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# God the Father - Spring of everlasting love and life

*Trinitarian impulses for a culture of peace  
and healing communication*

## Abstract

Belief in the Holy Trinity as an essential sign of Christian identity leads to a certain life style and promotes a culture of peace, of justice and of love. The apophatic dimension of the doctrine of God shows that God remains an absolute mystery which does not allow us a hierarchical understanding of him. In this article I would like to examine the soteriological meaning of the doctrine of God, the trinitarian concept of person and the trinitarian dimension of the Father. God surpasses every relation, so that the Son and the Holy Spirit coexist eternally with the Father and stand beyond every causality. God the Father is a distinct Hypostasis with personal, unmistakable identity, in an absolute unity of being with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Although the Father is called the spring of the Trinity, the Son and the Holy Spirit always exist with and in the Father. One would be able even to speak about an ontological “dependence” of the Father on the Son, because He would not be a Father without Him. Without the Son, the Father would have neither Logos, nor Sophia, nor Dynamis, nor Eikon or Apaugasma (radiance – Heb 1.3).

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Consequently, there is no subordination in the Trinity, but absolutely the same dignity belongs to each trinitarian person. For Gregory of Nazianzus, the Monarchy is related not to the person of the Father, but to the divinity, i.e. to all three trinitarian persons together. According to Athanasius, the Son rules over the Kingdom of the Father as Word and Wisdom and Image of the Father and even sits on the throne of the Father. The Father subjects everything “by his merciful will” to the Son, while the Son subjects everything to the Father by his work.

The image of the perichoretic life of the Trinity serves as paradigm for theology and for Christian culture generally. The trinitarian Koinonia leads to a trinitarian ecclesiology, a trinitarian eschatology and a trinitarian culture of equal rights, solidarity and peace.

### Keywords

God the Father, Trinity, apophatic theology, concept of person, culture of communication, Perichoresis, trinitarian Ecclesiology, trinitarian Eschatology

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The belief in the Holy Trinity belongs to the essential basics of Christianity. The development of the trinitarian dogma was “the most important theological achievement of the first five centuries of church history”.<sup>1</sup> Christianity differs from the great world religions by virtue of its faith in one trinitarian God: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In this article I would like to underline the thesis that the trinitarian understanding of God the Father as *the spring of everlasting love and life* leads to a new world view. The Father as spring of love is never to be thought of as without the Son and the Holy Spirit. The paradigm of trinitarian perichoresis as a paradigm of perfect love and perfect communication justifies neither oppression nor discrimination in society. It leads rather to a *culture of peace, justice and healing communication*.

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<sup>1</sup> J. P. Whalen, J. Pelikan, „General Editors’ Foreword“, in: E. J. Forman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1972), p. xiii.

## 1. Apophatic dimension of the doctrine of God – the apophatic character of the Father

Alongside the ataphatic dimension of the doctrine of God, in Orthodoxy the stress falls on the apophatic character of the Father. Ultimately, every cataphatic view flows into the infinite depth of God, so that the mystery of God can be never solved by our knowledge of the Holy Trinity. It is not accidentally that John of Damascus begins his essay *De fide orthodoxa* by emphasising the inconceivability of God: “Ἀρρήτων οὖν τὸ Θεῖον καὶ ἀκατάληπτον”<sup>2</sup> – “The divinity is inexpressible and incomprehensible”; “Ἄπειρον οὖν τὸ Θεῖον καὶ ἀκατάληπτον. καὶ τοῦτο μόνον αὐτοῦ κατάληπτον, ἢ ἀπειρία καὶ ἀκαταληψία” – “The divinity is infinite and incomprehensible, and this is the only thing we can understand about his being, his infinity and his unintelligibility”.<sup>3</sup>

God the Father is unfathomable “and incomprehensible”<sup>4</sup>, so that we can call him Father only because of his love.<sup>5</sup> “According to his magnitude he exceeds our images”.<sup>6</sup> “We cannot recognise God in his greatness, because it is impossible to measure the Father”.<sup>7</sup> God the Father is “for all creatures invisible and unapproachable”<sup>8</sup>, “sublime” (Lk 1.76), “omnipotent” (Zach 4.14), “merciful, compassionate and benevolent, gentle, fair, the God of all, of Jews and also of heathen (...) namely the Father of all believers”.<sup>9</sup>

God as Creator of the world transcends all definitions which use the categories of the created world. Existence can be ascribed to him, because he is the inexpressible *spring of existence*. At the same time, as absolute

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<sup>2</sup> See S. J. Damasceni, *Expositio accurata Fide Orthodoxae, Liber Primus*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1864), p. 789A; see I. Damaschin, *Dogmatica* (trad. D. Fecioru, Bucuresti 1938), p. 3; see S. J. Chrysostomi, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura I*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XLVIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1862), p. 701-748.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, p. 800B; see I. Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, p. 12; see J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, p. 797B: “Τὶ δὲ ἐστὶ κατ’ οὐσίαν καὶ φύσιν ἀκατάληπτον τοῦτο παντελῶς καὶ ἄγνωστον”.

<sup>4</sup> Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien* (Bd. II, München: Kösel, 1912), p. 18, p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 13.4, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien* IV, 20. 1, 61. See D. Munteanu, *Die Einheit der Kirche in der Gemeinschaft des Heiligen Geistes. Patristische Impulse zu einem dynamischen Einheitsbegriff*, in: T. Hainthaler, F. Mali, G. Emmenegger (ed.), *Einheit und Katholizität der Kirche. Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens* (Pro Oriente Band XXXII, Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2009), p. 347f.

<sup>8</sup> Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien*, II, 1.47, 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 1.8, 7.

existence, he exceeds our thinking and all our images of his existence.<sup>10</sup> God cannot be limited “by any quality” because he is limitless: “For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth.” (Ps 47.2). “Great is the Lord and highly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable” (Ps 145.3).<sup>11</sup> There is no concept either of time or of space which could reach him.<sup>12</sup>

God has revealed himself so far as it is possible for us to understand him.<sup>13</sup> In spite of his Revelation God remains an absolute secret, a mystery of perfect, interpersonal love.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, at the beginning of every trinitarian theology stands humility, i.e. the realistic awareness of human cognitive limitations. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote that he had “neither thoughts of his own nor words of his own about God”.<sup>15</sup> If we examine the doctrine of the Trinity we realise our own individual limits. It is indeed impossible to find a suitable picture which could illustrate precisely the manner of existence of the Holy Trinity.<sup>16</sup> “Though it is impossible to apprehend God in words, yet to understand him is still less possible”.<sup>17</sup>

As a *spring of goodness, justice and existence*,<sup>18</sup> God wants to take up the world in his innertrinitarian communion. The trinitarian God as “structure of perfect love”<sup>19</sup> and overabundance of existence is at the same time *the mystery of salvation*, i.e. of everlasting life. Hence, the preoccupation with the Trinity is based primarily not on an intellectual interest, but on a *soteriological interest*. “*Rebirth* comes from the trinitarian God: that is why

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<sup>10</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Mystagogia*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 664C; see Gregor von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden* (griechisch-deutsch, übers. u. einl. H. J. Sieben, Freiburg im Breisgau u.a. Herder, 1996), p. 101: We are not able “to grasp such an immense reality with our reason”; p. 115: “The human reason cannot understand the divinity and cannot imagine how great it is”; p. 129: “Neither has any person found out nor ever will find out what God is in his nature”; see I. Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Ambiguorum Liber*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus*, (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 1304B.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> See I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 4: “God revealed himself so much as it is possible for us to understand him”.

<sup>14</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 289: “Tell me what is meant by the innascibility (agennesia) of the Father, and I will describe to you more exactly the nature of the fathering of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, and we will lose both our minds in the attempt to understand the secrets of God”.

<sup>15</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 407.

<sup>16</sup> See I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 27: “There is impossible to find a picture in the world which illustrates in itself and exactly the manner of the Holy Trinity’s existence”.

<sup>17</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> I. Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik* (Band 1, Zürich: Benziger, 1985), p. 256.

the belief in the Trinity is necessary”.<sup>20</sup> Everlasting life consists in participation in the trinitarian God, in seeing God “face to face”. Here we can find the soteriological motivation or attraction of trinitarian theology as a „minimum of knowledge about God<sup>21</sup>, who is absolute love, as unity in diversity and diversity in unity.<sup>22</sup> The Revelation of the Trinity has a *soteriological significance*, because it embodies a *healing truth*.<sup>23</sup> The Trinity is the salvation of the world, and knowledge of it leads to the redemption of interpersonal communion with God.

The longing for more knowledge of the Trinity is based upon an ontological thirst on the part of the human being to participate in the spring of the everlasting life: “*Inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te Domine*”<sup>24</sup>, wrote Augustine. Irenaeus of Lyon also emphasised this longing and the existential thirst of the human person: “*Gloria vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei*”.<sup>25</sup> John of Damascus spoke about a knowledge of God which is naturally proper to every person.<sup>26</sup> As *imago trinitatis* or “εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα τῆς Τριάδος”,<sup>27</sup> the human being already possesses an ontological connection with the Trinity which is as important for his life as is breathing.<sup>28</sup> The universality of the search for God is based on this *immediate experience of God*<sup>29</sup> which stretches like a crimson thread through the whole of mystical theology and reveals at the same time the basic datum of theological anthropology.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>20</sup> G. von Nyssa, *Schriften. Große Katechese* (übers. K. Weiß u. E. Stolz, München: Kösel & Pustet, 1927), p. 79; see I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 250: “We are baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity. The reason for this is that those who receive baptism need the help of the Holy Trinity for their new existence”; see G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 209.

