was the literal interpretation of divine omnipotence that eliminates human otherness. Berdyaev stresses that Nietzsche detested God because he believed that if God exists, human creativity is impossible. Nietzsche, indeed, exclaims, 'Away from God and gods this will lure me; what would there be to create, after all, if there were gods?'¹⁰ Berdyaev approved of Nietzsche's critique of the idea of transcendental infinity, demonstrating, however, that Nietzsche was incapable of imagining a union of the uncreated and created in which the latter not only would not be devaluated but would possess the power to enlarge the former.¹¹

Ontological freedom, as explained by John Zizioulas, ought to be distinguished from the freedom of will. Freedom is the question of

Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 38.

⁷ Kearney, *God*, 168.

⁸ Richard Kearney, "Returning to God after God: Levinas, Derrida, Ricoeur," *Research in Phenomenology* (2009): 174; Paul Ricoeur, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: Continuum, 2007), 49.

⁹ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, trans. R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 42.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 179. Paul Ricoeur also believed that the 'death of God' for Nietzsche signified the death of the God of onto-theology. Kearney, *Returning*, 173. Not only did Nietzsche detest God, but he also cursed the good and the righteous because they hate those who create. Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. D. A. Lowrie, ed. B. Jakim (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 171; idem, *Smysl tvorchestva: Opyt opravdaniia cheloveka* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1991), 122.

ontology or 'freedom is to be other in an absolute sense'.¹² Nietzsche, while using different vocabulary, also believed in the ontological character of liberty. Freedom, for Nietzsche, is one's undetermined otherness. Deleuze writes that, according to Nietzsche, what one will want is to affirm its difference. There is a pleasure in knowing that we are different; difference produces enjoyment.¹³

Nietzsche argued that divinities should be able to engender their own opposites out of themselves.¹⁴ He understands nature as chaos, but chaos is the freedom that is abounding with subjectivities and wills: 'every centre of force adopts a perspective toward the entire remainder, i.e., its own particular valuation, mode of action, and mode of resistance'. The organic world, for Nietzsche, 'is the interviewing of beings with invented little worlds about them: in that they impose upon outer experience their power, their desire, their habits as their external world'.¹⁵ Furthermore, 'every centre of force [in nature]—and not only man—construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint'.¹⁶ This is what is usually called Nietzsche's perspectivalism. To see the nature 'from the inside', in a disinterested Kantian sense, and not from the perspective of our interest, would be to construct the object subjectively—to see as subject what traditional metaphysics has always viewed as an object.¹⁷

Everything in nature, and the human being in particular, is a subject that invents its 'little world', projecting its subjectivity and will as its 'external world'. Freedom is here regarded as the power of subjectivity to break the necessity of the given world by creating a

¹² J. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 39.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Quadrige/PUF, 6^e édition 2010), 10.

¹⁴ Babette E. Babich, 'Nietzsche's Chaos Sive Natura: Evening Gold and the Dancing Star', *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 57 (2001): 229.

¹⁵ Cited in Babich, 234.

¹⁶ Cited in Babich, 235.

¹⁷ Babich, *Chaos*, 239.

new world.¹⁸ The essence of every being is what Nietzsche famously named ‘the will to power’.¹⁹ Nietzsche’s philosophy inaugurates the problem of creativity as the defining trait of the modernity. It creates a rupture in the cultural history of the West by giving new status to the human being, who now from the creature becomes the creator.²⁰

Defining chaos

If there were gods, there would be nothing for us to create, asserts Nietzsche, rejecting God and introducing chaos. The primary role of chaos is to allow for unencumbered human creativity. ‘I tell you,’ says Zarathustra, ‘one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.’²¹ Some authors suggest that we should understand Nietzsche’s chaos in the archaic Greek sense as *physis*: that which brings forth of out of itself. Since Nietzsche identifies chaos with nature, the meaning of chaos might also be self-generative nature or ‘she who will be born, she who will bear.’²²

¹⁸ Freedom to be other, for Zizioulas, ‘involves the tendency to create a world other than the given one, that is, to bring about otherness in the radically ontological sense of the emergence of new identities bearing the seal of the lover’s or the creator’s personhood. This is expressed in art when it is not a mere copy of reality, and it is a distinctive characteristic of the human beings in creation.’ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 40. See also John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, ed. Luke Ben Tallon (London / New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 135–36. Italics mine.

¹⁹ Marie-Alix de Solages, ‘Nietzsche et Berdiaev,’ *Revue Contact* 41, no. 147 (1987): 162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra; Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, eds. (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 1980), Prologue, 5.

²² Babich, *Chaos*, 227–228. In Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche, argues Babich, chaos is taken in its contemporary sense as impotent confusion. Indeed, Heidegger does say that Nietzsche understands the word chaos not in the primordial Greek sense, but in the later and in particular modern sense. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 3, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. David Farrell Krell, Frank A. Capuzzi, and Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 77. However, Heidegger

Jean Granier stresses that nature, as chaotic being, should not be identified with an intelligible being or with a cosmos. Nature is not a book written by a superior intelligence, but it is merely chaos in the Greek sense of the word. Nietzsche rejects nature as the book of God because he sees it as a fixed manuscript to which we could not add anything. But if nature is not divine creation, how should we understand it? Granier tells us that for the Greek gods, the world or the phenomena dissimulated what their manifestation because what they (i.e., the world and the phenomena) manifested was the most terrible (that is, chaos. Nietzsche suggests that the real constitution of things might be so hostile towards life that we needed to create a mask to be able to live). This masking Nietzsche calls art. The naïveté of the Greeks was in their determination to interpret the text of chaos in such a way that its absurdity appears as beauty. Truth, therefore, is what is most terrible. It defines the chaotic being of bottomless depth. To continue living despite that fact, the profound person must embrace the intentional superficiality, the naïveté that characterised the Greeks. Life and art are synonyms for the single creative act of ordering chaos, of stabilising becoming.²³

In contrast to Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*, Nietzsche introduces chaos *sive Natura* and de-deifies nature. He is aware that the human being needs the groundless other as the infinite source of life. This is why, apart from de-deifying nature, he also strips it of its rational

adds that chaos, for Nietzsche, does not mean 'a turbulent jumble'. 'Rather, it means the concealment of unmastered richness in the becoming and streaming of the world as a whole'. *Ibid.*, 80. Therefore, while it is true that Heidegger does not see a self-generative power in Nietzsche's chaos, it is not entirely correct to say that he identifies chaos with impotent confusion. Emmanuel Falque confirms this, writing that chaos is not a disorder in contrast to cosmos. Chaos, in Falque's words, is where we come from. Emmanuel Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 16.

²³ Jean Granier, *Nietzsche: Dionysos et le tragique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 138–139. For Nietzsche's Dionysius, life justifies and affirms suffering, while from the Christian perspective suffering accuses life and makes of it something that needs to be justified. Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 16–17.

grounding and its commensurability with human cognitive faculties. For Nietzsche, the inherent self-generative character of nature is the artless art of nature, to which he opposes all-too-artful human art. Nietzsche's objective is to recover the innocence of nature's artlessness, of its natural, unconscious art, as an infinite potential for human creativity. Humanity needs to be re-naturalised, but this is possible only via de-humanised nature, which is redeemed to its chaos.²⁴ Nietzsche's chaos is less a lack of order than an excess and impossible abundance.²⁵

While the human needs re-naturalisation, chaos is still intrinsic to his nature because he is a part of that nature. The human is a part of nature and yet 'outside' of it. But also, nature is part of the human and 'outside' of him. This is the paradox of Nietzsche's dialectics. Once we approach nature as chaos, we can create ex nihilo out of its impossible abundance. To be human means to find it impossible to accept any form of givenness. The human, for Nietzsche, is a liar by nature; he is by nature an artist who is opposed to the scientific or theistic 'truth' of the cosmos. The artist is the one who flees from 'truth', and the one who violates reality.²⁶ Nietzsche's original idea is 'to take what we need from [nature], to dream above and beyond the human'. And not only above the human; we should also be able to go beyond nature. 'Something more grandiose than the storm, and the mountain range, and the sea should arise—and yet born of humanity!'²⁷

With his idea of inexhaustible chaos, Nietzsche re-inaugurates the question of the power of being to the Western philosophy. After Nietzsche, there was no returning to the old metaphysics. One could either follow his path in rejecting lifeless divinity or create a radical paradigm shift in our understanding of God.

²⁴ Babich, *Chaos*, 235.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 242.

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, XIII, 193.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, X, 415.

Freedom 'outside' of God

We recall that ontological freedom is about absolute ontological otherness. To be free means to be utterly unique. Etienne Gilson stated that to be is to act, and to act is to be,²⁸ to which we add that to act is to create. Action must amount to creation; it must have ontological consequences.

The 'terrifying ontological ultimacy'²⁹ of the human person requires the actualisation of our uniqueness in our creative acts. I am unique only insofar as the result of my actions is also unique. Unique, in this case, means that what I create is an absolute newness in being. There is more being after my acts than there was before. Following the logic of ontological ultimacy, Zizioulas concludes that the authentic person must be uncreated, that is, unbounded by any 'necessity,' including God.³⁰ It follows that we can actualise our 'un-createdness' only if we can create out of uncreated freedom. Uniqueness is impossible without uncreated freedom. John P. Manoussakis maintains that 'the real problem appears to be located in our inability to imagine freedom prior to existence. We have to imagine (no matter how unthinkable this is) a God who not only is free in His existence but also a God who is free from and before His existence!'³¹ Berdyaev did not shun away from thinking the 'unthinkable,' and he argued that 'freedom is the power to create out of nothing.'³² The

²⁸ Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 94. Charles Hartshorne entertains similar idea: 'To be is to act; to be individual is to act individually, that is, as not fully determined by another individual or set of individuals.' *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), 21.

²⁹ Zizioulas, *Communion*, 235.

³⁰ Zizioulas, *Being*, 43.. Since he does not envisage uncreated freedom, Zizioulas will have to admit that the human person cannot be 'uncreated,' that is, it is impossible to say that the person is not determined. Determination, however, precludes uniqueness, without which the person is inconceivable.

³¹ John P. Manoussakis, "From Exodus to Eschaton," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 1 (2002): 98.

³² Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 144–46; Tillich, *Systematic*, 179.

‘nothing’ from this definition does not imply that we create without a medium, but that we create from a potency or undetermined freedom before being.

Potency and non-being

Potency is always a kind of trace of non-being within Being.³³ To build a new paradigm of God, to inaugurate God as the posse, we need to introduce non-being to the divine being. As Paul Tillich claimed, If God is called the living God, if he is the ground of the creative processes of life, if history has significance for him, if there is no contrary principle in addition to him which could account for evil and sin, how can one avoid positing dialectical negativity in God himself? Such questions have forced theologians to relate non-being dialectically to being-itself and consequently to God. Boehme’s Ungrund, Schelling’s ‘first potency,’ Hegel’s ‘antithesis,’ the ‘contingent’ and the ‘given’ in God in recent theism, Berdyaev’s ‘meonic freedom’ — all are examples of the problem of dialectical non-being exerting the influence of the Christian doctrine of God. If God is called the living God, if he is the ground of the creative processes of life, if history has significance for him, if there is no contrary principle in addition to him which could account for evil and sin, how can one avoid positing dialectical negativity in God himself? Such questions have forced theologians to relate non-being dialectically to being-itself and consequently to God. Boehme’s Ungrund, Schelling’s ‘first potency,’ Hegel’s ‘antithesis,’ the ‘contingent’ and the ‘given’ in God in recent theism, Berdyaev’s ‘meonic freedom’ — all are examples of the problem of dialectical non-being exerting the influence of the Christian doctrine of God.³⁴

This kind of reasoning prompted Berdyaev to borrow the concept of the Ungrund from Jacob Böhme (1571–1624), whom he

³³ George Pattison, *God and Being: An Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 295.

³⁴ Tillich, *Systematic*, 210.

regarded as the 'greatest of all mystics'.³⁵ According to Berdyaev, Böhme was 'the first in the history of human thought [who] has made freedom [i.e., posse] the first foundation of being [:] freedom is to him deeper and more primary than all being, deeper and more primary than God himself'.³⁶ According to the German mystic, the Ungrund dwells deeper than God; it is the Godhead 'prior' to God. The Ungrund is 'the uncausable and uncaused ... an eternal nothingness, and the cause of an eternal beginning'.³⁷ The Ungrund is nothing craving for something, similar to Nietzsche's will to power. Böhme goes beyond the confines of Greek thought and starts a new epoch in the history of human thought.³⁸

Although Böhme was the first to make freedom primary to God, commencing a whole new epoch, Berdyaev was not entirely satisfied with Böhme's ground-breaking theory. Berdyaev felt he needed to introduce a seemingly minor and yet fundamental amendment. 'According to Böhme', explains Berdyaev, 'this freedom is in God; it is the inmost mysterious principle of divine life; whereas I conceived it to be outside of God'.³⁹

If freedom is 'in' God, this implies that freedom is created and given to us by God. But God cannot give what he does not have, that is, he cannot give something that is ultimately different from him. God can give only what he possesses. To manifest his potency by creating his absolute ontological other, the person capable of broadening his being, God would need to have something he does not have. Let us, therefore, ask a question, seemingly mere sophistry: How can

³⁵ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950), 179; idem, *Samopoznanie: Opyt filosofskoi avtobiografii* (Moscow: Hranitel, 2007), 220.

³⁶ Nikolai Berdyaev, "Ungrund and Freedom," in *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, by Jakob Böhme, trans. John Rolleston Earle, with introductory essay by Berdyaev (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1958), xxiii.

³⁷ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939, 130.

³⁸ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 18.

³⁹ Berdyaev, *Dream*, 99; idem, *Samopoznanie*, 124.

God have something that he does not have? Berdyaev's answer to this question is probably his most important contribution to the history of philosophy.

How can it be that there is something that God does not have, something 'outside' of him? God's 'external', to provide absolute ontological otherness, cannot be the privation of being; it could not be the absolute non-being (οὐκ ὄν) of Christian theology. It must have full ontological reality. 'If ex nihilo meant the absolute negation of being, it could not be the origin of the creature', noted Tillich. Creatureliness entails non-being, but it is more than non-being since it carries in itself the power of being.⁴⁰

The issue, therefore, is the ontological status of the 'nihil'.⁴¹ Can there be something 'outside' of God with uncompromised ontological status? Pondering the question of evil, Paul Ricoeur seems to be admitting such an assumption: 'It is necessary to think of a nothingness hostile to God, a nothingness not only of deficiency and privation but of corruption and destruction.'⁴²

Nicolas of Cusa rejected the classical metaphysical view about the possible as secondary and derivative to the actual. For Cusanus, absolute possibility co-exists with actuality in a co-eternal union. This is Cusanus' idea of *possest*, of the union of *posse* and *esse*. But the coexistence of *posse* and *esse* leads Cusa to the conclusion that everything that exists already exists enfolded in God. If the possibility-to-be exists, argues Cusanus, then all things are already actualised, and nothing remains outside of it. Since there is nothing other than God, it follows that anything different from him is already contained in him, ceasing to be different. Drawing from his initial premise about the coexistence of possibility and actuality, Cusanus needs to conclude that there cannot be otherness in God, for he is before non-being. If God were posterior to non-being, he would have

⁴⁰ Tillich, *Systematic*, 281.

⁴¹ Gavin Hyman, "Augustine on the Nihil: An Interrogation," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9, no. 1 (2008): 35–49, cit. 39.

⁴² Ricoeur, *Evil*, 60.

been not Creator but creature. Consequently, God does not create ex nihilo but from himself.⁴³ The actuality side overrides potentiality. Pure actuality, or actuality free from any element of potentiality, is not alive. 'Life includes the separation of potentiality and actuality. The nature of life is actualisation, not actuality. The God who is actus purus is not the living God.' Tillich stresses that, insofar as God is a living God, two elements in him must remain in tension.⁴⁴ This is a theological schema in which God and the 'nihil' become opposites, and it is more radical than the one in which God domesticates the 'nihil.' The 'nihil', in a sense, becomes God's rival.⁴⁵

We have defined onto-theology as the failure to understand human freedom from the ontological perspective. Now we can add that onto-theological is the concept of God that does not permit the ontological status of the dialectical non-being. As long as we endorse that the 'nihil' is the absolute non-being, we cannot overcome God as actus purus. Only if there is something both outside of God and in God can God create something that is not him. What could be concurrently outside of God and in God? If we understand uncreated freedom as Godhead or divine nature, we could think of freedom as both 'in' and 'outside' of God. Divine nature is external to God in the sense that God emerges from it rather than being its creator. In contrast to Cusanus, God creates not from himself but from his nature, which allows him to create ultimate otherness. Nature always remains outside God, and it can never be domesticated. But nature is at the same time 'in'; it is God's infinite power, without which he could not be the living God.

It was because he insisted on the externality of non-being, on the maximum tension between the divine polarities, that Berdyaev managed to produce the image of the living God. Life implies that one has something that one does not have. It is the absolute otherness of the non-being that generates the tension in the form of longing for what

⁴³ Kearney, *God*, 103–4.

⁴⁴ Tillich, *Systematic*, 272–73.

⁴⁵ Hyman, *Augustine*, 41, 48–49.

is radically different from us. We desire genuinely only what we do not have, but the power of our eros transforms the external into the internal, without ever being able to abolish the difference. Diaphora, or difference, Maximus the Confessor reminds us, is a primary ontological characteristic and it does not imply diairesis or separation.⁴⁶ But diaphora as the hypostatic ontological otherness in the Trinity or the particularity of the created is inconceivable without the freedom that is before and outside of every form of Being. Berdyaev suggested an image of God as the union of the inexhaustible and eternal ontological difference, which might also affect our understanding of the nature of the world. This model still awaits severe philosophical appraisal.

⁴⁶ 'For Maximus, *diaphora* is an ontological characteristic because each being has its *logos* which gives it its particular identity, without which it would cease to be itself and thus to be at all. Without *diaphora* there is no being, for there is no being apart from beings.' This ontology is also applicable to Trinitarian theology. Zizioulas, *Communion*, 22–23, 23n29.

6. Social Freedom and Dignity of the Human Person According to Nikolai Berdyaev

Prologue

Because of the event of the Incarnation, it is probably not so difficult to accept that God is in time, as much as it is challenging to admit that time is in God. We can imagine without difficulties God in time because he is eternal and he can abide in history without being mixed with it. However, it is far more challenging to imagine time in God - to accept that time is one of God's essential qualities without which God cannot be what he is.¹

By the same token, it is less unimaginable to think that God is in human being, because God can share his grace with the creature without having to participate in the created nature. But it is more daring to consent that human being is in God, because why God, who is perfect and omnipotent, would need human person in his being?

Time is movement, but the perfect and self-sufficient God - and we talk here about the God of theism - is immobile. God of theism is also a God of monism and subordination. Since theism cannot find motive for movement in God it has confined itself to monism, because begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit represent a theology, a movement in the innermost life of God. It inevitably follows that the Son and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father. If movement is by definition unthinkable, even if as a result it now has two other Hypostases, how to explain the movement towards the creation of the multiple worlds? Monism therefore leads to monophysitism and acosmism. For monism, this world is nothing but an

¹ About different concepts of time see more in Knežević, Romilo Aleksandar (2011), *Time and Cognition: A Theological Reading of Marcel Proust* (Serbian), Belgrade: Orthodox Theological Faculty, and "Outside of God: A Theanthropic Scrutiny of Nietzsche's Concept of Chaos and Berdyaev's Notion of the Ungrund", *Analogia*, volume 8, pp.77-87.

appearance and illusion, and it has no real, ontological existence. Monism associates movement only with the plural and illusory world and leaves the divine life unaffected by it. This bears grave consequences both for the concept of God and the notion of the human being. God is depicted as the creator of delusions whilst the human person is only a victim of his heartless experiment.

