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Vladimir Lossky's Hermeneutics of Tradition as a Patristic and Ecclesial Theology

Abstract

This study highlights the cultural, historical, and theological background of Vladimir Lossky's Theology. There are at least three major lines of approach: theology in relation with spirituality, gnoseology in relation with culture, and the anthropology of deification based on the Trinitarian Theology. Lossky's theology has been critical received: his gnoseological point of view, stressing on total apophatism, with the separation between nature and person, as well as his ecclesiology, with the two oikonomia of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Vladimir Lossky's Theology is an ecclesial and patristic theology with a genuine philosophical foundation.



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Keywords

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The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of the second half of the 20th century and early 21st century is characterized as one which has mostly renounced on abstract dogmas and manuals, as an attempt to present the Orthodox theology as a theology of experience, keeping together without confusion, in a paradoxical perspective, the apophatic and the cataphatic, the rationality and the mystery, the Church and the world, the history and the eschatology.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to an Orthodox rebirth, but in the West not in the East. Thus, the Russian intelligentsia expatriated in the West had a fundamental contribution in overcoming the Western models of theology and in highlighting the patristic theology and its spiritual significance for the modern man.¹

The Russian Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, after 1917, bears the undeniable stamp of the Russian theology from Diasporas, located in a different intellectual and religious environment from that of the “Holy Russia”. The Russian Orthodox traditionalism faced various modernisms of European culture and other beliefs of the Christian West.² In terms of theological development, the revolution of 1917 has created an almost

¹ Donald Fairbairn, *Ortodoxia răsăriteană din perspectivă occidentală*, trad. Sofia Gheorghe, Editura Multimedia, Arad, 2005, p. 22.

² Ioan I Ică jr, *Sensul exemplar al unei vieți și opere: lupta pentru teologie*, Studiu introductiv la Vladimir Lossky, *Vederea lui Dumnezeu*, trad. Maria Cornelia Oros, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1995, pp. XIV-XV. About the Russian religious thought before 1917 and the following period, see also John Meyendorff, *Visions of the Church: Russian Theological Thought in Modern Times*, in „St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly” 34, (1990), pp. 5-14; N. Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance*, London, 1963; Georges Florovsky, *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Belmont, Mass, 1981; V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, New York, 1953; P Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Russian Slavophilism*, Paris, 1972; J. Pain, N. Zernov, *A Bulgakov Anthology*, Philadelphia, 1976; R. Slesinsky, *A Metaphysics of Love*, Crestwood, New York, 1984; Alexandre Schmemmann, *Ultimate Questions*, Crestwood, New York, 1977.

total severance, so that all the potentiality of Russian theology was in danger of losing, but the role played by some Russian émigré theologians - Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky - is significant.³

After the events of 1917, the Russian Orthodox Dogmatic Theology develops and explores the exceptional contributions of Russian theologians of the Diaspora. These theologians made a considerable effort to specify their identity of faith in a confused world, not only politically and socially, but also theologically. All this effort was necessary also because of the neo-Thomism – the scholastic conflict between the dominant and the early movements of the liturgical and the patristic “renewal” in Catholicism; and the confrontation between the liberal culturalism and the dialectic theology of Protestantism. Also, the Russian theology of Diaspora tries a decantation of the Western influences, which the Orthodoxy has undergone in the last three centuries.⁴

The salvation came through the appeal to the Holy Fathers, an appeal that was vigorously proposed by Father Georges Florovsky and other theologians, at the first Congress of the Faculties of Orthodox Theology (Athens, 1936). The publication by Georges Florovsky, in 1937, of his work - *The Ways of Russian Theology*, “had the effect of a true deflagration across the whole Russian «intelligentsia» in Western Europe.”⁵

1. The General Framework of Vladimir Lossky's Theology

Vladimir Lossky is one of the biggest neo-patristic theologians, hostile to any Slavophil sentimentalities or to Western

³ John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴ Ioan I Ică jr, *op. cit.*, p. XV.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. XXII. See also Cristinel Ioja, *Dogmatică și Dogmatişti. Prolegomena privind aprofundarea Teologiei Dogmatice Ortodoxe în România în a doua jumătate a secolului al XX-lea și începutul secolului al XXI-lea*, Editura Marineasa, Timișoara, 2008, pp. 18-21

rationalism. He showed, with great vigour, the dogmatic theology in the patristic and mystical view, being equally above the philosophical, ideological and cultural aspects of his time.