<sup>21</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik*, p. 257f, p. 80.

<sup>22</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 93: define the enlightenment as paradoxical – “ἐνικῶς διαιρουμένην καὶ συναπτομένην διαίρετως” (One in diversity and diversity in unity).

<sup>23</sup> See I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 4: God revealed only things “that are useful for us”.

<sup>24</sup> S. Augustinus, *Confessiones, Liber primus I, 1*, <http://www.stoa.org/hippo/frames1.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien, IV, 20.7*, 66.

<sup>26</sup> I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> See Saint Gregory of Sinai, *Discourse on the Transfiguration* (ed., tr., with introduction by D. Balfour, San Bernardino: Calif., Borgo Pro. 1990), p. 41: “ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα τῆς Τριάδος”.

<sup>28</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 75: “To think on God is more important than to breathe”; see K. Ware, *Weisen des Gebetes und der Kontemplation in der Ostkirche*, in: J. Meyendorff, J. Leclercq (ed.), *Geschichte der christlichen Spiritualität. Erster Band. Von den Anfängen bis zum 12. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Echter, 1993), p. 406.

<sup>29</sup> E. Stein, *Wege der Gotteserkenntnis. Dionysius Areopagita und seine symbolische Theologie* (München: Kaffke, 1979), p. 53f: Edith Stein spoke of a “feeling of God’s presence” as the core of all mystical experience.

<sup>30</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 121: “Indeed, every spiritual nature strives for God and the first cause”.

Unlike Judaism and Islam, Christians believe in one God in three distinct and perfect Persons: μία οὐσία - τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις.<sup>31</sup> God exists in three distinct Hypostasis (τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις) and at the same time in an unbroken unity of being (μία οὐσία).<sup>32</sup> The infinite and incomprehensible communion of being between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit excludes any modalistic degradation of person to mere mask, as well as the danger of tritheism.<sup>33</sup> The origin of the Son and the Holy Spirit is not an abstract divine being, but the person of the Father<sup>34</sup> who preserves the other two persons from dropping to an infinite, impersonal being. The divine Hypostases or Persons are one without being mingled and distinguished without being separated.<sup>35</sup> God is not one person only because he embodies absolute love as well as the fullness of life and communion. Love assumes several persons. As one single person and absolute love at the same time God would be the “most sublime egotist”<sup>36</sup> because the everlasting, absolute love would be fixed on this one person. Only the trinitarian God as absolute love can explain, preserve and complete the existence of the universe and the human person.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. The trinitarian Person of the Father

The trinitarian understanding of God the Father assumes a biological metaphor. In the Old Testament Israel is depicted as a Son of God (Ex 4.22-23) and God as a Father of the righteous (Eccl 2.16-18) and of the wisdom (Prov 8.22-31).<sup>38</sup> In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus Christ is described at his

<sup>31</sup> See J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, p. 824B; see I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 247.

<sup>32</sup> See Ch. Stead, *Why Not Three Gods? The Logic of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Doctrine*, in: H. R. Drobner, C. Klock (ed.), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der christlichen Spätantike* (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1990), p. 155f; see P. Schaff, H. Wace (ed.), *A select library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian church, vol. V, Gregory of Nyssa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 23-26.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution', in: Chr. Schwöbel, *Trinitarian Theology Today. Essays on Divine Being and Act* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), pp. 45-49.

<sup>34</sup> See J. Zizioulas, *Being as communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), p. 42f.; see idem, *The Teaching of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective*, in: J. S. Martins (ed.), *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum. Atti del Congresso Teologico Internazionale di Pneumatologia in occasione del 1600 anniversario del I Concilio di Costantinopoli e del 1550 anniversario del Concilio di Efeso, Roma, 22-26 marzo 1982* (Rom: Libr. Ed. Vaticana, 1983), p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt. Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 6. durchges. Aufl., 1992), p. 513.

<sup>37</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik*, p. 288, p. 161.

<sup>38</sup> See M. Alexandre, *Quelques textes grecs sur la paternité divine et leurs échos dans la première littérature chrétienne*, in: Y. de Andia, P. Leander Hofrichter (ed.), *Gott Vater*

baptism (Mk 1.11; Mt 3.17; Lk 3.22) and at his transfiguration (Mk 9.7; Mt 17.5; Lk 9.35) as the “beloved Son” of the Father. Up to his death agony on the cross where he calls “ὄββὲ ὁ πατήρ” (Mk 14.36), Christ perceives himself as a Son sent by the Father (Mt 7.21; Lk 11.2; Mk 14.36).<sup>39</sup> The prayer “Our Father” defines the Christian communities from the very beginning.<sup>40</sup>

Christ emphasised the goodness of the Father who “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt 5.44), and called his disciples to imitate the divine philanthropy: “You should be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5.48).

The Father-figure must be still analysed in the appropriate cultural context. For S. Freud, the *Father complex* forms the essence of religion.<sup>41</sup> In the Jewish patriarchal society in which women had no right to serve as witnesses and were put by the law on a par with minors, slaves and idiots, Jesus used the symbol of the Father for the freeing of the oppressed.<sup>42</sup> “Jesus neutralises the absolute power of the earthly father by means of the claims of the heavenly Father. (...) Far from being a sexist symbol, the ‘father’ was for Jesus a weapon chosen to combat what we call ‘sexism’. (...) It is a possibility that Jesus chose the father symbol precisely to humanise the patriarchy”.<sup>43</sup>

Which role does the Father play in trinitarian theology? Why is the person of the Father important in trinitarian discourse?

The teaching about God the Father represents for Irenaeus “the central doctrine” of the Christian faith.<sup>44</sup> Dependent on the hypostatic reality of the Father is the reality of the Trinity as well as the eschatological redemption of the person and the world by communion with the trinitarian God. Without the ontological reality of the person of the Father there would be neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit and also no inter-Trinitarian communion as a “structure of supreme love”.

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*und Schöpfer. Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens, Pro Oriente-Studientagung “Le Mystère du Dieu, Père et Créateur”* Luxemburg, Juni 2005 (Pro Oriente, Innsbruck: Tyrola, 2007), p. 23f.

<sup>39</sup> See M. Alexandre, *Quelques textes grecs sur la paternité divine*, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> See R. Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father. Theology and Patriarchy in the teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>44</sup> Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien*, I, 1, 6.

The Cappadocian Fathers Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa disproved in their Trinitarian theologies *Subordinationism* as well as *Sabellianism* and underlined nevertheless the absolute unity of God. The relation between divine οὐσία and three ὑποστάσεις is like between “τὸ κοινόν” and “τὸ ἴδιον”: “Discourse about the common characteristic leads however to ‘οὐσία’, ‘ὑποστάσις’ refers to the specific of everyone”.<sup>45</sup>

The unmixed differentiation in the Trinity is preserved by means of a special characteristic of the Hypostasis<sup>46</sup>, which is a demarcation to the unity of οὐσία.<sup>47</sup> The three perfect trinitarian hypostases have in common being, divinity, strength, will, action, principle, rule and kingdom.<sup>48</sup>

The peculiarity of the Father lies in the fact that He owes his existence to no cause, of the Son that He is begotten alone from the Father, of the Holy Spirit that He arises from the Father alone. While the Son and the Spirit have the origin of their existence in the Father, the Father is perfect God by himself: “Πατὴρ ἐστὶ πλήρης Θεὸς ἐν ἑαυτῷ”.<sup>49</sup>

Gregory of Nazianzus calls the different, Trinitarian ιδιώματα: “ἀγεννησία, γέννησις, ἐκπόρευσις”<sup>50</sup>, while Basil the Great mentions “πατρότης, υἰότης, ἁγιασμός”.<sup>51</sup>

John of Damascus also refers on “τρίς ιδιότης” and speaks of “ἀγεννησία, γέννησις, ἐκπόρευσις” as well as of “πατρότης, υἰότης, ἐκπορεύσεις” which he understands as “ὑπάρξεως τρόπον”.<sup>52</sup>

For John of Damascus, the Father is the reason (τὸ αἴτιον), the Son that which is caused (τὸ ἄτιατόν) and the Holy Spirit the completion (τὸ τέλειον) of the *divine manner of existence*.<sup>53</sup> Unlike John of Damascus,

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<sup>45</sup> G. Bausenhardt, “In allem uns gleich außer der Sünde”. *Studien zum Beitrag Maximus’ des Bekenner zur altkirchlichen Christologie. Mit einer kommentierten Übersetzung der „Disputatio cum Pyrrho“* (Tübinger Studien zur Theologie und Philosophie 5, Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verl. 1992), p. 48

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> S. Gregorii Theologi, Oratio XXXIX. In Sancta Lumina, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXVI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1885), p. 345C; idem, Oratio XLII. Suprem Vale, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus*, (Tomus XXXVI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1885), p. 477B.

