



# The Source Antinomy of the Mystery of the Trinity as the Foundation and Hermeneutical Key of Christian Apophaticism in the View of Vladimir N. Lossky

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**Abstract:** For some time now, there has been a definite revival of interest in apophatic theology within religious thinking as well as at its antipodes. It often takes the form of criticism of religion, including Christian Revelation, and thus the theology based on it. From a Christian perspective, this provides an invitation to reflect on the rich heritage of apophaticism and to show its specificity as a consequence of what constitutes the *specificum christianorum*, i.e. the *Trinitatis mystery*. Important clues in this regard can be found in the thought of Vladimir N. Lossky, a prominent 20th century Orthodox theologian, a radical defender of the specific apophatic nature of Christianity and a theologian faithful to Trinitarian orthodoxy. Looking at the most important issues related to the Trinitarian dogma, we will point out that in the Russian's view, the Trinitarian antinomy is the source and foundation of Christian apophaticism and its hermeneutics. This conclusion will be based on revealing the Trinitarian antinomy as what is primordial, unconditioned by nothing, non-derivable from anything and therefore as a purely religious given and truth *par excellence*, accessible to man through Its free Revelation, which It also infinitely transcends.

**Keywords:** Vladimir N. Lossky, Trinity, antinomy, apophaticism, Orthodoxy

An interest in apophaticism seems to be noticeable today in many dimensions of human thought, culture, art, science – in a way, one could ascertain a kind of ubiquitous apophatic climate in the form of strongly influencing agnosticism and weak rationality. On the one hand, this is the result of the collapse of foundationist cognitive projects, and thus attempts to base patterns of life on them, which have since been identified as negatively fundamentalist; on the other hand, a strong awareness of the complexity of reality and the human experience of it in its multiple conditions, which has opened a space of mystery often where it seemed to be overcome. In the context of a specific “fascination with negative theology,” Robert Woźniak points to four reasons for it: the turn towards religious skepticism, the key meaning of the concept of difference in philosophy, the return to experience manifested

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by the privatisation and internalisation of religion, and the impact of the discovery and fascination with holistic religions of the East.<sup>1</sup> It seems that one could add here the renaissance of interest in occult and esoteric trends, even in the form of neogenesis, or broadly understood mysticism. Stanisław Wszolek and Janusz Królikowski notice that,

for various reasons, there is a revival of interest in apophaticism [also – note M.P.] in theology today. Some are interested in it because they want to remain faithful to their own tradition – this is the case with Orthodox theologians; others try to rediscover apophaticism as a way of defining the possibilities and limits of reason in theological cognition of God; and still others see apophaticism as a way of entering into dialogue with those religious traditions that – at least at first glance – seem to have much in common with it, such as Buddhism. Without going into the evaluation of these proposals, we will deal with some issues, the consideration of which will help to determine the conditions for the meaningfulness of the apophatic discourse in theology.<sup>2</sup>

To this end, however, a more fundamental issue needs to be addressed, namely the problematic of the place and significance of apophysis in Christianity, after all Christian theology, even in its negative dimension, as a reflection *sui generis*, is derived from the *specificum christianorum*, which is the *Trinitatis mystery*. The purpose of this thesis will be to explicate the<sup>3</sup> antinomy of the mystery of the Trinity as the foundation and hermeneutical key of Christian apophaticism in the context of the thought of one of the most eminent Orthodox theologians of the 20th century, Vladimir N. Lossky, who is also one of the greatest defenders and promoters of the apophatic nature of Christianity and Christian theology *en bloc*.

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1 Woźniak, *Różnica*, 416.

