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COSMOLOGY OF THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS: A CONTRIBUTION TO DIALOGUE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY TODAY

Fr. Vladimir Shmaliy

As variants of the Christian tradition have emerged through the centuries they have given rise to distinct versions of Christian metaphysics with divergent cosmological commitments. In the early Church, the Cappadocian fathers constructed a theological framework which focuses on the “personal” nature of reality. The personal nature of reality is central not only to understanding key theological doctrines, such as the Trinity, but also the cosmos itself. This essay explores the Cappadocian conception of the cosmos as personal both in its origin and as a medium for an interpersonal relationship between God and creatures.

Introduction

Karl Popper claimed that since antiquity, science developed under the influence of metaphysical ideas and metaphysical research programs implicit in scientific theories.¹ It was changes in these programs that conditioned radical changes in science. It is important that this thesis should be taken into account in the current dialogue between science, philosophy and theology. It is relevant here to discuss, under the theme of our present conference, the metaphysical assumptions and ensuing cosmological insights existing in Christian theology and philosophy of religion.

Despite the basic unity that Christian communities shared in the biblical foundations of their faith, they could not, historically, stay within one theological description of Revelation due to the different historical and socio-cultural situations in which they lived. This led to several, rather than one, versions of Christian metaphysics. Thus, Christian thought in the West, developing historically from St. Augustine to St. Thomas and further towards modern European philosophy, took a direction different from that of the theological speculation of the Orthodox East. In the modern dialogue between science and Christian thought it is necessary therefore to discern not only the modalities apparent in the metaphysical assumptions of scientific thought, conditioned by the historical circumstances in which philosophy developed in the West, but also differences within Christian thought itself, seeing in them a diversity of metaphysical programs. Eastern Christian (Orthodox) theology, for a number of reasons, partly external and historical, partly internal and axiological, remained for many centuries more stable, traditional and less variable than Western theology.



Moreover, the Eastern Christian vision of the world is still conditioned to a considerable degree by the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Gregory of Nyssa – all theologians of the 4th century. Even such an outstanding theologian as St. Maxim the Confessor who made a great impact on Eastern Christian metaphysics was decisively influenced by the Cappadocian cosmology.

The Cappadocian cosmology discussed here was part of a larger theological project, or to be more precise, part of the project to develop Christian theology as such, as different from both the philosophy of antiquity and the style of rabbinic reflection and early Christian kerygma.

The Cappadocian theology crowns the three-century-long effort of the Church to find a discourse adequate for the subject it analyzed, which is the content of biblical faith and religious experience. The earlier religious thought of Christianity proved unable to do this since the pre-Nicene theology was either uncritical towards the philosophical elements of antiquity, failing to analyze its assumptions or evasive with regard to the problems posed by rationality.

The faith of Israel and the philosophy of antiquity

As is known, there was, in Israel, no rational or specifically philosophical comprehension of religious ideas. For biblical man the questions: "What is God?" or even "Is there God?" are too abstract or too general. Israel's ideas of God are concrete and existential. The issue of the existence of God always concerns one's specific situation. It is not about "existence in general," but "existence of someone." At the same time in the philosophy of antiquity, the same question about the existence of God addresses only a particular aspect of a more general problem: What is this "is" itself? What is "existence"? What is this "what"? And how these can be understood? The Greek absolute, be it Parmenides's "Being" or Plato's "Good" or Aristotle's "First Mover" or the Neo-Platonists' "One," is very difficult to reconcile with the biblical image of God, boundlessly mighty and existing apart from the world while still participating in its life, giving men commandments, punishing, showing mercy, wrath and forgiveness.

The cosmos of antiquity is equally difficult to reconcile with the biblical perception of the world. In the ancient worldview, cosmos is self-sufficient. Even when cosmos is opposed to Reason or One this opposition more often than not implies only internal gradations in the same cosmos. For instance, the opposition is made between the "intelligent cosmos" and the sensual cosmos, but ultimately these are aspects of one and the same world. It is possible to come necessarily from One to the sensual cosmos and to move up necessarily from cosmos to Reason and One. The "God" of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus is cosmic. It is the ultimate cosmic principle. God can be outside of existence (to be more precise, beyond existence), but not outside cosmos since cosmos is order and harmony.

We can see a completely different approach in the classical biblical perception of cosmos. Cosmos is thought to be a free creation of the absolute and sovereign God Who is absolutely transcendent to the world He has created. It is impossible to embrace God and the world in one concept, in

which their existence or at least relationship is thought to obtain necessarily. God might not have created the world at all or might have created a different world or annihilated the present one as He destroyed the world by a flood. The relationship between God and the world is thus personal and volitional, that is, it is based on the personal volition of the Almighty and sovereign God.