<sup>48</sup> See J. Damaskenos, Expositio, p. 94A: “μίαν οὐσίαν, μίαν θεότητα, μίαν δύναμιν, μίαν θέλησιν, μίαν ἐνέργειαν, μίαν ἀρχήν, μίαν ἐξουσίαν, μίαν κυριότητα, μίαν βασιλείαν, ἐν τρισὶ τελείαις ὑποστάσεσι”.

<sup>49</sup> M. Confessoris, Ekthesis, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus*, (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 1017C.

<sup>50</sup> S. Gregorii Theologi, Oratio XXXIX, 477C.

<sup>51</sup> Basil der Große, *Ausgewählte Briefe* (München: Kösel & Pustet, 1925), p. 245; see Guido Bausenhardt, “In allem uns gleich außer der Sünde”, p. 50.

<sup>52</sup> J. Damaskenos, Expositio, p. 828C.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem.

Maximus the Confessor emphasises that the relation between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit may not be thought of as a relation between the cause and the caused. There are no such relations between the Trinitarian persons, because God exceeds every relation: “οὐ γὰρ μεσιτεύεται σχέσει τὸ ταυτὸν πάντα καὶ ἄσχετον, ὡς πρὸς αἴτιον ἀΐτιατόν”.<sup>54</sup>

The existence of the Father has no beginning, just a little like his kingdom.<sup>55</sup> The Son and the Holy Spirit co-exist with the Father substantially, while They are naturally from Him and in Him, i.e. above every reason and causality (ὑπὲρ αἰτίαν καὶ λόγον).<sup>56</sup>

God the Father is ἀναρχος (without beginning), ἀκατάληπτος (unfathomable)<sup>57</sup>, ὡς πᾶσιν ἄβατος (absolutely inaccessible), i.e. “without beginning, without middle and without end (οὔτε ἀρχή, οὔτε μεσότης, οὔτε τέλος)<sup>58</sup>, is uncertain, unmoved and endless” (ἀόριστος, ἀκίνητος, ἄπειρος)<sup>59</sup>, i.e. sublime, “above all being, strength and work”.<sup>60</sup>

The Trinitarian persons differ only in respect of their hypostatic, untransferable qualities<sup>61</sup>, which contribute to the fact that they remain distinct without being separated from each other.<sup>62</sup> They are neither separated nor mixed with each other in a Sabellian manner.<sup>63</sup>

The differentiation in “how”, i.e. im τρόπος ὑπάρξεως<sup>64</sup> does not annul the unity in “what”, i.e. in the common divine nature.<sup>65</sup> However, the hypostatic differences refer not to the being, but to the relation of a Hypostasis to the others as well as to its manner of existence: “τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσεως καὶ τοῦ τῆς ὑπάρξεως τρόπου”.<sup>66</sup> Consequently God the Father is a *distinct Hypostasis* with personal, unmistakable identity, in a perfect unity of being with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>54</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Expositio Orationis Dominicae*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus*, (Tomus XC, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), p. 892D: “There is no relation such as between effect and cause there, where everything is one and without relation”.

<sup>55</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Expositio Orationis Dominicae*, p. 884B.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>57</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Capitulum Theol. et. Oecon. Centuria I*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XC, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), p. 1084A.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, p. 1085B.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 1084A

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> See J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, p. 824B; p. 829: “ἡ γὰρ ιδιότης ἀκίνητος”.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 824B.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, p. 829A.

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem, p. 817A.

<sup>65</sup> See G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 111: Concerning the divine nature all three trinitarian persons are “ungenerated”, “disembodied”, “limitless”, “beginningless” and “immortal”.

<sup>66</sup> J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, p. 837C.

God the Father is „the principle and the cause of all (ἀρχὴ καὶ αἰτία τοῦ πῶς εἶναι); He is not born from somebody; He is the Creator of all and the only one uncaused and unborn (ἀνάιτιος καὶ ἀγέννητος). He is by his being the Father of the only begotten Son and the origin of the Holy Spirit“.<sup>67</sup> The Father is the origin of the Son as well as “προβολεὺς”<sup>68</sup>, i.e. “προβολέα τοῦ παναγίου Πνεύματος”.<sup>69</sup>

The Father should be understood not as a name of the divine being or act, but as a name of the relationship (σχέσις) “how the Father behaves to the Son or the Son to the Father”.<sup>70</sup> However, it is not permissible to identify person with relationship as does Thomas Aquinas: “persona est relatio”.<sup>71</sup>

### 3. The Father as spring of the *concomitant* and *equivalent* Trinity

John of Damascus calls the Father “suprasubstantial sun, spring of goodness, abyss of being, reason, wisdom, strength, light, divinity, unborn spring and origin of the good concealed in itself”.<sup>72</sup>

The quality of the Father as “πηγὴ καὶ αἰτία”<sup>73</sup>, i.e. as *spring of the Trinity*, excludes every temporal distance between him, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The existences of the Son and the Holy Spirit do not begin after the Father, because they were and are always with and in the Father (ἀχρόνως καὶ ἀχωρίστως).<sup>74</sup> They are perfect Hypostasis and inseparable from the Hypostasis of the Father.<sup>75</sup> Consequently there was no time in which the Father would have been there without the Son and the Holy Spirit. „The

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, p. 821C-D, p. 809B: “Εἰς ἓνα Πατέρα τὴν πάντων ἀρχὴν καὶ αἰτίαν. Οὐκ ἔκ τινος γεννηθέντα. ἀνάιτιον δὲ καὶ ἀγέννητον μόνον ὑπάρχοντα. πάντων μὲν ποιητὴν”.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, p. 849.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, 809B; p. 810B: “sanctissimique Spiritus productorem”.

<sup>70</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 205.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas von Aquin, *Summa Theologica* I, (Paris 1631), q 40, art. 2; see Thomae de Aquino, *Quaestiones de Trinitate divina* (ed. B. Geyer, Bonnae: Hanstein, 1934), q. XXX, Art. 1, 25: “Persona in divinis significat relationem ut rem subsistentem in natura divina”; q. XXIX, Art. 4, 20: “Persona enim divina significat *relationem ut subsistentem*”, 25: “nomen persona in divinis significat simul *essentiam et relationem*. Et hoc est significare relationem per modum substantiae, quae est *hypostasis subsistens in natura divina*”.

<sup>72</sup> I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 44: “The Father is the Sun, supraessential, spring of goodness, abyss of being, of reason, of wisdom, of strength, of light, of divinity; bearing their spring and cause of good which is hidden in Himself”.

<sup>73</sup> J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, p. 849A: “Ο Πατήρ πηγὴ καὶ αἰτία Υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου Πνεύματος”; See Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I: Cuvant impotriva elinilor. Cuvant despre intruparea Cuvantului. Trei cuvinte împotriva arienilor* (Bucuresti: Edit. IBMBOR, 1987), p. 327: The Son is from the Father “like life coming forth from a spring”; p. 328: “the Son is like the radiation from light and like the river from a spring”.

<sup>74</sup> See J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, p. 816C.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, p. 821A: “τῆς πατρικῆς ἀχωρίστως ὑποστάσεως”.

birth of the Son and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit are concomitant<sup>76</sup>. God could not be called Father if he did not have the Son.<sup>77</sup> One notes here a certain *ontological dependence of the Father on the Son*, because the Father would not be Father without the Son. Without the Son the Father would have neither “Λόγος, σοφία, δύναμις, εικὼν, ἀπαύγασμα”.<sup>78</sup> The Father is rational (λογικός) and wise (σοφός), because he always had the Logos: “βουλή καὶ σοφία καὶ θέλησις τοῦ Πατρὸς ὁ Υἱός”.<sup>79</sup> The Logos is the living Reason, the Will and the Strength of the Father<sup>80</sup>, from whom all creatures have their origin. “In other words the Father decides and wills with his Logos; He thinks and wills through the Son”.<sup>81</sup>

There is no becoming of the Father, but there is an *everlasting existence of the Father* in his relationship with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. The Fathers of the Church underline not only the *mono-causality in the Father* – “Μόνος γὰρ αἴτιος ὁ Πατήρ”<sup>82</sup>, but also the simultaneity and equivalence of all trinitarian persons.<sup>83</sup> They *are timeless and with the same dignity* – “ἀχρόνως καὶ ὁμοδόξως”. If one wanted to understand the begottenness of the Son temporally, He would have no beginning.<sup>84</sup> Therefore one can speak about the Father as an origin without origin of the Son and the Holy Spirit, who have also no beginning and are eternal. Although the Father is the origin of the Son and the Spirit, He does not precede them. Consequently in respect of time all three trinitarian persons can be called without origin (ἀναρχά).<sup>85</sup>

The Son and the Holy Spirit have everything that the Father has except his ἀγεννησία as a distinguishing feature of his person. He has his existence from no other separate Hypostasis but only from Himself. He is the cause of the Son because the Son is born from the Father and not *vice versa*. The

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, p. 824A; see G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae – Theologische Reden*, 187.

<sup>77</sup> See I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 20f.

<sup>78</sup> J. Damaskenos, Expositio, p. 849 B; see Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I*, p. 146: The Son of God is “the word and the wisdom and the strength of the Father”.