How are we to explain the origin [of the plural world] in this so-called absolute lifeto which no form of human movement... is applicable? Neither the pantheistic monism of the Hindoo type... nor Parmenides; nor Plato, who was unable to bridge the dualism of the unique-immobile and the plural-mobile world; nor Plotinus; nor, finally, the abstract monism of German idealism, were able to achieve it. It remains an insoluble mystery to them all. ²

Humanism and concept of the individual

Contemporary European democracies, and Liberalism in particular, are established upon the foundations of Humanism. Humanism, as its name entails, denotes the elevation of the human being and setting up of the person in the centre of the universe. Humanism was a reaction against the mediaeval view of the omnipotent and omniscient God of theism and monism that we have just described. Humanism searches for an understanding of man that would fulfil man's intuitive desire for self-confidence and self-esteem – genuine human dignity. What kind of freedom would be sufficient and adequate for true human dignity? What is the 'myth' that would embody the ultimate fulfilment of our inmost desire for dignity?

Whilst affirming human self-respect against the theistic image of God, humanism contained an opposed principle, that of man's abasement. Humanism found itself in a major philosophical cul-de-sac: how to reconcile the all-powerful and perfect God with the dignity of the human person, i.e., the doctrine of the omnipotent God

² Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009).

with the teaching of *imago Dei*. It seems that classical teaching on divine omnipotence is irreconcilable with the idea of *imago Dei*. As we know, the Church Fathers describe God's icon as the autoexousion. That one is created according to the divine image means that one is bequeathed with absolute power of self-determination. Nothing and nobody determines my freedom, not even God. As Nikolai Berdyaev, a renowned Russia religious philosopher explains, "personality determines itself from within... and only determination from within and arising out of freedom is personality."³ Although human personality is created, it possesses the capacity for autonomous self-determination. "Personality is emancipation from dependence upon nature, from dependence upon society and the state. It opposes all determination from without, it is a determination from within. And even within, the determination is self-determination, not even God can do it."⁴ In addition, Berdyaev maintains that we cannot say that the suprapersonal is higher than human person.

Man as a personality cannot be a means to God as Personality. The theological doctrine that God created man for his own glory and praise is degrading to man, and degrading to God also.⁵

Faced with this radical understanding of freedom, which originates from, and is dictated by, the deepest realms of the human being, most of the humanistic thinkers chose to reject both God and the idea of the divine icon. Within the framework of the omnipotent God, the doctrine of *imago Dei* seemed to be nothing but a flamboyant metaphor, a consolation for the redundant and unneeded creature. Humanism, therefore, denied man's divine sonship and proclaimed that man is the son of nature. Hence, Humanism not only

³ Nicolas Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), originally published as *O rabstvye i svobodye cheloveyeka* (Paris: YMCA-Press), 24. For Berdyaev's concept of the human person also see Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, *Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2020), 160–79.

⁴ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

avowed man's self-confidence, but it also debased him, by defining him as a product of natural necessity, as a being that shares all defects and limitations of nature. The natural man was divorced from the spiritual. The Christian view of man began to lose its strength, but instead of leading to the liberation, the death of the Christian doctrine only gave rise to a self-destructive dialectic within humanism.

European democracy, in Berdyaev's view, rests upon the humanistic principle of sociological positivism according to which true freedom has a social origin. Even the most liberal of all democracies have never known the spiritual bases of freedom. Liberalism, argues the Russian philosopher, has created a 'one-planed' being,⁶ it has separated the citizen from the integral personality, by refusing to admit the spiritual dimension of the human being. Freedom of the individual, as defined by Liberalism, is about atomistic, particular liberty, mainly depicted as freedom from the oppression of society. But freedom for or positive freedom of Liberalism is by definition confined to the subjective or psychological level. It is a 'leave me alone' type of freedom, freedom the essence of which is self-defence of the individual from the collective subjects of society, state or nation.⁷ Defining him as a completely natural creature, Liberalism forever sentences the individual to one-plane enslavement by the natural and sociological necessities.

Liberalism is exclusively a social philosophy: the liberals are social-minded and for them, liberty means only a form of political organisation for society, whereby society grants certain subjective rights to its citizens. Liberalism is a one-planed world-concept: it fails to see that man belongs to two planes of being.⁸

Berdyaev stresses that true freedom cannot be simply a formal self-defence, that it must lead to creative activity. This is why the transition is inevitable from formal liberty, which protects us and defends us, to true freedom capable not only of creatively transforming the

⁶ Berdyaev, *Fate*, 50.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45

⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

human society but also of creating a new world.⁹ The problem of freedom, therefore, is vastly deeper than that of Liberalism.¹⁰ It concerns the question of the origin, the meaning, and the destiny of the human being.

Humanism has given birth to the notion of the individual, which resembles very much a windowless, Leibnitzian monad. For Leibnitz, a monad is a simple substance, 'it is closed, shut up, it has neither window nor doors', explains Berdyaev.¹¹ One may even argue that the structure of the monad is akin to the perfect and self-sufficient, immovable and changeless God of theism. As we know, theistic God is *actus purus*, God who does not change because his entire potential is equal to his actuality.¹² God-*actus purus* is perfect and he cannot become 'more perfect'. He is free because he does not have to move. He is free because he does not need, and will never need, to create something new. He is free not to have to create and move. Movement is considered as a sign of imperfection, it does not have an ontological value, and is reserved solely for the realm of the created world. The movement towards the creation of the world, therefore, has no ontological consequences. By creating the world, God does not add anything to his being, nor would he lose anything should the world cease to exist. In this sense, God does not need the world.¹³

Individual or monad is a being with no ontological potential or implication. Freedom of the individual cannot be conceived of as uniqueness or ontological otherness. To be unique, or to have "absolute

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹ Berdyaev, *Slavery*, 22.

¹² More about God conceived as *actus purus* in essay by Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, "Outside of God", 77–87.

¹³ For more about different views of the meaning of creation, and in particular about the concept of *analogia entis*, in case of Sergius Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdyaev, see my Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, "Freedom: Created or Uncreated; Sergius Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdyaev on *Creatio ex Nihilo* and the Third Kind of Non-Being," *Philotheos: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* (Belgrade), 8 (2022).

ontological otherness”,¹⁴ implies that there is in one’s identity something that does not exist in any other identity, including God’s. But how can there be something that does not exist in God, something that God does not have, if He has created everything that is? Or, perhaps, there is something that God did not create?

Freedom of the individual is therefore illusory as much as his ontological otherness. One is free to dwell in a temporary redundancy, and one is free to be “saved” from it. But “to be saved” means here to jump from the frying pan into the fire, that is, to exchange historical and fleeting redundancy for the eternal one.

Fleeing from the theistic God, who expresses his omnipotence by the absolute power of determination and control, Humanism chose to entirely reject God as well as the idea of the divine image. Nietzsche rejected God on the same grounds. He “burned with creative desire” but “knew only the law and the redemption in neither of which is the creative revelation of man”, and hated God because he believed that if God exists man’s creativeness is impossible.¹⁵ As a result, Humanism embraces the notion of the individual, which connotes a “one-planed” being, being that belongs only to the realm of nature and is limited by natural laws.

Christian concept of personality

Berdyayev claims that Christianity, on the other hand, found a way to resolve the problem of human freedom by creating the concept

¹⁴ For John Zizioulas, freedom means to be other in an absolute ontological sense. *John Zizioulas, Communion & Otherness*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

¹⁵ Nikolai Berdyayev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 106; originally published as *Smysl tvorchestva: Opyt opravdaniia cheloveka* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1991).

Berdyayev probably here has in mind Nietzsche’s assertion, ‘Away from God and gods this will lure me; what would there be to create, after all, if there were gods?’ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67.

of personality. Personality belongs not only to nature but also to the spirit. In Berdyaev's vocabulary, nature denotes determination whereas spirit signifies freedom. To be free means to be created in the divine image, that is, to possess radical power of self-determination. Berdyaev is, of course, aware that the conventional notion of God's omnipotence is in stark conflict with the concept of *imago Dei*. Why, then, is he promoting Christianity as a religion of freedom?

Well, he is not. He discerns between two types of Christianity: between historic Christianity, which is "the work of man" – and this "work has been both bad and good"¹⁶ – and the renewed and transfigured Christianity. Historic Christianity is not fit to be the leader of the revolution for the sake of personality because it has betrayed God's very idea of man and His image, as has that of the God-man and Divine-human life.¹⁷ This Christianity, in Berdyaev's words, "has not yet revealed itself as a religion of freedom"¹⁸

He believes that history now judges Christianity in all the domains of human life and culture. This is essentially judgement upon false monism and false dualism, upon extreme immanentism as well as extreme transcendentalism. The divine has been torn apart from the human.¹⁹ Christianity has been all too often anti-human, insisting more on the commandment to love God than to love the human being.²⁰

Christian piety all too often has seemed to be withdrawal from the world and from men, a sort of transcendental egoism, the unwillingness to share the suffering of the world and man. It was not sufficiently infused with Christian love and mercy. It lacked human warmth. And the world has risen in protest against this sort of piety, as a refined form of egoism...²¹

¹⁶ Berdyaev, *Fate*, 118.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁸ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 122.

¹⁹ Berdyaev, *Fate*, 120.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

Christians have drawn false conclusions from the doctrine of original sin and have denied human creative capacities. As a result of an unseemly concept of asceticism, Christianity has been antagonistic to cultural creativity. It was too late when Christianity decided to endorse creativity in culture, and hence - human creative culture got out of Christian hands.²²

In short, Berdyaev detects a fundamental setback in Christian teaching, which is responsible for the debacle of historical Christianity. Most of the deformation and clouding of Christianity has come about because man found it difficult to take in the full truth of God-manhood. Now man has turned to God and away from man, now toward man and away from God... The problem of Christian anthropology, the religious question of mankind, is the basic problem of our epoch. And only the fullness of Christian truth can fight successfully against dehumanization, and prevent the final destruction of man.²³

In spite of two-thousand years-long history, Christianity has so far failed to produce the fullness of truth about the human being. In other words, Christianity has not yet produced an ontological justification of the human being, and this is because it could not absorb the full truth of God-manhood.

In the Christianity of the early Fathers, there was a monophysite tendency, a hesitancy about the revelation of Christ's human nature and hence of the divine nature of man, his oppression under sin and his thirst for redemption from sin (...) And the task of humanity's religious consciousness is to reveal the Christological consciousness of man (...)²⁴

The Church Fathers, indeed, write about the deification by which the human being becomes, in the words of Maximus the Confessor, 'without beginning and end'²⁵ or - in an even more daring expression

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁴ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 81. (emphasis mine).

²⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10, in *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1144C.

of Gregory Palamas – “without origin”.²⁶ But even in this teaching on theosis, which aims at describing the glorified and deified character of human nature, it is not clear what would be the specific difference of created nature in comparison with divine nature.

The teachers of the Church had a doctrine of the theosis of man, but in this theosis, there is no man at all. The very problem of man is not even put. But man is godlike not only because he is capable of suppressing his nature and thus freeing a place for divinity. There is godlikeness in human nature itself, in the very human voice of that nature. Silencing the world and the passions liberates a man. God desires that not only God should exist, but man as well.²⁷

What would be, in Berdyaev’s view, the full truth of God-manhood? This is the question the renewed and transfigured Christianity needs to answer to reveal the Christological consciousness of man.

The full truth of God-manhood

Berdyaev writes that Christ was God-man from all eternity. There was never a “moment” in the life of the Divine Being when Christ was not both God and the human being. Berdyaev avers that “the creation took place in eternity as an interior act of the divine mystery.”²⁸ Furthermore, “through the birth of the Son in eternity the whole spiritual race and the whole universe comprised in man, in fact, the whole cosmos, responds to the appeal of divine love.”²⁹ Therefore, the creation of human personality must have taken place in meta-history or theandric time-eternity, which are synonyms for the traditional term eternity.³⁰

²⁶ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 3.1.31.

²⁷ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 84. (emphasis mine).

²⁸ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 198.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “But it is absolutely impossible to conceive either of the creation of the world within time or of the end of the world within time. In objectified time there is no beginning, nor is there any end, there is only an endless middle. The beginning

One can penetrate the mystery of the creation only if one grasps the inner life of the Divine Being. Traditional affirmative theology has been closely confined within rational concepts and that is why it has been unable to grasp that inner life of the Divine Being, solely in which the creation of the world and man [that is to say, the attitude of God towards His other self] can be understood.³¹

There is a strong parallel between the reasons why God is the Trinity – why the Father begets the Son and makes the procession of the Spirit – and the creation of the human. Although the human person is created, God needs her almost in the same way as the Father needs the other two Hypostases.³² And since God needs his creature, the traditional concept of the creation has to be rejected.³³ Berdyaev claims, ‘rationalistic and exoteric religious thought is obliged to maintain the cruel idea that God created the world capriciously, without necessity, and entirely unmoved from within.’³⁴

If the creation was unnecessary for God, the world and the person, the entire creation, is without significance and is going to perish,

and the end are in existential time.” Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, trans. R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 207.

³¹ Nicolas Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, trans. Oliver Fielding Clarke (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 190. (emphasis mine).

³² Berdyaev is aware that due to the limitations of human language it is difficult to express the exact character of God’s ‘need’ for man. He writes, “in the depths of spiritual experience there is revealed not only man’s need of God but also God’s need of man. But the word ‘need’ here is an inexact expression, as indeed are all human terms when applied to God.” Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 210.

³³ If we again take Maximus the Confessor as an example of the Patristic teaching, we find that, despite his teaching on the human as microcosm and mediator, he does not understand the creation of the person as ‘necessary’ for God, or as a part of the interior life of the Divine. Maximus emphasizes that God is immovable and that movement pertains only to creatures. The goal of the creation is that creatures find rest in God’s immobility. Although this rest is conceived as “perpetual striving” (ἐπέκτασις), it is clear that only creatures strive towards God whereas God Himself is utterly immovable vis-à-vis His creation. See Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), 73–81; idem, *Ambigua* 7, in *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1069A–1077B.

³⁴ Berdyaev, *Beginning*, 190.

contends Berdyaev.³⁵ To secure a genuine basis for human liberty, we need to see the mystery of creation “as the interior life of the Divine”. We can grasp what human freedom is only if we understand that we are intrinsically connected with the life of the Trinity.

Just like a human person is a part of the inner life of the Trinity, time is not essentially different from eternity. In a mysterious sense, eternity is history. God is in time. On the other hand, if history is more than a mere external phenomenon, if it holds absolute significance with absolute life, if it is, moreover, based upon a true ontological principle, then it must have both its origin and its fulfilment in the inmost depths of the Absolute.³⁶ Time is in God.

In his often criticised prophetic style, Berdyaev maintains that God the Trinity and God-Man are inseparable to such an extent that God without the human would not be God the Trinity. “God without man, an ‘inhuman’ God, would be Satan, not God the Trinity.”³⁷ This is the answer to the ultimate philosophical question, “why there is something rather than nothing”, or why the primordial Nothing yearned to become something?³⁸ God became God only for the sake of creation.³⁹ Both God and the human being originate from the same source, from

³⁵ It is clear that for Berdyaev we cannot ground human freedom solely on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, that is, on the doctrine according to which the creation of the world was not an act of necessity. If God creates freely, His creation, according to Patristic teaching, also possesses freedom and is even “equal of honour” (ὀμοτιμος). Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, ed., *A Greek Patristic Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 209–10.

³⁶ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, trans. George Reavey (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 44.

³⁷ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 189.

³⁸ Jacob Böhme poses a unity that in its absolute lack of distinctions, is Nothing, *ein Ewig Nichts*, the *Ungrund*. But this *Ungrund* possesses an inner *nisus*, striving for self-realization, which establishes itself as a dialectical force to the primal Nothing, and sets the otherwise static unity in motion. In this way, the Nothing is transformed into Something and the source of all existing things. Meyer Howard Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973), 161.

³⁹ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 194.

the primal void of the divine nature or Nothingness where, before the first movement, they existed in an undifferentiated union.

In the primal void of the divine Nothingness [of Godhead], God and creation, God and man disappear, and even the very antithesis between them vanishes. “Non-existent being is beyond God and differentiation.” The distinction between the Creator and creation is not the deepest that exists, for it is eliminated altogether in the divine Nothingness that is no longer God.⁴⁰

The human being, therefore, is a part of the inner movement of the divine life. Anthropogonic and the theogonic process started together and neither of them had ontological primacy over the other since the Son was never conceived otherwise but as God-Man. The idea of God-humanity requires a literal interpretation of perichoresis: the two natures in Christ ought to be seen as ontologically reciprocal, equally enlarging each other, mutually dependent. This is why Berdyaev stresses, “God exists if man exists. When a man disappears, God will also disappear...” And quoting Angelus Silesius he adds, “I know that without me God could not endure for a moment. Were I brought to nought He would yield up the Ghost for lack (of me).”⁴¹

Dignity of a metaphysical factor

During his second sojourn to the US, C.G. Jung visited a village of Pueblo Indians in New Mexico. He had a conversation about religion with an elderly member of the tribe. The Indian told him: We are the sons of Father Sun and with our religion, we daily help our

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 194. Using Whitehead’s terminology, this would mean that in the divine Nothingness the antithesis between God’s conceptual nature and derivative nature disappears. See, Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected Edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 345.

⁴¹ One of the meanings of the death of God is the multiplication of life. See Knežević, *Homo Theurgos*, 8. God’s death implies the descending of the Son of God into the original void of freedom. Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 135. By descending into meonic freedom, the New Adam empowers and resurrects human nature without acting as nature’s determining cause.

father to go across the sky. We do this not only for ourselves but for the whole world. If we were to cease practising our religion, in ten years the sun would no longer rise. Then it would be night forever.⁴²

Jung straightaway realised on what the “dignity, the tranquil composure of the individual Indian, was founded. It springs”, the Suisse writes, “from his being a son of the sun; his life is cosmologically meaningful, for he helps the father and preserver of all life in his daily rise and descent.”⁴³ After this discussion, Jung envied the elderly Indian, I had envied him for the fullness of meaning in that belief, and had been looking about without hope for a myth of our own.⁴⁴

It seems that, eventually, Jung found out what the myth he was looking for was about: man is indispensable for the completion of creation. He is the second creator of the world, in the sense that he feels capable of formulating valid replies to the over-powering influence of God.⁴⁵ He can render back something essential even to God.

That he can render back something essential even to God, induces pride, for it raises the human individual to the dignity of a metaphysical factor. “God and us”... this equation no doubt underlies that enviable serenity of the Pueblo Indian. Such a man is in the fullest sense of the word in his proper place.⁴⁶

Epilogue

In Berdyaev’s view, monophysite deviations of the Christian teaching were directly responsible for the raise of Humanism with its rejection of all-powerful God who, unlike the God of the Pueblo Indians, did not need human being. Humanism turned its back to God and declared that human being is the son of nature. But to be the son of nature means to be fundamentally determined by natural

⁴² Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Fontana Press, 1995), 281.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 285, 282.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

laws, having no impact on cosmic developments. How can today's humanity find its way to "the dignity of a metaphysical factor"?