Thus, he played an important role in condemning Bulgakov's "sophiology", as an unorthodox dogma in the Tradition of the Church, on behalf of the the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1935⁶. In an excellent presentation, Ioan Ică jr. synthetically renders the historical, social, cultural and theological circumstance in which Vladimir Lossky's work arises and develops.

The first half of the twentieth century, when Lossky's work began, was marked by the "politically and socially confrontation between communism, fascism, democracy and between liberalism and totalitarianism. Philosophically, it was marked by the rise of positivism counterbalanced by the ideas of Henry-Louis Bergson and the current of the early existentialism. In Catholicism it was marked by the conflict between the dominant neo-Thomism scholastics and the early movements of the liturgical and patristical «renewal», whilst in Protestantism, by the confrontation between the liberal culturalism and the «dialectic» theology, as well as by the affirmation of the «Ecumenical» movement which tried to solve, with novel methods, the crisis of the advanced Dechristianised Western societies, on the background of the disunited confessional scandal".⁷

Beyond this general framework, the Russian Diaspora with its "Slavophilical and monarchical reactionary conservatism collided with a variety of socialisms and liberalisms cherished and fecundated by the experiments of the religious philosophy (Berdyaeu, Bulgakov, Frank, Ilin, Struve, Shestov). The Orthodox Russian traditionalism was confronted with both

⁶ In 1936 Lossky publishes a work called: *Controversa asupra Sofiei. Memoriul protopresbiterului S. Bulgakov și sensul Decretului Patriarhiei Moscovei*, in which he systematically demonstrates the sophistic argumentation of the apology Fr. Bulgakov, Ioan I Ică jr, *op. cit.*, p. XX.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. XIV-XV.

European culture modernisms and the massive presence of the Western Christian's un-orthodox beliefs.⁸ In this context, Lossky's work and thinking can be situated in an effort to recover the Orthodox identity "in a critical contrastive delimitation between Western Christianities on one hand, and the profound influences exerted by them on the Russian Orthodoxy over the last three centuries, on the other hand".⁹ Theologizing in such a social, cultural, political and religious framework, the works of Vladimir Lossky appear as a miracle, a pearl of Orthodox theology of that time, or rather as a true revelation, considering that in his famous work *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1944), he discovers to the Orthodox world, a new way to Theologize, to express the Dogma and to understand the dogmas and the life of the Church.

The world in which the Russian theologian from Diaspora testifies is a challenging world, a world that threatens Orthodoxy either with its ignorance, or with its misunderstanding in the conditions of a rigid, abstract and un-anchored testimony in the dimension of life of the church, its sacraments, its vision on man and the world he lives in.

Thus, the unity between the Dogma and spirituality in the life of Church, their experience in the communion of the living God present in the Church and the man as son of God called to deity, constitutes the essential elements of the reconstruction and the true expression of the Orthodox theology, so that its redemption message reaches the heart of the contemporary man.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. XV.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

2. Aspects of Vladimir Lossky's Theology

2.1. Theology and Mysticism / Spirituality

Vladimir Lossky's fundamental work is *Attempt on the Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1944) in which he shows the dogmatic and mystical traditions of Orthodoxy, which does not conceive of a divorce between theology and mysticism, mysticism and theology, but mystical theology is the theology per excellence. "In the Eastern tradition there never was a clear distinction between mysticism and dogmatic theology, between the personal experience of the divine mysteries and the affirmed dogmas of the Church. (...) Far from being opposed, theology and mysticism are based on each other and complete each other. One is impossible without the other. If mystical experience is a personal enhancement of the content of common faith, theology is an expression, which is available to everyone and can be tried by everyone. (...) So, there is no Christian Mysticism without Theology, but especially there is no Theology without Mysticism"¹⁰ This unitary manner of doing theology in the spirit of the Fathers and the Eastern Church will be met in all the Russian theologian's approaches from Diaspora, his vision being not only aimed at overcoming the scholastic method, but also at the highlighting of a new way to approach, analyse and express the Church's truths of faith through a progressive rediscovery of the Fathers, themselves being devoted to a unified vision, as concerns dogma and spirituality.