2 Wszolek – Królikowski, *Teologia*, 109.

3 “[...] the term ‘antinomy’ is used either as a synonym of the word paradox or (quite often in Polish writing) more narrowly, to denote an unambiguous and formally correct proof of two mutually contradictory sentences. In this narrower sense, an antinomy is an unambiguously formulated paradox, the source of which is a – more or less hidden – contradiction of assumptions” (Bifat, “Antynomie w logice,” 18). “In der Philosophie heißt Antinomie der (scheinbar nicht aufzulösende) Widerspruch zwischen zwei Prinzipien oder Gesetzen, die sich zwar gleich gut begründen lassen, einander aber ausschließen [...]. In der Theologie führt die Notwendigkeit, alles Bedingte auf den Unbedingten als letzten Grund zurückzuführen, zur Gottesrede im Paradox (Coincidentia oppositorum)” (Vorgrimler, “Antinomismus,” 47). From the theological perspective, “antinomies, sometimes also called paradoxes, are formulas consisting of two seemingly contradictory statements, but both necessary to be maintained so that the fullness of faith is not compromised. A typical example of an antinomy is the dogma of the Holy Trinity, in which God is pronounced at the same time as absolute unity and tri-Personality, or the formula of Chalcedon about the union of natures in Christ” (Persidok, “W trosce,” 146).

## 1. Underlying the Revelation of the Trinitarian Antinomy

According to Vladimir Lossky, the apophatic attitude is not only a fundamental feature of all theological thought in the Eastern tradition,<sup>4</sup> but “aphophatism is, therefore, a criterion: the sure sign of an attitude of mind conformed to the truth. In this sense all true theology is fundamentally aphophatic,”<sup>5</sup> more: theopoietic-apophatic.<sup>6</sup> This applies to theology,<sup>7</sup> but not to its basis, truth, source, and thus ultimately the God-Trinity, who is beyond all negation and positivity,<sup>8</sup> as the primordial, non-derivable truth and foundation, within Whose Revelation we always find ourselves, and Who at the same time transcends this Revelation:

God is known in revelation as in personal relationship. Revelation is always revelation to someone; it is made up of encounters which order themselves into a history. Revelation in its totality is therefore; it is the reality of history, from creation to parousia. Revelation is thus a ‘theocosmic’ relationship which includes us. Not only can we now God outside it, but we cannot judge it “objectively” from outside. Revelation knows of no ‘outside’, for it is this relationship between God and the world within which, like it or not, we find ourselves. But in the immanence of revelation, God affirms Himself to be transcendent to creation. If one were to define as transcendent that which escapes the sphere of our knowledge and experience, one must say that God not only is not a part of world but even transcends His own revelation.<sup>9</sup>

The peak of historical Revelation is the dual economy of the Son and the Holy Spirit, in which it is God who reveals and gifts Himself as He is in Himself, that is, as Tri-Unity.<sup>10</sup> Lossky was aware that the explication of the Trinitarian richness contained in the self-revelation of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit was taking place in the Church gradually, not without resistance and not without blind corners, misconceptions or simply heresy. This, of course, raises the problem of the different understanding of the development-evolution of dogma in the East and the West,<sup>11</sup> which we will not address here, especially as it largely concerns the issue

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lossky, *The Mystical*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Płóciennik, “Teopoietyczno-apofatyczny,” *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> For Lossky, theology is not a purely intellectual-cognitive activity, but this dimension of theology always remains in the function of divinising union with God, hence it has a mystical character from beginning to end; Płóciennik, “Teopoietyczno-apofatyczny,” 118–138.

<sup>8</sup> “What will subsist beyond all negating or positing is the notion of the absolute hipostatic difference and the equally absolute identity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit” (Lossky, “Apophasis and Trinitarian,” 16).

<sup>9</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> See Kupiec, “Pneumatologicznie ukierunkowana,” 267–279.

<sup>11</sup> See Hryniewicz, “Dogmatów ewolucja,” 18–19.

of dogmas promulgated after the schism of Christianity in the 11th century, and thus long after the last joint Council of East and West (which took place at Nicaea in 787).

Lossky notices the beginnings of Trinitarian theology already in the New Testament, especially in the writings of John. “[...] we must stress the evangelical roots of the orthodox triadology”<sup>12</sup> – states the Russian, thus strongly opposing any attempt to separate the Gospel and theology. “The chief source of our knowledge of the Trinity is, indeed, none other than the Prologue of St. John (and also the first epistle of the same) [...]”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the Fathers commented on John’s Prologue with extraordinary frequency and referred to it, wanting to justify the truth about the Divinity of Christ and, at the same time, the Trinitarian existence of God.