This radical ontological gap between God and the creation does not allow for thinking of God and the world at the same time; it does not leave any room for any cosmology. The biblical culture does not generate anything similar to Greek philosophy. Only later, in the Hellenic period, does the rabbinical thought and the books of Wisdom produce something like theology, that is, an attempt at an original reflection on Revelation as related in particular to cosmos and its ideal contents. A concept of Wisdom emerges as a kind of agent between God and cosmos. On the borderline between epochs, in the 1st century, Philo Judaeus makes an attempt to apply some ideas of Greek philosophy to a description of the relationships between God and the world. He introduces a concept of "logos" as mediator in God's creation of cosmos. Philo's "logos" possesses both divine and cosmic characteristics. His conception remains contradictory while yet anticipating some points in the subsequent development of Christian theology.

Since the time of Adolf von Harnack (*The History of Dogma*), a tradition developed to oppose early Christianity to later Christianity as Hellenized and no longer biblical and, accordingly, to regard Christian thought as Hellenizing the Gospel. The Orthodox theological and historical scholarship, though recognizing the occurrence of certain historical excesses, regards the process of inculturation of the Gospel on the basis of the culture of antiquity as natural and even providential, conditioned by the inner logic of Revelation and the universality of the Church. It is in this sense that it pays homage to the philosophical thought of antiquity and criticizes the narrow, anti-historical and static "bible-ism" pursued in the name of academic reconstructions which reject the life of the Church in the Holy Spirit manifested in particular historical developments.

If the Old Testament were a self-sufficient, closed culture and system of ideas and the philosophy of antiquity were the same, it would never be possible to compare the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with the cosmos of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Proclus. But the Old Testament, and I affirm this as a Christian, is not a closed system of ideas, but an open dynamic, historically conditioned and historically directed project preparing for the coming of Christ and fulfilled in Him. The same can be said to a considerable degree about ancient Greek philosophy. As the Troparion for the Nativity of Christ ("troparion" is a liturgical hymn expressing the most important notional aspects of the Orthodox feasts) says, "Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone upon the world with the light of knowledge."

Towards a theological synthesis

The legacy of antiquity, especially its philosophy, science, literature and art, was the universal cultural language of the Roman Empire. Winning hearts, the Church had also to win minds, that is, to show that Christ is the

fulfillment of the aspirations of not only Jews, but also the philosophy and scholarship of antiquity.

The first three centuries of Christian history were those of apology for Christianity, a time for substantiating the claim that Christ is the ultimate universal Meaning and ultimate universal Truth.

The gospel's witness to Christ as the pre-existent and pre-eternal Logos, true God and the Son of God and at the same time perfect man was not understood theologically right away. The faith of the Church in the Trinity and in Christ as God and man was conceptualized in several stages in the context of the challenges that the Church faced in her historical existence.

The specificity of apologetic theology lies in the task of showing the "logisity" or rationality of Christianity, on one hand, and solving problems arising in the rational and systematic reflection on the proclamation of the Church, on the other.

The apostolic kerygma is neither philosophy nor theology in its task, style or contents. It is proclamation of the Kingdom and Salvation accomplished in Christ and a call to empirical sharing in the grace-giving life of the Church. Doctrinal provisions in the apostolic kerygma are given unsystematically; attempts to understand the content of Revelation rationally and philosophically or to compare it with the basic assumptions of reason either in philosophical or scientific form are almost absent. Such was also the catechism in the first Church. It only described the faith of the Church without offering any critical analysis.

It is characteristic of the methodology of ante-Nicene religious thought that it does not define the specificity of theology as such, as different from kerygma on one hand and philosophy on the other. Substantially however, the apologetic theology deals with relationships between God, Christ the Logos and the world. Moreover, Logos is understood cosmologically, as mediator in the creation. Logos is thought in two stages: as logos prior to the creation and as logos for the creation or in the creation. As a matter of fact, the concept of logos appears necessary for interpreting the creation, while Logos Himself is necessary to God for the creation. This cosmological nature of Logos could be also understood in an unorthodox way as in Paul of Samosata's system of thinking in which Logos is seen as God's power.