The Russian theologian emphasizes this unity precisely in a Western world, which lacks a unified vision in terms of dogma and spirituality; the West recorded a "divorce" between

¹⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, trad. Vasile Răducă, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993, pp. 36-37. See also David C Dawson Vásquez, *The mystical theology of Vladimir Lossky: a study of his integration of the experience of God into theology*, Catholic University of America, 2001.

theology and mysticism / spirituality. This split between theology and mysticism in the West led to the proliferation of mystical individualism in Western literature that we can identify quite late, in the 13th century.¹¹

Vladimir Lossky shows that the separation between dogma and spiritual/mystical individualism with its consequences cannot be found in the Christian East: "the individual experience of the great mystics of the Orthodox Church remains mostly unknown to us.

Apart from a few rare cases, the Eastern Christian spiritual literature does not have autobiographical writings about the inner life, such as those of St. Angela of Foligno, Henry Suso's or like "The story of a soul" of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: "The path of mystical union is usually a mystery of God and of the soul, which is not revealed, only to the confessor or a few apprentices. What is shown are just the fruits of the union: the wisdom, the knowledge of divine mysteries expressed in a theological or moral teaching, or in advises that are designed to strengthen the brethren. (...) A certain scission had to be reached between the Orthodox faith and personal experience, between our individual and our church life, for the spirituality and dogma, mysticism and theology to become two separated areas, so that the souls which don't find enough food in the theological amounts, start to eagerly seek individual stories of mystical experiences, in order to be refreshed in an atmosphere of spirituality. Individualism remained alien to the mystical spiritual life of the Eastern Church"¹².

¹¹ About the evolution of the medieval theology with all its confrontations and scissions, especially in West, see also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Tradiția creștină. O istorie a dezvoltării doctrinei III. Evoluția teologiei medievale (600-1300)*, trad. Silvia Palade, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2006.

¹² Vladimir Lossky, *op. cit.*, p. 47-48. About the spirituality of the Middle Age in West, with all its aspects and implications in the thought and life of the Western Christians, see also André Vauchez, *Spiritualitatea*

This tendency has led in the West to the separation of theology from mysticism on one hand, and ultimately to the separation of theology from the life of the Church. On the other hand, mystics have been separated from the life of the Church, as they professed a more individual mysticism broken from the life of the Church.¹³

In “the mystical theology”, Lossky addresses and deepens the concrete and specific method of his vision and neo-patristic orientation, the fundamental issues embedded in a hermeneutic of the ecclesial of Tradition – delimited from the so-called traditions, as well as from the theological errors of the Western theology, and from the influences of the different philosophies of his time. In a personal, creative and persuasive style, Lossky presents the issue of the gnoseology, the teaching about the Triune God, the cosmology, the anthropology, the Christology, the pneumatology, the ecclesiology and eschatology of the mystical tradition in the Christian East, culminating in deification and the seeing of the uncreated light, as the ultimate aim of both anthropology and cosmology.

A further elaboration of these themes in a mystical and spiritual vision we find in *The Vision of God*, which gathered over time both positive and negative feedback.¹⁴ To Lossky, Tradition is

Evului Mediu Occidental, trad. Doina Marian, Daniel Barbu, Editura Meridiane, 1994.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 41, 49. See also Cristinel Ioja, *Rațiune și mistică în teologia ortodoxă*, Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2008, pp. 26-30. See also Alar Laats, *Doctrines of the Trinity in Eastern and Western theologies: a study with special reference to K. Barth and V. Lossky*, Frankfurt am Main, New York: P. Lang, 1999.