<sup>79</sup> S. Cyrill Alexandrini, De adoratione in spiritu et veritate, Liber XI, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXVIII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1864), p. 728 BC; idem, De sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate Dialogus, Liber II, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus LXXXV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 776BC; see S. Athanasius, Oratio III Contra Arianos, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXVI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1887), pp. 456C-457A; see G. Martzelos, Die Freiheit Gott-Vaters als trinitätstheologisches Problem, in: Y. de Andia, P. Leander Hofrichter (ed.), *Gott Vater und Schöpfer*, p. 65f.

<sup>80</sup> I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 49.

<sup>81</sup> G. Martzelos, Die Freiheit Gott-Vaters als trinitätstheologisches Problem, p. 65.

<sup>82</sup> J. Damaskenos, Expositio, p. 849 B.

<sup>83</sup> H. Alfeyev, The Mystery of God the Father, in: Y. de Andia, P. L. Hofrichter (ed.), *Gott Vater und Schöpfer*, p. 134.

<sup>84</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae – Theologische Reden*, p. 409.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, p. 176.

Son is not a Son of the will, but of the Father who wishes him. The Father is a real subject who generates the Son.<sup>86</sup>

The Son has in the Trinity the position not “from” which, but only “in” which the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit receives his existence not “through the Son”, but “in the Son”, so that in him all creatures find their completion. The Holy Spirit is the “hypostatic rest” of the absolute love of the Father in the Son.<sup>87</sup> If the Holy Spirit came from the Son, the Father would be a “Grandfather of the Spirit” and the Son a “Father of the Spirit”.<sup>88</sup> This would call in question the uniqueness of the Father as a Father. “If the Holy Spirit is generated by the Son, we find ourselves with God’s Grandson”.<sup>89</sup> In the Trinity, however, everything is unique. The Father is not from the other Father, nor does the Son becomes a Father. In God, the Father is in peculiar way Father and the Son in peculiar way Son.<sup>90</sup>

#### 4. The Trinitarian monarchy

In the theology of *Gregory of Nazianzus* the idea of monarchy, unlike anarchy and polyarchy, forms the basic mark of the divinity: “What we so admire is the monarchy, a monarchy, nevertheless, which is not determined by one single person (...) but exists based on the same dignity of nature, accord of will, and unity of movement and orientation with this One among those which are from the One”.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, for Gregory of Nazianzus the monarchy is not referring to the person of the Father, but to the divinity, i.e. to all three trinitarian persons together.<sup>92</sup>

Maximus the Confessor understands in this regard the Trinity as a perfect triad (Trias) in perfect unity (Monas). There is only “one being, one

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<sup>86</sup> S. Gregorii Theologi, Oratio XXIX – Theologica III, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXVI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1890), p. 84C: The birth of the Son remains a mystery: “If you do not understand even your own birth, how can you want to understand the birth of God?”. All trinitarian Persons are ἀγέννητος, i.e. uncreated, but only the Father is ἀγέννητος, i.e. unbegotten.

<sup>87</sup> D. Stăniloae, Introducere, in: Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea a II-a*, (Translation, Introduction and Comments D. Stăniloae, București: Ed. IBMBOR, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I*, p. 40f.

<sup>89</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae – Theologische Reden*, p. 287.

<sup>90</sup> See Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I*, p. 182.

<sup>91</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae – Theologische Reden*, p. 171: “There are three opinions about God (...), namely anarchy, polyarchy and monarchy. (...) Anarchy leads to the loss of order and polyarchy to uprising, and with it anarchy. and with it the loss of order. (...) The loss of order is the preparation for disintegration”.

<sup>92</sup> H. Alfeyev, *The Mystery of God the Father*, p. 132: “The idea of monarchy is associated in Gregory not with the monarchy of the Father but with the unity of the Godhead”.

divinity, one strength and one work of three Hypostases” (μία οὐσία καὶ θεότητα καὶ δυνάμις καὶ ἐνέργεια ἐν τρισὶν ὑποστάσεσιν).<sup>93</sup>

Athanasius the Great underlines that the Father is called Lord not by reason of his relation with the Son, but only by reason of his relation to creation.<sup>94</sup> The Son rules over the Kingdom of the Father<sup>95</sup> as word, wisdom and image of the Father<sup>96</sup> and sits even on the throne of the Father.<sup>97</sup> “By his merciful will” the Father subordinates everything to the Son, while the Son by his work subordinates everything to the Father.<sup>98</sup> The Son is the “true image”<sup>99</sup>, the “truth”, the “wisdom”, the “power”, the “life”, the “magnificence” of the Father.<sup>100</sup> “If it is honorable for the Father to be descended from nobody, it is not less honourable for the Son to come from such a Father”.<sup>101</sup> Consequently the Trinitarian persons are absolutely equal and with the same dignity. The honour of unbegottenness, begottenness and proceeding is the same. “The Son's being is no deficiency. (...) These (Trinitarian) names express no deficiency and no decrease concerning being. Unbegottenness, begottenness and proceeding pertain to the Father, the Son and (...) the Holy Spirit, so that the unmixed character of three Hypostases remains protected in one nature and dignity of the divinity. (...) Three are one on account of divinity and this one is three on account of particularities”.<sup>102</sup> All trinitarian persons work “with the same dignity and power”.<sup>103</sup> Neither in the wish nor in the power there is a division.<sup>104</sup> God is “light” and “light” and “light” like “three suns linked with each other”<sup>105</sup>, which emit only one

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<sup>93</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Ambiguorum Liber*, p. 1261 A; see M. Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua* (übers., Einl. u. Kommentare D. Stăniloae, București: Ed. IBMBOR, 1983), p. 230: “Perfect Trinity in perfect unity, i.e. one substance, one divinity, one power and one work in three hypostasis”.

<sup>94</sup> Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I*, p. 195.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem, p. 227, p. 329.

<sup>96</sup> Ibidem, p. 195, p. 212.

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem, p. 214.

<sup>98</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae – Theologische Reden*, p. 231.

<sup>99</sup> See Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I*, pp. 195.181f.174f.331: The Son is the image of the Father. In him the Father is recognised and revered. That is why whoever ignores the Son, also ignores the Father; see idem, *Scrieri, partea a II-a*, p. 96: Whoever sins against the Son, that person sins against the Father and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>100</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae – Theologische Reden*, p. 209: Without Son the Father would be without truth, without wisdom (ἄσοφος), without power (ἀδύνατος), without life and without magnificence (λαμπρότης); see Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I*, p. 146.

<sup>101</sup> G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae – Theologische Reden*, p. 195.

<sup>102</sup> Ibidem, p. 291.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem, p. 245.

<sup>104</sup> Ibidem, p. 301.

<sup>105</sup> Ibidem.

single light.<sup>106</sup> We worship “God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, three particularities (τρεις ιδιότητας), one single divinity, undivided in magnificence, honour, substance and dominion”.<sup>107</sup>

One finds also at Irenaeus a view contradictory to hierarchical thinking. He revealed that the knowledge of the Father releases the people from rule: “no longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15.15).<sup>108</sup> *The knowledge of the Father leads to freedom, i.e. to a new relationship with God.* The believers are no longer slaves, but “friends of God”<sup>109</sup> and participate in the internal life of God, i.e. in the immortality and magnificence of God which “friendship with God” brings with it.<sup>110</sup> Participation (μετουσία) in the magnificence of God is according to Irenaeus the aim of the human being. The Son of God has become human, and “with it the human being embraces the Spirit of God and comes into the magnificence of the Father”.<sup>111</sup> The Son of God has become human to bring the entire humanity into communion with God: “in his body the light of the Father met us, emitted upon us from his body, and thus the human being attained incorruptibility, while it was surrounded by the paternal light”.<sup>112</sup>

## 5. The Father as „totius fons et origo divinitatis“

Maximus the Confessor calls the Father “Creator and Fulfiller – δημιουργῶ καὶ τελειοποιῶ”.<sup>113</sup> The Father is Creator and Spring of every form of fatherhood (πατριά) (Eph 3.15). “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom (ἐξ οὗ) are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom (δι’ οὗ) are all things, and we *exist* through Him” (1 Cor 8.6). God is the Spring, the middle and the aim of all created

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<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, p. 279: “only one light and one God”.

<sup>107</sup> Ibidem, pp. 327.209-210: “*The whole Trinity is worship, has royal power, one throne, one honour, is elevated above world and time, is uncreated, invisible, untouchable, unfathomable in its being, and is recognised in its order only by itself*”.

<sup>108</sup> Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien* IV, 14.4, 38.

<sup>109</sup> Ibidem, 39; IV, 16, 2, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Ibidem, 14.4, 39; IV, 16.4, 47.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem, IV, 20, 4, 65.

<sup>112</sup> Ibidem, IV, 20, 2, 62.