The ante-Nicene theology reached its height in the theological system of Origen. The image of the Son-Logos ceases to be a *mere* cosmic agent, a mediator in the creation. The Son is a certain conceptualization of the fullness of divine predicates existing potentially in the Father. Origen refers to the eternal birth of the Son, which however does not imply that He is consubstantial with the Father: the Son is subject to the Father. Cosmos is given existence through Logos. Just as the Son is born eternally, so cosmos is created eternally.² Eternity in this case does not mean potential but actual infinity, that is, ideal fullness. Acquiring ideal properties, cosmos ceases to be a creation, while Logos becomes cosmic. As with Philo and Plotinus, the cosmos of Origen is not separated from God by a clear border. Just as in Aristotle, his cosmos is eternal. Birth does not differ qualitatively from creation as both emerge, but this emergence is ideal, pre-time. Historical existence in Origen however is accidental; it needs to be overcome. Therefore he excludes any time in the birth of the world and in the ideal creation of cosmos.

Origen's system provoked a reaction from Arius. Arius proceeded from the same presuppositions as Origen: the birth of the Son and the creation of the world are to be understood in terms of emergence, that is, Logos is linked to cosmos much more strongly than to God. Unlike Origen, whose rejection of time led to the depreciation of the meaning of biblical history and the coming of Christ as the most important event in it, Arius, committed to the spirit of biblical historical dynamism, emphasizes the meaning of time and identifies any emergence with time. Hence arose the Arian teaching that "there was a time when the Son was not there."

Arius and Origen have a common idea of the indissoluble nature of relationship between Logos and cosmos. Hence, recognizing, like Origen, the co-eternal and equally divine nature of Logos one had to recognize also that cosmos is co-eternal with God and therefore actually uncreated. If the created nature of cosmos and its beginning in time was recognized, then the actual created nature of Logos and His beginning in time had to be recognized as well.

This dilemma could be resolved only through the construction of "theology," that is, a special discourse about God "in Himself." The basic assumptions of this discourse were laid down by St. Athanasius the Great. His method is built on soteriological assumptions and lies in drawing a clear line between the "internal" existence of God the Trinity, including the generation of the Son by the Father, and the "external work" of God, which is the creation. The first belongs to nature, while the second to will.³ That is to say that the ontological status of the existence of God and of the existence of the world are completely different. It is impossible to describe both within the same logically coherent concept.

This principle was developed and considered in its various aspects, both in the sphere of theology (the teaching on the Trinity) and the sphere of the knowledge of God, by the Cappadocian Fathers. They are those who gave a classical form to "theologia" and defined the principles and boundaries of the knowledge of God as different from "oikonomia." And what is important for our theme, they clearly formulated within "oikonomia" the doctrinally necessary scope and character of the theological definitions of cosmos.

Philosophy and the Faith of the Church in the Cappadocian thinking

The most important task that faced the Cappadocian Fathers was to draw a demarcation line between Christian thought and philosophy. On the one hand, the Greek Fathers were Greeks in the sense that they inherited from Greek thought the insight of "logos" as having priority in meaning, thinking and idea over all things sensual, changeable and transient. For them to think was imperative, to think in the form of thought even about the unthinkable nature of thought or prohibition of thought.

At the same time however, their Christian experience of faith, the experience of their personal relations with God and grace-giving life, was decisive. For them, Christian faith as sharing in the whole experience of the Church and the whole experience of transformed human existence had an unconditional priority over other aspects of human existence.

All aspects of human existence are partial and instrumental with regard

to the entire vocation of man. The role of philosophy and other forms of human rationality is thus auxiliary with regard to the ultimate tasks of human existence.⁴

Since the world is created by God and its origins are in the hand of God, the claims of philosophy to interpret the world are ungrounded. That is to say, philosophy is given the role of thought about thought, not thought about what there is. Philosophy is devoid of the sacred right to seek the first cause of being.

Philosophy for the Greeks was much more than merely a rational tool. Philosophy offered a worldview, an integral vision of the world, and further defined the order of values. Philosophical schools often determined the way of life for a person and his behavior. The Church had to overcome the temptation to become, for the Greeks, one of the philosophical schools. She had to vindicate the opinion that Revelation and Tradition have absolute priority over philosophical metaphysical constructions. At the same time however, she had to use particular philosophical methods and tools for an analysis of Revelation, apology, mission, catechism, polemic with heresies, etc. Thus Christian theology was created, using philosophy as a tool and philosophical notions as metaphors.

Apophasis as theological method

Theology was created as rational reflection on the Revelation and Tradition of the Church. That is to say that the subject of theology is not existence in general, not human thought, but Revelation and the way in which it can and must be perceived by man.

As a form of rational discourse, theology had to develop a certain method. An important theological method used by the Cappadocian Fathers was apophasis (negation). The apophatical method presupposes the affirmation that God cannot and should not be the subject of intellectual analysis like other subjects and objects of the created world.⁵ The radically inconceivable nature of God and the fundamental incompleteness of thought, its inability to embrace God, are affirmed *a priori*.

