T. F. TORRANCE AND JOHN ZIZIOULAS
ON THE DIVINE *MONARCHIA*:
THE CAPPADOCIAN BACKGROUND AND
THE NEO-CAPPADOCIAN SOLUTION

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Abstract: *The disagreements between T. F. Torrance (1913-2007) and John Zizioulas (1931-) regarding the reading of the patristic (especially Cappadocian) doctrine of the monarchy of the Father bear implications for fundamental issues of theological method which require careful study. In the present article, questions regarding the transcendent and immanent Trinity, historical revelation as a starting point of Christian theology and the interpretation of the Cappadocian Fathers will be discussed in connection with a critical comparison of the way these two eminent theologians, who belong to different traditions (Torrance, Reformed; Zizioulas, Eastern Orthodox), interpret the monarchy of the Father as the most fundamental issue of Trinitarian theology.*

It is no exaggeration to say that Trinitarian theology is currently a point of deep interest and theological creativity amongst the most eminent of modern theologians across the Christian traditions. However, the method of interpreting this fundamental doctrine of faith and the implied understanding of its consequences that follow from different methodologies have rendered this doctrine a primary point of divergence between Eastern and Western Christianity. Since Theodore de Regnon's schematic and superficial definition of the radically different approach to Trinitarian theology,[1] this – one may dare say – "gulf" between the two traditions has been conceived as a sort of metaphysical

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1   See Theodore De Regnon, *Etudes de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinite*, 3 vols. (Paris: Victor Retaux et Fils, 1892). In his magnum opus he argued that the West began its reflection about the Trinity with the common essence, while the East with the different persons. See also the interesting discussion and re-assessment of de Regnon's thesis in Michel René Barnes, "De Regnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51–79.

argument. Even today this quite simplistic understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is still taken for granted to some extent.

In this paper a study is conducted of the work of two well known Trinitarian theologians, T. F. Torrance (1913-2007)[2] and John Zizioulas (1931-),[3] and the ongoing debate between them, regarding their reading of the patristic, but especially Cappadocian, doctrine of the *monarchy of the Father*, in relation to fundamental issues having to do with the proper theological *method* of Christian theology and patristic *interpretation*.

I. Sources, Conceptual Tools, and Motives

A

T. F. Torrance is widely considered as one of the most creative minds in modern Trinitarian theology. In several of his writings on Trinitarian doctrine, he provided extensive historical and systematic reading of patristic theology regarding the Church's Trinitarian faith.[4] The basic guide for Torrance's interpretation of Trinitarian doctrine is, without doubt, the patristic theology of the fourth and fifth-centuries: the Cappadocians, with priority given to Gregory of Nazianzus; Cyril of Alexandria, and Epiphanius of Salamis. The pre-eminence, however, goes to the thought of Athanasius of Alexandria – doubtless the key lens through which Torrance approaches the whole tradition.[5]

If one looks over the chapters of his books that deal with this issue, one sees from the outset that the *Athanasian-Nazianzen* axis is the dominant platform upon which he bases his Trinitarian thinking. However, Torrance will also take into account the "evangelical" roots of the Trinitarian doctrine.

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2   For an overview of his thought and an extensive bibliography of his work see Alister McGrath, *T. F. Torrance. An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

3   For an overview of his thought and an extensive bibliography of his work see Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) and Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

4   See T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *The Trinitarian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997); and *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

5   For contrast, see Colin Gunton, "Eastern and Western Trinities: Being and Person. T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," in *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Towards a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003), 51, who argues critically that it is in fact really Augustine that lies behind Torrance's Trinitarian theology.

Torrance's close devotion to Athanasius explains to some extent his preoccupation with the term *homoousion*[6] – once sanctified by the Nicene Council – as his almost unique conceptual tool in dealing with the issue of divine monarchia.[7] But how in fact does Torrance understand the meaning of *homoousion*?

From the outset, Torrance makes a methodological comment: with the "aid of the *homoousion* and the *perichoresis* our understanding of God's self-revelation to us is lifted up from the economic Trinity to the ontological Trinity, yet paradoxically, without leaving the economic Trinity behind."[8] Moreover, this concept identifies the Son within the divine *ousia,* a term which, according to Torrance, is used to denote the "Being of God" and, further, expresses the reality of "the identity of being (ταυτότης της ουσίας) between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," as manifested by God's self-revelation in history. Following Athanasius, Torrance will question any use of *ousia* that is preoccupied by a preconceived idea or definition of being, such as the metaphysical and static sense of being in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and (supposedly) scholastic theology.[9]

Torrance argues that "the doctrine of the *homoousion* was as decisive as it was revolutionary: it expressed the evangelical truth what God is toward us and has freely done for us in his love and grace and continues to do in the midst of us through his Word and Spirit, he really is in *himself*…"[10] What is at stake here are the *soteriological* implications of the proper conceptualization of the relationship between God and the world, following what might be called the "grammar of the Realism of Revelation."[11]

In this context, Torrance makes use of another closely related concept, that of *perichoresis*, which could be understood as a necessary "deepening" of the

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6 E.g. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith,* 110-145, where he describes the hermeneutical and evangelical importance of the "homoousion."

7 As has been recently stated [Victor Shepherd, "Thomas F. Torrance and the Homoousion of the Holy Spirit," *Participatio* 3 (2012): 108], "Thomas F. Torrance has become notorious for his insistence on the *homoousion* (of the Son) as essential to any sound doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that the *homoousion* safeguards . . . the Trinity against any form of Sabelianism or modalism, and the doctrine of God against any form of Unitarianism or polytheism."

8 Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 110.

9 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1028b quoted in ibid., 116. See Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 2 and 40 quoted in idem., 116.

10 Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 130.

11 Colin Gunton, "Eastern and Western Trinities: Being and Person. T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," 50, in his critical approach to the theology of Torrance refers to a sort of "homoousial revelation" in order to highlight the importance of *homoousion* for his entire argumentation.

understanding of the *homoousion*.[12] Making use of this concept introduced by Pseudo-Cyril and John of Damascus, Torrance aims to give

> expression to the dynamic Union and Communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with one another in one Being in such a way that they have their Being in each other and reciprocally contain one another, without any coalescing… *Perichoresis* has essentially a *dynamic* and not static sense … [i]t imports a mutual movement as well as a mutual indwelling.[13]

In this respect, "the mystery of *perichoresis*" is "not a speculative concept. It expresses the soteriological truth of the identity between God himself and the content of his saving revelation in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit." Torrance emphasizes that *perichoresis*, "[t]ogether with the conception of the *homoousion* . . . enables us to read back the interrelations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation into the eternal relations immanent in the one Being of God."[14] Finally, *perichoresis* in conjunction with *homoousion* allows one to apprehend the *order* or τάξις, the equality and the distinction of the Trinitarians persons.[15]

What is it that motivates Torrance's insistence on the *homoousion*? It is evident throughout his writings that Arianism is considered as the most serious primitive heresy,[16] the *context* from which the proper Trinitarian formulations emerged. If one would like to "translate" this in a more systematic way, one could find the same *soteriological* motivation lying in the background of his conception, inasmuch as Arianism was the most serious threat against the confession of the *divine* nature of the Son and Logos of God, an idea with profound and explicit implications for the very reality of the salvation of man and the created order as a whole.

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John Zizioulas is widely recognized as the most representative Orthodox theologian in recent times and an original, although in some respects controversial, spokesman of the Cappadocian legacy. In various *ad hoc* publications, Zizioulas

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12   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 168.