The only way for Christianity to rectify the tragic results of its tendency towards monophysitism and to imbue human kind with a true dignity is to preach that "God without human being would be Satan, not God the Trinity."⁴⁷ Perhaps now we can understand better Berdyaev's dictum "God exists because human being exists"; "when a human being disappears, God will also disappear..."

⁴⁷ Berdyaev, *Freedom*, 189.

7. C.G. Jung and the Book of Job: Human Responsibility for God's Knowledge of His Dark Side

“We still cast bewildered glances backward toward the events of Pentecost instead of looking forward to the goal toward which the Spirit leads us. Because of this, humanity is wholly unprepared for the things that will come.”

— C.G. Jung

Does the responsibility of religions lie in teaching us to think less and believe more, or rather to think not only more but also differently? Should there perhaps be an equivalence between the principles of religion and the principles of the Enlightenment? According to Kant (Immanuel Kant), the Enlightenment is “humanity’s emergence from self-imposed immaturity.” “Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed if its cause is not a lack of understanding but a fear of using it independently. Hence, the motto of the Enlightenment: Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own reason!”¹

In other words, take responsibility for your reasoning. Have the courage to think not only more but also differently. The maturity of enlightenment is not unattainable; it requires only freedom. However, Kant notes: “(...) From all sides, I hear: Do not argue! The officer says: Do not argue, march! The tax collector says: Do not argue, pay! The priest says: Do not argue, believe!”²

Kant is clear that a priest is obliged to educate his flock in accordance with the doctrines of the Church he serves, as this is a condition of his employment. However, as a scholar, that same priest is not only entirely free but also bears the responsibility to convey carefully

¹ Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?*, accessed October 29, 2023, <http://www.blackmask.com>, 1.

² Kant, *Enlightenment*, 2.

considered and well-intentioned critiques regarding the flawed aspects of those doctrines to his congregation. He is also obliged to propose solutions for better organizing religious and ecclesiastical matters. Thus, as a scholar addressing his flock through his works, the priest enjoys unrestricted freedom to use his reason and speak in his own name.³

The classical interpretation of God's perfection creates the two greatest problems facing modern thought grounded in the principle of *sapere aude*: the origin of evil and the ontological justification for human creation. If God is understood as *actus purus*, meaning perfect and fully realized, there is no potentiality or non-being in God awaiting fulfilment. Therefore, evil cannot exist alongside a perfect God, as that would imply God created it. The ontological reality of evil must, therefore, be denied. A perfect God is self-sufficient, needing no one, making it impossible to explain the impulse for creating humanity. If God creates humanity, there must be a reason, implying that humanity is somehow "needed" by God. It is important to note that we are speaking here of an ontological "need." Any other explanation of "need" not rooted in a need within being is unacceptable. For humanity to be needed by God, it must possess something unique, something God lacks. Since the classical concept of God does not allow for this assumption, it follows that humanity has nothing of its own. However, to avoid the conclusion that humanity has nothing of its own because it was created from God (*ex Deo*), possessing all that God has, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* is introduced. Yet, unlike the Platonic "nothing," me on, Christian "nothing," ouk on represents absolute nothingness. Thus, if humanity has anything of its own, it can only be the absolute nothingness from which it was created. Humanity, like evil, does not exist in the full sense of the word. Evil is merely the absence of good; humanity is merely the absence of God.

The question of the origin of evil and the problem of totalitarian ontology pose the greatest challenges for contemporary philosophy, as acknowledged by thinkers of the calibre of Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel

³ *Ibid.*

Levinas, and Jacques Derrida.⁴ However, Ricoeur warns that this acknowledgment alone means little. Far more important is how we receive it. Is it a call to think less, or an invitation to think—not only more but also—differently?⁵

The responsibility of religions, therefore, is not primarily to think less and strive at all costs to preserve the existing doctrinal paradigm with closed eyes. The responsibility of religions lies in the readiness to think differently and the courage to be open to a radical paradigm shift. Kant argues that it is impossible to establish a list of unchangeable doctrines, even if issued by a church synod. Such an agreement, which would forever prevent further enlightenment of humanity, would be utterly meaningless and invalid.

“No agreement reached in one era can prevent the next from developing and correcting prior teachings (...) or advancing in enlightenment. This would be a crime against human nature, whose destiny lies precisely in achieving such progress. Later generations are thus fully entitled to reject such agreements as unauthorized and unlawful.”⁶

The problem of evil compels us to dare a leap of thought and liberate ourselves from the imperative of theodicy, which is based on the concept of God as *actus purus*, a perfect and fully realized being. Every theodicy raises the question of how to reconcile three propositions: God is omnipotent; God is absolutely good (*Summum Bonum*); yet evil exists.⁷

It is well known that Gnosticism burdened Western thought with the question *unde malum*—where does evil come from?⁸ However, if we claim that God is omnipotent and *Summum Bonum*, the question of the origin of evil remains an insoluble problem. No opposing principle of evil can exist alongside a perfect God. There are two ways out

⁴ Richard Kearney, *God Who May Be* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2007), 33.

⁶ Kant, *Enlightenment*, 5.

⁷ Ricoeur, *Evil*, 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

of this problem, but due to its orthodoxy, the method that seeks to think less, simply denying the existence of evil without questioning the prevailing paradigm, has won greater approval among philosophers.

Augustine reiterates the old claim that evil cannot be a substance or essence, something that possesses being, as being always implies absolute and undivided good. Thus, it is illogical and inconsistent to claim that evil has substance. Evil is, so to speak, merely a benign absence of good—*privatio boni*.⁹

Within Christian thought, a new concept of nothingness or absolute non-being from which the world was created emerges, along with the notion of the ontological distance between the creation and the Creator, which allows for discussion of the creation's deficiency. Due to this deficiency, combined with free will, the world tends to both distance itself from God and gravitate toward nothingness.

Since the problem of the origin of evil no longer carries ontological weight, the question *unde malum* now becomes: *unde malum faciamus*—how do we come to do evil? The problem of evil has shifted from the ontological to the moral plane and is linked to the concept of free will. A special kind of nothingness is introduced—*nihil privativum*, a concept that could technically be described as an “empty object of thought.” There is no need to seek a cause for this nothingness, as it is entirely a product of free will inclined toward evil.

In *Contra Fortunatum*, Augustine explains that the origin of all evil lies either in sin or in punishment for sin. The logical consequence of the concept of God as *Summum Bonum* inevitably leads to the conclusion that all good comes from God, and all evil from humanity—*Omne bonum a Deo, omne malum ab homine*.¹⁰ This purely moral conception of evil also implies a view of history as a settling of debts or retribution. Since all good comes from God and

⁹ “The old way of thinking spoke of evil only in terms of a lack of being... Evil lies outside any onto-theological possibility since it has no essence in or of itself. According to Augustine, evil is non-being and, as such, does not create a dualism in relation to good.” Graham Ward, „Introduction“, in Ricoeur, *Evil*, 16.

¹⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, *Answer to Job* (London: Routledge, 2002), 122.

evil solely from humanity, each person is responsible for the suffering that befalls them, and no soul is unjustly condemned.¹¹

The coherence of this doctrine, resting on questionable premises, came at a high cost. To justify the conclusion that every form of suffering, regardless of its magnitude, is merely punishment for sin, sin had to take on superhuman, generic, and historical dimensions. This refers, of course, to the well-known doctrine of original sin. However, it is difficult to overlook the fact that, according to this scenario, evil exists before the intention to commit it arises. How could a person freely choose to do evil if evil did not already exist? In other words, if evil does not exist, humanity could not commit it. Why, then, does God allow the existence of evil?

Evil that exists prior to the intention to commit it strongly resembles the Gnostic dualism of good and evil. Since it is logically impermissible to introduce the concept of non-being into God's being, the concept of original sin was combined with two disparate ideas: the biological transmission of sin through reproduction and individually acquired sin. Ricoeur rightly notes that the concept of original sin could be called an anti-Gnostic Gnosticism, as it denies the ontological status of evil and suffering while simultaneously preserving the dualistic structure of being.¹²

One of the most ambitious attempts to construct a theodicy is found in Hegel's (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) works *Philosophy of History and Phenomenology of Spirit*. As Gilles Deleuze noted in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, modern dialectics, particularly Hegel's, is essentially a Christian ideology.¹³

Ricoeur observes the irony in Hegel's philosophy of history: while it finds meaning in major historical events, it does so by nullifying the question of happiness and suffering. History is simply not the context in which to expect happiness. This view inevitably recalls the

¹¹ Ricoeur, *Evil*, 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47-48.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), 18.

Christian perception of history as a “valley of tears.” Ricoeur adds: “For us, reading Hegel after countless catastrophes and sufferings in the 20th century, the separation of consolation and reconciliation offered by the philosophy of history has become a great source of confusion: the more the system progresses, the more its victims are marginalized. The success of the system engenders its downfall.”¹⁴

Are we then forced to abandon thinking about the problem of evil altogether? Ricoeur’s response, as we recall, is that we must not think less about evil but rather think more—and, more importantly, differently. The emphasis is on a different way of thinking, one that believes it is necessary to make a radical shift and abandon the attempt to base theodicy on denying the ontological reality of evil. As an example of such an attempt within Christian theology, Ricoeur cites Karl Barth and his renowned *Church Dogmatics*. In the section titled *God and Nothingness*, Barth writes that only an “imperfect theology,” one that has abandoned “systematic totalization,” can dare to engage in the daunting task of thinking about the problem of evil.¹⁵ “Imperfect theology” is a way of thinking that, as Ricoeur puts it, acknowledges evil as a reality that cannot be reconciled with God’s goodness or the goodness of creation. For this kind of reality, Barth reserves the term *das Nichtige*—nothingness. According to Barth, this nothingness must be considered not only as a lack or absence of good but as a nothingness hostile to God. Only in this way is human suffering taken seriously, refusing to be explained as retribution for moral evil. How, then, can we move beyond the confines of classical theodicy, asks Ricoeur? Barth would say—by thinking differently. But what exactly does “thinking differently” mean?

Barth’s “different thinking” boils down to seeking answers within the context of Christology. Christ defeated nothingness through His death on the cross. Ricoeur sees this explanation as Barth’s doctrinal inflexibility. If we believe that God defeated evil in Christ, we must also believe that evil can no longer harm us. It is no longer permissible to

¹⁴ Ricoeur, *Evil*, 58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

claim that evil possesses any power, as that would imply that victory will only be achieved in the future. For Barth, the victory is already accomplished; only its full revelation is lacking. Barth bridges the gap between the already-achieved victory and its full realization with the idea of “permission”: due to God’s permission, we do not yet see His kingdom, which makes it seem as though evil still threatens us.¹⁶

Ricoeur considers Barth’s dialectic to be only ostensibly “imperfect,” arguing that Barth still thinks within the framework of theodicy. Although Barth claimed that nothingness is not merely a lack of good, he ultimately denies its ontological status. “Nothingness represents the reality that God does not will. Nothingness exists only because God does not will it.”¹⁷ In other words, evil exists only as the object of God’s wrath. With this dialectical manoeuvre, Barth demonstrates that his primary concern is preserving the sovereignty of God as *Summum Bonum*. Ricoeur rightly argues that instead of an imperfect dialectic, Barth offers only a weak compromise between God and nothingness.¹⁸

C.G. Jung and Thinking Differently About God

None of the philosophical-theological systems mentioned by Ricoeur achieve a “different” way of thinking precisely because they a priori adhere to a monolithic or “one-dimensional” concept of God, in whose being there is no room for non-being. A different way of thinking, therefore, must inevitably abandon the theodicy project based on denying the ontological reality of evil. This step would require a radical re-examination of the concept of God characterized by the classical attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and absolute goodness. It involves creating an image of God fundamentally different from that constructed in the mainstream of Western metaphysics.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/3*, section 50 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1951), 289–318.

¹⁸ Ricoeur, *Evil*, 63.

It must be noted that different thinking is not truly different as long as it claims that evil has no ontological reality. Theories that deny the substantiality of evil rely on the victory over evil in the eschaton. The eschaton is the context of ontology, not history. This dialectical tactic appears innocent in light of a simple question: Why does God wait for the eschaton to defeat evil? What is the meaning, admittedly impenetrable, of God's permission due to which the Kingdom of God still remains invisible for us? As Jung rightly asks, why doesn't God simply and once and for all eliminate evil along with its root?¹⁹ In search of an answer to this question, Jung wrote a short book, *Answer to Job*. This book, Jung's final work, will prove to be responsible for ending several decades-long friendships.

At the time the *Book of Job* was written, there were already several testimonies presenting an ambiguous image of Yahweh—a picture in which knowledge and dullness, gentleness and harshness, creative power and destructiveness coexist in Yahweh.²⁰ Jung is interested in how modern humans, raised on Christian teachings, react to the dark side of God revealed in this Old Testament book. Jung believes that his reading of the *Book of Job* will echo the voice of all those who, like him, are horrified by the spectacles of divine ruthlessness. Instead of rationalizing these examples, thereby diminishing their reality, Jung argues it would be more appropriate to accept them as they are and experience their intensity. Jung is aware that one who succumbs to affect is no different from the one who provoked it and bears the same measure of responsibility. However, Jung believes that humans must be permeated by the experience of violence to be able to assess its true nature—the ontological reality of evil in history. “For this reason,” Jung writes, “I will express my affect boldly and mercilessly in this book and respond to injustice with injustice, so that I may understand why and for what purpose Job was wronged, and what consequences this had for both Yahweh and humanity.”²¹

¹⁹ Jung, *Answer*, 90.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

As convinced as he is of the existence of evil in Yahweh, Job is equally certain of His goodness. He recognizes that God is in conflict with Himself and that in God, he can find his advocate—against God. Yahweh is both persecutor and helper, and both aspects are equally real. Yahweh is not divided, Jung says; Yahweh is an antinomy or totality of internal opposites, which is a prerequisite for His immense dynamism, omnipotence, and omniscience.²²

A God who is perfect, omnipotent, and omniscient has no need for humanity. But Yahweh is an antinomy or coincidentia oppositorum. Yahweh is a God in the process of becoming, and in this process, humanity is a being of paramount importance to Him. Humanity is as necessary to Yahweh as He is to humanity.

Yahweh astonishingly easily allows one of His sons to lead Him to doubt Job's loyalty. As a result, Job is unjustly subjected to cruel moral testing, even though it would have been far simpler for Yahweh to consult His omniscience. Why, then, was this test conducted at all, Jung asks? From a human perspective, Yahweh's behaviour is so unacceptable that it inevitably raises the question of whether there might be some secret envy or resistance towards Job. This would explain why Yahweh allowed Himself to be influenced by Satan. But what could humanity possess that God does not already have? Due to their insignificance and helplessness before the Almighty, Jung explains, humans have developed a somewhat sharper self-consciousness. To survive, humans are forced to constantly remind themselves of their powerlessness. God, however, encounters no insurmountable obstacles that would compel Him to analytical self-reflection. Is it possible, then, that God suspected that humanity possesses, albeit infinitely small, a flickering spark of self-consciousness that He lacks? Such a suspicion might explain His behaviour.²³

Without much hesitation, Yahweh allows bandits to steal Job's flocks and kill his servants, then permits the death of his daughters and sons, and finally allows Satan to add unbearable physical torment

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

to Job's suffering. In the end, his wife and friends pour salt on his wounds with unjust accusations.

Jung focuses his attention on what gradually takes shape in the background of these events. It is possible to assume that, as a result of Job's unjust suffering, something happens in him that cannot leave Yahweh indifferent.

“Without Yahweh's knowledge and contrary to His intentions, the innocently tormented Job is secretly elevated to a level of divine knowledge that God Himself does not possess about Himself... Job recognized the inner antinomic nature of God, thereby attaining a level of divine enlightenment... By not abandoning his intention to present his case before God, even in the hour of hopelessness, Job remained steadfast and thus created an obstacle that forced God to reveal His true nature.”²⁴

Yahweh soon ends His cruel game, but those who think Job will receive moral satisfaction or that God's wrath will now turn toward Satan are mistaken. Instead, riding on the whirlwind of omnipotence, Yahweh descends upon His half-dead servant: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”²⁵

Who is darkening counsel, and what counsel is being referred to, Jung asks? The only ambiguity is how it came to pass that Yahweh made a wager with Satan. Job certainly did not darken any counsel, least of all regarding any consultation, as no consultation ever took place. Whose words, then, are without knowledge? We assume Yahweh is not rebuking Job's friends or wife but Job himself. But what would Job's fault be? The only reason Job could be reproached is his incurable faith that he could still demand God's justice. However, Job is mistaken, as we see from Yahweh's words. God does not wish to be just; God boasts, placing power above justice. It follows that Yahweh is the one who darkens counsel and whose words are without knowledge. Humanity must not have an opinion about its Creator, let alone insight into God's nature that God Himself does not possess. Yet, that

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁵ *Book of Job* 38:2, trans. Đura Daničić.

is precisely what happened, as the mortal man, through his suffering, was elevated above the stars in the sky to a position from which he could see God's "back." Almighty Yahweh can do everything, but, like any ordinary mortal, He cannot see His own back.²⁶ The act of recognizing God's dark side leads to a change in His nature.²⁷

Sophia and Hieros Gamos

Centuries before Christ, the memory of Sophia, co-eternal with God, resurfaces. Wisdom reveals itself to humanity as an ally in the misunderstanding with Yahweh, manifesting the bright and good side of God's nature. The co-existence of Sophia and Yahweh testifies to an ongoing hieros gamos or sacred marriage, the interpenetration of the masculine principle of perfection with the feminine principle of wholeness. As wholeness is always imperfect, perfection is always incomplete—that is, sterile. For *ex perfecto nihil fit*.²⁸

The essence of the change that follows lies in Yahweh's desire to renew His nature. This will happen through Yahweh becoming human. The true cause of Yahweh's incarnation, as we have seen, is His encounter with Job.²⁹ Christ, the Son and second person of the Trinity, is on one hand the mortal man Adam, but on the other, the God begotten by the Father, who as the Son rejuvenates the Father.³⁰ Yahweh's decision to become human has profound consequences: He rises above the existing level of self-consciousness by indirectly acknowledging that Job is morally superior to Him. Precisely because His creation surpassed Him, Yahweh must renew Himself by becoming human. In this way, the human nature of God and the divine nature of humanity are revealed.

Jung criticizes the Protestant doctrine of the singularity of Christ's incarnation. He reminds us of Christ's words about adoption through the Spirit: The Holy Spirit will teach us all knowledge and

²⁶ Jung, *Answer*, 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 45

lead us to the fullness of truth, and believers will perform miracles greater than His. God's incarnation in Christ requires continuous realization, as the Son of God, due to His immaculate conception, is not fully an empirical human. He remained outside and above humanity. Job, on the other hand, is an ordinary man, so the injustice done to him can only be redeemed by God's incarnation in an empirical human being. For just as humanity had to suffer from God, so too must God suffer from humanity. The power of the Spirit will not be diminished in believers because they were not immaculately conceived, nor will it diminish their ability to perform miracles.³¹

From a metaphysical standpoint, the significance of the Spirit is invaluable, but not from the perspective of ecclesiastical organization, as the Holy Spirit, as we read in Scripture, "blows where it wills." For this reason, the uniqueness of Christ's incarnation is emphasized, while the continuation of incarnation—*incarnatio continua*—is largely ignored.³² The life of the Holy Spirit is revealed not only through affirming truths known to all but also through the courage to glimpse as-yet-unimagined facts. Jung asks: "(...) From the perspective of God's infinity and the possibilities of different eras of cosmic development about which we know nothing, to what extent has God been transformed?"³³ In other words, we know that God transformed Himself through the sacrifice on the cross, but we do not know whether this was a complete transformation or whether our knowledge of God is final. Jung explains: "In that case, we can expect to come into contact with realms of God that have not yet been transformed, and this may happen as our consciousness begins to expand into the spheres of the unconscious."³⁴

³¹ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

³² *Ibid.*, 91.