Theological apophatism, despite all its similarity to philosophical apophatism, has absolutely different roots. Just as an insight into the optically expressive, coherent and harmonious cosmos, rational in its foundations and therefore "comprehensible" and transparent in its existential roots, was the basis of the pre-rational Greek philosophical thought, so an important insight of patristic thought was the radical opposition it made between God and the world — an opposition having the biblical faith as its basis.⁶

The apophatism of Greek philosophy, a classical example of which are implications of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* dialogue,⁷ is a result of a move up to a more general reality and, accordingly, a recognition of internal limitations of human cognitive resources, of the limitation as it were "from below." The patristic apophatism however proceeds from the initial opposition of God and the world. Ontologically, it does not allow of conceptions logically linking the existence of God and the existence of the world, while epistemologically it affirms the radically inconceivable nature of God. This is a limitation "from above."

These internal prohibitions compelled theology to learn to operate in very hard methodological conditions. There is tough apophasis according to which we can say almost nothing about God, on the one hand, and yet we are obliged to speak about Him, on the other. Thus, the specificity of theological thought is developed, compelling one to refer to what cannot be discussed, to express the inexpressible, to insist on completeness from a situation of incompleteness and instability. An utterly abstract and symbolic language is created, which is more metaphorical than conceptual, the task of which is to express a limited experience.

Philosophy as metaphor of theology

Many notions in patristic theology function in a way different from the way in which they function in philosophical thought. To describe realities outside our experience metaphorically, the holy fathers drew images and metaphors from the realm of nature and artifice. In the same way they used the language of philosophical notions. It does not mean however that these notions remained only metaphors in the theological realm as well. Their metaphorical nature was used only for critical comparison with philosophy. It is because of the radical incompatibility of the two levels of reality: divine and cosmic. Philosophy builds its notions by generalizing the experience of perception of this world. Therefore, applied to the realm of uncreated existence, they necessarily turn into philosophical metaphors. This is what Vladimir Lossky described as “deconceptualization of concepts,”⁸ that is, extracting them from their original realm of philosophical usage to apply to theology. The philosophical system from which a notion is extracted serves as an illustrative aid. But if a philosophical system serves in this case as a conceptual illustration and aid, then there are no grounds for which this philosophical system with its internal logic and meaning should interfere in the way in which a particular category is used in theology. In a similar way, it would be strange to criticize literary allegories using images of animals from the perspective of biology. At the same time, the metaphorical nature that philosophical systems acquire in theology does not mean of course that theological categories may be used arbitrarily.

Characteristically, theology always gravitates stylistically not towards formal and dry description of “how God works,” but rather towards hymn and praise. And the reason for it is not only that God and the world are an abyss apart, but also that God can never be an “object” for description by a theologian. He is always and only Subject and Person. Thus, only two persons, along with St. John the Theologian, are described as theologians in the Eastern Church – St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Simeon the New Theologian. Both are known for the highly artistic and poetic form with which they clothed their theological works. An analogy in world culture can be found in the description of such a notion as love, which can never be “objectivized,” being always personal and intimate. The most sublime forms of discourse on love therefore have the form of praise in various works of literature, poetry, music and painting.

Nature and energy – a change of guidelines in epistemology

In reflecting on God, His nature and energy (acts), discernment was one of the most important and typical principles in the Cappadocian thought. For the above-mentioned reasons, the nature of God is declared inconceivable in principle and incommunicable to created beings separated from it by their created nature. This apophatical principle has an ontological, epistemological and spiritual-ascetical dimension. Ontologically, this principle is negative in conceptualizing the insurmountable existential border between God and the creation. Epistemologically, this principle radically restricts the human cognitive claims, insisting that any “description of God’s nature” will be His idol, while on the spiritual and devotional plane, it calls the ascetic to make his mind “formless” by avoiding spiritual fantasies and invented images of God.

But the inconceivable nature of God for man, to be more precise, the inability of man, by independent efforts, to “ascend” to the knowledge of God’s nature on the basis of the known natures of the created world, does not imply the hidden nature of God. God, being radically “other” than the world, manifests Himself in the world and reveals Himself. The holy fathers describe this method of “linking” God and the world and His manifestations in the world by the term of “energy.” They offer a classical formula: God is inconceivable in nature, but conceivable in His energies (acts) in the world.⁹ This term was used systematically in the philosophy of Aristotle and the Neo-Platonists, but in the system of theological thinking it was intended to emphasize rather the creative nature of God’s attitude to the world and the absence of any ontological, but rather only personal and volitional, relationships between them.