13   Ibid*.,* 170–171. Cf. Ps-Cyril, *De Sacrosancta Trinitate*, 10 and 23, (*PG* 77.114D and 1164B); John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 1.8, and 1.11 quoted in idem., 170.

14   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 172.

15   Ibid*.,* 172–73.

16   Colin Gunton, "Eastern and Western Trinities: Being and Person. T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," 38.

highlights the importance of Cappadocia as a *third* – so to say, alternative – way[17] of doing theology against the dominant discourse of Alexandria and Antioch.

It is noteworthy that Zizioulas, unlike Torrance, does not make use of the biblical narrative as his starting point. Instead, he draws his theological reasoning almost exclusively from the Cappadocian Fathers[18] (especially Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen) of the late fourth–century (and subsequently on the Creed of the Second Ecumenical Council and also Maximus the Confessor), while at the same time offering important exemplary lessons regarding how one might go beyond the *merely historical* study of texts to a more *systematic* one.[19]

If the recovery of the importance of the Cappadocian patristic theology was a major achievement of Zizioulas, his ontology of personhood seems to be the axis upon which he founds his whole theological argument. Since the beginning of his career Zizioulas has focused on the importance of the concept of personhood both as a *conceptual* tool for the conceptualization of the doctrine of the Trinity and as the very *soteriological* reality of Christian faith, the fulfillment of *theosis.* As he puts it, "the concept of person with its absolute and ontological content was born historically from the endeavor of the Church to give ontological expression to its faith in the Triune God."[20] Highlighting the "revolution" inherent in the Cappadocian identification of *personhood* (a relational concept) with *hypostasis* (an ontological concept), Zizioulas asserts that personhood, despite its dominant understanding as *mask* (*prosopeion*) in earlier ages, should be now conceived as an ontological concept, belonging to the very core of being.[21]

Zizioulas articulated his theology of personhood for the first time with reference to the *Eucharistic* context. He repeatedly argues that personhood is "an identity that stems from a relationship." This does not mean, however, that person should be assimilated to an abstract relationality, like the "in–between"

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17   John Zizioulas, "The Father as Cause: Personhood Generating Otherness," in *Communion & Otherness* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 124.

18   The title "Cappadocian Fathers" seems to be a misleading caricature, insofar as it assimilates the theological and philosophical variety of thought of the three Fathers, to the extent that they appear to share the same vision and methodology of doing theology without contradistinctions or differences. In this direction, see for instance the very important work of Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 271–324. I owe particular thanks to my good friend Matthew Baker for bringing to my attention Beeley's work on the Cappadocians and in particular Gregory of Nazianzus.

19   John Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008) ix–x.

20   John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 36.

21   Ibid.*,* 39.

of Martin Buber or the modern "metaxology" of W. Desmond,[22] which then might acquire primordial ontological status along the lines of the essence or substance of ancient Greek and medieval philosophy, defined as a necessary entity. Rather, Zizioulas considers personhood as a *relational*, *unique,* and *concrete* identity having *ontological priority* over substance, a priority that bestows the person with absolute freedom and relationality. *Communion* and *otherness* are the fundamental aspects of the concept of personhood. Grounded in the Eucharistic experience of the Church, the Cappadocian Fathers elaborated an original Trinitarian theology of personhood which implies that "the person rests in the fact that [it] represents two things simultaneously which are at first sight in contradiction: particularity and communion."[23] For Zizioulas, the person is in fact the soteriological outcome of the doctrine of the Trinity, the necessary concept for conceptualizing the divine-human communion in terms of freedom, love, constant relationship, and uniqueness.[24]

If for Torrance the fundamental threat to orthodoxy was the heresy of Arianism, in the case of Zizioulas, Eunomianism occupies the central place. Yet the central issue here is again the divine nature of the Son of God. The Cappadocians had to wrestle with the Eunomian identification of the essence of God with the Father alone, which downgraded the divine status of the Son to that of a creature with a different essence than the Father. Again, the problem was soteriological.

II. Methodology

In discussing the methodological parameters[25] of Trinitarian theology, Torrance is adamant that "the movement from economic to ontological relations in our formulation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity must be taken seriously, for only in the Lord Jesus Christ…are we really in touch with God, and through him with the Trinitarian relations of love immanent in God." And further, conversely, "the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity through the unfolding of its stratified structure reinforces our basic evangelical conviction that theological understanding

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22 William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Christopher Ben Simpson "Theology, Philosophy, God and the Between", *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics*, 1:1–2 (August, 2012): 262–279.

23 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 105.

24 John Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 9–11.

25 For a detailed analysis of the epistemological levels of Torrance's "Trinitarian mind," see Colin Gunton, "Eastern and Western Trinities: Being and Person. T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," 36–38, where he clearly presents the three epistemological levels in Torrance's thought: 1) experience, 2) economy, and 3) Theology.

and doctrinal formulation are properly grounded in God's unique self-giving to us in the Lord Jesus Christ."[26] In this respect he follows Athanasius,[27] who seems to legitimate the "godly contemplation and humble worship of the Holy Trinity and the reverent formulation of the doctrine,"[28] not primarily because of the threat of heresy, but mainly because of the soteriological fact that it was the *Word* that was made flesh and has made God known (Jn. 1:14, 18).

While strongly emphasizing that it is only from and through the economic self-manifestation of the triune God in Christ that one can begin reflection on the immanent Trinity, Torrance is at the same time quick to secure the ontological priority of the transcendent or ontological Trinity and the unity of both levels in Christ, since it is "on the ontological Trinity that the evangelical nature of the economic Trinity entirely depends."[29] It is clear that Torrance's methodology of elaborating his Trinitarian perspective is based on a firm economical-evangelical account that takes quite seriously God's great will to reveal himself in the person of Jesus Christ in history, as the only legitimate starting point of doing theology.

While Zizioulas himself considers the question of "theological presuppositions" of profound importance for theological discourse in ecumenical perspective, since the "latter are only logical developments of the former,"[30] he very rarely, if ever, demonstrates explicitly his starting point of doing theology. Claiming to follow the methodological premises implied in Basil's introduction of a new doxology in the Liturgy ("Glory be to the Father with the Son, with the Holy Spirit" instead of "Glory be to the Father through the Son, in the Holy Spirit"),[31] Zizioulas, according to his own account, opts for a *meta*-historical, liturgical and eschatological starting point in theology, which goes beyond the dominance of a propositional understanding of Revelation to focus on *Theologia* (God *ad intra*) in a manner that seems to put aside the methodological priority of God's self-revelation in history. In this light, the Eucharist renders possible the participation by communion in the very life of God, which is communion of persons caused by the person of the God the Father. In Zizioulas' understanding, this communion legitimates discussion about God's very being, the question of *how* God is – his *personal* mode of existence – rather than the *what* of the ineffable divine

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26   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 109-10.

27   Ibid.*,* 111.

28   Ibid.

29   Ibid.*,* 109.

30   John Zizioulas, *The One and the Many. Studies on God, Man, the Church and the World Today* (Alhambra, CA.: Sebastian Press), 136.

31   Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 1.3, 7.16 (Ibid., 160), 25.58 (Ibid., 220).

ousia. Therefore in virtue of his Eucharistic methodology and his concern for ontology, Zizioulas is able to reflect on the personal "aspect" of God's very being, supposing that believers participate by communion and acquire real knowledge of the Trinitarian personal life, as manifested in this ecclesial communion.