³³ Edward F. Edinger, *The New God-Image: Study of Jung's Key Letters Concerning the Evolution of the Western God-Image* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1996), 81.

³⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, *Letters*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 314. (emphasis mine).

The expansion of human consciousness into the realms of the unconscious has as its first task the realization of the interdependence of God and humanity, as well as the new and incomparably more significant role given to the human being. This realization is also linked to the aforementioned question: where does evil come from? Jung writes: "The answer to this age-old question can only be given if we assume the existence of a [supreme] being that is largely unconscious. Such a model of being would explain why God created humanity with the gift of self-consciousness and why He seeks to realize Himself through humanity. In this, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Buddhism agree. As Meister Eckhart wrote, 'God in His divinity is not blessed. He must forever be born in humanity.' This happens in the Book of Job: The Creator sees Himself through the eyes of human self-consciousness, which is why He became human and why humanity is endowed with the dangerous gift of the divine 'mind.' We see this truth in the saying: 'You are gods,' but humanity has not yet begun to know itself. Self-knowledge is necessary for humanity to prepare for the dangers brought by incarnation continua, which began with Christ and the sending of the Spirit to poor, almost unconscious beings. We still gaze blindly backward at the events of Pentecost instead of looking forward to the goal toward which the Spirit leads us. Humanity is thus wholly unprepared for the events that will follow. Divine forces compel humanity to progress by increasing self-consciousness and knowledge, developing and moving further away from the original religious context that no longer holds meaning for it. Its religious teachers and leaders remain hypnotized by events that once marked a new eon of self-consciousness, instead of understanding their essence and the consequences they will bring... It seems that the true history of the world consists in the gradual incarnation of divinity."³⁵

What consequences of the continuous incarnation of divinity, of which religious teachers and leaders are unaware, does Jung speak of? First, humanity has become a participant in divine life and is

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 435-436.

compelled to take on the responsibilities associated with continuous incarnation. Continuous incarnation also places before us the imperative of individuation. The meaning of individuation is not exhausted merely in the fact that humanity has risen above animals but also in that it has partly become a divine being. This means that humanity has reached maturity through the realization that not only does it depend on God, but God also depends on it.

“Humanity’s relationship with God will likely have to undergo significant changes. Instead of hymns to an unpredictable king or childish prayers to a beloved father, responsible living and fulfilling the divine will shall be our form of worship and relationship with God.”³⁶

It is well known that Joachim of Fiore was one of the sources of Jung’s inspiration. The Italian thinker wrote as early as the late 12th century that the Church would wither away in the third millennium and be replaced by a new, “spiritual Church.”³⁷ (Edinger 1996: 93) Jung believed that the sacred space in the era of the Spirit, in line with humanity’s new role, would not be limited to hymns and prayers. The old church of redemption would be replaced by a church of “responsible living,” and “responsible living” would become “our form of worship.”³⁸ The sacred space will expand from being exclusively liturgical to encompassing every area of human creativity that enables the realization of God’s continuous incarnation.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

³⁷ Edinger, *New*, 93.

³⁸ Jung, *Letters*, 316.

8. Nikolai Berdyaev on Genius, Creatio ex Nihilo, and a Special New Type of Monasticism

On the way of creative genius, it is possible that a special new type of monasticism should arise... The life of genius is a monastic life 'in the world'.

-N. Berdyaev

Men who are imperfect and are not saints sometimes possess more knowledge and more beauty than the saints and the perfect ones.

-N. Berdyaev

If someone intends to define what the adjective “religious” implies he would need to consider the most basic theological concepts: the concept of God and the concept of the human being. Consequently, “religious” is that kind of relationship that reflects our understanding of God and human being. Monasticism is an embodiment of this relation in its ideal form. Hence, monastic communities are concocted in such a way to provide the best framework for the implementation of the monastic methodology. It follows that if the image of God slightly changes this should automatically provoke modification of the notion of monasticism.

The hunch about the advent of “a special new type of monasticism”, chosen as this paper’s motto, presupposes therefore a possibility of mutation in God’s nature. There could be no “new” monasticism without a new image of God. Or, in other words, the new image of God instigates a new type of monasticism. But why would one need to speak about the “new God-image” in the first place?

The idea about the mutability of God’s nature, as we know, is unequivocally rejected by the Church Fathers. Change, it is argued, is a sign of imperfection. Being perfect, God cannot become “more perfect” and therefore He does not need to mutate.¹

¹ See Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, *Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2020), especially pp. 69–77.

Although it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss at length the issue of the immutability of God's nature, we cannot avoid mentioning the ontological problem perpetuated by this doctrine.² That divine nature cannot mutate entails in the final analysis that God has said everything He has to say. It also implies that God cannot create anything new. In other words, God has completely exhausted His creative capacities. What perhaps is not obvious at first sight is that by endorsing immutability of the divine nature we also accept the view that God is fully actualised. There is no potency or posse left in God that awaits to be realised, there is only esse or complete actualisation, which means that our concept of God is similar to the scholastic *actus purus*. Just like His nature, this world is also completed. The world is an endless repetition of uniformity.

The most important drawback of Plato's Demiurge, argue Christian thinkers, is that he cannot freely create. Demiurge's creativity is limited by the pre-existent matter, what Plato calls *me on* or relative non-being. So Christian theology introduces the concept of *ouk on* or absolute non-being, which should liberate God from all external constraints, allowing Him to create in absolute freedom. We notice that God's freedom is identified with freedom of creativity. God is free because He is creative.

What does it mean to be creative? It means to be free to create something different from what has always existed or, in other words, to create something that has never existed – something absolutely new. Thus, we can say that God is free – or that God surpasses the notion of platonic deity - because He can create absolute newness. So, is Christian God free? He would be free if He was capable of creating absolute newness, i.e., newness not only from our, human perspective but something new even for Himself. This would, however, imply a mutation of the divine nature. But, what do we exactly imply when we say “nature”?

² See Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, “Maximus’ *Opuscula* and the Concept of the Hypostatic Union: A Critical Interrogation of the Ontology of Absolute Non-Being”, *Studia Patristica* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024).

Nature is that, which exists only as enhypostatised or, put differently, only as a particular person. Thus, nature is that potency that allows for each person's radical ontological particularity. Nature is that, which makes possible continuous creation of radical newness in being. To be the potency that facilitates unending change, nature has to be something that in itself involves constant mutation. When we say that God creates *ex nihilo*, therefore, we infer that this nihil is God's nature. However, Christian absolute nihil is an utter lack of potency or an unconditional non-being. It is something that does not exist. So, the expression *creatio ex nihilo* is just another way of saying that God created the world *ex Deo* - out of Himself. God has to create out of Himself because his nature is something absolutely non-existent. God is God-without-nature or without power to create something different from Himself. Hence, God's liberation from pre-existent matter ended in His subjugation to absolute non-being.

Perhaps we understand better now why Berdyaev argues that the problem of the possibility to create a radical surplus in being is the most important question of our epoch.

We face the task of overcoming a twofold consciousness: the scientific consciousness of the impossibility of creatively increasing the amount of energy in the world, and the religious consciousness of the impossibility of continuing creativity in the world. Creative philosophy recognizes the dynamic quality of created being. Created being is continuously created – it knows no limits to the creative process; it is not a closed set of data. Created being is through and through personal and plural, i.e., it consists of self-sufficient and creative individual beings.

Unless we can actualize our uniqueness, we cannot claim to be free.³ But we need to ask the following question: When we speak about the creation of absolute newness, do we imply that this happens only in some sort of spiritual, abstract reality, or is the material

³ This question, of course, is logically preceded by the issue of God's liberty. Is God capable of creating a new ontological reality? Is God, the way we conceive Him, a free God?

world also involved? Does our creativity also affect physical reality? In other words, can we create new matter out of nothing? It seems that the quoted paragraph from Berdyaev is suggesting this possibility. Initially, this question may seem absurd, because both our common sense and our everyday experience tell us that this, of course, is not possible. How could we create *ex nihilo* something not simply intellectual, but also corporeal and tangible?

Firstly, because our nature is not only noetic but also physical we need to assume that this is achievable. We are psychosomatic creatures, we inhabit a world that is both mental and material, and these two aspects of our being are indistinguishably connected. What is physical is also intellectual and vice versa. Freedom therefore of necessity presupposes creation not only of a new mental world but also of a new material world – creation of a new matter.

Secondly, to dispel possible ambiguity, we need to specify what we imply by *creatio ex nihilo* or, more precisely, what is the ontological status of the “*nihil*”. We cannot create new matter out of nothing, if this nothing happens to be defined as absolute non-being. Already the Greeks knew that out of (the absolute) nothing, nothing comes. But perhaps there is a kind of “nothing” that makes possible the generation of the new material world, a non-being that is not an absolute lack of being?

When we talk about *creatio ex nihilo*, most of us probably imagine a running of an experiment in which a scientist is trying to bring forth new matter literally out of complete nothing. The fact, however, is that we never encounter this kind of absolute nothing. Where could one encounter absolute nothing? Nowhere. Why is this the case? Because absolute nothing - does not exist. This means that we are always surrounded by something that is still formless and amorphous and so we chose to qualify it as “nothing”. The nature of this “nothing” is something that allows for the creation of radical newness.

So the reason why we cannot encounter absolute non-being is that it does not exist. But what about the new matter? Can we prove that a new piece of matter came into being, on this planet or elsewhere

in the Universe? Of course, nowadays already in the primary school kids learn that from the time of Mendeleev in 1869 there were 65 elements added to the periodical table. Mendeleev observed the gaps in the table and he predicted the discovery of new elements. In nature, only elements up to 94 atomic numbers exist, but the rest of 24 were created, i.e., synthesized in a laboratory. We don't know yet how far the table will be expanded and whether the patterns of the known part of the table will continue into this unknown realm.⁴ However, the question we should be concerned with is whether the generation of new elements could be qualified as a creation out of nothing? In other words, what is the "nihil" the scientist deal with to create new elements?

To create the world's next undiscovered element number 119 one would need to take a few milligrams of berkelium, a rare radioactive metal that can be made only in specialized nuclear reactors. One should bombard the sample of berkelium with a beam of titanium ions, accelerated to around one-tenth the speed of light. Then, we should wait for about a year and be very patient. For every 10 quintillion titanium ions that slam into berkelium, the experiment will probably produce only one atom of element 119. Nonetheless, the new atom will fall apart within one-tenth of a millisecond. As it decays, it will spit out α -particles and γ -rays, which hit silicon detectors placed around the target, testifying that element 119, if only evanescently, existed.⁵

Scientists use atoms, but perhaps we could to a certain extent qualify these atoms as "nothing". As we know, atoms are mostly empty space. If an atom were blown up to the size of a soccer field, the atomic nucleus at its centre would be the size of a small grape. To create a new element, the minuscule nuclei at the centre of both atoms

⁴ Elizabeth Williams, "Modern-Day Alchemy: A Recipe for a New Super-heavy Element," *The Conversation*, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/modern-day-alchemy-a-recipe-for-a-new-superheavy-element-17598>.

⁵ Philip Ball, "Extreme Chemistry: Experiments at the Edge of the Periodic Table," *Nature*, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00285-9>.

must touch each other, because only then can the nuclear force begin to be efficient. The nuclear force is that power that glues the protons and neutrons in the atomic nucleus together.⁶

So, is the space between the atoms - the so-called empty space - empty? It is not because, as we see, it is charged with different kinds of forces, one of which is nuclear force. We may say that totally empty space is an illusion as much as it is the absolute “nihil”. “Emptiness” or “nihility” should be regarded as potency capable of generating new reality. If the structure of matter were fully actualised, it could not bring forth a new being. This brings us to the conclusion that matter is not configured as *actus purus* or an *esse*, which is fully actualised and therefore immobile and immutable. The structure of matter is a binary dialectical union of potency and the actualised, a combination of *posse* and *esse* - or *possest*, in the words of Nicolas of Cusa.

Unlike mainstream Christian theology, Berdyaev claims that we cannot avoid acknowledging a creative development in God. The creation of the world is creative development in God, His emergence from solitude; it is the call of divine love. Creativity presupposes movement and dynamic within divine life. The creative process is carried out in God from all eternity... If divine nature is not capable of creativity, what sort of nature could be?⁷

Let us for a moment entertain this heterodox idea that from all eternity divine life is characterised by movement and dynamic. If we want to be consistent, this would imply that God is free to create something new for Himself; that this newness is every human person, and that this person, being unknown to God, can also create something unknown to Him. We now have a new God-image that entirely changes the nature of the relationship between God and humans and consequently changes the essence of what is called “religious”. If God’s nature is a bottomless potency, a “nothing” that yearns to become something, then God’s essential attribute is the activity of constant

⁶ Williams, *Alchemy*.

⁷ Berdyaev, Nicolas. *The Meaning of the Creative Act*. San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009, 128.

creation. The main principle of God's nature is movement and change. God is free - and He is a living God - because He can constantly move forward, adding new traits to his being. This happens to be also the chief quality of the human being: by generating new realities, we are enlarging each other's beings. This is how we arrive at the concept of a special new type of monasticism.

Is there some other religious way, some other religious experience of creative ecstasy? By itself, the way of asceticism is not a creative way, and the ascetic ecstasy of saints and mystics is an ecstasy of return to God, the vision of the divine light, rather than the creation of a new world, of life hitherto unseen. The experience of creative ecstasy as a religious way is not revealed in the consciousness of the Church Fathers or in the consciousness of the old mystics. The creative experience, the creative ecstasy, is either denied completely by religious consciousness as 'worldly' and of the passions or else is merely admitted and permitted. Up to the present, religious consciousness has seen in creativeness, not 'spiritual', but rather 'worldly' action.⁸

As we know, Berdyaev believed that Christianity goes through different epochs, following the changes in God's being. He discerns three different religious periods: the epoch of the law (Old Testament), the epoch of redemption (New Testament), and the religious epoch of creativity (Holy Spirit). Berdyaev argues that the old religious consciousness could only ask the question of the justification of creative experience, but the new religious consciousness puts the question of creative experience as in itself religious and in itself justifying.⁹

In Berdyaev's view, creativeness truly follows the Gospel commandment not to love the world. The creative person feels not to be of this given world and desires to create a new world. Simply because it is given to us, the world represents a necessity that we need to overcome by creating a new world.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 161. (emphasis mine).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

In the creative act, man passes out from this world and enters another world. The creative act is not an arrangement of “this world”, but in it another world, a real cosmos, is set up. Creativeness is not an adaptation to this world – creativeness is a transition beyond the limits of this world and the overcoming of its necessity... Not to love the world means to be free and to reveal our sonship to God: to cling to this world, however, means being a slave to necessity.¹⁰

Creativeness is the overcoming of the world in the Gospel sense, different from asceticism but equal to it in value. In Christianity, the attitude towards “the world” has been too pagan and characterised by obedience to evil. Unlike the ascetic path, creativeness is not an experience of obedience, but rather an experience of daring.¹¹ One should not think, however, that there is a contradiction or opposition between creativeness and asceticism. The world that asceticism denies is also denied by creativeness. But while the traditional path is content with the negative asceticism, - with the rejection of the world - creativeness is a positive asceticism because it affirms quite another world.

Berdyaev does not reject negative asceticism and he wants to complement it with the positive one. He explains that the struggle with sin begins with repentance: “The spiritual life is unthinkable without the great mystery of repentance. Sin must not be only recognised but also consumed in the fire of repentance.”¹² However, repentance sometimes may not bear fruit and may lead to spiritual suicide. When repentance turns into despair, it should stop there. Then it is necessary to take another way.

When deep despair sets in, when one is unable to arrive at a new life through repentance when the darkness within has attained its thickest concentration, then repentance loses its value and must itself overcome. And there remains only one way of salvation from spiritual death... - the way of creative shaking of the spirit. In a mysterious

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162-163. (emphasis mine).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹² *Ibid.*, 165.

and wonderful way, repentance is reborn into creative impulse and renews the fainting and fading spirit frees its constructive powers. Creativity cannot replace repentance. The way of repentance is inevitable, but the creative ecstasy and the creative impulse are a revolutionary birth into new life.¹³

Berdyaev warns against those who demand only repentance but fear and forbid the creative upsurge. Whoever does this must be, in Berdyaev's view, "out of his mind". These lovers of repentance, "timorous opponents of creativity, are enemies of the spirit's rebirth..."¹⁴ Negative asceticism or the asceticism of the Church Fathers was something new in the world. But now this same asceticism has become "a mortal prison for the new man, for our new times."

The revolutionary spirit of asceticism has changed into petrification and inertia. St Isaac the Syrian was palpitatingly alive in his time and will remain so forever. His work was revolutionary: it carried on a super-human struggle against the old nature... Today St Isaac the Syrian, great and eternal, may become a source of death for us... Now the world is moving towards new forms of ascetic discipline. The old experience of humility and obedience has turned into something evil. And it is necessary to enter the way of religious disobedience to the world and the evil of the world when the spirit of death is sensed in the fruits of obedience. Man is to face the world not with humble obedience but rather with creative activity.¹⁵

Christianity was once young, new, and revolutionary, but it has now become lifeless and petrified. What once was life has now become for the new man only a dead formula. "The New Testament has become a religion of the scribes and Pharisees. Christianity is fading away and crumbling down in front of the creative religious epoch just like the Old Testament was dying and collapsing in front of advancing Christ."¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* The last sentence is missing from the English translation.

Christianity is going through different epochs and it's getting old – it's 2,000 years old. People of the new epoch may have a larger revelation not because they are spiritually more perfect than the one who lived 1,000 years ago, but because they live in another cosmic epoch and another stage of revelation.¹⁷ What is especially important is that the new cosmic epoch is not at all connected with man's saintliness. Holiness was a characteristic gift only of Christianity's youth.

There used to be more saintliness than we have now. The saintliness in our world has diminished – it is as though the man had been deprived of the gift of saintliness. If we are to expect a new revelation, a religious renaissance out of personal saintliness, then our situation is hopeless... Christianity, as a New Testament revelation of redemption, is becoming decrepit. The Christian blood is cooling off and all sorts of restoratory measures are being used to warm it up again. You cannot produce youth artificially. And Christian saintliness was related to Christianity's youth.¹⁸

What humanity now needs so as to produce a new religious renaissance is something else than holiness. In Christian holiness, there is undoubtedly an eternal truth, but this truth is incomplete and it does not reveal the whole meaning of the human calling. Berdyaev believes that alone, this old Christian saintliness is unable to lead man over into a world-creative epoch. Each one of us, poor as we may be, with almost no spiritual gifts, are already living in a religious epoch other than that of the great saints. We cannot pretend to belong to the period of Christian youth and start our life as if Christianity was not two millennia old.