<sup>113</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Ambiguorum Liber*, p. 1304C; see M. Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, p. 260.

existence.<sup>114</sup> “For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things” (Rom 11.36).<sup>115</sup>

Irenaeus too understood the Father as „*Creator of heaven and earth*”<sup>116</sup>, i.e. as a “Father and Creator of the world”<sup>117</sup>, who “nourishes us by his creation”.<sup>118</sup> It is the “ungenerate”, “infinite” and “invisible” God the Father<sup>119</sup>, who “created and ordered everything and called non-being into existence and is all-embracing and immeasurable”.<sup>120</sup>

The creed of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) describes the Father as “Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible”<sup>121</sup> or as “Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible”.<sup>122</sup> At first sight it appears, as if the mark of differentiation of the Father would consist in his quality as “Creator of heaven and earth”. Nevertheless, this creative dimension is not limited only to his person, since the Son who is born from the Father takes part in the act of creation: “ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο”.<sup>123</sup> According to the creed, the creation is a Trinitarian act. Not only the Father is Creator because all things were created through the Son: “δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο”. Even the Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father “τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (...) τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον”, is “mighty and life-giving” (“τὸ κύριον καὶ ζωοποιόν”), i.e. creative. The creation, redemption and completion of the world occur from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>124</sup> The Father is the *primary cause* („ποχαραρκτηκὴ αἰτία“), the Son the *constructive cause* (“δημιουργικὴ

<sup>114</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Capitum Theol. et. Oecon. Centuria I*, pp. 1085C-1088A “Ἀρχὴ τῶν ὄντων καὶ μεσότης καὶ τέλος ἐστὶν ὁ Θεός”.

<sup>115</sup> Idem, p. 1101B: “Πάσης γὰρ ζωῆς καὶ ἀθανασίας ἀγιότητός τε καὶ ἀρετῆς, δημιουργός ἐστιν ὁ Θεός” (God is creator of all life, of immortality, of holiness and virtue).

<sup>116</sup> Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien*, II, 1, 1; II, 9, 1, 115; III, 2, 209; IV, 6, 4, 16; II, 10, 4: Irenaeus underlines the creation of matter by God.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem, IV, 10.3, 27.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, IV, 6.2, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem, I, 1, 6, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Ibidem, I, 1, 4-5, 5.

<sup>121</sup> J. Wohlmuth (ed.), *Dekrete der Ökumenischen Konzilien, Band 1 Konzilien des ersten Jahrtausends. Vom Konzil von Nizäa (325) bis zum vierten Konzil von Konstantinopel (869/70)* (Paderborn, München u.a.: Schöningh, 2. durchgesehene Aufgabe, 1998), p. 5: “Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν πατέρα παντοκράτορα, πάντων ὁρατῶν τε καὶ ἀοράτων ποιητής”.

<sup>122</sup> Ibidem, p. 24: “Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴς οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων”.

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>124</sup> S. Athanasii, *Epistola I ad Serapionem*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXVI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1887), p. 596: “All things are created from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit”; see Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea a II-a*, p. 58.

αἰτία”) and the Holy Spirit the *completing cause* (“τελειοτική αἰτία”).<sup>125</sup> The Father is Creator with regard to our being and Father on account of his grace<sup>126</sup>, „πηγή”, i.e. „Spring of the only everlasting life”<sup>127</sup> and „the ultimate spring of knowledge because He has everything in Himself”.<sup>128</sup>

There is only „one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4.6). The Father, according to Athanasius, is „over all” as origin and spring, “through all” by his Word and “in all” by the Holy Spirit.<sup>129</sup> The things of the world exist on account of the *will of the Father*, in the *action of the Son* and are completed in the *presence of the Holy Spirit*.<sup>130</sup> That is why the Holy Spirit is called “πηγή τῆς σοφίας καὶ ζωῆς καὶ τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ”.<sup>131</sup> God the Father creates everything through the Son in the energy of the Holy Spirit<sup>132</sup> who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son.<sup>133</sup>

Also the Synod of Toledo (638) described the Father as “*ingenitus, increatus, totius fons et origo divinitatis*”.<sup>134</sup> The Father is seen in Eastern as well as in the Western Theology as *Spring of the Trinity and of the everlasting life*.

## 6. The perichoretic life of the Holy Trinity

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit possess the wealth of divine being and form an absolute unity. The Holy Trinity is the „essential subsistence of the tri-hypostatic unity. The Trinity is really unity because it is in this way, and the unity is really Trinity because it subsists in this way. There is only one single divinity which exists uniformly and subsists in a trinitarian manner”.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> S. Basilii Magni, Liber de Spiritu Sancto, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXXII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1857), p. 136B; see J. Damaskenos, Expositio XII: Der Heilige Geist ist der Vollender der Schöpfung.

<sup>126</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, Expositio Orationis Dominicæ, p. 884D.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem, p. 892C.

<sup>128</sup> D. Stăniloae, Anm. 120, in: Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I*, p. 377.

<sup>129</sup> Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea a II-a*, p. 59.

<sup>130</sup> S. Basilii Magni, Liber de Spiritu Sancto, p. 136B.

<sup>131</sup> J. Damaskenos, Expositio, pp. 821-822B: “sapientiae, vitae et sanctitatis fontem”.

<sup>132</sup> I. Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, p. 263.

<sup>133</sup> See J. Damaskenos, Expositio, p. 821B. The eternal Father is at the same time the spring of all fatherhood (Eph. 3,15).

<sup>134</sup> J. R. Pavés, Totius fons et origo divinitatis. La Personne du Père dans les symboles de Foi des Conciles de Tolède (s. V-VII), in: Y. de Andia, P. L. Hofrichter (ed.), *Gott Vater und Schöpfer*, pp. 321-344; see T. Hainthaler, God the Father in the Symbols of Toledo - fons et origo totius trinitatis, in: *International Journal of Orthodox Theology (IOT)*, 1:1 (2010), 125-136.

<sup>135</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorul Liber*, p. 1036; see M. Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, p. 47.

The Trinity is “ὁμοούσιός καὶ ὑπερούσιος Τριάδα”<sup>136</sup>, “ἐν μονάδι Τριάδα καὶ ἐν Τριάδι μονάδα”.<sup>137</sup> There is no becoming of the Trinity out of an abstract unity; as uncreated, God is from the very beginning really unity (μονάδα) and Trinity (Τριάδα) at the same time.<sup>138</sup> Divine unity concerns the rationality of being (κατ’ οὐσίαν λόγῳ) while Trinity concerns the manner of existence (καθ’ ὑπαρξιν τρόπῳ).<sup>139</sup>

God is a unity in respect of being and Trinity in respect of Hypostasis. “The divinity is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the divinity is in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit”.<sup>140</sup> The divinity is entirely in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.<sup>141</sup>

The trinitarian persons exist not side by side, but in each other (ἐν ἀλλήλαις)<sup>142</sup>, so that between them there is no spatial distance.<sup>143</sup> They have a *common being*, a *common movement*, *one single will*, *one single goodness*, *one single rule*, so that they are one, namely one single God.<sup>144</sup> Between the trinitarian persons there is neither separation (διάστασις), nor conflict (μάχη), nor composition (σύνθεσις).<sup>145</sup> The Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity are in a movement of union and exist without mixture in a mutual perichoresis (ἐν ἀλλήλαις περιχώρησιν). Concerning being They are neither separated, nor afar from each other.<sup>146</sup> The dynamism of the mutual inhabitation can also be described as a dynamism of mutual love. Each person forms the dwelling place of both other Trinitarian persons. “The Son is in the Father and in the Spirit, the Spirit in the Father and in the Son”<sup>147</sup> without mingling. “ὅλος γὰρ ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ Υἱῷ καὶ τῷ Πνεύματι τελείως ἐστὶν ὁ Πατήρ”.<sup>148</sup> The unmingled unity of the Trinity is so perfect that one can recognise the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Son.

<sup>136</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Expositio Orationis Dominicae*, p. 884C.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem*, 892C.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem*, 893A.

<sup>139</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Expositio Orationis Dominicae*, p. 894A: “totam unitatem eamdem, quae personis non divisa sit; totamque eamdem ipsam Trinitatem, nihil inde confusam, quod unitas existit”.

<sup>140</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Capitulum Theol. et. Oecon. Centuria II*, p. 1125A.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1125B.

<sup>142</sup> J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, pp. 825B. 829A.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 828D: “Οὔτε γὰρ τοπικὴν διάστασιν”.

<sup>144</sup> See J. Damaskenos, *Expositio*, pp. 825B.829B.

<sup>145</sup> See G. von Nazianz, *Orationes theologicae - Theologische Reden*, p. 106.

<sup>146</sup> I. Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, p. 32.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51: “The Hypostases live in each other and are inseparable and undivided (...). The Son is in the Father and in the Spirit, the Spirit in the Father and in the Son, the Father in the Son and in the Spirit without confusion and without mingling. There is unity and identity of movement among them, because three Hypostases have one single impulse and one single movement.”

<sup>148</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Capitulum Theol. et. Oecon. Centuria II*, p. 1125B: “The Father is entirely in the entire Son and the entire Holy Spirit in a perfect way; and the Son is in

## 7. The Trinitarian doctrine as a paradigm of Theology and Christian culture

John of Damascus rightly begins his dogmatics with the Trinitarian doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity belongs for him neither in the middle nor at the end of theological considerations, but precisely at the beginning. Christian identity as well as all writings in theology depend on the Trinitarian teaching. In this regard one can describe the doctrine of the Trinity as a paradigm of theology, as a matrix which should decisively leave its mark on the whole of Christian thinking.