III. *T. F. Torrance on the* Monarchy *of the Father*

From the outset, Torrance makes a bold statement about the monarchy, which he claims follows the viewpoint of Athanasius: "the *Mone Arche* (μόνη Ἀρχή or Μοναρχία) is identical with the Trinity, the *Monas* with the *Trias* … and it is precisely in the *Trias* that we know God to be *Monas*…. The *Monarchia* or the *Monas* is essentially and intrinsically Trinitarian in the inner relations of God's eternal *Ousia*."[32] For Torrance, there is only one understanding of the monarchy and that is a *Trinitarian* one. Here he also refers to Epiphanius of Salamis, who argues that "in proclaiming the divine *Monarchia* we do not err, but confess the Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, one Godhead of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit."[33]

Torrance is clear in making a very subtle distinction between two understandings of the divine Fatherhood. As he puts it:

> when the Father is considered relatively, that is *ad alios* in relation to the Son and the Holy Spirit, he is thought of as the Father of the Son, but when the Father is thought of absolutely, that is *in se*, as God himself (Αὐτόθεος), the name 'Father' is often applied to God . . . or the Godhead . . . The name 'Father', then, may refer to the one Being or οὐσία of God, but it may also refer to the Person or ὑπόστασις of the Father . . . When considered absolutely God the eternal Father is the one Principle of Godhead, the μόνη Ἀρχή, Μοναρχία, or the Monarchy, but when the Father is considered in his inseparable oneness in Being with the Son and the Spirit, as One Being (μια οὐσία), then the Monarchy . . . is to be thought of as identical with the Holy Trinity.[34]

On the one hand, there is a kind of an *ad intra* monarchy of the Father, as regards his inner-relationship to the Son (Father of the Son), following in this respect the well-known passage from Gregory of Nazianzus: "The Father is a name neither of *ousia* nor of *energeia* but of *schesis* and of *how* the Father relates to the Son or the Son to the Father."[35] Torrance argues that this first way "does not mean,

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32   Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 4.1,3; *De Decretis* 26; etc., quoted in *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 183.

33   Epiphanius, *Haereses* 62.3, quoted in ibid*.,* 184.

34   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 140–41.

35   Gregory Nanzianzus *Theol. Orat*. 3.16, quoted in *Communion and Otherness,* 126.

however, that the Son is to be thought of as proceeding from the *Person* of the Father . . . but from the *Being* of the Father . . . as in the pronouncement of the Council of Nicaea."[36]

On the other hand, as regards the *ad extra* relationship and providence of God toward humanity and creation, then one should apply the concept of monarchy to the *Trinitarian* God, as a whole. In other words one would say that for Torrance there is a "Trinitarian Monarchy" (*τριαδική ἀρχή*). Beginning with Nicaea and the Athanasian "axiom" that "whatever we say of the Father we say of the Son and the Spirit except 'Father'," Torrance holds that "since the whole Godhead is in the Son and in the Spirit, they must be included with the Father in the one originless Source or Ἀρχή of the Trinity."[37]

In order to understand his position better, it is necessary to follow the chain of his argument for a Trinitarian monarchy from the beginning. In virtue of his methodological presuppositions, Torrance asserts that it is necessary to "think of the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity together or conjunctively as a whole."[38] In this perspective, following the Nicene endeavor to clarify the status of the Son against the Arian challenge, he notes that "what is at stake here was the essential oneness in Being and Act between the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity." This essential oneness, in Torrance's view, was upheld by the adoption of the Nicene *homoousion*, underscoring that God is indivisibly and eternally in himself the same one indivisible Being in three coequal persons that he is toward us in the redemptive missions of the Son and his Spirit.[39]

It is important to note that for Torrance *ousia* is used in view of *identity of Being* (ταυτότης της οὐσίας),[40] as this concept was re-interpreted under the impact of divine revelation. Following this *grammar of revelation*, Torrance couples the "I am of Yahweh and the 'I am' of our Lord together." This conjunction, he says, gives rise "to an onto-relational and fully personal conception of the being of God, and indeed to the understanding of the Being of God as Communion, for the three divine Persons in their communion with one another are the Triune Being of God."[41] With reference to Basil's conception of the Trinity as

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36 Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 141.

37 Ibid.*,* 181.

38 Ibid.*,* 114.

39 Ibid., 115.

40 Ibid.*,* 116.

41 Ibid.*,* 124.

communion[42] and Gregory Nazianzen's application of the *homoousion* to the Holy Spirit,[43] Torrance argues strongly for the oneness of God's Being in his interior relations, as the communion of the three divine persons with one another.

In his attempt to outline the "Trinitarian mind" Torrance gives priority to the one being (*ousia*) of God and then talks subsequently about the Trinitarian persons. This approach follows from his understanding of the self-revelation of God in history which reveals the triune Fatherhood whereby the Son and the Holy Spirit are "included within God's Fatherhood of all creation and his covenant people."[44] This understanding is further underwritten by the concept of *homoousion* in order to show the unity of God both *ad intra* and *ad extra* and also to insist on the soteriological importance of the divine nature of the Son. At the same time, Torrance thinks of *homoousion* as an adequate concept to demonstrate also "the eternal distinctions and internal relations in the Godhead wholly and mutually interpenetrating one another in the one identical Being of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,"[45] since (following here Epiphanius) "one Person cannot be *homoousios* with himself."[46]

Turning to the intra-Trinitarian relations, Torrance makes use of the concept of *person*, following his reading of Gregory of Nazianzus,[47] "as substantive relations (in preference to the concept of 'modes of being' developed by the other Cappadocians)." In other words, person is "an onto-relational concept,"[48] since the relations between the divine persons belong to what they are *as* persons, i.e. they are constitutive onto-relations.[49] It is in this same light that Torrance, following again Gregory of Nazianzus, brings to the fore also the relevance of *perichoresis,* as a concept identifying at once: (a) the τάξις "that obtains between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their relations with one another;"[50] (b) the full equality of the three divine persons as "whole God,"

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42   Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 45 (CCEL 200): "εν τη κοινωνία της Θεότητας εστίν η ἑνωσις".

43   Gregory Nazianzus, *Fifth Theol. Orat*. 31.10.

44   Benjamin Dean, "Person and Being: Conversation with T. F. Torrance about the Monarchy of God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15 (2013): 65.

45   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 125.

46   Epiphanius, *Anchoratus* 6.8; *Haereses* 57.10 etc. quoted in Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 126.

47   Gregory Nazianzus, *Third Theol. Orat*. 29.16 (CCEL 616). Cf. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 157; Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith,* 239–240, 319.

48   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 157.

49   Ibid.*,* 157.

50   Ibid.*,* 176.

"whole from whole," in order to express their indivisible nature and essential equality in Being;[51] and finally; (c) the distinctions between the persons.

Torrance is known for his robust critique of the "Cappadocian settlement," which identified the monarchy exclusively with the person of the Father and introduces causal relations within the Holy Trinity: the Cappadocians "sought to preserve the oneness of God by insisting that God the Father, who is himself without generation or origination, is the one Principle or Origin and Cause of the Son and the Spirit."[52] Torrance strongly questions the Cappadocian understanding of the distinction between *ousia* (denoting what is *common*) and *hypostases* (signifying the *particular*) in God's being,[53] insofar as this understanding entails a radical differentiation between the three hypostases due to their distinct modes of existence (Father unbegotten, Son begotten, and Spirit sending forth). Torrance is concerned here to avoid any suggestion of tritheism and, on the other hand, a subordinationism of the Origenist type. With the Cappadocians, he claims, the two "senses of Paternity were completely conflated," and the "emphasis upon the ὁμοούσιος, as the key to the identity, intrinsic oneness, and internal relations of the Holy Trinity" shifted "to emphasis upon the three diverse ὑποστάσεις, as united through the Μοναρχία of the Father."[54] This development, Torrance feels, "was done at the cost of cutting out the real meaning of οὐσία as being in its internal relations, and robbing οὐσία of its profound personal sense which was so prominent at Nicaea," suggesting instead "a hierarchical structure within the Godhead."[55]

According to Torrance, the introduction of such a hierarchical and subordinationist structure, following from the priority of the person of the Father as the "cause" of the Godhead and the one principle of Trinitarian unity, constitutes the main thrust of the Cappadocian teaching.[56] This, however, threatened the affirmation of the oneness of God's being and the equality of the Trinitarian persons. According to Torrance, the perception of ἀρχή as the cause of deity was an explicitly Origenist concept. Torrance acknowledges that the Cappadocian Fathers (especially Gregory of Nazianzus as president) did play a decisive role in the formulation of the Trinitarian doctrine at the Second Ecumenical Council of

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51   Gregory Nazianzus, *Orationes* 36.15; Athanasius, *Ad Serapionem* 1.16 quoted in ibid*.,* 175.