The old Christian consciousness, which fearfully closed its eyes to man's religious growth, which obliged him to undertake bold creativity, is doomed to disappear because we no longer have the sainthood and saintly living which there was in the youth of Christianity. Powerless envy of the religious life of the past gnaws at the Christians

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

today. This constant spiritual depression paralyses creativeness and gives birth only to religious cowardice. This eternal discouragement, because one is powerless to become a saint, is unworthy: this does not increase saintliness by one iota.¹⁹

Berdyaev argues that it is not that all cannot be saints; not all should be. Not all of us are called to be saints. Sainthood is a calling and from the religious viewpoint, the one who is not destined should not try to become a saint. It would have been a religious crime if, for example, Pushkin, in a fruitless effort to become a saint, had ceased to write poetry.²⁰

Genius or a creative person like Pushkin is the role model for the new religious epoch. Men are elected to the way of genius as much as they are to the path of sainthood. "Pushkin was fated to be a genius-creator", writes Berdyaev, "and he not only could not have been a saint, he should not be one."

In every truly creative genius, there has been the sainthood of the creative epoch, another kind of sainthood, more sacrificial than ascetic and canonic sainthood. Genius is another kind of sainthood, but it can be recognised and canonised only in the revelation of creativeness. Genius is sainthood of daring rather than of obedience... Perhaps a virtuous humility is not always pleasing to God. In the dark womb of life, there ever remains some rebellious and God-resisting blood and the pulse of free, creative instinct.²¹

Berdyaev is convinced that the creative experience of genius will be recognized as religiously equal in value with the ascetic saintliness. And just as the will to holiness has been recognized as a religious imperative, so will be the will for genius. This is possible because the potentiality of genius, like the potentiality of saintliness, rests in the very image and likeness of God. "The Creator foreordained man for genius."²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 173. (emphasis mine).

²² *Ibid.*, 176.

But before we recognize the religiosity of genius, we need to overcome the old Christian consciousness according to which in the experience of saintliness there is revealed the creative secret of being, a secret surpassing the mystery revealed in the creativity of genius. Christianity of redemption has been teaching for 2,000 years that saintliness is the only path to the secrets of being. All the gifts are given as a reward for holiness and outside holiness they are unobtainable. This old Christian consciousness argues that only holiness is the revelation of the mystery of creativity; only the saint is the true knower and the true poet.

The saint in his contemplation learns the final secrets of being, and in developing his saintliness he creates beauty. This consciousness leaves nothing to genius: everything is given to saintliness. But can we admit that the gnostic gift or the poetic gift depend on saintliness or religious-moral perfection? (...) Is not the gift of saintliness a special gift, different from the gnostic, the poetic ... I think the gnostic gift in Jakob Boehme was far stronger than in St Francis, and the poetic gift in Pushkin was more powerful than in St Seraphim of Sarov. To the genius of Boehme and Pushkin, there were revealed things which were not revealed to the saintliness of Francis and Seraphim. Men who are imperfect and are not saints sometimes possess more knowledge and more beauty than the saints and the perfect ones.²³

There have been many saints, reminds us Berdyaev, who were very poor in the gifts of knowledge or beauty, and who were not at all gnostics or poets. Likewise, there were great mystics who contemplated the higher mysteries but who were not at all saintly. "Poets have rarely been saints."²⁴ Most Christians no doubt believe that those who are not foreordained to be saints must not dare to create, to grasp the mysteries of being or to create beauty. But in that case, Berdyaev observes, we should condemn all the geniuses of the world since they venture to create without being saints. We should also reject

²³ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Christianity that teaches free grace, reminding us that every gift is something free and that only that which is free is a gift.

In the religious epoch of the law and redemption, the moral side of human nature outweighed its aesthetic and cognitive side. Salvation or perdition are related only to our moral perfection, while the aesthetic or the cognitive side are neglected. It follows that the only meaningful religious activity is centred around salvation. Hence, the monk is defined exclusively as someone who prays for his and the salvation of the world. But Berdyaev wants us to meditate about the question that has rarely been asked in the history of philosophy.

But can the same goal [of salvation] be reached by religious-aesthetic or religious-perceptive perfection? Can God refuse a man for his ugliness or want of knowledge if the man is morally perfect? Can a man be refused because he does not create beauty or knowledge? Can a man be saved and inherit eternal life by great accomplishments in the beauty of knowledge? For man's eternal life, does God require only the moral man, or also aesthete and the knower?²⁵

Berdyaev claims that every kind of perfection, in everything like the perfection of God – ontological and not only moral – entire fullness of being is required for eternal life. We doubt that Berdyaev had in mind any specific type of community when he writes about the “special new type of monasticism.” He was a solitary person who believed that “in the single, lone Nietzsche there was more of the universal spirit than in many a sect, many a social collective, even than in the official churchliness.”²⁶ So probably his first and indirect verdict about monastic communities, written in 1916, at the beginning of his career, should be considered as the last one: “The life of genius is a monastic life ‘in the world.’”²⁷

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

9. Was There a Time Before the Big Bang? The Patristic Concept of God and Stephen Hawking's Proto-Singularity

Most contemporary philosophers would likely agree that the most pressing issue today is the question of artificial intelligence. This topic is inevitably linked to the fundamental theological question of the relationship between God and human beings, specifically whether humans, like God, can create a living being. The project of artificial intelligence appears to set maximalist goals, aiming not only to create superintelligence or construct an artificial body but to create a living being. It seems that humanity, as the image of God, is inscribed with an imperative dream—an archetype—of creating a living being, as evident in stories of the Golem, homunculus, or Frankenstein. We call a being “living” if, from the moment of its creation, it continues to self-develop and self-create independently of its creator, without merely replicating the creator’s deeds. To create an entirely new reality, such a being would need to possess a unique and absolutely singular identity.¹ If I am absolutely unique, then every manifestation of my being is also unique, radically new to others. A being endowed with an absolutely unique identity is what we call a personality. It is clear that humans can create artificial intelligence characterized by great logical reasoning power. There may be a difference in the degree of intelligence between two machines, but is there, beyond this quantitative distinction, another qualitative criterion by which we could differentiate them? How can a qualitative difference, uncopiable and unattainable by any other machine, be embedded in a machine? This is precisely the most important characteristic of

¹ More about the concept of identity see Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, *Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2020), 48.

identity and personality: everything a personality manifests carries an elusive tone or hue unique to that personality alone. Even when we do not know the author of a musical piece, we can identify it as Bach, Vivaldi, or Mozart based on this distinctive expression.

The renowned Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev argued that there is a clear boundary between divine and human creativity. According to Berdyaev, humans can create new worlds but can never create a personality.² Only God creates personality. The claim that it is possible to create a personality implies a clear stance on the nature of the Creator and the Universe. If a personality is absolutely unique, creating each personality represents an absolute increase in Being. This, in turn, means that claiming the possibility of creating a personality asserts that God can add something new to His being, augmenting and transforming it. The theory of personality, therefore, cannot be grounded in the classical conception of God as an Absolute, whose fundamental attributes are simplicity, perfection, immutability, and immobility.

Despite efforts to conceptually separate the notion of God from the ancient Greek concept of the Absolute, Christian theology has not fully succeeded in this endeavour. The Absolute and the Christian God share identical attributes of perfection, omnipotence, and immutability, rendering them self-sufficient and without need for an ontological “other.” Berdyaev asserts that for the Absolute, there is not and never will be another in the true sense.³ The Absolute has already said all it had to say and done all it had to do. Nothing happens in the Absolute, nor can anything ever happen, especially not the creation of an ontologically distinct other.

Based on this model of the Absolute, the prevailing concept of the Universe assumes that the total amount of energy is always constant. Energy cannot be destroyed, nor can it be increased or created

² Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (San Rafael, CA, Semantron Press 2001), 112.

³ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (Semantron Press, San Rafael CA, 2009), 49-50.

ex nihilo. This view appears to contradict claims by some scientists that the universe is expanding at an incredible rate, approximately 67.5 kilometres per second per megaparsec (a distance equivalent to 3.26 million light-years). In other words, the distance between galaxies increases at a speed nearly four times that of light. However, expansion does not necessarily imply enrichment or the creation of something new; it may simply be an eternal repetition of uniformity.

The Absolute is thus conceived in accordance with the principle of divine simplicity. This principle is unconditionally accepted by the patristic concept of God, despite the evident complexity of God's being—consisting of divine nature and the Trinity, with the second Person being both God and man. The issue is further complicated by the concept of uncreated energies introduced by Gregory Palamas in the 14th century.

The theory of personality clearly rests on the assumption of the possibility of continuous augmentation and expansion of both God's being and the Universe. This stance, as Berdyaev notes, contradicts two types of consciousness: 1) religious consciousness, which claims that it is impossible to continue the creation of the world, and 2) scientific consciousness, which asserts that it is impossible to increase total energy or create energy *ex nihilo*.⁴ According to Berdyaev, the most critical task of contemporary philosophy is to overcome these two forms of consciousness, which share the same premise: it is impossible to add something new to being, whether being is understood as God or the Universe. God and the world are complete, immutable, and immobile, and there is not, nor will there ever be, anything “new under the Sun.” If God is conceived as complete, He cannot create an absolutely new reality—personality—whose fundamental attribute is the power to continue the creation of the world as an absolute novelty.

Paul Tillich writes that the theistic God deprives us of identity and particularity because we simplistically imagine Him as omnipotent

⁴ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 133.

and omniscient.⁵ This God appears as an invincible tyrant, an Absolute beside whom no being can have freedom or identity.⁶ This is the God, Tillich notes, that Nietzsche sought to kill because no one can bear being reduced to a mere object of someone's absolute knowledge and control. "If there are gods," Nietzsche writes, "then nothing is left for us to create."⁷ Theism is the deepest root of atheism. Thus, the most critical question contemporary philosophy must inevitably pose is: can humans create a new world?

This example demonstrates that philosophy and the natural sciences are not as distant in their fundamental assumptions as is commonly thought. Classical metaphysics and science are based on a similar prejudice: God and the Universe are understood as perfect and complete Absolutes. We cannot say that nothing happens in the Absolute, in any of its various forms, but what does happen is always a failure to create the world. In Plato, the created world is merely a pale shadow of the eternal world of Ideas. In Plotinus, the world arises from the overflow of the One's surplus, and the further the wave of creation moves from its Cause, the less being it contains.

By proclaiming the law of the impossibility of increasing energy, physics asserts that the proto-singularity is perfect, immutable, and immobile. Traditional theologians claim the same for God. However, a singularity conceived in this way cannot explode; the Big Bang cannot occur within it. A God conceived in this manner has no reason to move. Even if we were to assume movement in God, it would merely be a repetition and reflection of God in creation, bringing nothing new to Being. Creation is justified only if it brings augmentation.

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd, Digswell Place, 1968), 202.

⁶ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 3-4.

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006., 67.

The Mystery of Time

What is time? Modern science has confirmed what artists have long intuited: time and space do not exist as objective categories. There is no giant cosmic clock ticking minutes and hours at a uniform rhythm for all people.

There are three types of time: 1) the circular time of cosmology, measured by the movement of planets; 2) conventional time, determined by calendars and clocks through agreement; and 3) existential time, which is not measurable and flows differently for each person, depending on the nature of their life. Thomas Mann's "The Magic Mountain" explores these three types of time as one of the novel's central themes. The time that Marcel Proust writes with a capital "T"—time lost and then found—is the protagonist of "In Search of Lost Time".⁸ This essay is primarily concerned with the third form of time, the existential and unmeasurable. The Church Fathers write that what is "anypostato" (without personal form) is "anuparkto" (non-existent). Just as there is no human nature outside a specific personality, there is no (existential) time outside a specific individual. Accordingly, there exists only hypostatic, personal, or existential time.

In his final book, "Brief Answers to Big Questions",⁹ Stephen Hawking explains that in the ultimate singularity—a super-dense point of mass before the Big Bang—gravity was so strong that it completely compressed time and space. Thus, in the depths of this primordial density, time did not exist. In other words, time did not exist "before" the Big Bang, meaning there could not have been a Creator. For, as Hawking argues, if there was no time, there was no possibility for a Creator's existence.

Is it possible, however, to imagine a singularity in which, despite extreme density, some form of time and space existed—forms

⁸ See Romilo Knežević, *Time and Cognition: A Theological Reading of Marcel Proust* (Serbian), Belgrade: Orthodox Theological Faculty, 2011).

⁹ Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (New York: Bantam Books, 2018).

without which it would be impossible to theoretically ground the hypothesis of the Big Bang? It should be clarified that the purpose of this essay is not to defend the existence of a Creator despite the timelessness of the singularity. I merely wish to point out that, on this issue, Hawking deviates from what Berdyaev calls the principle of scientific consciousness.

From a philosophical standpoint, it is “avant-garde” to claim that a Creator requires time to exist, as this introduces time into a divine being that, by definition, should be timeless. This is not only avant-garde but also logically inconsistent. Clearly, Hawking uses the singularity as an equivalent to a Creator. However, in the singularity, time does not exist, meaning the Big Bang or the act of world creation does not require time. In contrast, Hawking emphasizes that a Creator’s existence is impossible without time.

The similarity in structure between the theistic and patristic God and Hawking’s singularity is evident. Both God and the singularity have a simple or singular configuration. In other words, they are not conceived as a binary or dialectical unity of opposing principles. It is well-known, however, that a binary structure of God’s being would violate the principle of divine simplicity, one of the most fundamental principles of Aristotelian and classical Christian metaphysics. God cannot be complex, as this would lead to polytheism.

Scholastic metaphysics describes God as *actus purus*, or “pure actuality.”¹⁰ This means that God is absolutely perfect and, consequently, cannot become better or more perfect. Movement in God is *a priori* rejected as a sign of imperfection. God is perfect and thus self-sufficient. Not only does God have no need to add anything to His being, but He also cannot do so, as He is *actus purus*, absolute actuality. The fact that He is conceived as perfect in this way indicates that there is no potentiality (*posse*) in Him that would need to be actualized. *Actus purus* is, therefore, immutable and immobile.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 3, a. 4, ad. 1.

See also: Charles Herbermann, ed., “Actus Purus,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913).

Hawking's proto-singularity is also simple and monolithic. The singularity is so densely compressed that it allows no room for an opposing principle. Like the theistic deity, Hawking's singularity possesses no potentiality. Thus, we can conclude that Hawking, perhaps unconsciously, thinks in alignment with traditional theology, creating a secular version of divine simplicity—the simplicity of the proto-singularity.

Given that this conceived singularity lacks potentiality to be actualized, it is also perfect, immutable, and immobile. This makes it difficult to explain why an explosion or Big Bang would occur in a singularity with these characteristics. Moreover, how could something previously immutable and immobile suddenly move and change?

The theory of the Big Bang, like other fundamental laws of quantum physics, cannot be based on a timeless and spaceless concept of the singularity. It is unclear which of the three types of time mentioned earlier Hawking has in mind when he claims the singularity is timeless. It certainly cannot be conventional or cosmic time. This leaves only the existential or personal form of time.

Time and space represent the movement of creating radically new realities. In a world of sameness and uniformity, time and space do not exist. Thus, for the primordial explosion in the singularity—the Big Bang—to occur, time and space are necessary. Time and space represent the potentiality (*posse*) for the emergence of that which has never existed before. The only novelty in being is personality, and the only being capable of bringing new realities is personality. Time does not exist where there is no personality.

God as Coincidentia Oppositorum

However, there are currents in philosophy and theology that argue for the necessity of restoring the principle of potentiality to God's being. The concept of God's perfection is now interpreted differently. God is not perfect due to His complete actuality and finality but, on the contrary, due to His power to continuously create anew, infinitely

enriching and expanding being. Philosophers like Richard Kearney¹¹ argue that *posse* must not be imagined as something God can tame and appropriate, as this would strip it of its potential for otherness. Berdyaev adds that we must conceive of *posse* as something uncreated, as uncreated freedom, metaphorically located outside of God.

These philosophical currents, therefore, understand God as a dialectical unity of binary opposites. Theology cannot avoid addressing God's complexity, as it always speaks of God's nature and three Hypostases. Thus, it is difficult to understand why theologians continue to strive to preserve the classical interpretation of divine simplicity.

The structure of God's being represents the maximal tension between infinite potentiality (*posse* or non-being) and the actualization of this potentiality (*esse* or being). Classical theism, in contrast, seeks to subordinate potentiality to actualization. Over centuries, rationalism stripped God of this attribute, and, as Paul Tillich writes, "the power of divine nature disappeared."¹² God became *actus purus*, pure actuality without potentiality.

One thinker who dared to challenge the theistic concept of God was Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464). Cusa rejected the theory that potentiality derives from actualization and is of secondary importance. He boldly asserted that potentiality and actualization coexist in God, leading him to coin the term *possest*, which denotes the unity of *posse* and *esse*.¹³ However, he does not follow the logical consequences of his theory and concludes that the world has always existed in God. Cusa believes that all reality is already actualized in God, and nothing remains outside of God. Everything different from

¹¹ Romilo Aleksandar Knežević, "Outside of God: A Theanthropic Scrutiny of Nietzsche's Concept of Chaos and Berdyaev's Notion of the Ungrund." Athens: *Analogia: The Pemptousia Journal for Theological Studies*, 2020), 78.

¹² Tillich, *Systematic*, 278. Knežević, *Outside*, 78.

¹³ Nicholas of Cusa, *Dialogus de Posseset*, in *The Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, by Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 69.

God is already contained in God, ceasing to be different, unlimited, and unpredictable. In Cusa's case, actualization/esse completely engulfs posse.¹⁴ However, Tillich warns that "life implies the separation of potentiality and actualization." If we imagine God as a living God, Tillich argues, there must be maximal tension between these two elements. Something must be simultaneously in God and outside God. Otherwise, there is no tension from which life arises.

This type of tension is found in Nikolai Berdyaev, who drew inspiration for some of his most important ideas from the writings of Jakob Böhme, a 16th-century German mystic. Böhme developed a theory of the Ungrund, or abyssal freedom, which lies at the foundation of all being.¹⁵ It seems evident that this abyssal freedom is, in fact, God's nature. Importantly, Böhme believed that nature, though the foundation of all being, including God's, resides in God. Böhme's concept of the Ungrund is akin to the Kabbalistic notion of *tzimtzum*, which denotes the space of freedom God created within Himself for humanity.

Berdyaev adopted Böhme's idea of the Ungrund but made a crucial modification. He argued that if we say freedom is in God, we imply that freedom is created, that God created it. Consequently, freedom loses its potential for realizing otherness, as everything that exists in it also exists in God. Berdyaev thus dared to make a paradigm-shifting claim: this is uncreated freedom, metaphorically located outside God. The fact that freedom is outside God means that God is not its creator.

Is there anything problematic with the theory of uncreated freedom, freedom outside God? If we replace the phrase "uncreated freedom" with the term "nature"—divine nature—it becomes clear that Berdyaev is making a fundamental paradigm shift. By claiming that freedom/nature is outside God, he articulates what theology has

¹⁴ Knežević, *Outside*, 84.

¹⁵ Jacob Böhme, *Aurora* (Morgen Röte im Aufgang, 1612) and *Ein gründlicher Bericht or A Fundamental Report* (Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620) (Leiden – Boston: 2013), 4:120–121; 2.1:8.

always believed but never dared to fully express: that divine nature is uncreated, meaning God did not create His own nature. Theologians likely fear voicing this thought, as it would imply that there is something God did not create, thus suggesting that God is not omnipotent.

Why did Berdyaev consider it necessary to radically deconstruct the theistic concept of God and, perhaps for the first time in the history of philosophy, explicitly claim that there is something “outside” God, something God did not create? A God whose structure is $A=A$ cannot create something different from Himself. Such a God can only replicate Himself. Since there can be only one God, the created world represents a failed attempt at God’s self-replication in time and space. How does this relate to the problems of contemporary cosmology?