The teaching on the creation as God’s energy (energies), on the creative Revelation to the world, articulates the *symbolic* nature of the Christian theological understanding of the world and the Revelation. The entire cosmos turns out to be a system of symbols and a symbol in which God is revealed in the created manifestations of God’s uncreated energies. This breath-taking paradoxical nature of the Revelation of the Inconceivable God is resolved only in the *personalistic* understanding of God, Revelation, man and God’s relationship with man and the world.

Cappadocian triadology – development of personalistic ontology

The Cappadocians are often described as “neo-Niceans” because, first of all, they assimilate the major assumptions of the Nicene theology developed and defended by St. Athanasius the Great. In delimiting clearly the external and internal divine life, including the birth of the Son, they however do it creatively, overcoming the difficulties raised in the Church by the Nicene teaching on the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. This could be understood either in terms of monarchic modalism, or in the sense of distribution of one divine nature between the Father and the Son as “co-heirs,” or in terms of emanation with the Son understood as part of the nature of the Father. All these overtones should have been negotiated and excluded from the theological language. The notion of “substance”

should have also been clearly defined. In Greek philosophy this notion was understood in a variety of ways. In Platonism “substance” (*ousia*) denotes commonality, while in Aristotle it is first of all individual existence (*first substance*), and only after that “substance” was used to describe general genus uniting and embracing individual existences (*second substance*).¹⁰

The Nicene theology was criticized for making unity prevail over the reality of persons. Using the differentiation between *ousia* and *hypostasis* that emerged in the polemic around the terms of *ousia* and *homoousios*, the Cappadocians develop a new system of describing the trinitarian dogma using the term of *hypostasis*.¹¹ They manage to offer a well-balanced description of the triadity and unity of the divine persons. They express both unity and diversity in the Trinity in ontological terms. Unity is sealed by the notion of consubstantiality while the reality of persons by the notion of *hypostasis*. *Hypostasis* and *ousia* are borrowed from the philosophical vocabulary without any association in the Cappadocian theology with any of the philosophical schools of antiquity. The Fathers follow neither Aristotle with his categorial differentiation between the first and the second substance, nor Plotinus with his three *hypostases* of being.

If the logic of philosophical reasoning is to be followed, these terms should be put in certain relationships pointing to the most fundamental one. Two ways are possible here: to give priority to the individual, as in Aristotle, or to unity, as in Plotinus, who emphasizes the ontological priority of One. In the first case, we will arrive either at organic complexity of the Godhead or tritheism. In the second, the triadity will prove subject to unity and the authentic triunity will not be expressed. The Cappadocians deliberately use the actually equivalent and synonymous terms of *hypostasis* and *ousia*, which makes it possible to emphasize, due their equal ontological value, not only their identity but also their otherness, with *hypostasis* irreducible to *ousia*. Both identity and otherness appear to be ontologically equal in significance and value as well as “simultaneous” (in thought); that is, the otherness and irreducibility of *hypostasis* and *ousia* have the same status as the substantial identity of *hypostases*. Apparently, this otherness cannot be of some “different *ousia*” (otherwise God would be a composition of several substances), i.e., some other “what” would be God. It can be expressed only in terms of “who” and “how.” That is to say, the Three Hypostases are Three essentially identical existences but at the same time irreducible to substance and not derivable from it; they are Three unique and consubstantial Persons.

The categorial identification of *hypostasis* and person became an important result of the historical genesis of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It sealed the ontological status of the category of person, on one hand, and led to the personalistic re-thinking of the category of *hypostasis* and the trinitarian doctrine in general, on the other. Thus the triadological polemic led to the development of the church teaching on personality — a radical innovation in thinking, first of all with regard to the earlier ontology of antiquity as a whole.

The teaching on personality developed further in the context of struggle with Christological heresies and attempts to formulate a doctrine on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Cappadocian Fathers rejected the Apollinarian heresy based on the identification of person with spirit as the

sublime part of human nature. To preserve the integrity of the person of Christ, this required excluding reason as bearing the personal element of the human nature He assumed. Having refuted Apollinarius, the fathers clearly showed that the human person cannot be reduced to its nature, nor its parts, otherwise this "personal" element of nature should be inevitably excluded from the human nature assumed by God the Word in the incarnation. But what is not assumed cannot be healed and saved. That is to say, to recognize person as reducible to nature means to undermine the teaching on salvation.