52   Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith,* 237.

53   E.g. Basil, *Ep.* 234.4: "I shall state that *ousia* has the same relation to hypostasis as the common has to the particular."

54   Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith,* 240–41.

55   Ibid*.,* 242. Also *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 182.

56   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 181.

Constantinople (381). Yet he insists — without much evidence — that "the main development did not follow the line advocated by the Cappadocians in grounding the unity of Godhead in the person of the Father as the unique and exclusive Principle of the Godhead, but reverted to the doctrine of the Son as begotten of the Being of the Father."[57] In this respect he singles out Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Epiphanius, Cyril, and Augustine for praise for their supposed support of a wholly Trinitarian view of the monarchy, which "may not be limited to one person."[58] As Benjamin Dean states clearly, "the coequality of Father, Son and Spirit – together the one eternal Being of God – renders this trinitarially construed monarchy intrinsically Trinitarian and thereby, on Torrance's reckoning, the perfection of divine triunity."[59]

Paradoxically enough, as we have already seen, Torrance praises Gregory of Nazianus, one of the Cappadocian Fathers, who according to his reading, while he "offered much the same teaching as his fellow Cappadocians," nevertheless "exercised more flexibility in the use of theological terms, and had a more Athanasian conception of the unity of God and of the Godhead as complete not primarily in the Father but in each Person as well as in all of them."[60] Bringing Gregory Nazianzen into conflict with his Cappadocian colleagues, Torrance admits that while Gregory does at times speak of the Father as *arche* or *aitia* within the Trinity, this perception really refers to *scheseis* in God that are "beyond all origin (ἀναρχος), and beyond all cause (ἀναίτιος)."[61] Torrance's reading of a few important passages of Gregory could be considered one-sided, and not absolutely accurate in his perception or usage of Gregory's texts. However, one should give merit to his patristic scholarship, especially as he provides a theological interpretation of the texts that move beyond the narrowly historicist approach evident in much Anglo-Saxon patristic scholarship.[62]

In general Torrance attempts to stay close to the *grammar of revelation,* which according to him, gives a sort of monarchical *priority* to the person of the Father on the level of *economy*, yet does not allow that this priority should be read

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57 Ibid.*,* 182.

58 Gregory Nazianzus, *Third Theol. Orat*. 29.2, 31.14. Cf. Also *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 182–184.

59 Benjamin Dean, "Person and Being: A Conversation with T. F. Torrance about the Monarchy of God," 61.

60 Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith,* 239.

61 Gregory Nazianzus, *Third Theol. Orat*. 29.2.

62 For this see Alan Brown, "On the Criticism of *Being as Communion* in Anglophone Orthodox Theology," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas. Personhood and the Church,* ed. Douglas Knight (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), 35–78.

back into the intra-Trinitarian life, where the absolute oneness of God's being and coequality of the persons renders impossible any kind of one-sidedly asymmetrical relationship of the person of the Father towards the other persons. It seems that it is only in this perspective, of *order* in the economy, that Torrance would be able to attribute a monarchical sense to the Father alone who, through his "two hands" of the Son and the Spirit, works toward the salvation of the created order.

IV. John Zizioulas on the Monarchy *of the Father*

Since his early work, Zizioulas has repeatedly expressed his insistence on the *causal priority* of the Father within the Trinitarian life. He presents his position as follows:

> Among the Greek Fathers the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological "principle" or "cause" of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the *hypostasis*, that is *the person of the Father*. The one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the "cause" both of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit. Consequently, the ontological "principle" of God is traced back, once again, to the person. Thus when we say that God "is" we do not bind the personal freedom of God . . . but we ascribe the being of God to His personal freedom. In a more analytical way this means that God, as Father and not as substance, perpetually confirms through "being" His *free* will to exist…Thus God as person – as the hypostasis of the Father – makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the One God.[63]

Zizioulas distinguishes between two opposite ways of defining the unity or oneness of God: (a) by way of the divine *substance,* a position which Zizioulas attributes to the Augustinian and in general the western (medieval or modern) tradition; and (b), by way of the *hypostasis* of the Father, which is the dominant if not the exclusive perception of the unity of the God in the Greek patristic tradition. The issue at stake here for Zizioulas concerns no less than the very heart of *Monotheism* – as well as, on a more philosophical level, the ontological ultimacy of *otherness* in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is true that Zizioulas is searching for a kind of correlation (as in Tillich) of biblical faith with the "existential" needs of modern humanity, following the patristic ethos and way of bringing the Gospel in a transformative dialogue within their context.

Zizioulas traces the location of the unity of God in the *hypostasis* of the Father in relation to the monistic attitude of the Greek ontology with which

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63   Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 40–41.

the Cappadocian Fathers were in continuous struggle. Much of the introductory chapter in Zizioulas' celebrated *Being as Communion* is focused on the position and the perception of the concept of person within the various trends of Greek philosophy, in order to show that there was always a tendency towards a monistic and necessary substance-ontology. This was the dominant way of approaching the being of God in both Sabellianism and Arianism, against which the Greek Fathers had to wrestle. But, according to Zizioulas, this same *tendency* is evident even in the western Christian tradition, Roman Catholic and Protestant, especially following Augustine who, according to him, radicalized the "priority of substance over against the personal relations in Trinitarian theology,"[64] leading to the predominance of *De Deo Uno* over *De Deo Trino* in western theology.[65] In this respect Zizioulas adopts, on the one hand, De Regnon's well-known assertion*,* while on the other hand, he praises Karl Barth and especially Karl Rahner for their efforts to raise a voice against this predominant approach.

Zizioulas's argument in favor of the sole monarchy of the Father is articulated in a *threefold* thesis. As he puts it:

> By making the person of the Father the expression of the one ontological ἀρχή in God, we make otherness ontologically constitutive in divine being. Equally by attributing divine being to a personal cause rather than substance, we elevate particularity and otherness to a primary ontological status. Finally, by attributing primary ontological causation to only one person of the Trinity, we affirm that the 'One' of the platonic and Greek ontology does not ontologically precede the 'Many' but is itself 'One' of the 'Many'… The ontological Monarchy of the Father, that is of a *relational* being, and the attachment of ontological causation to him, serve to safeguard the coincidence of the One and the Many in divine being.[66]

Working out the implications of this three-fold affirmation, one should highlight two fundamental dimensions of Zizioulas' thought. First, there is the dialectic relationship between *ousia* (a monistic category by definition) and *hypostasis* or person (which is inconceivable without relationship)[67] – or, in other words,

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64   Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 33, following in this respect the interpretation of J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A&C Black, 1977), 272; also, Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1956), 326. Zizioulas seems, throughout his work, to lack a first hand and comprehensive reading of the work of Augustine or even of the recent secondary literature, following in an uncritical way the far outdated work of otherwise eminent patristic scholars.