¹⁴ Ioan I Ică jr, *op. cit* pp. XL-LII. Polycarp Sherwood recognizes as valid the historical sketch of Lossky regarding the sight of God, but he disagrees with the term *participation*, specific for the fundamental distinction between being and the energies in God. On the other hand, R Williams accused Lossky’s schematism of work and ideas in its content and also the instability of his investigations by continuous passage from the historical aspect to the dogmatic one. Williams’ position is also taken over by Kallistos Ware who affirms that the work

viewed in a vertical-dynamic perspective as a movement-confession within the same personal Truth, which through the life-working power of the Spirit's facilitates the renewal. Therefore, the Tradition is alive and is the life of the Holy Spirit in Church.¹⁵

2.2. The Problem of the Knowledge

We find the Patristical and ecclesial-soteriological vision of Vladimir Lossky in all the aspects of the theology, which he addresses and deepens, and as such, in gnoseology. And here we find his patristic foundation of his gnoseological vision closely related to the dimension of the life of the Church, founded on Revelation and on the experience of the Communion. Thus, in gnoseology, Lossky reevaluates the vision of Dionysius the Areopagite about the affirmative and negative theology in the process of knowledge.¹⁶ Taking as a model the ascent of Moses on Mount Sinai, Lossky speaks just as Dionysus, about the union and not simply about knowledge "the negative theology as a path to mystical union with God."¹⁷ This union

"reduced too much the patristic testimony to a single model (pattern) and did not understand enough the diversity of expression from one Father to another." Ioan I. Ica Jr. states that "if there is a gap in Lossky's work *The Vision of God*, then this is the very lack over the decisive role of Augustine (430) in determining the fate of this whole issue in the history of the Christian West which he deviated today on another path than that of the Eastern Orthodoxy".

¹⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, trad. Anca Manolache, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998, pp. 153-155.

¹⁶ Idem, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, pp. 53-56. See also Idem, *La notion des „analogies” chez Denys le Pseudo-Areopagite*, in „Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age”, nr. 5(1930), pp. 279-309; *La Théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite*, in „Revue des Sciences philosophique et théologique”, nr. 2 (1939), pp. 204-221. Regarding the issue of knowledge in Lossky's work see also R. Williams, *La voie négative et les fondements de la théologie „Contacts”*, nr. 2(1979), pp. 153-184.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

with God that involves *anabasis* can not be achieved without *catabasis* without the descent of God on the line of uncreated energies to the creature.¹⁸ Following the Cappadocians, he stresses the unknowable of the divine being, which does not mean agnosticism and the fact that the God of Revelation is not the God of the philosophers¹⁹, but implicitly, that “Christianity is not a school of Philosophy speculating on abstract concepts, but above all, it is a sharing with the living God”.²⁰

In his approach of gnoseology, Lossky borrows from the antisocially expression of Dionysius the Areopagite and stresses the apophatic method of theology, the apophatism being “the true warp of the whole tradition of the Eastern Church”²¹. Lossky warns that by applying the apophatic method of knowledge is neither esotericism nor Gnosticism, but “a school of contemplation in which everyone gets his part of experience of the mystery lived by the Church”.²² The consequence of this

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

¹⁹ See also Idem, *Introducere în teologia ortodoxă*, trad. Lidia și Remus Rus, Editura Enciclopedica, Bucuurești, 1993, pp. 20-22. Vladimir Lossky shows that by adapting the notion of absolute revelation to reason, it receives various meanings, so that Descartes’ God is a mathematician God, for Leibnitz God is necessary in order to justify the harmony between reality and our default perception, Kant needs the idea of God within moral, Bergson’s God is a God of creative evolution, the God of Aristotle is unmoved postulated by the existence of movement. For some philosophers seeking God is an inherent necessity of their thinking in the sense that God must exist in order to give coherence to their conception of the universe. If the philosophers are building the idea of God, for the theologians God reveals Himself. In this work, Lossky deepens the great themes of Orthodox dogmatic tradition: the problem of knowledge, cosmology, Christological dogma and anthropology. The book is preceded by a prologue in which Lossky explores the relationship between faith and theology, but also between theology and philosophy in regard to the question of knowledge. (pp. 11-29).

²⁰ Idem, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, p. 61, 70

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 69-70

view related to a legitimate reaction against various reductive and unilateral anthropologies will determine the Russian theologian to assert that: "the level at which the question of the human person exceeds that of ontology, as it is usually understood; it's a meta-ontology that only God alone can know".²³

2.3. The Anthropology of Deification Based on the Holy Trinity

Man was created by God in order to become god; the failure by the original sin made the Incarnation to foundation of human deification. Lossky also considers thoroughly the Orthodox anthropology examining the theological notion of "human person", "the theology of image" and anthropological implications of the dogma of the Church, the Orthodox dogma about the Holy Trinity, both from the perspective of knowledge and from the perspective of pneumatology, but also regarding the *oikonomia* which includes besides the creation, the redemption and the deification, as well as the eschatology.²⁴ Man and the world are in a close relationship, the world being transformed by man who plays the role of the macrocosm. The relationship between being and person is seen in an apophatic perspective, similar to the relationship between being and persons in Trinity.