Characteristically, the final formulation of the Church's teaching on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in the 5th century became possible when the Council of Chalcedon formulated the Christological doctrine using the Cappadocian method distinguishing between nature and person. It was shown that God the Word assumed in the incarnation the human nature in its fullness, while assuming no human personality, which would have led to the duality of person in Christ. If the Second Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity were not irreducible to divine nature, then we would have to speak about the incarnation of the whole Trinity. If human personhood was not irreducible to human nature, then we would have to agree also that in Christ there is no unity of person and God the Word becomes incarnate in a particular human being and thus saves and deifies only one human person — a certain man by the name of Jesus. The fact that "person" cannot be reduced to nature makes it possible to express at the same time the unity of subject in Christ (Christ's personality is divine; it is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, that is, Logos is subject of the Incarnation and our salvation) and the duality of natures, Divine and human, united without confusion, inseparably, undividedly and unchangeably in one hypostasis of Christ.

The Nicene triadology proved to be a historic event in the conceptualization of Christian faith. Theology is fully freed not only from conjunction to a particular philosophical conception, but also from the basic insights and aspirations of the Greek philosophy. Personalism overcomes impersonal and abstract ontologism on the level of theological system.

An attempt was made later to understand God primarily as the divine nature having ontological priority over the Persons. This tendency in thinking is present in St. Augustin and to a considerable degree in the subsequent teaching of the Western Church on God the Trinity. Precisely here lies the principal reason for the differences between East and West concerning the so-called *Filioque* clause. For the Eastern Church the unity of the Trinity is determined by the unity of the Father. That is, the unity of the Trinity is not impersonal but determined by the person of the Father. In the person of the Father (via the personalistic teaching of the Eastern Church on the "monarchy" of the Father), it is the Father who is the source of the existence of the Son and of the Spirit, and He determines the "order" or "taxis" of the Trinity. The notion of nature appears to be secondary, *expressing* rather than *determining* relations between the Father, and Son and the Holy Spirit. This teaching on the Trinity excludes any conditionality and declares perfect personalism as freedom with regard to one's own nature.

The Holy Trinity represents a paradigm of personal existence. The cate-

gory of *ousia* in the trinitarian doctrine proves to be not only a means for expressing the unity of God, but also a way of expressing the *community* of life in the ineffable communion of the Three Persons in one nature raised to the Person of the Father. That is, a person cannot be viewed in solitude. "I" always implies "you", "he", "we." A person, to be a person, must be relational.¹²

God *is* communion of the Three Persons. The Father begets the Son not because He has to do it by virtue of an irrational impersonal natural process, but because of love alone. The very existence of God as Three Persons *is* love. It itself *is* God understood as nature, community of the Three in love. It is a communion that excludes any self-closure or self-sufficiency but presupposes self-emptying for the Other, that is, ecstatic dwelling in the Other without the slightest loss of One's own identity.

Personalistic cosmology – cosmos as the medium of interpersonal communication

There is no idea of creation in the Greek philosophy. Creation can be seen as a religious metaphor meaning actually, say, emanative emergence in the Neo-Platonic sense, or the ordering of cosmos in the Demiurge myth.

The points of departure for Christian cosmology are antinomic conditions presupposing at the same time the non-originality and ontological stability of the world. The world as a creation is not original, on one hand, but it should be ontologically stable and truly real and independent, on the other.

An important notion reflecting the created nature of the world in the Cappadocians is *diastema* – severance, extension, spacing.¹³ The *diastema* concept transposes the illogical and inconceivable metaphysical gap between the Creator and the creation into the internal structure of the created existence itself. God's creative energies, inconceivable in themselves but conceivable in their results, prove to be a kind of border and at the same time an internal form of the world. *Diastema* understood as a gap is expressed in the particular gradation of the world's topology beginning from form in the contemplated world, to space and its topology on the physical level of the world. *Diastema* understood as a metaphysical change that initiated the existence of the created world appears to be the ability to change the origin of the cosmos from contemplated changeability to physical temporality.

The Cappadocians managed to break off from the cosmology of antiquity concerning the necessity of the existence of cosmos. In the cosmologies of antiquity, cosmos exists necessarily. Plato's Good, Aristotle's First Mover or Plotinus's One cannot not generate cosmos. Strictly speaking, it is true for Origen as well since his God cannot "become" Creator; he must be such from eternity; being Creator is His eternal predicate and a characteristic of His nature; therefore He eternally creates the world with necessity. In the Cappadocians, energies by which God creates the world are clearly distinct from the nature of God. They are volitional and at the same time notional. They are essentially "logical" as words ("*logoi*") of God by which He creates the world.¹⁴ The origin of the world as a consequence of God's will changes completely the previous perspective: creation now is not necessary, not demanded by nature. God could have not been a Creator while remaining God.¹⁵

At the same time, having resolved the problem of the non-self-sufficiency of the world and non-necessity of its existence conceptually, the Cappadocians should have also resolved the problem of the independent substantial status of the world. They emphasize the radical "nonentity" of the world, its lack of any eternal ontological basis. But does this not mean the rejection of any authentic "what is" of the world? Does not it mean an illusory nature of created things?