The confession of the Trinitarian God remains not only a confession for specialists, but contains a “continuing challenge” and a “vital imperative”<sup>149</sup> in the life of every Christian. The Trinitarian Koinonia leads to a Trinitarian culture, to a Trinitarian Ecclesiology as well as a Trinitarian Eschatology.

### 7.1 Trinitarian culture: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi, lex convivendi*

The understanding of God as Trinity leads to a culture of solidarity, of responsibility and of dialogue, of freedom from violence and of peace. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5, 48). The Father in heaven is perfect only in communion with the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is why the person cannot be complete without communion.<sup>150</sup>

The Trinitarian culture has an ecumenical dimension: “that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity” (Jn 17.22-23). A culture inspired by the Trinity promotes reconciliation and recognition of difference. It is a culture of dialogue, of acceptance of the other as an expression of God’s rationality. Trinitarian culture is eschatological and based on the anticipation of the eschatological doxology of God’s kingdom.

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the entire Father and the entire Holy Spirit in a perfect way; and the Holy Spirit is entirely in the whole Father and Son in a perfect manner. For this reason the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God. The nature, the strength and the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same, so that no person can exist or can be understood without the other”.

<sup>149</sup> G. Maria Hoff, *Der dreieine Gott – ein Bekenntnis nur für Fachleute?*, in: H.-G. Wirtz (ed.), *Dreieinig Einer. Das Ringen um das christliche Gottesbild: eine bleibende Herausforderung* (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünwald-Verl., 2008), p. 24.

<sup>150</sup> D. Stăniloae, Anm. 67, in: Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrisori, partea I*, p. 356: “There is nothing before the communion of persons. It explains everything and gives a sense to existence. (...) The trinitarian existence wants to subsist forever, because of the love of one person for the other”.

As an expression of the trinitarian paradigm, Christianity could have a transformative effect on the world and on society. The *ethos of divine childship* excludes every temptation of domination, as long as the Father is the spring of Trinitarian love. The Trinitarian understanding of God leads to a spirituality of communion because the Father is “the Father all” (Eph 4.6).

The Creator is no isolated subject, but a communion of three persons, who love and indwell each other (Jn 10.30,38). This everlasting, open communion of love serves as a model for church and society, because the completion of the person as *imago Dei* involves sociality without subordination. The acceptance of the Trinitarian doctrine as the Revelation of God does not mean accepting some theoretical religious content, but taking up the cross and following Jesus Christ (Lk 14.27), i.e. practising God’s love.

Jürgen Moltmann, one of the most important representatives of the Trinitarian thinking in the Western, Protestant world, uses the thought of perichoresis, i.e. of mutual indwelling of the Trinitarian persons as a model for the „communication without domination“.<sup>151</sup> He calls this perfect communion of the Trinitarian God a “matrix and living space for the free communion of men and women without rule and without oppression, in mutual respect and reciprocal recognition”.<sup>152</sup> Herein consists the prototypical character of the Trinity. Moltmann’s social teaching of the Trinity takes the clear form of a *political programme of liberation* from all domination. He shows that the Trinitarian, indwelling God who is capable of suffering abolishes every justification of the monarchic absolutism.<sup>153</sup>

Consequently the teaching of Trinity can and should make a decisive mark on *Christian culture*. In Latin-American liberation theology, Leonardo Boff took over the thesis of the nineteenth century Russian Feodorov “The Trinity is our social programme”<sup>154</sup> and used it as an engine for his *ethics of liberation*. The Trinitarian communion is for him “the basis of a comprehensive social liberation”<sup>155</sup> as well as “a criticism and inspiration for human society”.<sup>156</sup> Boff stresses the social relevance of the Trinity when he describes it as the “highest society” which looks “for relations of

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<sup>151</sup> J. Moltmann, *In der Geschichte des dreieinigen Gottes: Beiträge zur trinitarischen Theologie* (München: Kaiser, 1991), p. 16.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

<sup>153</sup> See J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes: Zur Gotteslehre* (München: Kaiser, 1980), pp. 207-239.

<sup>154</sup> See L. Boff, *Der dreieinige Gott* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1987), p. 29.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145f.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 173f.

participation, co-determination and equality".<sup>157</sup> The mystery of the Trinity as mystery of perfect Perichoresis is for him a source of "light" and an "impulse" for the life of society. This concerns first the "coexistence between person and society, between the happiness of each individual and the well-being of all".<sup>158</sup> The perichoretic model of the Trinity acts as a liberating critique and an inexhaustible inspiration for human society as it regards the overcoming of all racist, economic, ethical and sexual discrimination.<sup>159</sup>

Leonardo Boff's theology shows that the social teaching of Trinity can be of the utmost practical use because it encourages action for justice and the transformation of society. The image of a communitarian God motivates the fight for social justice, for equality, for solidarity and for liberation of oppressed people. One finds in the social doctrine of the Trinity not only inspiration and motivation for the transformation of society, but also a real criterion for the perfect society. The aim of society is to become a "sacrament of the Trinity".<sup>160</sup> And that is why the Trinity forms the "true programme for society".<sup>161</sup> L. Boff speaks in this context about the "project of God" and means by this the historical realisation of God's Kingdom by liberation from the slavery of sin which throws the person and society, into the captivity of egotism. The social and structural sins of oppression and injustice in the institutional and structural forms of society contradict "the project of God".<sup>162</sup> Unlike Trinitarian thinking, every form of rigorous monotheism serves as a justification for totalitarianism and leads to the *concentration of political or religious power in one single person*.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibidem, p. 140.

<sup>158</sup> Ibidem, p. 141; see also G. Mantzaridis, *Soziologie des Christentums* (Berlin: Duncker Humblot, 1981), p. 122: "The social ideal of Orthodoxy is in fact summarised in the dogma of the Trinity". The distinguishing criterion of the trinitarian absolute love, of the absolute communion of love is altruism.

<sup>159</sup> Ibidem, pp. 145f.173f.181f.

<sup>160</sup> L. Boff, *Der dreieinige Gott*, p. 26.

<sup>161</sup> Ibidem, p. 29. On Boff's trinitarian Theology see also R. von Sinner, *Reden vom dreieinigen Gott in Brasilien und Indien. Grundzüge einer ökumenischen Hermeneutik im Dialog mit Leonardo Boff und Raimon Panikkar* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

<sup>162</sup> L. Boff, *Der dreieinige Gott*, p. 76.

<sup>163</sup> Ibidem, p. 34.

## 7.2 Trinitarian Ecclesiology - Spirituality of Communion

Trinitarian Koinonia leads to eucharistic Ecclesiology: “Koinonia is the very essence of the Church”.<sup>164</sup> Maximus the Confessor emphasises the Trinitarian Perichoresis as the reason for the effective presence of God in the church.<sup>165</sup> The sanctification of human beings and of the whole creation occurs by the architectural work of the Holy Spirit: “διὰ τῆς ἀρχιτεκτονίας τοῦ πνεύματος”.<sup>166</sup> If the Holy Spirit dwells within humans and creation, then with Him come also the Son and the Father because the Trinity is inseparable.<sup>167</sup> All divine indwelling has therefore an internal Trinitarian matrix.

Humans become “ὁ οἶκος Θεοῦ”<sup>168</sup>, i.e. the dwelling place of the Trinity if they participate in the *restoration of creation’s dynamism by Christ in the Holy Spirit*.<sup>169</sup> This participation in God’s communion leads at the same time to a divinization (theosis) of the universe.<sup>170</sup>

Baptism confers on each person a movement towards the divine rationality of everlasting existence, i.e. of the life of the resurrection.<sup>171</sup> It concerns the *new deiform life* (θεοειδοῦς ζωῆς)<sup>172</sup>, the *life in communion with God* which begins with rebirth of the Holy Spirit (πνευματικὴ γέννησις).<sup>173</sup> *Participation in divine, everlasting life* takes place, according

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<sup>164</sup> A. Schmemmann, ‘The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Theology’, in: J. Meyendorff (ed.), *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church* (Bedfordshire: The Faith Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1973), p. 165; see D. Stăniloae, *The Problems and Perspectives of Orthodox Theology*, in: idem, *Theology and Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), p. 217f: “True spirituality implies communion and true communion implies spirituality”.

<sup>165</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XC, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), p. 672: The Holy Spirit is in the Father and in the Son, because of the unity of divine substance, so that he is given to the Church through the Son.

<sup>166</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorum Liber*, p. 1281A.

<sup>167</sup> Athanasius, *Epistola I ad Serapionem*, p. 600B; see Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea a II-a*, p. 85.

<sup>168</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, p. 637.

<sup>169</sup> See D. Stăniloae, *Dinamica creației în Biserică*, in: *Ortodoxia* Nr. 3-4 (1977), pp. 281-291.

<sup>170</sup> See Vgl. I.-H. Dalmais, *Mystère Liturgique et divinisation dans la Mystagogie de Saint Maxime le Confesseur*, in: J. Fontaine, C. Kannengiesser (ed.), *Epektasis. Mélanges patristique offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), p. 56.

<sup>171</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorum Liber*, p. 1349; see L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus Confessor* (Lund: Gleerup, 1965), p. 392.