Time Before the Big Bang

With the binary concept of God in mind, the question arises: how does this fundamental paradigm shift affect our understanding of the origin of the world and the theory of the Big Bang?

According to the Big Bang theory, the universe emerged as a result of an explosion in a maximally compressed singularity smaller than an atom. From this point, all matter, energy, and so-called “empty space” that constitute the universe, and everything that could ever exist in it, originated. This raw material evolved into the cosmos as we know it today, following a series of strictly prescribed scientific rules and laws.

What are the fundamental characteristics of the proto-singularity, and how could they have led to the “bang” that gave rise to the world? How should we understand this “explosion”?

Stephen Hawking and his like-minded colleagues argue that a combination of the laws of gravity, relativity, and quantum physics would be sufficient to explain everything that has happened or will happen in the universe. However, it is unclear which of these laws would be

responsible for the primordial explosion of the proto-singularity. The proto-singularity could have remained an unformed point of indeterminacy, but something—some law of being—set it into existence.

I believe it would be correct to say that the proto-singularity is structured according to a binary *posse/esse* model, in which the element of actualization can never fully exhaust the element of potentiality. Using Jakob Böhme's terminology, the explosion we speak of is the result of the yearning and desire of the primordial Nothing or proto-potentiality to become Something. However, it is difficult to imagine how an impersonal Nothing could yearn to become Something. Yearning and desire are not attributes of essence, substance, or nature; they exist only in the personal realm. The biblical God differs from Aristotle's Prime Mover in this regard, as He expresses a desire to create the world: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light..."

If there was time before the Big Bang, what did it look like? How can we describe time in the absolute singularity? This question is significant because, if there was no time in the point of absolute density, there could have been no "bang" and no creation of the world. To explain the origin of the world, we must question the structure of the singularity, just as we did with the concept of the theistic *actus purus*. It is necessary to assume a binary configuration of the singularity, whose essence is the maximal tension between potentiality and actualization, non-being and being. Time before the Big Bang is the tension between abyssal potentiality and actualization. As Tillich wrote, the nature of life is not existence (*essentia*) but becoming (*existentia*).¹⁶

Time can thus be defined as the actualization of the power to create radical novelty in the universe, that is, to create personality and personal reality. In the realm of uniformity and sameness, neither time nor life exists. For there to be movement and life in both God and the world, it is necessary to assume the existence of an abyssal and infinite freedom or potentiality as the foundation of all that exists.

¹⁶ Tillich, *Systematic*, 272-273. Knežević, *Outside*, 85.

Thus, the answer to the question of whether there was time before the Big Bang is: if infinite potentiality is the foundation of all that exists, time has always existed, in the form of infinite potentiality.

Transitioning from a proto-singularity to a proto-binarity does not fully resolve the question of the world's origin and its ontological freedom, as the most important categories in our explanations remain impersonal: The Absolute, potentiality, essence, substance, being, and nature. Both classical theism and modern science remain captives of a Neoplatonic worldview that still conceives the Creator of the world as an Absolute, as essence. Berdyaev wrote that enslavement to the Absolute is humanity's primordial enslavement. Philosophers and theologians have attempted to free themselves from the concept of essence or *ousia*, but they did so in a flawed and hopeless manner, adding the prefix "super" to essence. God was no longer essence but super-essence, "hyperousiotes". However, this strategy could not liberate them from the realm of essence; on the contrary, each added prefix only reinforced its dominance. The use of the prefix "super," particularly prevalent in Dionysius the Areopagite and later in Gregory Palamas, was a clear example of the futile and tragic efforts of some thinkers to break through to the realm of freedom.

To reach freedom, another paradigm shift is needed—a revolutionary new concept that carries a radically new ontological connotation. We all know this concept is hypostasis, introduced into patristic thought by the Cappadocians. Before the Cappadocians, hypostasis had the same connotation as *ousia*—essence. However, the Cappadocians decided that henceforth, the term would mean personality. As I noted at the beginning, the Fathers state that what is *anypostato* is *anaparkto*. Essence does not exist on its own but only in a specific personality. In the world of an immobile and self-sufficient essence, as in the world of the proto-singularity, time does not exist. But time exists in the primordial binarity, in a God who is a dialectical unity of nature and hypostasis.

Perhaps the greatest effort in quantum physics relates to the question of indeterminacy, which is essentially the question of freedom.

But there can be no unpredictability or freedom in a world where it is impossible to create new energy, in a world of a complete and immobile Absolute. To unravel the mystery of reality, quantum physics will likely require a paradigm shift similar to the one that occurred in philosophy when the impersonal essence ceased to be the primary metaphysical category and was replaced by personality.

10. Poet and Homo Theurgos¹

Man lives in history and he cannot help using historical means for creating relationships, either with God or with other men. One of the historical means par excellence for communication is, certainly, language. If we say, together with John Zizioulas, that man is a relational being, we have to go one step further and claim that man is a being of language. If the essence of man's relational existence is language, we are bound to elucidate the semantic of this language.

Rainer Maria Rilke's "transformation" of the visible into invisible is operated by means of language. Man cannot save the visible unless he creates the language of the invisible, as Maurice Blanchot argues in *L'Espace Littéraire*.² I argue that manual side of our acts represents solely external crust. According to Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, who was a priest and an artist, the Eucharist is performed in that way so as to keep in our mind as fully as possible Christ's deeds during His life amongst men. Sakharov writes that the priest who prepares himself for celebrating the Eucharist is obliged, according to his powers, to have in his mind and in his entire being³ the meaning of Christ's redemptive journey on earth: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5). A manual act acquires its full meaning only if taken together with the noetic attitude

¹ The text was published in the magazine *Poem: International English Language Quarterly*. Edited by Fiona Sampson. Issue 2. London, 2013.

² Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 142.

³ "If the metamorphosis of the visible into the invisible is our task, if it is the truth of conversion, then there is a point at which we see it through without losing it in the evanescence of "extremely momentary" states... "How, says Rilke, in a text written in French, "how could one sustain, how could one save the visible, if not by creating the language of absence, of the invisible?"

³ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *His Life is Mine* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 87.

that follows it. One external act can have many different and even mutually excluding meanings depending on the thoughts that accompany it. So I fully agree with Jean-Louis Chrétien when he writes that manual praise presupposes speech:

So there assuredly is an operative praise, a manual praise. But it presupposes speech, as in any case its social character confirms, and it cannot be seen as its opposite. St Augustine thinks of agricultural labour as dialogue with nature: “Human reason can in some degree speak with the nature of things.” [Emphasis added.]⁴

Nothing that we do only with our hands can be regarded as a genuine Eucharist. Man has to act with all his powers, corporeal and spiritual, undivided. In each of his human acts, his whole being ought to be focused and fully present; otherwise his actions are incomplete, feeble and ambiguous.

If manual praise presupposes speech, it means that we have to look for the inner-noetic, language-related meaning of the Eucharist. According to the original Greek word εὐχαριστία,⁵ as is well known, the Eucharist is the act of thanksgiving or expressing gratitude. Still, how can we establish the relation between human expression of gratitude to God and human creativity responsible for the transformation of the whole creation? In other words, what is the essence of thanksgiving? Jean-Louis Chrétien writes that to think is to thank.⁶ We find exactly the same presumption in Heidegger.

The Old English *thencan*, to think, and *thancian*, to thank, are closely related; the Old English noun for thought is *thanc* or *thonk*: a thought, a grateful thought, and the expression of such thought.

I argue that vice versa is also the case; that to thank is to think. In this way we interpret thanksgiving more broadly and it encompasses

⁴ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, trans. Andrew Brown, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2004), 144. *L'arche de la parole*, (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 195.

⁵ See: *A Greek Patristic Lexicon*, edited by G. W. H. Lampe, Oxford at Clarendon Press, 2004, p. 579.

⁶ Chrétien, *Ark*, 119.

human relation to the created world. In order to be genuinely creative, therefore, Eucharistic thanksgiving, ought to entail some sort of thinking.

However, I do not mean any kind of thinking, but the “thinking of being”.⁷ In the Eucharist we give thanks for all the gifts given to us by God, but first of all we are expressing thanks for the supreme gift which is that each one of us is an absolutely unique person, created in the image of God, which means that we are beings endowed with logos. Here I argue that human capacity of logos is the power of thought. Nonetheless, I don’t understand thinking as an operation of human being performed in vacuum, that is, thinking as a result of human ipse-ity. If being was created out of nothing, it bears the characteristics of its Creator. This implies that being of the created world is logos-like, that it bears the resemblance to God the Logos. This view is expressed with particular emphasis in the works of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

In the light of the Incarnation, for Hopkins even aesthetic experience is somehow Christened. In this light too, within the context of Duns Scotus’ influence, Hopkins perceived nature to be Christically expressive. The Incarnate Word is the ultimate pattern and intelligibility of created being in its various and singular manifestations.

Although they don’t use Christian terms with regard to their experience of the created world, one could argue that even secular writers such as James Joyce and Marcel Proust, write about the enigmatic essence of matter or what Hopkins called the inscape.⁸ Joyce, by virtue of his education very close to the Jesuit Hopkins, named this essence the whatness or quidditas of things, while Proust wrote about the general essence of things.⁹ One could hardly deny the

⁷ “The thinking of being is the primordial form of poeticizing...” Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 247.

⁸ Philip A. Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament; The Theological Aesthetics of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Louvain: Peeter, 2000), 90.

⁹ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (New York: New Directions Press, 1944), 211–13; Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, *À l’Ombre*

striking similarity between the whatness, inscape or general essence of things with what Heidegger named the gods.¹⁰ For Heidegger the created world, eventually – by being logosic or Christic – possessing the traits of the divine,¹¹ is an abyss of meaning and consequently the “most thought-provoking food for thought.”¹²

The Eucharist, in order to represent the authentic human creativity, ought to be giving thanks which think of the potentially infinitely reach of being. The true Eucharist is not simply an act of external pioussness in which the priest offers the gifts to God. It is quite unclear from Zizioulas’ work what the activity of the congregation should be in the Eucharist. One has the impression of congregation’s sheer passivity, as if it is only the priest, and not every man, that has the vocation to be the priest of creation. Here, of course, I am not talking about the sacramental priesthood: which does not mean that this sort of priesthood is absolved from the necessity of thanking as thinking of the being. I am talking about the priesthood which is the gift given to every human being by the fact that he is a living being endowed with logos,¹³ and that man’s using of the capacity of logos has an immediate ontological impact on the whole creation. If this is the case, it should be observed that in Heidegger’s concept of human creativity and, consequently, in his notion of the priesthood of man,¹⁴ we find human agency. Heidegger’s understanding of the (non-sacramental) Eucharistic act is close to the Christian mystical contemplation of the logos-like nature of creation:

des jeunes filles en fleurs (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 24, 182.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 112.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹² Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967), 143.

¹³ “According to this determination, man is τὸ ζῶον λόγον ἔχον—the being that emerges from itself, emerges in such a way that in this emerging (φύσις), and for it, it has the word.” Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 68.

¹⁴ Although Heidegger does not use the term “priesthood”, I think it is quite adequate in this context.

How can we give thanks for this endowment, the gift of being able to think what is most thought-provoking, more fittingly than by giving thought to the most thought-provoking? The supreme thanks, then, would be thinking? And the profoundest thanklessness, thoughtlessness? Real thanks, then, never consists in that we ourselves come bearing gifts, and merely repay gift with gift¹⁵ (emphasis added). Pure thanks is rather that we simply think—think what is really and solely given, what is there to be thought.¹⁶

Neither the sacramental Eucharist nor the inner one can consist of physical acts only, they include a much more complex and demanding activity of human logos capacities. Can we, then, postulate that in the Eucharist thanksgiving which is thinking represents also both an interpretation and incantation of the essence of creation? If to thank is to think; if God's activity is apprehended as artistic and, subsequently, if the creation represents the "holy book", *liber naturae*¹⁷ or the work of art, than this book can be read and interpreted solely by virtue of poetical means. Heidegger's view, that "The thinking of being is the primordial form of poeticizing..."¹⁸ appears to lead to the conclusion that the creation is the work of art and that, logically, the only possible way to interpret it is poetical.

I have asked, nonetheless, if thanksgiving as thinking can be understood both as interpretation and incantation. Here, I confine myself to saying that incantation indicates the ontological relation between thinking of being and the being. To interpret the being is at the same time to incantate it, to renew it, re-create it and liberate it from the consequences of the fallenness. This is how I understand Heidegger's words: "The poeticizing essence of thought preserves the sway of the truth of being."¹⁹

¹⁵ Here one has the impression that Heidegger describes the priest carrying the gifts in the Eucharistic procession.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *What*, 143.

¹⁷ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 291.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Beaten*, 247.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

If man is a language being, then it is by the very essence of discourse that he is in an ontological relation with the being of the created world. This is more so because the being itself is made of a speech-fabric. Chrétien explains this point drawing on Paul Claudel:

Things must offer themselves to us so that we may in turn offer them by offering ourselves, and both of these offerings will be made possible by speech: "Created speech is that in which all created things are made such that they can be given to man."²⁰

On the other hand, the innermost logic of the human language is re-creative in its core. The syntax of the human speech rebels against any form of given-ness and petrification. It requires, moreover, constant negation and deconstruction of the already-achieved and represents a vital invitation to the absolute newness. The nature of human speech is Christic in the sense that it follows the same path of Golgothian dying and resurrection. In his remarkable book *Towards a Christian Poetics*, Michael Edwards claims that:

The constitution of language itself, even prior to writing, suggests a latent propensity for the contradicting and re-saying of the fallen fact. Verbs, for example, reach out of the-world-as-given in tenses and moods such as the conditional, the subjunctive, the optative; a "syntax of counter-factuality and contingency" opens to a realm of possibility, of liberating hypothesis. And if the way we make language attests to an obscure, partly conscious desire to elaborate it as a strategy of renewal, it is already just such a strategy, as Mallarmé argues, in its simplest, least mediated form. The word 'fleur', when said, or when pronounced and heard in the mind's ear, is big with metaphysical activity. Language, however little we ask of it, is already a process of death and resurrection, and is thereby related to the process fundamental to everything.²¹

²⁰ Chrétien, *Ark*, 132. Compare: "In the word and as word the Being of beings is given in relation to the essence of man in such a way that the Being of beings, in virtue of this relation to man, lets man's essence emerge and lets it receive the determination that we call the Greek one." Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 68.

²¹ Michael Edwards, *Towards a Christian Poetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 146–47.

It seems that, unless we accept the broader connotation of the notion of thanksgiving as thinking of being, it is impossible to comprehend the Eucharist as a genuine human creativity related to the transformation of the created world. In this sense, the human priesthood should be understood as connoting man's poetical vocation. The meaning of both vocations can be derived only from the nature of man as a discourse-and-relation-creating being. Man is a priest of creation only if he is a poet of creation.

Nonetheless, is Christianity able to espouse such a centauric symbiosis? It seems that the vocations of the priest and that the poet are rather in conflict than in concord. G. M. Hopkins himself provided lots of reasons for questioning the compatibility of these two vocations: "He clearly struggled with their co-existence in his life and never achieved a peaceful synthesis of the two."²²

Sakharov went through almost the same crisis when his "passion" for painting came into a conflict with the newly born and extremely strong desire for prayer:

The beauty of the world around combined with the miracle of the dawning vision enthralled me. But in my art I tried to sense, beyond the visible reality, the invisible, timeless essence which afforded me moments of exquisite delight. However, the hour came when increasing mindfulness of death entered into outright conflict with my passion for painting. The struggle was neither brief nor easy. I became a sort of a two-dimensional battleground: the grace of mindfulness of death did not descend to earth level but summoned me to higher spheres. Art began to define itself as something lofty, transcending the material plane, in its finest achievements touching on eternity. All this travail was in vain: the disparity was too obvious, and in the end prayer won.²³

I have already claimed that I do not understand art or artistic creativity solely as a cultural phenomenon. I only use art as an example

²² Ballinger, *Poem*, 63.

²³ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *We Shall See Him as He Is* (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: The Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2004), 15.

to outline the main traits of artistic creativity, which is the activity aspiring to create out of nothing, and to use its principles in the context of the human relation to God and the rest of creation. Sakharov's view on art as a cultural phenomenon was mostly negative. Nevertheless, there are tokens in Sakharov's work that attest to the fact that he was also aware of the broader meaning of artistic creativity and that he had special admiration for it. Perhaps the most obvious example is from Sakharov's homilies to the monks and the nuns of his monastery, and his exclamation; "O, how I wish that all of you could become poets! Without the creative inspiration it is difficult to live even one day according to Christian standards."²⁴

²⁴ Arhimandrit Sofronii (Sakharov), *Duhovniye Besedy*, vol. 1 (Esseks–Moskva: Svyato-Yoanno-Predtechenskii Monastir — Izdatelstvo "Palomnik", 2003), 259.

11. The Rose Has No Why

“Rose, oh pure contradiction, desire,
to be no one’s sleep beneath so many lids”
— R. M. Rilke

Logical reasoning suggests that knowledge entails the elimination of distance between the subject and the object of knowledge. By knowing, we draw closer to the truth of the other. However, the very use of the terms “subject” and “object” imposes not only a specific type of knowledge but also a particular understanding of eliminating distance. The subject is the one who knows, while the object is that which is known. It follows that the subject can fully know the object, describe it completely, and define it. The concept of defining, as is well known, derives from the Latin verb *de(-)finire*, which, as the word suggests, concludes or finalizes the cognition of a given object. The potential of the known object is exhausted forever, and the object, as such, can be placed on a shelf with other defined irrelevancies. The mathematization and mechanization of nature, so characteristic of the Enlightenment, “subsumes the particular under the general.”¹ From the perspective of science, wine has become a mere liquid.² “Nature becomes a giant gasoline station.”³ In the natural sciences, “knowledge which is power knows no limits.”⁴ Fear of the unknown and the longing for absolute omnipotence are the essence of the technology that such science creates.

It would be rash to entirely deny humanity’s desire for true knowledge of the other. However, genuine knowledge is possible only

¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 6.

² Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 170.

³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 201.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

if the other is also understood as a subject in a shared act of co-knowing. Otherwise, the elimination of distance is understood as the mere erasure of physical separation. It becomes necessary to penetrate the object and uncover its ultimate secret. It is essential to lay bare what has never been seen with the eye. This intrusive voyeurism now becomes, thanks to technology, the privilege of a significant portion of humanity.

“All distances everywhere are shrinking. Man now reaches overnight, by plane, places which formerly took weeks and months of travel. He now receives instant information, by radio, of events which he formerly learned about only years later, if at all. The germination and flourishing of plants, which remained hidden throughout the seasons, now film presents publicly in a single minute. ... Television will soon be the culmination of this process, pervading and dominating the whole technique of communication.”⁵

The technological elimination of distance is not necessarily negative in itself, provided it is accompanied by reverence. Reverence arises from the conviction of the essential unknowability of the other. The other must also be recognized as a subject, as a reality whose truth consists not only of its manifested being or *esse*, but also of its groundless potentiality or *posse*. To a certain extent, Western metaphysics has understood this in its teachings on modalities. Possibility belongs to being just as reality and necessity do.⁶

The existence of the other as an unknowable subject is thus conditioned by the presupposition of an “open” Being, whose existence is grounded in the Groundless, in what Boehme calls the *Ungrund*. Paradoxically, because it is the Ground, Being is Groundless, an Abyss (*Abgrund*).⁷ The Groundless is the abyss of creative power.