65   Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 40.

66   Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 35.

67   Ibid.*,* 34–35.

between necessity (divine being without cause, that is self-explicable and thus logically necessary) and freedom (divine being attributed to a radically other person yet in relation to radically other persons, which causes otherness, freedom and its ontological content). Second, there is his view that

> the idea of God as Father did not arise as a speculative reflection about God, but emerged from ecclesial experience. Only in and through incorporation into the ecclesial community can there be recognition of God as Father. This is what the baptismal origin of the idea of divine Fatherhood implies.[68]

As already mentioned, Zizioulas speaks of an ontology emerging from the *Eucharistic* experience of the Church and guiding the Fathers "in working out their doctrine of the being of God."[69] While the concept of personhood occupies a central place in his work, this should be explained by attributing *communion* and *otherness* as the necessary content and components of this personalistic ontology.

However – and this is a decisive point in understanding his view – though he assigns to communion an ontological ultimacy, Zizioulas is quite cautious in not attributing to communion an ontological priority over the persons. Rather, it is the person "which makes something really be." As he puts it:

> the fact that God owes His existence to the Father, that is to a person, means a) that His 'substance', His being, does not constrain Him … and b) that communion is not a constraining structure for His existence.… The fact that God exists because of the Father shows that His existence, His being is the consequence of a free person, which means … that not only communion but also freedom, the free person constitutes true being.[70]

While Zizioulas is more a systematic theologian than a historian of doctrine, he does attempt to trace the historical roots and basis of his argument. Taking as his starting point the early Creeds, he highlights the importance of the old creedal statement: "I believe in God the Father Almighty." The crucial exegetical problem in this case is the question of whether the word "Father" should be understand as attached primarily to "Almighty" or to "God." Following the frequent biblical reference to "God the Father" (Gal. 1:3, 1; Thess. 1:1, etc.) and the early Fathers,[71] Zizioulas argues for the latter.

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68 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 113; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 16–17.

69 *Being as Communion,* 17.

70 Ibid., 17-8.

71 E.g. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech*. 7.4, 33, 608–10: "only by a misuse of language … can the word 'Father' be understood as referring to God's relation to mankind; it properly

In his attempt to follow the philosophical consequences of this primal conjunction of "Father" to "God," Zizioulas distinguishes between "the ontological and the moral content of divine Fatherhood."[72] He stresses that, while all the old creeds "relate divine Fatherhood . . . to creative power," one should avoid a possible confusion of divine Fatherhood "with some of divine energy," something that is an inherent danger in the western prioritization of the moral content of the Fatherhood, at least according to Zizioulas' reading of Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine.[73] In this regard, following the original sense of "Almighty" found in the Greek Fathers as *παντοκράτωρ*, rather than *παντοδύναμος*, Zizioulas attributes priority to an *ontological* understanding of divine Fatherhood – God is Father because he has a Son – instead of the *moral* connotation of creative and providential relationship toward creation. In virtue of this bold distinction between God's being *ad intra* and his *ad extra* action, Zizioulas argues for the necessary distinction between *being* and *act*. Nevertheless, as we have seen above, in the Eucharistic context, one participates within the very life of God – and so it might be said: in his personal being, not just his act.

Zizioulas acknowledges that by adding the word "one" before God the Father, the Eastern Creeds highlighted the problem of divine *unity*. As he puts it: "if God = Father, as is the case already with the Roman creed and if now, in the case of the Eastern creeds, God is 'one,' it follows that only the Father can properly be called 'God.' The phrase 'one God the Father' seems to attach divine unity to the divine Fatherhood."[74] Following Zizioulas' argumentation, one sees which two alternatives were left to early theology in order to solve the problem of divine unity:[75] either (1), a "radical departure" from the biblical association of God with Father, giving priority to divine substance and assigning to it the role of expressing the divine unity; or else (2), the more eastern, Cappadocian way of dealing with the Arian challenge, maintaining the bold biblical equation between God and the "Father."[76] In his case, following Gregory of Nazianzus[77] especially, Zizioulas argues that although the Fathers do speak of divine substance in

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belongs to God in virtue of his relation to the Son" quoted in Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 114.

72 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 114.

73 Ibid., 114–15.

74 Ibid., 117.

75 If we also add the more or less variation of the communion model in place of substance we will have in front of us the threefold spectrum of possible responses to the problem of divine unity as this has been considered by Zizioulas.

76 Ibid., 117–18.

77 Gregory Nazianzus, *Orat.* 42.15.

relation to the oneness of God, nevertheless "the ground of unity" is "the Father, out of whom and towards whom the subsequent persons are reckoned."[78]

Two specific points that have been introduced by the Cappadocian Fathers are of great importance for the development of Zizioulas' argument. One the one hand, the clear distinction, especially in Basil, of the concepts of *person* or *hypostasis* and *substance* or *ousia* will facilitate the prioritization of personal language and causation in the divine being, since the Cappadocians would give to being a sort of double definition beyond the monistic substantialism of Greek philosophy. In this emerging personalistic ontology, not only *ousia* (τι ἐστιν) but also *personhood* (πως ἐστιν) acquires *ontological* status.[79] On the other hand, it is claimed that the Cappadocian Fathers in general, especially Gregory Nazianzus, contributed to the introduction of the idea of ἀρχή in the sense of both a *personal* ontological origination (referred to the Father) and a *movement* (from the *one* to the *Three*), as well a *causal relationship* between the divine persons.

Interpreting Gregory in this regard, Zizioulas states that this kind of causation "takes place (a) before and outside time[80] . . . and (b) on the hypostatic or personal level and not on that of *ousia*,[81] which implies *freedom* and *love.*"[82] This is opposed to the Greek, especially neo-platonic, perception of the *arche* in a substantialistic sense.[83] Zizioulas highlights in this perspective the necessity of distinguishing between the level of *nature* or *ousia* and that of *person* or *hypostasis* in divine being.[84] Thus, Zizioulas argues, according to this development of the Cappadocian theology,

> what the Father 'causes' is a transmission not of ousia but of personal otherness . . . the Father as 'cause' is God or *the* God in an ultimate sense, *not because he holds the divine essence and transmits it . . . but because he is the ultimate ontological principle of divine personhood . . .* in fact, the equality of the three persons in terms of substance is not denied by the Father's being the cause of personhood; it is rather ensured by it.[85]

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78   Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 118.

79   Basil, *C. Eun* 1.14–15; Gregory Nazianzus, *Orat.* 3.16.

80   Gregory Nazianzus, *Orat.* 42.15.

81   Basil, *C. Eun*. 1.14-15; Gregory Nazianzus *Orat*. 3.15–6.

82   Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 119.

83   Ibid.*,* 127–28.

84   Ibid.*,* 128–29.

85   Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 130. In this respect, Zizioulas strives against Lossky's reading of John of Damascus, who seems to identify the divine ousia with the Father, implying that the Father "confers His one nature upon the Son and upon the Holy Spirit." See, Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church,* 60, quoted in

Hence, for Zizioulas, "the idea of cause was introduced…in order to indicate that in God there is not only substance, relational and dynamic, but also otherness, which is also dynamic," implying a movement within the divine being. This, however, is not a movement of the divine substance or the three persons altogether; rather, "it is the one, the Father, that 'moved to threeness," according to the famous passage of Gregory Nazianzen.[86]

In stressing the distinction between *ontological* understanding of the divine *monarchia* and any understanding of this monarchy in exclusively moral or cosmological terms, Zizioulas brings evidence from Basil[87] and Gregory Nazianzen[88] in order to highlight that the Greek Fathers, while informed of both meanings of ἀρχή, distinguish carefully between them, attributing the divine *monarchia* exclusively to the Father as regards the ontological realm.