<sup>172</sup> S. M. Confessoris, *Liber Asceticus*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XC, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), pp. 911-912: “πολιτεῖον ἡμῶν θεοειδοῦς ζωῆς ἐπέδειξε”; (“vitae nobis Dei aemulae rationem ostendit”).

<sup>173</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Orationis Dominicae brevis expositio*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XC, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), p. 878; see W.

to Maximus the Confessor, mainly through the Eucharist, which fills human beings with a divine strength and “like a leaven, raises the whole nature to the resurrection of life”.<sup>174</sup>

Maximus the Confessor uses for this the term *περιχώρεσις*<sup>175</sup> (inter-penetration), a central concept of his theology. According to the degree of a person’s faith, Christ indwells the human person. This indwelling means the fulfilment of an ontological longing of the human being and the return to communion with the origin of his/her existence. Thereby the human being experiences a dynamic rest in God as an *anticipation of the completion of his/her existence*.<sup>176</sup> This rest at the goal of all longings means everlasting and *unceasing joy* in the sense of participation in the divine life. Perichoresis as a way to Theosis means participation in the “spring of life”<sup>177</sup>, i.e. participation in the ultimate aim of existence. It is actually the way to the apotheosis of the person and of the whole creation. It opens the possibility of knowledge by participation in the internal life of the Trinity, a sort of knowledge through experience – “κατ’ ἐνέργειαν γνῶσιν”.<sup>178</sup>

The way to *ἔνωσις ἀσύγχυτος*<sup>179</sup> has a cosmic dimension because all that exists is intended to attain to communion with God. The person and the whole universe have the inner vocation *to become church*, i.e. to have an *ecclesial existence*. This reborn existence anticipates the everlasting life of the resurrection and repose in the fullness of divine, Trinitarian life.

Holiness embraces the preservation of creaturely differences through *unity in diversity*. The church as a creative space of peaceful coexistence of different people and cultures illustrates the Trinitarian perichoresis and is “an icon and image of God” if it carries out the same work of reconciliation and unification. This unification of the world has a liturgical dimension. That is why the liturgy focuses on *Trinitarian Ecclesiology*. “The proper key for Trinitarian theology is one of worship”.<sup>180</sup>

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Völker, *Maximus Confessor als Meister des Geistlichen Lebens* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1965), p. 87.

<sup>174</sup> Maximus der Bekenner, *Drei geistliche Schriften* (Freiburg in Breisgau: Johannes-Verl., 1996), p. 25.

<sup>175</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, p. 608; see H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus’ des Bekenner*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verl., zweite, völlig veränderte Auflage, 1961), pp. 55.170: “absolute mutual inhabitation”; see L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 23: “The term perichoresis (...) seems to have been used for the first time precisely by Maximus”.

<sup>176</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, p. 608.

<sup>177</sup> Idem, *Capitulum Theol. et Oecon. Centuria II*, p. 1143.

<sup>178</sup> Idem, *Questiones ad Thalassium*, p. 624.

<sup>179</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 122.

<sup>180</sup> J. Behr, *The Formation of Christian Faith, Volume 2, The Nicene Faith, Part Two. One of the Holy Trinity* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), p. 318.

### 7.3 Trinitarian Eschatology

The paradigm of Trinitarian Perichoresis allows an understanding of everlasting life as a participation in the perfect communion of God's love. Irenaeus describes participation (μετοχή) in the divine life on the one hand as "immersion in God" (IV, 20.5), and on the other hand as an embrace of God which reaches its culmination (IV, 20.4) in the incarnation of the Logos. It is nothing other than an expression of the infinite love of God which allows communion with Himself. Following from the interpersonal character of love between God and human beings, Irenaeus sees the meaning of the incarnation as being achieved when the human being „embraces the Spirit of God and enters into the magnificence of the Father" (ibid.).<sup>181</sup> The magnificence of God is for Irenaeus the goal and the fulfilment of the human being (IV, 16.4). The person attains everlasting life with its incomprehensible immortality by participating in the divine magnificence or by seeing God (IV, 20.5).

Another picture of everlasting life is the ecstatic dynamism of mutual indwelling: God indwells the human and the human indwells God.<sup>182</sup> God prepares a suitable space for humans and the human being becomes by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit a "temple of God" (V, 6.2). Thereby the Trinity appears as *everlasting Trinitarian space, in which human beings can rest and live*, while the human person forms "gloria Dei" or the place where God's magnificence resides. The mutual inhabitation and penetration which contain a real union (ἔνωσις) and communion (κοινωνία) with God<sup>183</sup> always mean a *unio personalis*.<sup>184</sup> The infinite dynamism of union with God is based on the infinite depth of interpersonal communion, which assumes a compatibility of the human being with the infinite magnificence of God, in spite of his limitations as creature.

The eschatological "dwelling place" of human beings is *God himself*. By progressing in everlasting life, humans can ascend "by the Spirit to the Son, and by the Son they rise up to the Father" (V, 36.2). Only in the magnificence of the trinitarian God do they get to know, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2.9).

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<sup>181</sup> See D. Cairns, *The image of God in Man* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 88.

<sup>182</sup> See Irenäus von Lyon, *Fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien*, IV, 40.4; V,1: "(...) because he (Christ) poured out the Spirit of the Father to connect the human person with God in the most tender way, while he laid down the Spirit of God in the human person and by his incarnation placed the human person inside God".

<sup>183</sup> See L. Baur, *Untersuchungen über die Vergöttlichungslehre*, in: ThQ 101 (1920), pp. 44f.186.

<sup>184</sup> See P. Gächter SJ, *Unsere Einheit mit Christus nach dem hl. Irenäus*, in: ZKTh 58 (1934), pp. 509.531.

“Le dogme trinitaire est essentiellement celui de la Vie dans l'Éternel”.<sup>185</sup> The perichoretic dance of God’s love allows the human person an everlasting life of full dynamism and at the same time of full rest (ἡσυχία). It concerns a “vibration ardente”<sup>186</sup> in joyful rest in God’s inhabitation.

The restless, incessant movement towards the Trinitarian God is a blessed acquisition of kidship by the inhabitation (ἐνοίκησης) of the Holy Spirit. However, the inhabitation of the Spirit is at the same time an inhabitation of the whole Trinity, a participation in the divine δόξα<sup>187</sup>: “Comme il est impossible de saisir le Père sans le Fils, ainsi le Fils est insaisissable sans le Saint-Esprit. Car de même qu'il est impossible de remonter vers le Père sans y être élevé par le Fils, de même il est impossible de dire Seigneur Jésus sinon dans l'Esprit-Saint”.<sup>188</sup> The Holy Spirit who glorifies the Father and the Son leads human beings and the world into the infinite circle of divine love, into the intimate heart of God<sup>189</sup>, i.e. to perfect unity.<sup>190</sup>

In God’s Kingdom, as Kingdom of Trinity,<sup>191</sup> participation in the fullness of the Trinitarian communion (πάντων τὸ πλήρωμα) causes a transfiguration of the person. This μὶμνήσκωσις of εἰκῶν into divine beauty means at the same time an incarnation of the divine transcendence.<sup>192</sup>

The ascendant movement of the person toward God’s boundless beauty (τὸ θεῖον ἀόριστον κάλλος) is accompanied by a “feeling of God’s presence” (αἰσθησις παρουσίας).<sup>193</sup> One cannot separate the inhabitation (ἐνοίκησης) of man in God from the inhabitation of God in man.

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<sup>185</sup> See H. U. von Balthasar, *Présence et Pensée. Essai sur la Philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), p. 134ff.

<sup>186</sup> Idem, XIII.

<sup>187</sup> Idem, 279f.

<sup>188</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée*, p. 135: citing Gregory of Nyssa, C. Maced., II, p. 1316B.

<sup>189</sup> Ibidem, p. 136f.

<sup>190</sup> See J. Rother, Gottverähnlichung als ein Weg zur Gotteinigung beim Hl. Gregor von Nyssa, in: H. R. Drobner, Chr. Klock (ed.), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der christlichen Spätantike*, p. 555.

<sup>191</sup> See S. Gregorii Nysseni, *Adversus Macedonianos*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graecae cursus completus* (Tomus XLV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 1321.

<sup>192</sup> See J. Gaith, *La conception de la liberté chez Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Vrin, 1953), p. 29; see B. Salmona, Logos come trasparenza in Gregorio di Nissa, in: H. R. Drobner, Chr. Klock (ed.), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der christlichen Spätantike*, p. 169f.; see H. Merki O.S.B., *ὁμοίωσις Θεῶ. Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Freiburg in der Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1952), p. 122f, p. 130: Merki observed that for Gregory of Nyssa, the process of becoming increasingly similar to God means *participation*. That is why ὁμοίωσις and εἰκῶν are based on μετουσία θεότητος (p. 136).

<sup>193</sup> See J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, (Paris: Aubier, 1944), p. 177.