The Aristotelian concept of perfection, adopted by mainstream philosophy, is defined quite differently. A perfect or “closed” Being implies completion. The perfect would not be what it is if it had to achieve

⁵ Heidegger, *Poetry*, 163.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

unrealized goals. The perfect is self-sufficient, eternal, immutable, and immobile.⁸ When placed in the context of Christian doctrine, the Perfect does not need to engage in generation, procession, or creation. In the Perfect, there can be no potentiality that still needs to be realized. Any change is a sign of imperfection. God's nature is immutable. Perfection means complete realization—*actus purus*. Perfection also means unambiguous closure. Consequently, the Perfect Being not only has no need for movement or creation—it cannot move or create. How, then, can we explain the generation of the Son, the procession of the Spirit, and the creation of humanity? If God is perfect, He cannot create anything new or different from Himself. This understanding of the Absolute seems to preclude the existence of the other.⁹

Metaphysics based on Aristotelian concepts logically deduces the notion of beings from Being. Beings can only be understood in relation to Being; the imperfect and mutable can only be understood in relation to the Perfect and Immutable. Leibniz's principle of "sufficient reason" (*principium reddendae rationis*), which, according to Heidegger, became the fate of Western metaphysics, states: "Nihil est sine ratione." In its affirmative form, this principle reads: "Everything has a reason." This means that every claim about nature, humanity, art, or other subjects proves its legitimacy and scientific validity only if we can "provide a reason" for it—or, more precisely, if we can find a reason that explains it.¹⁰

By posing the fundamental question of "why," the principle of sufficient reason aims to "fix" beings in one place. According to Heidegger, this principle establishes the entire status of a given object, in every respect and for everyone. In other words, it brings the object to complete immobility. Beings are made to stand before us

⁸ Ernesto Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies* (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1983), 16.

⁹ Nikolai Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), 49–50.

¹⁰ Grassi, *Heidegger*, 41.

as objects. However, as Grassi notes, beings “do not stand”—they change, come into being, and become different.¹¹ Just as a human person has no purpose, even in God, beyond its own realization, so too “the thing things.”¹² Die Rose ist ohne warum; sie blühet weil sie blühet. “The rose has no why; it blooms because it blooms,” as Borges quotes Angelus Silesius.¹³

In contrast, an “open” Being is perfect precisely because it possesses the potential for change. Change is the creation of the eternally new and different. Only an “open” Being can add something new to what already exists and create an absolutely Other.

It is evident that the concept of an “open” or infinite universe, introduced by Giordano Bruno, represents, on the cosmological level, a projection of the philosophical idea of an open Being.¹⁴ Television, as a precursor to the internet, can be the ultimate “elimination of any possibility of distance” only if we define Being as the Greek concept of the Absolute.

The quest for absolute power is one of the most powerful drives in human nature. Perhaps the most destructive expression of this drive is seen in our often partially unconscious effort to deny the existence of the Other. Humanity behaves as an Absolute for whom the Other does not exist. The Other is unknown and mysterious. We fear the unknown because it escapes our omnipotent control.

“Enlightenment has put aside the classic requirement of thinking about thought. ... For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion.”¹⁵

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹² Heidegger, *Poetry*, 174.

¹³ Jorge Luis Borges, *Siete Noches* (Seven Nights), trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1984), 93–94.

¹⁴ Christopher D. Johnson, “Beyond Analogy and Contingency: Giordano Bruno’s Infinity of Worlds,” in *Kosmos: Vom Umgang mit der Welt zwischen Ausdruck und Ordnung*, ed. Peter König and Oliver Schlaudt (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2023), 197–214.

¹⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 11.

Striving for uniformity, humanity “leaves great distances behind and thus places everything before itself at the closest possible distance.”¹⁶ However, the elimination of all distances does not necessarily bring closeness. Closeness does not consist in the mere shortness of distance.

“What is least distant from us in point of distance, by way of films or radio, can remain remote from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us. Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness.”¹⁷

What is closeness if it is not attained despite reducing the greatest distances to the smallest separations? What is closeness if it eludes us because of our efforts to eliminate distances? What is closeness if, with its loss, farness also disappears?¹⁸

Thanks to television, that which is closest to us remains distant. This happens only because we recognize the object as a subject. Unlike an object, subjects are not merely inanimate nature. Only that which is alive can hide and elude our determined efforts to eliminate distances. “The divinities are fled.”¹⁹

Heidegger suggests that closeness is achieved through a particular kind of thinking. This thinking is not scientific; it is not “something that takes hold of us by a chain of consequences.”²⁰ In a letter to a young student, Buchner, Heidegger explains that thinking about being means responding to the demand of its essence. For authentic responding, “sustained attention” is necessary.²¹ Only through unhurriedness and focus, through attention to being, can the demand of being be perceived. This attentive approach Heidegger calls “re-lease-ment toward things” and “openness to the mystery.” By heeding the essence of being, a person becomes a “shepherd” and guardian of Being. “Guarding is the vigilance for the destiny of Being.”²²

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry*, 163.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

²² *Ibid.*, 181–182.

Rapid technological advancements are the direct offspring of scientific knowledge. Knowledge equated with power “already had annihilated things as things long before the atom bomb exploded.”²³ What is the cost of this destruction? It seems that the very essence of human nature is at stake. But what can kill the human essence? What defines the human essence?

The atomic bomb is not the instrument that can destroy this essence.

“What threatens man in his essence is the opinion that this assertion of production would be risked without danger. ... What threatens man in his essence is the willed view that man, by the peaceful release, transformation, storage, and channeling of the energies of physical nature, could render the human condition, man’s being, tolerable for everybody and happy in all respects.”²⁴

By not acknowledging the Other, we project ourselves into everything around us. What threatens us with the death of our essence lies hidden in the fundamental principles of metaphysics. By understanding Being as complete realization, this metaphysics cannot explain the existence of the Other. Reading books in Horace’s otium, in leisure—that seemingly innocent of all occupations—may prove to be the most redemptive. But it will not meet this task if it does not rest on a conscious paradigm shift. The essence of this shift lies in the conviction that neither humanity nor our world requires external justification. We can free ourselves from the self-destructive idea that we live in a world that constantly requires justification. We endure a life we despise, for true life is perceived as somewhere else.

The rose, however, requires no “why.” The rose simply blooms.

²³ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 116.

12. Man—Priest or a Poet of Creation¹

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can (...)²

In these words of James Joyce's hero Stephen Daedalus, we find contained the very core of the "helplessness of Christianity in the face of the modern tragedy of man."³ What is "the helplessness of Christianity" and what is "the modern tragedy of man"?

Stephen Daedalus was mesmerized by the creative possibilities which language offers.

To none of his former fervours had he given himself with such a whole heart as to this fervour; *the monk now seemed to him no more than half the artist.*⁴

Young Stephen Daedalus does not want to serve that in which he no longer believes. And he ceased to believe in his church because he deemed that only as an artist, and not as a monk, is man completely free. What is it that an artist possesses, but that a monk or priest lacks? Why is Christianity "no more than half the art"? In Greek, the word "ποιητής" means both creator and poet. Is Christ not only a Redeemer but also a Creator, a Poet? And if Christ is also the Archpriest, does He not suggest that to be a priest one needs to become a poet? What if the problem was not in Christ, but in the clergy and theology that have distorted Christ's image? And this is

¹ The sermon was delivered in Oxford, at Balliol College Chapel, May 29 2011.

² James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 268–69.

³ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2008), 92.

⁴ Joyce, *Portrait*, 37. (emphasis mine).

the main reason why Christianity, in the words of the famous Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev “has not yet revealed itself in fullness, as an experience of freedom”.⁵

According to the Fathers of the Church, man is a priest, a priest of creation. But what if in their primordial connotation the terms priest and poet were interchangeable? What if God created man as a poet of creation? Perhaps Joyce’s vision of man as poet is much closer to the original Divine plan than the disfigured concept which mainstream Christian theology advocates? Is it inconceivable to be priest and poet at the same time?

One of the best writers of the Victorian period and a member of our college, G. M. Hopkins, struggled with the co-existence of these two vocations in his life and never achieved a peaceful synthesis of the two. In one letter Hopkins writes:

You give me a long jobation about eccentricities. Alas, I have heard so much about and suffered so much for and in fact have been so completely ruined for life by my alleged singularities that they are sore subject.⁶

Fr Sophrony Sakharov, the great Russian mystic and mystical writer of the twentieth century, claimed that unless one becomes a poet one cannot be a Christian. Are these words solely a romantic vision of the synthesis of Christianity and poetry? As we know, before entering into the Jesuit novitiate, Hopkins burned his Oxford poems. Almost in similar fashion to Joyce, who was also to become a Jesuit priest and had received education at the Jesuit College, Hopkins wrote these tragic words to one of his friends:

I want to write still, and as a priest I very likely can do that too, not so freely as I should have liked, e.g. nothing or little in the verse way, but no doubt what would serve the cause of my religion.⁷

⁵ Berdyaev, *Meaning*, 158.

⁶ *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 126.

⁷ *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins Including His Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*, 2nd ed., ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 231.

Is Hopkins saying that one can serve his religion only by losing his freedom? In another letter Hopkins describes the destiny of the artist in the Church, saying that the “flower of the youth of a country in numbers enter the Jesuit order”. “Among these how many poets, how many artists of all sorts, there must have been!” exclaims Hopkins - he continues:

But there have been very few Jesuit poets and, where there have been, I believe it would be found on examination that there was something exceptional in their circumstances or, so to say, counterbalancing in their career.⁸

I have asked about the modern tragedy of man and the helplessness of Christianity. The core of this tragedy is that man refuses to be only free *from*; that is, to be free from passions, but also desires to be free *for*: to be free for infinite creativity. “Freedom is the power to create out of nothing,”⁹ wrote Berdyaev, and this is so because God’s freedom lies in His capacity for *creatio ex nihilo*. However, in Christianity we find hardly anything else but the law and the redemption. Berdyaev observed:

[Nietzsche] burned with creative desire. Religiously, he knew only the law and the redemption in neither of which is the creative revelation of man. And so he hated God because he was possessed by the unfortunate idea that man’s creativeness is impossible if God exists.¹⁰

Being created in the Divine image, man needs to create in the same manner as God if he is to feel free. However, we have in front of ourselves the created world which allegedly limits our freedom. Are we to conclude, then, that the Christian God has not endowed us with genuine freedom?

Nevertheless, what if the medium of the created world does not limit human freedom; what if in the framework of language, harmonies

⁸ Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, 2nd ed., ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 93–94. (emphasis mine).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

or colours it offers infinite creativeness? In his novel *In Search of the Time Lost* Marcel Proust wrote about an imaginary composer, Vinteuil:

He knew (...) that the field open to the musician is not a miserable stave of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard (still, almost all of it, unknown) (...) ¹¹

Unfortunately Christianity failed to clarify the fact that the medium of this world provides unlimited possibilities. Christianity understands human being as a priest of creation and in this vocation man's greatest freedom is hidden. Since this is the best that Christianity has to offer regarding freedom, we have to see if the human priesthood conceived in this way is really creative.

Some of the most influential modern thinkers claim that man is a priest because he carries bread and wine to the altar, which are the symbols of all creation. Man offers them to God and prays for their sanctification. It is significant that man does not offer to God plain wheat and grapes but first makes them into bread and wine. ¹² The subsequent crucial action of transformation is, however, performed solely by God. Man's duty, it seems, is only to perform relatively passive prayer—and to be baker and winemaker.

St Maximus the Confessor, one of the most significant Church writers, viewed man as an incomparably more active being. What does it mean to be active in man's case? Man is first of all the "living being endowed with capacity of logos," ¹³ with the power to create

¹¹ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), 334–35.

¹² "In the Eucharist we do not offer to God simply grain or wheat and grapes, but bread and wine, i.e. natural elements developed and transformed through the human labor." "In the Eucharist we do not offer to God simply grain or wheat and grapes, but bread and wine, i.e. natural elements developed and transformed through the human labor." John Zizioulas, *Proprietors or Priests of Creation?*, Keynote Address to the First Plenary Session of the "Baltic Sea Symposium" on Religion, Science and the Environment, June 2, 2003, p. 8.

¹³ "According to this determination, man is τὸ ζῶον λόγον ἔχον—the being that emerges from itself, emerges in such a way that in this emerging (φύσις), and for it, it has the word." Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and

and interpret meanings. This is why the inner meaning of the Eucharist and of the priesthood is to redeem all creation, in the words of St Maximus, by “giving to the Lord the intellectual meaning of things.”¹⁴ And “the intellectual meaning of things” is that what Hopkins called *inscape*, what Joyce called *quidditas* or *whatness*,¹⁵ what Proust named *the general essence of things*.¹⁶

The medium of the created world not only does not limit, but requires man’s inborn impulse towards poetical *creatio ex nihilo*. According to the Fathers, the world is the Divine work of art and God is an artist *par excellence*. Heidegger observed that “the thinking of being is the primordial form of poeticizing...”¹⁷ To give the intellectual meaning of the Divine work of art is possible only by creating art. And by being a poet one is a priest of creation. “The poeticizing essence of thought preserves the sway of the truth of being,”¹⁸ writes Heidegger. Salvation of the world depends on our capacity to see the truth of its eschatological being and to think it and name it poetically. But man’s priesthood is not just a reiteration of Divine ideas. Berdyaev claimed that God has limited His own freedom, thus giving to man absolute freedom. God wishes to be surprised by man’s poetical priesthood.

Fr Sophrony Sakharov was right – man is priest only if he is a poet of creation; and poet is someone capable of ever-new creation, capable of surprising even God, which is freedom in its supreme form.

Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 68.

¹⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, question 51, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 90, col. 480A.

¹⁵ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (New York: New Directions Press, 1944), 211–13.

¹⁶ Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu: À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 24, 182.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 247.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

Christianity ought to discover itself finally as a religion of the poetical priesthood; not only as a religion of freedom; but as a religion in which freedom is an absolute imperative. Otherwise it will continue to be “helpless in the face of the modern tragedy of man”. And the flower of the mankind of every generation will say: “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe.”

13. True Art Creates Eternity¹

It is time, regardless of everything we have read, created, or believe we know, to seriously ask ourselves: what is creativity, in essence? What is the authentic creative force within us? This question is all the more important because we live in an era of hyperproduction of material things that aspire to be artefacts. This is the core of the complex study by the Hilandar monk Romilo Knežević, *Time and Knowledge: A Theological Reading of Marcel Proust* (Orthodox Theological Faculty, Belgrade, 2011), as well as the starting point of his doctoral dissertation, which he is completing at Balliol College, University of Oxford. Knežević is the author of numerous philosophical-theological texts in English, Greek, Russian, and Serbian, as well as prose and poetic works, and the co-author and conceptual creator of the documentary film *See You in the Obituary* (B92, 1995). By analysing Proust's implicit theory of knowledge in *In Search of Lost Time*, free from doctrinal biases, Romilo Knežević pays due attention to all the vital questions this work encapsulates.

You connect Proust, Rilke, Tarkovsky, and Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" in an unusual way. What is the essential thread that unites their works?

What they share is a Joycean rejection of the theistic concept of God, which only partially corresponds to the truth about God. The essence of theism is the notion of omnipotence, according to which God is self-sufficient, and the doctrine of creation, which claims that we are not necessary to God. These doctrines conflict with the teaching of humanity as the icon of God. To an omniscient God, even humanity's most magnificent work is unnecessary. The uniqueness

¹ This interview was published in *Politika Daily*, Belgrade, Serbia, in April 2015.

of each of us before the Omniscient is a story already seen, known, and unneeded. Christianity, which has accepted this concept of omnipotence, has not yet become a religion of freedom. Theism asserts, first, that we were created to glorify God. Second, that we are priests of creation, responsible for its salvation. Yet, the Omniscient knows even the smallest detail of our glorification. Salvation, however, means the power to be simultaneously distinct from the Creator and in communion with Him. Difference does not imply a rift, and there is no communion where difference ceases. Difference is the ability to create something distinct and new, but with a theistic God, this is impossible. We redeem creation by transforming the fallen world into a new world of beauty. Thus, the concept of omnipotence is in irreconcilable conflict with the teaching of the icon of God in humanity. The icon of God is the power to create a radically new world. This power is most evident in art, which is why some thinkers are more inclined to see humanity as a poet rather than a priest of creation. Ananda Coomaraswamy says that the artist is not a special kind of person, but every person is a special kind of artist. However, if the icon is the power to create the new, and for the Omnipotent the new does not exist, then freedom can only be expressed through the destruction of the world. For theism, freedom is only possible as “evil freedom,” leaving us with only “good necessity.” Theistic Christianity is not a religion of freedom but of “good necessity.” Thus, theism inevitably gives rise to atheism. The fullness of truth about humanity is achieved only by uniting the concepts of priest and poet.

If, as Proust says, the impression is the only measure of truth, how would you explain Proust’s theory of knowledge, which emerged in an era dominated by rationalism that prioritizes the mind above all else? The ruling mind. Whose mind is it that rules?

The question of the mind is inseparable from the problem of freedom. The Church Fathers say that the icon of God is primarily

in the mind. The mind cannot merely be a mirror but also the power to create a new world. Humanity is a microcosm, while the world is a macroanthropos, or a great human. Everything that happens in humanity is reflected with photographic accuracy in the cosmos. The cosmos is a living organism in which humanity occupies the place of the mind. But God's omnipotence leaves no room for human creativity. The solution, of course, is not in denial but in a new interpretation of omnipotence. For God expresses His power also by allowing Himself to be crucified. Everything is possible for God, even not being the creator of our freedom. The icon of God in humanity is an illusion if there is no uncreated or uncontrolled freedom. I emphasize that the Fathers generally view imagination as a negative power. Unlike Coleridge, they do not distinguish between egocentric fancy and imagination that stems from relationship and for which the impression is the only measure of truth. Orthodox theology considers the mind's sole task to be a mirror. Yet, we have seen that the mind as an icon must be an unlimited creative power. Proust's mind is not a destructive fancy but an imagination that "deciphers" the world. Proust is also aware of the responsibility for creation. He writes about the essence of things, Joyce about the "whatness" of matter, Heidegger about the "thingly character of things," Rilke about things aware of our existence. The freedom of the world lies in its power to appeal to humanity for redemption. But humanity cannot redeem if it is not itself distinct and free.

You said that the mind redeems the world by creating a new world of beauty. Can you explain how this happens?

John Zizioulas, the most prominent Orthodox theologian in the West, sees priesthood exclusively as a bodily act of offering gifts at the Liturgy. It is humanity's role to offer gifts, and God transforms the transient into the eternal. In St. Maximus the Confessor, this activity shifts from the bodily to the intellectual act of perceiving the essence of things. But as a mirror, the mind can only reflect the essence and

offer it to God in prayer. The icon in humanity still lacks the power to create the new, and humanity has no freedom. The Renaissance quest for freedom matures in Kant, the German idealists, and Coleridge. Yeats says that in the modern age, the mind turns from a mirror into a lamp. Coleridge's mind is a repetition of the original creation. Art transcends the priesthood of Zizioulas and Maximus and, starting from what exists, creates what did not exist before. Proust writes that God created the world by giving names, and the artist re-creates by naming anew. Rilke calls this the transformation of the visible into the invisible, and Joyce the transubstantiation of the everyday into the eternal. From the priest as a copy, we have arrived at the poet as a union of difference and communion.