On the other hand, Zizioulas also stresses the relevance of the monotheism of the *lex orandi*, especially the Eucharistic prayers, which were addressed to the Father, in order to strengthen his argument as regards the simultaneity of the one and the triune God, "thanks to not an impersonal relationality or 'Triperonality'[89] but to an *hypostasis*, which is both particular and relational."[90] Far from jeopardizing the co-equality and communion of the three persons, the confession of the monarchy of the Father preserves both the ontological *primacy* of the Trinitarian communion of the divine persons and the ontological *ultimacy* of the person of the Father, "without projecting into God subordinationist notions," as would be the charge of those who do not follow the relevant distinction between personhood and substance in the divine being. Recalling again Gregory Nazianzen,[91] Zizioulas argues that a sense of the reality of *order* within the life of the Trinity is always taken for granted. This *order* is not referred only to the economic manifestation and soteriological function of the Trinity, as many theologians hold, implying thus a dissociation of the *economic* Trinitarian from God's eternal being.[92] Based on his *Eucharistic* methodology, Zizioulas follows the "Basilian" axiom that "every movement in God, ad extra

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Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 129n52.

86   *Orat.* 3.2.

87   *C. Eun*. 2.22.

88   *Orat*. 3.2.

89   Against Dumitru Staniloae, who prefers the expression "Tripersonality" as quoted in Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 134n63*.*

90   Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness,* 137.

91   Gregory Nazianzus, *Orat.* 42.15.

92   Zizioulas is referring here to Vladimir Lossky, Colin Gunton, and T. F. Torrance, in Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* 138n75.

as well as ad intra, begins with the Father and ends with him."[93] This means that the "order" applies both to the *immanent* and the *economic* Trinity, in both cases assuming a *personal* initiative – that of the Father who is "moved as the Begetter (γεννήτωρ) and Emitter (προβολεύς), of whom the others are the one begotten and the other the emission (των δε, το μεν γέννημα, το δε πρόβλημα)."[94]

As Zizioulas clarifies his provocative and often misunderstood claim for the personal character of God's being,

> in saying that 'God as person – as the hypostasis of the Father – makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God[95], we automatically exclude the priority of substance over personhood ... The co-emergence of divine nature with the Trinitarian existence initiated by the Father implies that the Father too 'acquires' so to speak, deity 'as' the Son and the Spirit are in existence...Thus the Father is shown to be 'greater' than the Son...not in nature, but in the way ... the nature exists, that is, in the hypostatization of nature.... Trinitarian ordering (τάξις) and causation protect rather than threaten the equality and fullness of each person's deity.[96]

In close relation to this understanding of *order*, Zizioulas derives the lesson that divine causality

> teaches us . . . that personal otherness is not symmetrical but a-symmetrical. There is always in this otherness a 'greater' one (Jn. 14.28), not morally or functionally but ontologically. Otherness is, by definition, 'hierarchical', in spite of the pejorative sense that this concept has acquired in modern times.[97]

Despite recent important critiques of the radical way that Zizioulas understands the concept of divine *monarchia* and ἀρχή in God's being,[98] one should at least acknowledge that his contribution on the issue is of profound importance and has various implications on anthropology, ecclesiology and in Christian life in general.

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93   Ibid., 138.

94   Gregogy Nazianzus, *Orat*. 3.2. Cf. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 133.

95   Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 41.

96   Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 140.

97   Ibid., 143.

98   E.g. Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

V. The Debate between Torrance and Zizioulas and the Neo-Cappadocian Solution

It is not my intention here to deal in detail with the latent debate between Torrance's family tree[99] and Zizioulas on the understanding of the monarchy of the Father and all the implied issues, or regarding the importance and the development of the "Cappadocian settlement." This "Cappadocian settlement" has been more recently considered as more or less a *construction* of patristic scholarship rather than a conscious achievement of the Fathers. One should, however, argue that appreciation of the Cappadocian contribution should not primarily be focused on the classic formula "one *ousia*, three persons," which modern scholarship has attributed to Augustine,[100] but rather on the introduction of the concept of ἀρχή, as meaning the personal *origination* and *causation*, attributed to the person or hypostasis of the Father as the *ultimate* origin, cause, source and "ontological principle" of the divine being. Moreover, it is not hard to see that the debate between the Torrances and Zizioulas revolves around this prioritization of *personhood* over *substance* in Trinitarian ontology.

Following the previous presentation of Torrance's and Zizioulas's conception of divine *monarchia*, I would like to highlight now some fundamental methodological points of divergence between the two and also provide some hermeneutical comments on several passages from the Cappadocian Fathers – especially the most disputed, Gregory of Nazianzus – that seem to be the cause, or rather the *alibi*, of their dispute.

A. Historical Revelation vs. Eucharistic Experience

Undoubtedly one would agree from the outset that the most fundamental opposition between Torrance and Zizioulas is related to the starting point of doing theology. Torrance, on the one hand, adamantly follows the biblical narrative regarding the self-revelation of God in history and his "evangelical acts" and elaborates his theological enterprise in accordance with a grammar derived from this history; Zizioulas, on

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99   It is noteworthy that not only T. F. Torrance but also his brother James Torrance and his nephew Alan Torrance as well have been involved implicitly or explicitly in this debate with Zizioulas regarding the relevance of the Monarchy of the Father.

100 Cf. Joseph T. Lienhard, SJ, "Augustine of Hippo, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory Nazianzen," in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. A. Papanikolaou and G. Demacopoulos (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 81–99; and "Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of 'One Hypostasis'," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. S. T. Davies et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 99–121.

the other hand, concentrates his thought on the *Eucharistic* experience of the early Christian communities that provided them with the capacity to "communicate by participation" in the very life of God, acquiring thence knowledge of the personal mode of being. Despite the definition of Torrance's model of revelation as *homoousial* and Zizioulas' as *communal,*[101] one could argue that Christian theology should be articulated in keeping with the methodological priority of the self-revelation of God in Christ, as narrated in the Bible, without prioritizing ecclesial experience as the exclusive way of reception of this self-revelation of God. While it is true that this ecclesial experience could be interpreted, as has been done by Georges Florovsky,[102] in a historical perspective, there is always the danger in downplaying the methodological (not exclusively epistemological) priority of revelation in doing theology in a Christian, that is biblical, manner.

Although Torrance, due to his commitment to the biblical *grammar of revelation*, would stress the unity between the economic and transcendent Trinity, or in other words between *ontology* and *soteriology*, *being* and *act*, he did not follow this close connection through to its full implications. In this respect, on the issue of the monarchy of the Father, he refused to follow the *economic order* as indicated in the biblical narrative of the self-revelation of God and the divine deeds, to the *ontological* order. This entails, in my view, a logical inconsistency in his thought, insofar as he prioritizes the use of a substantialistic language that seems to downplay the Trinitarian persons and their respective roles. On the other hand, Zizioulas in virtue of his Eucharistic methodology and ontological pre-occupation (or "personalistic foundationalism")[103] seems to make a *leap* within the ontological Trinity, attempting to define in detail the intra-Trinitarian life in an abstract and metaphysical manner. This way of reasoning implies a radical departure from the biblical *grammar of revelation*, and subsequently implies a more or less diminution of the unity between economy and theology, if not always without important qualifications due to his Eucharistic and (according to him) "meta-historical" methodology.