Following the Cappadocians, in the theology about the Trinity, it will be stressed how important the *monarchy of the Father* is – the only one that preserves the balance between nature and person - detaching from the Western doctrine about Trinity and therefore Filioque, which he uncloaks with biblical and patristic arguments. He considers it the only main reason for the separation between East and West, the other doctrinal

²³ Idem, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, p. 120.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

differences being only its consequences.²⁵ The soteriology, which aims at man and cosmos in solidarity, has in its centre a triune-Christological, ecclesial-sacramental vision, the Church having a theandric constitution.

3. The Critical receiving of the Theological Thought of Vladimir Lossky

Vladimir Lossky remains one of the most important 20th century Orthodox theologians, integrating himself and actively participating with all his work in the “changing of paradigm”, from the scholastic method of theology, specific for the Western theology, to the highlighting of a method which does not ignore the Patristic theology and the unitary and integrative vision regarding theology and spirituality/mysticism. His contribution to the deepening of the Orthodox theology from a patristic perspective, with direct implications in the very orthodox way of doing theology in the 20th century is enormous, exceeding not only the theological immobility, but also the rigidity of the Western theology regarding the Revelation and the Apostolic Tradition of life, always present in Church and in the different conceptions of the secular modern society. It is certain that over time, Lossky’s work faced some corrections and analysis in its expression, which brought some corrections related to theological aspects, as well. These corrections, however, coming even from some modern exponents of the neo-patristic current - Father Dumitru Staniloae for example - does not marginalize Vladimir Lossky’s theological thought, which still remains very influential, even for some of its critics.

²⁵ Idem, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, p. 52.

3.1. Gnoseology: the Total Apophatism

Among the objections brought to Lossky's work we mention the total apophatism which refers to the interpretation of Dionysus' gnoseology and the problem of the two oikonomia, of the Son and the Holy Spirit, each with its consequences both in gnoseology and anthropology, as well as in ecclesiology and soteriology.²⁶

Regarding the implications of total apophatism in Lossky's theology, Silviu Rogobete believes that Lossky erred when he concluded that the superiority of the cataphatic over the apophatic is the only criterion which allows us to discover God. Identifying theological, metaphysical and even anthropological implications he concludes that Vladimir Lossky, being deeply influenced by Berdyaev's existentialist reason, he continues it but not so radically.

Through the superiority of the apophatic path over the cataphatic one, Lossky concludes that the apophatic way is the only one. Starting from the patristic movement, katabasis-anabasis, he argues that these are two complementary aspects

²⁶ Regarding the critic of the total apophatism in Lossky's work see also, Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *O ontologie a iubirii. Subiect și Realitate Personală supremă în gândirea părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, trad. Anca Dumitrașcu, Adrian Guiu, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2001, pp. 36-116. Fr. Stăniloae criticizes the total apophatism met in Lossky's gnoseology and Yannaras explains the apophatic knowledge, leaving from the character of Person of God, pleading for a fusion of the apophatic with the cataphatic (vezi *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* vol. I, p. 122). See also Emil Bartoș, *Conceptul de îndumnezeire în teologia lui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Editura Institutului Biblic „Emanuel” Oradea, pp. 52-84; Pr. Conf. Dr. Ștefan Buchiu, *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae*, Editura Libra, București, 2002; Nicolae Moșoiu, *Taina prezenței lui Dumnezeu în viața umană. Viziunea creatoare a Părintelui Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae*, pp. 65-100; Jurgen Henkel, *Îndumnezeire și etică a iubirii în opera părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, trad. Diac. Ioan I Ică jr. Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, pp. 155-160). Părintele Stăniloae, *Sfântul Duh și sobornicitatea Bisericii*, Ortodoxia, an XIX (1967), nr. 1, pp. 44-45.

of the same way, the apophatic one.²⁷ “One might even say that there is just one way that can be followed in two opposite directions: God descends among us through the “energies” that make Him known, and we go up to Him in “unions” in which He remains unknown through the being”.²⁸

Starting from these considerations we can say that in Lossky’s theology, the rational way of knowledge is separated from the mystical knowledge (gnosis), while in Father Staniloae’s theology through the balance between cataphatic and apophatic – influenced by Maximilian and Palamas – the rational and the mystical way of knowledge are not separated and don’t exclude each other, but they require one another; from here deriving the value and the possibility of the entire creation to deify itself through participation.