Having rejected pantheism in any form, the Cappadocian Fathers also refused to accept the hypothesis concerning the existence of any "other," any *meon* or matter co-eternal with God, which could serve as the substance of the created world. This thesis was also very innovative. Forbidding the existence of any "original" other, the Cappadocian Fathers affirm that "otherness" should not be understood as an eternal principle uncontrolled by God but as the very synonym of the creation, the synonym of creatively asserted *diastema*. *Diastema* however is not an irrational principle, not a created chaos or *meon*, but a primary, elementary, created and essentially ideal quality. From this follows the principle of the "ideality" of matter and of all objects of the physical world since they all are essentially nothing other than syntheses of ideal and intelligible qualities.¹⁶

The non-material nature of the world does not mean its unreality, even less its illusory character. This affirmation of the Cappadocian cosmology can be understood only in a broader theological context of that new personalistic interpretation of the ontology of antiquity that the Cappadocian Fathers offer. Within the classical impersonalistic ontology, the teaching on the creation can be interpreted only in two ways: monistically (pantheistically) or dualistically. But this antithesis of pantheistic monism and dualism or immanentism and transcendentalism is overcome in the Cappadocian cosmology by the understanding of the creation in terms of personal energy and communication. That is, having no independent "what is," the world is understood as mediatory environment for interaction between "who are:" the Person of God and the person of man created in His image. Cosmos in the Cappadocian thinking loses self-value to be viewed exclusively as environment for communication, education and edification.¹⁷

Ontologism is limited by personalism understood positively as "Other." There is no impersonal cosmology because there is no impersonal cosmos; impersonal cosmos is chaos; the beginning of organized cosmos is personalistic; there is no rationality in general; there is rationality as reflection and expression of the personal.

Cosmos appears to be a succession or hierarchy of "words," God's *logoi*, God's message addressed to man. But man himself is given the creative verbal ability of *logos*, that is, the ability to hear God and to respond to Him.

Diastema understood as otherness and change is not a property "negative in nature." On the contrary, unlike the cosmos of antiquity where otherness and changeability are essentially indications of non-self-sufficiency and inadequacy of the physical world, otherness and changeability are essentially good, created foundations of the world described as "very good" by God Himself. Therefore, while otherness is associated with the

internal form and topology of the created world on its every level beginning from contemplated to physical, changeability is associated with the dynamic character of interpersonal relations. In its very changeability the world can and must become unchangeable – unchangeable in its creative and free aspiration to God. Being able to change and being irreducible to his “what is,” man has before him a great prospect to be able to become what he is not, to become created god, god by grace.¹⁸

God’s creation is a reflection of the internal divine, ecstatic love. God creates not because He has to by His nature, but by love. God creates the world not from Himself, but from nothing; He creates it by His actions. Divine energies are other than the Divine nature but at the same time God is fully present in them, that is, He is all “in Himself” and at the same time “out of Himself.” Present in His energies, God comes as if “from Himself” to the creation, to a radical otherness, an object of His creative, and at the same time sacrificial, love to the cross. The creation, in its turn, and man above all as its crown and focus, is called to reciprocal love. It “is not obliged” to love God, but its very existence is possible only as a reflection of the divine existence, possible to the measure in which it freely responds to the divine love appealing to it and calling it to account. The existence of man and the creation in general is a creative encounter of two energies, created and uncreated, a synergy of God’s descending and man’s ascending love. The human nature also has the aspect of openness to other, the aspect of communication.

The world centered on man and understood as environment for interpersonal communication and interaction of God and man appears to be a symbol. The cognitive and creative ability instilled in man allows him to comprehend his Creator in the hierarchy of created symbols. Thus cosmos can be perceived as a living “book” (a “text” or even a “hyper-text”). Then language as a means of expression, understanding and communication acquires a fundamental significance.¹⁹ The communicative and symbolic character of cosmos also presupposes the theological synthesis of such insights of antiquity as musical harmony, mathematical orderliness, optical character and notional transparency of cosmos as a communicative and significative environment. The perfect contents of cosmos and the full colours and beauty of its expressive resources contain God’s message to man. But it is not a one-sided message, since man also speaks in cosmos to God and God hears him. Cosmos is a means of communication and first of all the communication of life. It is in this context that the place and significance of all other living beings as participants in the communication of the life of cosmos should be understood.