In other words, it seems that both Torrance and Zizioulas do not avoid *confusion* between the ontological priority of the transcendent Trinity (Zizioulas) and the methodological priority of the economic Trinity (Torrance). This is too subtle a point to be dealt with here in detail, but it indicates the profound relevance of *methodology* in theology, something almost neglected in modern Orthodox theology.

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101 Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion,* 299*.*

102 On this see Matthew Baker, "'Theology reasons' – in History: Neo-patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality," *Θεολογία* 81 (2010): 81–118.

103 Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion,* 300.

B. Athanasius, Cappadocians, and the
Contextualization of the Fathers

A careful reading of Torrance's Trinitarian *magnum opus* would indicate that Athanasius is celebrated as his patristic hero to which the whole patristic (and Reformation – mainly Calvin and Barth – as well) tradition should be fitted, toward the theological enterprise of clarifying the Christian faith. At the same time, the Cappadocians, especially Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, constitute the ever-privileged partner of Zizioulas's program, in his attempt to articulate a comprehensive and promising *personalistic* ontology. While, in most cases, Zizioulas bases his argument on a limited reading of the work of the three Cappadocians and related secondary literature and has also been accused of inaccurate historical use of his sources, his interpretation indicates a profound originality and a commitment to the "patristic ethos": to theologize creatively *ad mentem patrum* without the restrictive obligation to be in literal, textual or linguistic continuity with the earlier tradition.

However, what is at stake here, at least in my view, is the crucial issue about the proper way of approaching the Fathers, in the attempt to avoid various dangers of historical anachronism, homogenization, or abstract and romantic readings of them, outside of their historical and theological context. The discussion that opened following the provocative conference organized in Volos (Greece) 2010, on the question "Can Orthodox Theology be Contextual?"[104], should be understood as an indication of the urgent importance of the questions regarding patristic authority and patristic interpretation, in view of the danger of the so-called "patristic fundamentalism."[105] I would not argue here that one can see this danger in Torrance's absolutization of Athanasius's legacy or in Zizioulas's reduction of the three Cappadocians to one single voice. However, one must question the lack of a contextual reading in both cases. To argue for an Athanasian axis as the predominant starting point of reading the whole Christian tradition, against the subsequent conceptual and doctrinal development (of the Second Ecumenical Council, the concepts of *hypostasis* and *personhood*, the theory of the *logoi* of Maximus etc), or to try to combine the thought of the

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104 On June 3–6, 2010, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies in cooperation with the Orthodox Christian Studies Program at Fordham University, the chair of Orthodox Theology at the University of Münster, and the Institute for Inter-Orthodox, Interfaith and Inter-Christian Studies of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, organized an international conference entitled "Neopatristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology? Can Orthodox Theology be Contextual?" For the conference program, see www.acadimia.gr.

105 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "From the 'Return to the Fathers' to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 54 (2010): 5–36.

three Cappadocian Fathers, as if they represent a unique and single theological reasoning of the Greek patristic tradition, against the whole western tradition, and despite the latent differences (if not oppositions) that each of them evidence with one other on various points,[106] seems to be a historiographical error, one that could be the cause of a distortion of the ideal and often constructed image of a *single* and *undifferentiated* Christian tradition.

C. Ousia vs. Person

It seems that the basic motive that lies behind the theses of the two thinkers under review has to do with their differing conceptions of the being of God. Following his methodological prerequisites, Torrance seems to hold a single and undifferentiated understanding of the divine Being simply as *ousia*, as suggested in the subtitle of his book, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons.* This may be read as an exaggeration and hasty reading of his corpus. However, there is evidence that because of his absolute focus on the equality and *homoousial* relationship of the Trinitarians persons within the divine being, Torrance tends to downplay the distinctions between the persons, particularly since he believes that the concept of *homoousion* is enough to safeguard the particularity of the persons in place of any causal relations between them, which would compromise their inner equality. Torrance's definite distinction between the *being* and *person* of the Father could recall modalistic connotations, something that is obscured probably due to his diminution of the subsequent doctrinal development beyond Athanasius. While both Zizioulas and Torrance appear to agree more or less on a firm distinction between the *ontological* and *moral* (Zizioulas) or *absolute* or *relative* (Torrance) conception of Fatherhood, it is not clear what is the *role* of the Trinitarian *persons* in Torrance's essentialist account.

On the other hand, although Zizioulas recognizes a distinction between *person* and *ousia* in the divine being, attributing ontological priority to personhood, he seems simply tom invert the coin, prioritizing the personal aspect of divine life at the expense of the *ousia*, which is more or less marginalized. This is a very subtle issue since there is always the danger either to downplay the importance of the Trinitarian persons in the sense that they are swallowed by the *ousia* – in which case our prayers should be addressed to the divine substance as such! – or else to imply a disharmony within the divine life because of a dialectic relationship between *ousia* and *person*. This appears also to be a tendency in

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106 Following in this respect the recent patristic scholarship one might speak also of variety of voices even within a single Father. Cf. e.g. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*.

modern patristic scholarship, for example on Gregory of Nazianzus, where it is argued that what the Trinitarian persons commonly share is finally the Father's divine being.[107] This actually is not very far from the understanding of Eunomius, who identified the Father with the substance of God. The basic argument of Torrance against understanding the divine *monarchia* as located in the person of the Father provides thus an alternative perspective. However, as Zizioulas has pointed out, this is the only solution, if the causation is considered on the level of personhood and not of nature, in which case any kind of Origenistic subordination is excluded from the divine life, since the Father does not possess the divine substance prior to the other persons and then transmit it to them, but rather only causes only their personal otherness, while safeguarding the common possession of the divine substance.

Zizioulas' motivation to assign absolute freedom to the divine being in virtue of the *monarchia* of the Father could suggest the necessary simultaneity of monarchy and consubstantiality, if Zizioulas had only avoided the projection to the Trinitarian life of an *a priori* dialectical relationship between *ousia* and *person,* as two opposite aspects of divine being.[108] In order to go beyond any sort of impasse that would render "theologizing" a mere metaphysical and superficial abstraction, which is a tendency in Zizioulas' work, one should give greater recourse to the biblical grammar of revelation*,* which provides us with a profound Trinitarian structure and order that represents not only God in his economic manifestation but also in his divine life.

D. Gregory of Nazianzus vs Gregory of Nazianzus

The deep differentiation between these two eminent ecumenical figures is closely related to their different readings of the textual evidence mostly of the same Fathers. The reading of Gregory of Nazianzus appears to be the most fundamental point of divergence.[109] Torrance utilizes Gregory in opposition to

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107 Ibid.*,* 211.

108 It is noteworthy that in recent publications Zizioulas has attempted to give a more balanced understanding of the relation between *ousia* and *person* within the divine being, see John Zizioulas, "Trinitarian Freedom: Is God Free in Trinitarian Life?" in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology,* ed. Giulio Maspero and Robert Wozniak (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 193–207; and "Person and Nature in the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor," in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation Through the Resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St. Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra, CA.: Sebastian Press and The Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Belgrade, 2013), 85–113.

109 One should apply the same hermeneutical and exegetical perspective in similar

the other two Cappadocian Fathers and in supposed continuity with Athanasius, in order to argue against the attribution of divine *monarchia* to the person of the Father alone. In contrast, Zizioulas sees Gregory as in accordance with his Cappadocian colleagues and constituting together with them the "Cappadocian legacy" in which priority of the person is underscored.