Silviu Rogobete believes that by professing the total apophatism, Lossky opposes the mystical experience to the natural reason, perceiving the terms of *reason*, *rationality*, more in concordance with a post-Cartesian rational model of dualism i.e. knowing subject - object to be known-, and not according to the patristic tradition about the participatory dimension of reason and rationality.

As opposed to Lossky’s theory, Silviu Rogobete presents Father Staniloae, whose thinking is based on the continuum of natural-supernatural, where reason and mysticism find each other, and depend on each other in an interpersonal context in which the terms *reason* and *rationality* are understood in the light of the scriptural concept of Logos.²⁹

²⁷ Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *op. cit.* pp. 36-40.

²⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, pp. 67-68. See also Idem, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, p. 5.

²⁹ Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *op. cit.* p. 108.

3.2. Anthropology: the Nature-Person Separation

Father Staniloae's criticism also regards Lossky's anthropology.³⁰ Rogobete comments upon Lossky's anthropology, as a consequence of his gnoseology, in the following terms: "For Lossky, the human person, like the divine one, cannot be defined but in negative terms: the person means irreducibility to nature, but the person is not reducible to nature. Consequently, although the concept of person is saved from a pure biological or individualistic definition, the concept of human nature is compromised.

The human nature is seen, just like in existentialism, as a deterministic datum, a datum shackled by necessity, so in a continuous need to be overcome by the person's freedom. In other words, the Hypostasis is identified with the person and placed in opposition with ousia, which is assimilated with the substance or the nature. Thus, the very category of person is likely to become a "meta-category", mysterious of the grace, opposite to the "deterministic" category of nature. Therefore, Lossky's anthropology is in danger of collapsing in mystical existentialism."³¹

3.3. Ecclesiology: Christ and the Spirit - the two Oikonomia

Regarding the two issues of oikonomia as it is understood by Lossky, we also report some objections. Lossky affirms that the unity of human nature is restored by Christ, through the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and the diversity of humanity is restored at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit. Thus, "Christ's work is proceeding towards the human nature, which is resumed in

³⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, pp. 405-406.

³¹ Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110. See also Idem, *Existențialism mistic sau participare comunitară? Două alternative în cadrul tradiției ortodoxe: Vladimir Lossky și Dumitru Stăniloae*, in Teodor Baconsky și D. Tătaru-Cazaban (ed.) „Dumitru Stăniloae sau paradoxul teologiei”, Editura Anastasia, București, 2003, pp. 245-305.

His hypostasis. Instead, the work of the Holy Spirit is proceeding towards people, addressing each one of them. (...) Christ is the unique hypostasis of the common nature of mankind; the Holy Spirit gives each person created after God's image the ability to achieve the similarity in human-common nature; One gives His hypostasis to the human nature, the Other gives His divinity. Thus, the work of Christ unifies, the work of the Holy Spirit diversifies. Nevertheless, one is impossible without the other; the unity of human nature is accomplished in people and people cannot achieve perfection, cannot become fully people but in unity of being (...) The work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit are thus inseparable: Christ creates the mystical unity of His body through the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit partakes Himself to human persons through Christ."³²

Although Father Staniloae gives credit to Lossky, as concerns his vision over the catholicity of the Church according to the model of the Holy Trinity, he shows that Lossky does not give the Holy Spirit the role that Fathers of the Church gave in founding and supporting the Church as unity in diversity. Lossky, considering Christ as a principle of unity in the Church and the Spirit as a principle of diversity in people, facilitates the conclusion that the Son is not a person in the Trinity, He is the nature, and the Holy Spirit doesn't have the one divine nature, but represents exclusively the principle of person.