This interpersonal inhabitation as a progress upwards (ἀνάβασις, ἀναχώρησις) to God takes place in God's κοινωνία and occurs by ecstatic love (διὰ της ἀγάπης).<sup>194</sup> It transforms the human being who really becomes an "expanding universe, more and more open to the Trinitarian fullness".<sup>195</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa describes not only the current life as an incessant pilgrimage to God, but also the everlasting eschatological life which never comes to a standstill (στάσις).<sup>196</sup> The dynamism of eternity is and remains a releasing dynamism of ecstatic love (ἀγαπητὴ κίνησις) which overcomes every monotony.<sup>197</sup>

Maximus the Confessor took over from Gregory of Nyssa the concept of infinite progress (ἐπέκτασις)<sup>198</sup> and connected it with the inexpressible resting movement of the Trinity. He retained the concept of προκοπή, because participation in God assumes participation in the infinite movement of his love.<sup>199</sup> However, he modified the unsatisfied longing, as he substituted the picture of an arrow of love which moves through the everlasting mansions in the image of a "holy dance".<sup>200</sup> Movement is for him less a sign of restlessness and longing, than rather a sign "of trust, of a flowing to the ocean of divine rest".<sup>201</sup> God is for Maximus the Confessor "πρώτον κινούν μὴ κινούμενον"<sup>202</sup>, so that rest remains an essential sign of the divine life. However, here the determinative aspect is that this rest assumes movement.<sup>203</sup> The sublimity of God full of rest encloses the highest dynamism, so that God is ἀκίνητος only for the purposes of his

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<sup>194</sup> See idem, Introduction, in: Grégoire de Nysse, *La vie de Moïse ou traité de la perfection en matière de vertu* (preface J. Daniélou, Paris: Édition du Cerf, 2nd. Ed., 1955), p. XXIV: "Mais Dieu, à mesure qu'il se communique, dilate sa (de l'homme) capacité pour la rendre capable de plus grands biens".

<sup>195</sup> J. Lafrance, *Das Herzensgebet* (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1988), p. 90: quotes Cardinal Daniélou.

<sup>196</sup> See W. Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1955), p. 13. This view stands in clear contradiction to the view L. Boros that with the coming of death, the state of pilgrimage would also be abrogated: see L. Boros, *Mysterium mortis. Der Mensch in der letzten Entscheidung* (Olten: Walter-Verl. 4th ed., 1964), p. 98f.

<sup>197</sup> See J. Gaith, *La conception de la liberté chez Grégoire de Nysse*, p. 199.

<sup>198</sup> See V. E. F. Harrison, The Relationship between apophatic and kataphatic theology, in: *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995), p. 327f; see P. M. Blowers, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress', in: *VigChr* 46 (1992), pp. 151-171.

<sup>199</sup> See W. Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 287.

<sup>200</sup> See H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 137f.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.

<sup>202</sup> W. Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 35.

<sup>203</sup> L. Thunberg, *Man and the cosmos. The vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 31.

inexpressible transcendence of ὑπὲρ- or αὐτοκίνητος.<sup>204</sup> As a God ὑπὲρ πάσαν οὐσίαν<sup>205</sup> he is at the same time ὑπὲρ πάσαν στάσιν καὶ κίνησιν.<sup>206</sup>

The paradigm of *ever-moving rest* (ἀεικίνητος στάσις) and *ever-resting movement* (στάσιμος κίνησις)<sup>207</sup> of the Trinity outlines the whole theology of Maximus the Confessor. Each divine movement encloses after Maximus at the same time a repose of all Trinitarian Persons into each other because God has the perfection in Himself.<sup>208</sup> The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit rest in each other in their substantial communion and the everlasting movement of infinite divinity is the divine, Trinitarian manner of existence.<sup>209</sup>

This understanding of the Trinitarian rest as powerful movement provides the reason why everlasting life as life in the Trinitarian communion may never be understood as a life of exclusive rest. The rest characteristic of everlasting life is not rigid, but above movement, a movement ὑπὲρ πάσαν στάσιν καὶ κίνησιν.<sup>210</sup>

Maximus the Confessor understands the Trinitarian movement of love, full of rest, as an inexpressible freedom and creativity and therefore also as the internal reason of creation. In his ecstatic love, God intends to share the profusion of his Trinitarian life with the limited creature and to see the mystery of his perichoretic love incarnate in the entire creation.<sup>211</sup> His “incarnation” in all concerns an integration of creation into his Trinitarian communion, because God is the ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος of every movement.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> See S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorum liber*, p. 1153 B; see W. Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 53: God is ἄσχετος, infinitely superior to χρόνος, αἰών and τόπος.

<sup>205</sup> See W. Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 49.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 51.498.

<sup>207</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, p. 781C; see L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, pp. 448. 62; see H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 564; see W. Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 40f. 340. 391; see P. Christou, *Maximos Confessor on the infinity of man*, in: F. Heinzer, Chr. Schönborn (ed.), *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur Fribourg, 2-5 septembre 1980* (Fribourg Suisse: Éd. Universitaires, 1982), p. 270.

<sup>208</sup> See L. Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos*, p. 36: “The movement of God ... is at the same time a movement in which He finds His rest. (...) He expresses through that movement His own mode of perfection”.

<sup>209</sup> See S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorum liber*, p. 1036.

<sup>210</sup> Gregory of Nyssa describes the identity between movement and rest as the „highest paradox“ see S. Gregorius Nyssenus Episcopus, *De Vita Moysis*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XLIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), p. 405C; see H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 137.

<sup>211</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorum liber*, p. 1084 CD; see H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 277; see L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, p. 69.

<sup>212</sup> See W. Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 40.

The movement of creation founded by God has to be administered by the human being as μικρὸς κόσμος. As εἰκὼν and μοῖρα Θεοῦ s/he is enabled to realise the union (ἔνωσις) of creation with God.<sup>213</sup> The essential vocation of the human person lies in the realization of ἐκστατικὴ ἀγάπη, i.e. of the divine manner of existence.<sup>214</sup> By this s/he leads the creation from bare being (εἶναι) to well being (εὖ εἶναι) and finally to eternal well being (ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι).<sup>215</sup> This everlasting well being as ultimate aim of creation is pictured by Maximus the Confessor as the eschatological Sabbath of God which involves an unmingled union of the human person with the Trinitarian God. The perfect, mutual Perichoresis of God and his creation preserves the difference between Creator and creature. The essential reason for it is provided by the Trinitarian communion of God which embraces diversity and plurality. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are united without mingling, because the embrace of love does not extinguish a person. In communion with the Trinitarian God, the integrity of the human being will be preserved in eternity.<sup>216</sup>

In the everlasting Sabbath of God every created κίνησις ceases, because it will be replaced by the divine παρουσία.<sup>217</sup> However, the στάσις of the everlasting life transcends every movement as ἀεικίνητος στάσις and εἰρηνή of Trinitarian love.<sup>218</sup>

This fascinating vision of the new creation and the eschatological inhabitation of God can have a healing effect on today's world. The transcendental homelessness of post-modern society has to do with the loss of a perception of this dimension of human beings as the place of indwelling of God's magnificence. Only an understanding of yourself and of the neighbour in the light of this ability of humankind to be bearer of the divine light and philanthropy can restore the festive holiness of life, the cosmic joy of the transforming, indwelling and life-giving communion of the Trinitarian God.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibidem, pp. 88-102.140.

<sup>214</sup> See J. M. Garrigues, *Maxime le Confesseur. La charité, avenir divin de l'homme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), p. 185f.

<sup>215</sup> See S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorum liber*, pp. 1073 BD.1392 AB; see H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 138.

<sup>216</sup> See J. Meyendorff, *Theosis in der östlichen christlichen Tradition*, in: L. Dupré (ed.), *Geschichte der christlichen Spiritualität, Die Zeit nach der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Bd. 3, Würzburg: Echter, 1997), p. 496; see idem, *Christus als Erlöser im Osten*, in: B. McKinn (ed.), *Geschichte der christlichen Spiritualität. Erster Band. Von den Anfängen bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*, p. 254.

<sup>217</sup> See H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, pp. 162.617f.

<sup>218</sup> Ibidem, p. 352; see W. Völker, *Maximus Confessor*, p. 41f.

The beauty which will save the world, and can be anticipated today in liturgical form is the Trinitarian God in his interpersonal love, which gives us a home and everlasting existence. The miraculous fire which will shine in the being of all things as in the burning bush will be “the fire of divine love and the radiance of his beauty”.<sup>219</sup> The perichoretic dynamism of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>220</sup> will transform the whole universe in such a way that there will be only one single „fire of love within all things“<sup>221</sup>, the fire of mercy and healing love of the Holy Trinity.

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<sup>219</sup> S. Maximi Confessoris, *Ambiguorum liber*, p. 1148C; see M. Schneider, *Zur Erlösung in der orthodoxen Theologie* (Köln: Communio-Verlag, 2003), p. 60.

<sup>220</sup> See K. Savvidis, *Die Lehre von der Vergöttlichung des Menschen bei Maximos dem Bekenner und ihre Rezeption durch Gregor Palamas* (St. Ottilien: EOS-Verl., 1997), p. 58.

<sup>221</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, p. 354; See D. Alighieri, *La vita nuova - La divina commedia. Das Neue Leben - Die göttliche Komödie* (italienisch-deutsch, ed. E. Laaths, trans. K. Federn, R. Zoozmann, Augsburg: Weltbild Verlag, 1994), p. 461: Dante speaks in his thirty-third song of Paradise about “l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle”.