In view of this impasse, I would like, by way of conclusion, to comment on two important passages from Gregory that have been used by both Torrance and Zizioulas to opposing ends. The first passage is from the *Fifth Theological Oration* 31.14:

> What is our quarrel and dispute with both? To us there is One God, for the Godhead is One, and all that proceedeth from Him is referred to One, though we believe in Three Persons. For one is not more and another less God; nor is One before and another after; nor are They divided in will or parted in power; nor can you find here any of the qualities of divisible things; but the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate Persons; and there is one mingling of Light, as it were of three suns joined to each other. When then we look at the Godhead, or the First Cause, or the Monarchia, that which we conceive is One; but when we look at the Persons in Whom the Godhead dwells, and at Those Who timelessly and with equal glory have their Being from the First Cause — there are Three Whom we worship.[110]

One is obliged here to discern between two different meanings of *monarchia*. One the one hand, one can see that Gregory first refers to the entire Godhead as *monarchia*: first cause in relationship to creation, whereby the *ad extra* action is undivided, even if differentiated according to the specific mission and role undertaken by each person in the economy. In that case there is "one mingling of Light" that shines toward the created order (although "three suns joined to each other") with common power and will. At the same time however, and within the same passage, Gregory is adamant to make a subtle distinction of this *ad extra* divine *monarchia*, assigned to Godhead as a whole, from the *ad intra* divine *monarchia*, referred now to the *how* the Son and the Spirit "have their being" – not to the creative power and providence of God towards his creation. Therefore, it is clear from this passage that Gregory does not negate outright the personal cause and origination, or order within the Trinity, as Torrance claimed. It is also evident, however, that in this passage at least, it is only with great difficulty that one could attribute this same order (from the Father . . .) to the

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important passages of the other Cappadocians, as well: e.g., Basil, *De Spirtu Sancto* 45; and Gregory Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 3.2; and *On Not Three Gods: To Ablabius*.

110 Gregory Nazianzus, *Fifth Theo. Orat.* 31.14.

economic manifestation of God, as Zizioulas claims is the case with the entire Cappadocian theology. It seems paradoxically that each theologian read in the text only the half of Gregory's argument in order to fit his interpretation to his own respective theological rationale.

The *second* passage I would like to comment on is again from Gregory *Oration* 42.15:

> That which is without beginning, and is the beginning, and is with the beginning, is one God. For the nature of that which is without beginning does not consist in being without beginning or being unbegotten, for the nature of anything lies, not in what it is not but in what it is. It is the assertion of what is, not the denial of what is not. And the Beginning is not, because it is a beginning, separated from that which has no beginning. For its beginning is not its nature, any more than the being without beginning is the nature of the other. For these are the accompaniments of the nature, not the nature itself. That again which is with that which has no beginning, and with the beginning, is not anything else than what they are. Now, the name of that which has no beginning is the Father, and of the Beginning the Son, and of that which is with the Beginning, the Holy Ghost, and the three have one Nature – God. And the union is the Father from Whom and to Whom the order of Persons runs its course, not so as to be confounded, but so as to be possessed, without distinction of time, of will, or of power. For these things in our case produce a plurality of individuals, since each of them is separate both from every other quality, and from every other individual possession of the same quality. But to Those who have a simple nature, and whose essence is the same, the term One belongs in its highest sense. [111]

In this passage Gregory becomes more analytical. Again he appears to combine both meanings of divine *monarchia*, with no *a priori* dialectical relationship (if not radical *existentialist* opposition) between *ousia* and *person* such as we find in modern interpretations. It is clear from the outset that Gregory advocates the *causal* relations and the *order* between the Trinitarian persons and especially the *causal priority* of the Father, who "is the union . . . from Whom and to Whom the order of Persons runs its course…without distinction of time, of will or of power." The Father is considered in this perspective the "ground" of the unity of the three persons within the divine life. At the same time (note the evident subsequent order of the argument), Gregory, when he turns to the created order, attributes the concept of *monarchia* to the Trinity as a whole due to the "simple nature . . . and same essence." One should also mention the effort of Gregory to define with caution the distinctive characteristics (*idiomata*) of the

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111 Ibid, 777.

Persons, as *without beginning* (Father), *from the beginning* (Son), and *with the beginning* (Holy Spirit). *Pace* Torrance*,* Gregory affirms the causal priority of the Father regarding the *how,* the mode of existence,[112] of the divine Persons.

On the other hand, although Zizioulas claims that the name "Father" is a relational concept (there is no Father without his Son), there seems little in Gregory to support an exaggerated patrocentrism sometimes suggested by Zizioulas's work, as if the other persons do not play any constitutive role in the divine life. The one God is the Father as cause of the *Son* and the *Spirit*, but insofar as all three share the *common* divine *substance*. Therefore, in my reading of these two indicative passages of Gregory, there is a *personal* initiative and causation, to the extent that this is taken place *within* and not in opposition to the *ousia* or outside the divine being. The distinction suggested by Zizioulas between a *personal* and *substantial* level in the Trinity is legitimate insofar as both levels play an ultimately *in*stitutive (common *ousia*) and logically primary *con*stitutive (person of the Father in relation to the Son and Spirit) role in divine being as both one and the many, the one Triune God of our biblical faith.

VI. Conclusions

As has been shown, the debate surrounding the divine *monarchia* implies a great variety of consequences for fundamental issues in theology, concerning both the *lex credendi* and *lex orandi*. In this paper an attempt was made, with a view to the work of two ecumenical thinkers, Torrance and Zizioulas, to re-assess the whole debate on a methodological level. The idea of divine *monarchia* should not be considered as a secondary one, insofar as, even more than the *filioque,* it seems to be a basic point of divergence not only between East and West, but also within single traditions: as evidenced, for instance, in the work of late Colin Gunton, a Western advocate of the "Basilian" understanding of monarchy of the Father, as well as in the late Fr Dumitru Stanilaoe or Fr Nikolaos Loudovikos within the East, both of whom represent different understandings of the issue than what it found in Zizioulas.

These divisions might be overcome in the light of the above analysis, which suggests that one should distinguish between the *methodological* priority of the economic Trinity and the *ontological* priority of the transcendent Trinity. Further,

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112 Although Torrance argues that Gregory "would have nothing to do with his fellow Cappadocians' description of the divine Persons as 'modes of Being'," (Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 127), this is not enough to argue that Gregory finds himself in opposition to his colleagues regarding the attribution of divine *Monarchia* within the Godhead to the person of the Father.

following the *grammar of the revelation* as recorded in the Bible, one should be able to affirm the person of God the Father as the origin, source, cause and "ontological principle" of the intra-Trinitarian life, to the extent that this same God the Father with his "two hands" (the Son and the Spirit) is working toward the salvation of the created realm. Such a perspective would preserve both the *soteriological* unity between economy and theology but also the *ontological* difference between them, finding the meeting point of both in the *person* and the *work* of Jesus Christ. Following this way of reasoning – a sort of "Trinitarian Christology" – one would avoid confusing the two levels into one, as well as projecting into the divine life suppositions quite apart from what the self-revelation of God in history, as attested to us in Scripture, would have to say.

The fact that both theologians, Torrance and Zizioulas, would agree that theology has to do with *realities* and not just with names, and with the *presuppositions* that lie behind the issues and not primarily the theses, constitutes a promising hope for the future of Christian theology to regain its *biblical* and *apostolic* roots in the faith of God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Toward this end, one should study very carefully the patristic texts and especially the Cappadocian legacy, without projecting on them *a priori* philosophical or other premises, and without compromising their *distinct* voices. Rather than a univocal foundation for different theological visions, ever shifting according to the will and the motivations of each theologian, the Fathers in all their variety should be treated as pointers and witnesses to the revealed truth, the reality of the incarnate Logos of God.