In reality, as Father Staniloae explains, the Holy Spirit is not a cause of attrition in Church, of simple diversification, not only because He communicates the unity of the Body, but because He himself is the principle of unity, because He himself does not come in a unity of the Body of Christ which has already existed, but because He himself is the power of unification, but unification in communion and thereby, a factor of establishing the mystical Body of the Lord, i.e. the Church. Moreover, Christ is not only an indistinct factor of unity in Church, because He is

³² Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, pp. 195-196.

not only human, but He is also a divine Person and, consequently, a human person, and therefore, He does not represent only the unified nature of the Holy Trinity nor is he an impersonal nature, but He is a Person as a distinctive principle, and as such, He enters into relationship with each of those who form His body, affirming their personal reality.

Both through Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Church is realized as unity, as well as diversity. Christ and the Holy Spirit do not work separately, but in perfect union, having between them a unity of being and a personal relationship.³³ The differentiation between the work of the Son and the one of the Holy Spirit, found in Lossky's conception is also criticized by Father Florovsky, who opposes to it, a Christ-way of seeing the ecclesiology.³⁴

Yet, the neo-patristic synthesis performed by Vladimir Lossky has an inner coherence that makes the ecclesiology to be Trinitarian, having as a schematic model the two oikonomia: of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.³⁵

Zizioulas notes in this regard: "thus, using the «nature vs. person» scheme, Lossky develops the idea that both Christology and pneumatology are necessary components of ecclesiology and he sees in the sacramental structure of the Church the Christological aspect to be objective, which must always be accompanied by the "personal" or "subjective" aspect. (...) This seems to provide material for a synthesis between Christology and pneumatology in an ecclesiological plan. And yet, that mentioned scheme makes Lossky's position extremely problematic. Its first point of view, regarding the "distinct

³³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sfântul Duh și sobornicitatea Bisericii*, pp. 44-45.

³⁴ George Florovsky, *Christ and His Church, Suggestions and Comments*, in: „L'Eglise et les Eglises”, Chevetogne, 1955, vol. 2, pp. 158-170.

³⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, p. 205. Still, towards the end of his life (1956), Vladimir Lossky will talk about a unique „logo-pneumatological oikonomia” (see also O. Clément, *Orient-Occident. Deux Passeurs: Vladimir Lossky et Paul Evdokimov*, Labo ret fides, Genève, 1985, p. 63, nota 186.

oikonomia of the Holy Spirit”, is problematic for the same reason, making the synthesis so difficult that it must be abandoned. Lossky does not draw any conclusions from the implications of his views on the current structure and institutions of the Church.

The problem of how the institutionalism must refer to the charismatic, and the Christological to the pneumatology of ecclesiology, is still waiting to be treated by the Orthodox theology.³⁶ “Ioannis Zizioulas tries to overcome this opposition between the two oikonomia seen in Lossky’s work, talking about the pneumatically constitution of Christology³⁷ and Boris Bobrinsky will talk about the pneumatically Christology.³⁸

Thus, we can provide a framework for the thought and work of the great dogmatist: a) a Trinitarian doctrine rigorously established; b) the inseparable and complementary relationship between Theology and Mystics; c) the theology of the person, the apophatism of the person, a negative anthropology; d) the total apophatism and the issue of seeing God; e) the theory of the two oikonomia: the one of the Son, which regards the unity of nature and the one of the Spirit which regards the diversity of people, with consequences for ecclesiology; f) Tradition and traditions; g) the highlighting of the theological and ecumenical dimension of Orthodoxy; h) the development of various philosophical and ideological currents, except Berdyaev’s existentialism, present in anthropology; i) the development over the Slavophil sentimentality and exaggeration and the conscience of the unique mission of Orthodoxy in the Western environment.

³⁶ Ioannis Zizioulas, *Ființa eclesială*, trad. Aurel Nae, Editura Bizantină, București, 1996, pp. 137-138.

³⁷ Idem, *La continuité avec les origines apostoliques dans la conscience théologique de l’Eglise Orthodoxe*, Istina, 1 (1974), pp. 65-94.

³⁸ Boris Bobrinsky *Împărtășirea Sfântului Duh*, trad. Măriuca și Adrian Alexandrescu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1999, pp. 62-70.