There is nothing independently significant in the world, but God and man. The whole world, explored by man, appears in a sense to be a field for interaction of God and man. In this sense, cosmos is a “face” of God. Everything in cosmos points to God, but as soon as the experience of personal perception of God in cosmos is lost, a relapse into paganism and magic occurs. Difficulties encountered both in theology and science of perceiving God on the level of created analogies are caused by the impersonal character of these analogies.

The Cappadocians affirm the priority of will and freedom over “fate,”

“law” and “nature.” They affirm the priority of moral law over what is believed to be natural law or the priority of will over thought. Cosmos, and man in it, are thus given a fundamental ethical dimension. In cosmos there is no *adiaphora* since only chaos and nothingness are morally indifferent. Everything outside “who” is “nothing.” Everything impersonal is empty. Hence the Cappadocian cosmos creates a dual impression. It is very real, on one hand, and it is nothing in itself, on the other. Therefore it has no identity. There is nothing cosmic or physical outside of the ethical. Ethics is super-cosmic, super-ontological and super-metaphysical, for it is personal. Objectivity in actual fact appears to be nothing but subjectivity, that is, the more intensive the inter-subjective relation the higher the objectivity of its description. A hierarchy is created: the empirical — the intellectual — the super-intellectual (the inter-subjective).

The meaning of the world is outside it. What is outside the world is beyond meaning, and still the world is understood. This glaring paradox of the Christian vision of the world is resolved exclusively in the dynamic understanding of the world. The world is both a task and a process in which the meaningful and unpredictable dialogue between God and the creation is unfolding.

This means that science, which seeks to comprehend nature, has a profound meaning and value. But the task facing science is extremely complicated. What should be put in its basis is a completely special metaphysics – the metaphysics of the positively understood non-self-sufficiency of the world. The non-self-sufficiency of the world (if it is discussed at all) is understood in the thinking of antiquity rather negatively, as a result of deviation from the first principle. This understanding appears to be only a part of a larger project in which the world as it is, is a part or an aspect of a larger reality, self-sufficient and blessed, etc. In the Cappadocian theology however, there is no system in principle that is more general; the world in itself is incomplete, and this incompleteness is its good and source of life and hope.

Conclusion

The Cappadocian cosmology and theology as a whole represents a remarkable model of a coherent system of conceptualization of Christian faith. Moreover, it is a system basically sovereign from the philosophy and scholarship of its time. This fact alone should provoke a serious interest not only among historians of philosophy but also those interested in the methodology of science. The Cappadocians developed a completely specific variety of personalistic metaphysics and communicative cosmology. Applied in the modern context of the philosophy of science, the Cappadocian cosmology presents a challenge to metaphysical objectivism. Cosmos, the world, cannot and should not be viewed as it were in itself. It is always cosmos “for somebody.” It implies an “observer,” a “doer” interacting and communicating with those he observes. It does not mean that with the help of the Cappadocian personalistic metaphysics some scientific, physical concept, such as the Copenhagen interpretation of the quantum theory or the widely discussed Fine-tuning principle, should be supported. It is possible to do

this of course as a criticism of the existing objectivistic metaphysics. But still, the Cappadocian cosmology should rather promote the understanding that modern science and the philosophy of science need to be more flexible, pluralistic and aware of various insights, especially those which take into account personality and the human being not as an accidental or meddling "observer" but as a fundamental and ultimate value, unavoidable and constitutive for scientific discourse.

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NOTES

1. Karl R. Popper, *Quantum Theory and the Schism in Physics*. New York: Routledge. 1989, p.114.
2. *De princ.* I, 2, 10
3. *Apologia Contra Arianos*, 1, n.33.
4. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis* 2, 11.
5. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 38,7.
6. Basil, *Ad Amphilocheius*, 234.
7. *Parmenides*, 137c-142b.
8. Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974, p.108.
9. Basil, *Contra Eunomium*, 1,14; 1,6.
10. Aristotle, *Categories*, 5.2a.11-16; *Metaphysics* VII,11,1037a.
11. Basil, *Ep.* 38.
12. John Zizioulas, "Personhood and Being" in *Being as Communion*. New York: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1993.
13. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*. Ft. Collins, CO: Ignatius Press, pp.27-35.
14. Gregory of Nyssa. *Hexaemeron*, I.
15. Basil, *Hexaemeron*, I.
16. Gregory of Nyssa. *De anima et res.* III; *Hexaemeron* I; *Hom. Op.* I.
17. Basil, *Hexaemeron*, I.
18. Gregory of Nyssa. *Hom. Op.* XVI; *In cant.*, VI.
19. Gregory of Nyssa. *Hom. Op.* VIII.