Art and Christian thought rest on some important shared values. What, in fact, does creativity mean to you, given that you see it as salvation, describing the Creator as a creator?

Art and Christianity still lack shared principles due to the conflict between the icon and omnipotence. Christian anthropology remains in its infancy. It is as if there has been a lack of courage to draw logical conclusions from the teaching of deification. The deified person, the Fathers say, is as if without origin. But to be without origin means to be an unfathomable mystery, even to the Creator. This means that the Creator does not wish to control our freedom. It must finally be acknowledged that human freedom is incompatible with theistic omnipotence. "What is a human without their secrets? Without thoughts and desires known only to them?" writes the Swiss philosopher Pascal Mercier, adding: "Did the Lord not consider that His boundless curiosity and repulsive voyeurism steal our soul, a soul that should be eternal?" With such a God, humanity has nothing left to create, says Nietzsche. For Berdyaev, even God's love does not justify the surveillance of our soul. The Creator is omnipotent, but He expresses omnipotence by limiting Himself before our freedom. The true miracle is not the creation of clones but of a person who

possesses something absent in their source. Humanity is truly free only when in communion with God, a communion that is mutual enrichment.

You believe we are witnessing a serious crisis of spirituality reflected in a crisis of creativity?

If the Omniscient perfectly knows what we can create, then the purpose of our existence cannot be creativity. It follows that prayer for salvation is the only meaningful activity. From a creative being, we become an unnecessary being that prays for salvation. Why? So that our transient uselessness in history becomes permanent uselessness in eternity? If humanity is not necessary to God, then the entire history of humanity—both its immense sufferings and its most brilliant spiritual achievements—is a farce no one can justify. Can we accept an eternity, the ultimate measure of truth, in which even the brightest work of our spirit has no place? What, then, is left of humanity, and what is it that is saved? This is the great absurdity that theology must address with due attention. Given the uselessness of human creativity, Christianity could only justify art as a means of transient significance. But to fail to justify art means to fail to justify the artistic, the icon of God, humanity. “Art for art’s sake” emerges as an attempt to defend humanity. Yet, art here is a subjective amusement, powerless to create a new world. However, culture has reached a peak of maturity where it can no longer accept creativity as an illusion. Tired of futile art, humanity dreams of returning to culture as a cultic activity. For original creativity, from cave paintings onward, has always been a union of art and religion. Rimbaud, at the age of twenty-one, stops writing because he believes he has failed to fulfil the expectation that poetry would transform the world. For the same reasons, Huysmans replaces art with Catholic mysticism. But in contrast to them stands Scriabin, who believes that his *Mysterium* will give birth to a new reality. Science today tells us that the universe is constantly expanding. We do not know why this is happening. Perhaps a century ago, Rilke

was speaking of this when he said that when we dwell poetically, we might be creating new metals, stars, and constellations? Theology is therefore obliged to ask: Are the beings of the Creator and the world the same before and after the creation of a true masterpiece? Are the world and Henryk Górecki the same before and after the creation of his *Symphony No. 3*? Let us ask even more boldly: Is a true artistic work incorporated into eternity? Furthermore, does true art, by sanctifying the transient, create the eternal, create eternity? Christianity is the faith in the God-Man Christ. Therefore, any concept that, like the theistic notion of omnipotence, starts solely from God must be mistaken. We should not speak only of divine eternity but of God-human eternity, and not only of divine creation of the imperishable and sacramental but of God-human sacraments. Humanity builds its share of eternity here and now every time it creates new names of yet-unseen beauty from God's names for things. Eternity is the continuous God-human creation of new beauty. Christian thought has never justified human creativity as a transformation that makes the transient holy, eternal, and imperishable. Church institutions are increasingly less the place where the spirit of God-humanity dwells. The fate of Christianity today depends on the courage to complete the Renaissance vision of religion as a faith not only in God but also in humanity.

14. **Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev** by Romilo Aleksandar Knežević. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2020).

This review by Taylor Knight was published in the Heythrop Journal in 2022.

Homo Theurgos: Freedom According to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev is more than an explication of the two thinkers that grace its subtitle. Knežević's work interrogates the very history of freedom in Christian theology and proposes a radical rethinking of freedom today starting from a revised theological anthropology.

Christianity's primary break with Greek ontology was the doctrine of God's free creative act (*creatio ex nihilo*). This doctrine released both God and creation from necessity's stranglehold. In contrast to the divine freedom of creation *ex nihilo*, the Christian tradition has understood human freedom not as absolute, but as something received: the freedom that Christ gives us in the redemptive act. It is a freedom over the *hamartia* of existence as human. Again, this doctrine is formulated in polemic opposition to the Greek tragic sense of existence. There is a certain parallel between *hamartia* in the New Testament (translated as 'sin') and the *hamartia* as 'tragic fault' in the dramatic tradition. Christ's sacrifice and absorption of that fault frees humanity from the inevitability of a tragic fate.

The Christian tradition has largely understood freedom as a freedom *from*: grace as freedom from sin, and ascetical practice as freeing the soul from the passions. All the essential questions of Knežević's work, however, circulate around understanding what exactly freedom *is*. The author does not seek to explore the debate concerning freedom to choose. These debates concerning free will and predestination are central to the Reformation and thus to modern Western theology in its Protestant-Catholic conflict, but they

are debates which remain fairly marginal to the Eastern tradition from which Knežević writes. Is freedom *from* sin and *from* necessity enough, or do we live in a freedom *for*? The ‘freedom for’ which the author explores is a freedom that can only be expressed in creative activity—not the freedom to choose between already existing possibilities, but the possibility to create a totally new actuality and thereby to make the impossible possible. The radical thesis of this book is to extend the uncreated freedom of God’s *ex nihilo* creative act into the domain of the human, in short, to argue that the human being has a certain kind of ability to create out of nothing.

If human creativity has, in modernity, been explored *ad nauseum* on a purely human plane, it has rarely been explored within a theological horizon. The stakes of this book are precisely here. It is not only that God through Christ enriches human life, but that the human person ‘in God’ has the power to enrich the life of God. Such a radical *ontological* freedom is vital because it does not address only what a human being can do or know or choose but gets to the essence of what a human being actually is, and particularly what it is before God, even how its life ‘in God’ is actually realised.

As its subtitle makes clear, this is not a systematic theology but a critical reading: ‘Freedom according to John Zizioulas and Nikolai Berdyaev’. As Knežević sees it, Zizioulas and Berdyaev agree that ‘the failure of Christian doctrine to overcome the impasse of freedom is the main reason for the development of humanistic anthropology and its dangerous over-elevation of the human that might lead to its final destruction’ (pp. 25- 26). Both see that Christianity’s attempt to reconcile the human and God in terms of obedience leads directly to modernity’s outright rejection of God, that is, rejecting a servile form of relation. But beyond this shared diagnosis of the problem, the solutions these two thinkers propose become radically different. The author identifies with Berdyaev’s position and so the book opens with a largely critical appraisal of the thought of Zizioulas. Zizioulas does indeed posit that ‘being does not necessarily come out of being itself. Rather, it stems from freedom’ (p. 24). He reserves this freedom,

however, for God, arguing that it exclusively categorises God's capacity to create *ex nihilo*. Berdyaev wants to expand this radical freedom from the exclusive domain of God into what characterises the human person in her essence.

Chapter one, 'Zizioulas's Concept of Freedom as Absolute Ontological Otherness,' explores Zizioulas's interlinking of patristic theology with contemporary personalists and with Levinas's phenomenology of alterity. The patristic understanding of God's unity grounded in the person of the Father (and not grounded in a common God 'substance') ensures the break from Greek necessity and shifts the source of creation from being to otherness: the unparticipable person of the Father. Now Zizioulas calls such a freedom 'ontological freedom' or freedom as 'absolute ontological otherness.' The point of this designation as 'ontological', one presumes, is to designate the thickest type of freedom possible. It is not a freedom of choice between given possibilities. The very being of the entity (and not just its decisions) is free. But the designation as ontological seems to result in a paradox. After all, if we are trying to pass beyond a logic of being (an onto-logy) into a logic of persons, how can 'ontological freedom' be the right term? Perhaps the paradox is intended. An *ontos* given through and after a ground of freedom (*hypostasis*), thereby results in an ontology that surpasses ontologism. Or perhaps the term 'ontological freedom' is used loosely to designate simply what I have called a 'thick freedom': the deepest freedom possible, coming before any regulative principle. My sense is that it is primarily used in this less precise way. We are still inevitably stuck with the question of *what* a being is, for the 'what' more easily equates to our perceptions of the world and of others. It matches our nominative language by which we articulate not only our experience and knowledge, but our very self-identity. We can never fully pass into 'who' because it remains forever unfathomable by our language and our perception. The 'who' is only accessible through better and better approximate answers to the question of what. In light of these ambiguities, a bit more clarity on this 'ontological freedom' grounded in hypostasis seems

necessary, not only on the part of Zizioulas, but especially on the part of Knežević insofar as it is the central concept of the book.

Chapter two is entitled, 'Freedom and Personality in the Theology of Maximus the Confessor According to Contemporary Maximian Scholars'. The author proposes this discussion of Maximus as a way to mediate between his own view and that of Zizioulas, for whom Maximus is essential. Knežević sees an untapped potential in Maximus's understanding of personhood. Maximus addresses the question of freedom and personality through the lens of the Christological controversies of his own time. This limits what he can say about human personhood, however, since the puzzle of who Christ is as God and man derives from a very peculiar instance and therefore does not lead to a general principle of what humanity as such is. At the time, orthodoxy begins to crystallise around a formulation in which Christ is said to possess two natures but to be only one person, and the person who Christ is, is not a human person. It is the divine person of the Son. Maximus cannot move logically from Christ's personhood to human personhood precisely because Christ's 'who' is divine, even if he has a fully human 'what'. Christology is important for Maximus's development of a notion of freedom through the particularity of the hypostasis, but it also limits what he can say since no human *person* is there in the incarnate Christ. While I can't get into the complexities of the terminology explored in this chapter, this analysis raises a central concern for us: how do we move from the personhood of God to human personhood? Is there a real connection or do we just happen to use the same word 'person' in two equivocal ways? Additionally, how do we move from God's freedom to human freedom?

For Knežević, there is indeed a real metaphysical bond between divine and human personhood, even human personhood in the modern sense. This bond stems not from the incarnation, but directly from God the Father's full expression of his own personhood. Critically, Knežević insists that the Father's personhood is not only determined through his relationship with the other persons of the

Godhead: 'the personhood is not exhausted in relationship' (p. 115). The Father is a free person only if he can create and beget a free person out of nothing (that is, out of undetermined freedom). This assertion leads Knežević to his central claim: that God's deepest freedom is demonstrated in his act of creating a being who also has the capacity to create out of nothing, and therefore to create something that would be unexpected for God. The surplus or unidentifiable 'who-ness' of the human individual is a direct consequence of the most powerful and most free act of God.

While this marks an essential limit to what the incarnation can tell us about freedom and the human person, Berdyaev nevertheless develops a doctrine of God-manhood that is essential for his thinking about freedom. The heart of the book starts with the analysis of the Russian thinker that begins in chapter three, 'Freedom According to Nikolai Berdyaev'. The incarnation for Berdyaev reveals an eternal truth concerning the unity of humanity and divinity. We do not need to contradict orthodoxy to unpack this. Humanity is forever fused with divinity. Whether Jesus of Nazareth makes this togetherness real for the first time or reveals a truth that had existed from all eternity matters little. Christian thought has always understood that the Christ event is at once historical and from all eternity. A true revelation does not add something to a pre-existing system. Christ does not 'add' divinity to humanity. The Christ event, as revelation, starts something new in such a radical way that it reveals a new origin. In one sense this is a deeper layer of reality—'the lamb slain from the foundation of the world'. In another sense, it is something entirely novel.

One might contend that such a thesis concerning God-manhood is completely outside of the paradigms of mainstream twentieth century theology, which largely reduces the question of the theological and of revelation to epistemological concerns. Given the epistemological limits of human knowledge, how do we have access to God? On the one hand are those who insist that the only starting point we have as humans is human experience. On the other are those who

insist that God reveals himself from himself. For Berdyaev, by contrast, we must do theology neither starting from God nor starting from man but starting from 'God-man' (p. 147). It is this peculiarity that makes Berdyaev so foreign to the oppositions of the twentieth century, but which makes him an exciting thinker for today.

Knežević stresses that Berdyaev's thought is both built upon the foundation of orthodox Christianity and also radically challenges it. Berdyaev insists that a Trinitarian doctrine of God is necessary. He develops his anthropology of God-manhood through the doctrine of the incarnation, even if he does not stay there. Orthodoxy does not confine Berdyaev to repeating the insights of the fathers. Rather, it reveals the limits of previous theologians, whose primary occupation was to work out these doctrines, but whose work on these doctrines is largely accomplished (even if it can be infinitely refined). Berdyaev opens Christian theology in radical new directions precisely because he sees the implications of these established doctrines in light of our questions today—questions which are no longer preoccupied with what orthodoxy has defined, but which centre around things which remain mysterious to us. Our question today is no doubt the anthropological question more than the Christological one. What is the human being? Who can he or she be? How does he or she relate to his or her environment and to God? In a sense, we know more about the nature of God than we do about our own nature. For all the academic chatter about the body, do we even know what a body is? Spinoza is still undoubtedly correct when he remarked that we do not yet know what a body can do. If God-manhood is the central principle of Christianity, Berdyaev argues that, (and this is the whole point of Knežević's book), 'God the Trinity and the God-Man are inseparable to such an extent that God without the human would not be God the Trinity' (p. 171, Knežević's words).

If chapter three focused on the postulate that God-manhood implies that God the Trinity needs the human being, chapter four builds towards a new understanding of 'freedom for'. Freedom from the world is not fully achieved by freedom from the passions, but 'is

only accomplished when 'the new world' is created' (p. 213). In short, Christianity has rarely asked what kind of life we are redeemed into, but only that we are redeemed *from* something. Of what does life 'in God' actually consist?

The final chapter, 'Freedom as the Creation of a Beautiful Being: Human Being as *Homo Theurgos*', unpacks what Berdyaev means when he calls for 'a new religious epoch of creativeness' which is the age of the spirit, the age that comes after the age of redemption. He calls particularly for 'religious creativeness' insofar as it is 'an ontological form of creativity, a creativity that produces not only signs but a new being, a new world' (p. 218, Knežević's words). The principle of the human being that enables her to create something radically new is what we call genius, which Berdyaev describes as 'religious' because 'it entails resistance to "this world"' and 'victory over the burden of necessity' (p. 220). Knežević thus uses the term *homo theurgos* to designate the human vocation insofar as it expresses the human capacity to create a radically new being which persists into eternity. A presumably prototypical example is a work of art that seems impossible during its present age and is not accepted by current art critics. It becomes a classic precisely because of its unacceptability when it was made. It creates its own measure by which to be judged and becomes a measure by which to judge subsequent works. In creating a new order, it creates a new world. Knežević argues that art needs to return to a knowledge of its religious origin, an origin in which it was used to transform the world sacramentally rather than merely create a 'phantom world' as is the tendency of art within the epochs in which this cultic origin of art had been forgotten.

I will conclude this review with a few general remarks that I believe will help us get to the essential insight of Knežević's fine work. In this book, the thesis that remains the most difficult to grasp is the claim that freedom is primary or fundamental. We can easily understand what it means to assert a primordial chaos, or to understand God or necessity as that which is there in the beginning. Knežević, however, claims that freedom is ontologically primary. It is not a freedom that

is in God, but a freedom in which God exists. It is 'outside' of God. These claims are connected with Berdyaev's use of Böhme's term '*Ungrund*'. Freedom as fundamental is the most difficult to grasp because freedom seems like a term that is either too subjective or too conceptual for it to be detached from every being that would have it as an attribute. How can something non-entitative and non-material like freedom be before any material substrate or any formed form? It is not the perfect form (God as highest being or even form of forms) nor is it an order of laws or regulative system (necessity), nor is it the lack of order or unformed material (chaos). It is too conceptual to be a material principle, but too detached from anything to be a formal principle. One might suggest that this difficulty shows that freedom cannot be a foundation. This is no doubt what the Greeks thought in positing a primordial necessity.

One might, however, argue that this *via negativa* towards freedom reveals that a true insight into reality has occurred when we posit original ontological freedom. In other words, wouldn't the origin be 'the most difficult to grasp'? The doctrine of ontological freedom as *Ungrund* still seems to have characteristics similar to the principles I said freedom is not. As an indeterminate, potent *milieu*, it bears aspects of primordial chaos. Knežević is careful to distinguish between two kinds of creation *ex nihilo*. In the Greek, non-being can be either '*mē on*' or '*ouk on*', the former designating the kind of nothingness *Ungrund* is: nothingness as an indetermination rich with possibility. The latter (*ouk on*) signifies something closer to what we think of as a traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*: an absolute nothingness. Clearly '*mē on*' has certain characteristics of the prime matter or original chaos that the original doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was intended to overcome. God did not need a material out of which to make the world, the fathers argued. But if *Ungrund* is essential freedom, then it cannot really be the material substrate that it resembles when we try to grasp it. Freedom as primordial could only be an indetermination connected to a psychic principle—something between God and whatever it is that is indeterminate and 'outside of

God. As outside of God, freedom might be said to be the 'place' of God, giving it an ecological inflection. The closest analogue I have come across in philosophy seems to be Nishida's concept of *Bashō*, which he develops as a way of talking about the place of Being. In the end it seems that *Bashō* is quite different, for Nishida's Buddhist-influenced conception of Being is not the living, personal God that the biblical traditions are endlessly trying to articulate.

Knežević's book has emerged not only from a great deal of deep reading and research, but from the lived experience of the author both as a young journalist in Belgrade and then for a time as an Athonite monk. Indeed, one senses in reading it that the book is a conceptual articulation of something that was intuited from experience—a theological anthropology that arises out of a deep religious devotion and the urgent call for a reform without which Christianity will not survive.

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**NIKOLAI BERDYAEV
AND THE THIRD KIND OF NON-BEING**

Publishers:

Archives of Vojvodina, Novi Sad
Novi Sad, Žarka Vasiljevića 2A
www.arhivvojvodine.org.rs

University of Niš, Centre for Byzantine and Slavic Studies
International Centre for Orthodox Studies

For the Publishers:

Nebojša Kuzmanović, PhD
director of the Archives of Vojvodina

Professor Dragiša Bojović, PhD
on behalf of Centre for Byzantine and Slavic Studies
and International Centre for Orthodox Studies

Bibliographic Editing and Cover Design:

Ivana Gavrilović

Layout and Typesetting:

Željko Radaković

Printed by:

SAJNOS, Novi Sad

Print Run

300

ISBN 978-86-6178-227-5

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Библиотеке Матице српске, Нови Сад

141.32 Berdjaev N.

KNEŽEVIĆ, Romilo Aleksandar, 1963-

Nikolai Berdyaev and the third kind of non-being : probing the abyss of being / Romilo Aleksandar Knežević. Novi Sad : Archives of Vojvodina ; Niš : University, Centre for Byzantine and Slavic Studies : International Centre for Orthodox Studies, 2025 (Novi Sad : Sajnos). - 196 str. ; 20 cm. - (Library Special editions)

Tiraž 300. - Note on the author: str. 196. - Napomene i bibliografske reference uz tekst. - Bibliografija.

ISBN 978-86-6178-227-5

а) Берђајев, Николај Александрович (1874-1948)

COBISS.SR-ID 174742281