From the first verse of the Prologue, the Father is called God, Christ is called the Word and the Word, in this beginning which is here not temporal but ontological is at once God („in the beginning...the Word was God”) and other than the Father („and the Word was with God”). These three affirmations of St. John: “In the beginning was the Word- and the Word was with God-and the Word was God”, constitute the germ of all trinitarian theology. They immediately direct our thought to the obligation of affirming, at the same time, the identity and the diversity of God.<sup>14</sup>

As for the Holy Spirit, without whom we can only speak of binary nature in God, “it is the Gospel that also reveals to us the Trinitarian ‘situation’ of the Holy Spirit as the Third Hypostasis in the Trinity, and those relations which emphasise His personal ‘singularity.’”<sup>15</sup> In doing so, Lossky refers to Jesus’ statements about the Holy Spirit in His farewell speech to the disciples (see John 14–17), particularly those fragments which indicate His personal separateness from the Father and the Son and, at the same time, His identity as to Divinity with the Father and the Son.<sup>16</sup>

In short, the biblical texts confront us with the antinomy of simultaneous identity and difference in God! “It is, of course, scandalous to break this antinomy by ‘rationalising’ this or that term” – notes Lossky, however, he is also aware that as a result of the paradoxical nature of this state of affairs, in the face of such an incomprehensible truth about God, the human mind, being helpless in the face of it tried to “rationalise” it, and “thus there have appeared, more or less explicitly, two major

<sup>12</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 36. Lossky (*ibidem*, 34–36) repeatedly emphasises the inseparability and interdependence of Christology and Trinitology.

<sup>15</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 38–39. It is ultimately the Holy Spirit who makes it possible to know God in the fullness of His being, which is the Trinity – cf. Lossky, *The Mystical*, 246. “This is why, in Eastern rite, the day of Pentecost is called the festival of the Trinity” (*ibidem*, 239).

<sup>16</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 39.

heretical tendencies: Unitarianism Tritheism.”<sup>17</sup> And it is precisely because of this rationalising-extreme character, which cannot bear the mysterious tension of the antinomy, but which absolutises only one of its members at the expense of the other, thus robbing the mystery of its mystery, that it is worth taking a closer look at them, as well as at the way the Church has gone about overcoming them, while remaining faithful to its fundamental experience, attested and reflected in biblical texts.

## 2. Non-Apophatic Attempts to Rationalise the Trinitarian Antinomy: Unitarianism Tritheism

„Unitarianism has often assumed the aspect of an absolute monarchianism: there is only one person in God, that of the Father, Whose Son and Spirit are only emanations Or for ces.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, the trend of monarchianism – since it is difficult to talk about any agreed doctrine – consisted of several different orientations, which were connected by the fact that they abolished the specific shape and salvific significance of the triune reality of the Revelation of God.<sup>19</sup> Its aim was to try to reconcile Christianity with Judaism, with its absolute monotheism, and Hellenistic philosophy, which favoured unity over plurality. At the same time, monarchianism appeared as a counter-reaction, or rather an attempt to correct, the subordinationist doctrine of the Logos, which, by introducing duality into God together with the Logos, threatened strict monotheism.

Many authors divide monarchianism into two of its branches: the dynamic (or Adoptionist) and the Modalistic (or Sabellian). In its dynamic-adoptionist form, this trend held that Jesus was a mere man who, at the moment of his baptism, filled with the Holy Spirit, or at another moment of his life became the Son of God – thus negating the eternal Divine Sonship of Christ. In contrast, one of its main representatives, Paul of Samosata, additionally negates the personal separateness of the Father and the Son. Neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit possesses an existential separateness.<sup>20</sup>

However, according to Lossky, monarchianism took its “most perfect” form in the modalism of Sabellius (other representatives of the modalistic version of monarchianism were Noetus of Smyrna and Praxeas<sup>21</sup>). The Russian summarises his views

<sup>17</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 36.

<sup>18</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 36–37.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Courth, *Der Gott*, 172.

<sup>20</sup> Płóciennik, “Teologia trynitarna,” 63.

<sup>21</sup> Hippolytus opposed the views of Noetus, see Hippolytus Romanus, *Contra Noetum*, and the teaching of Praxeas was opposed by Tertullian, see Tertullianus, *Prax.*

as follows: “For Sabbelius indeed, God is an impersonal essence which manifests itself diversely to the universe. The Tyree persons are then no longer anything but three successive modes of action, three appearances to the world of the same monad always simple in itself.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, at the moment of creation, God assumes the person of the Father, then incarnates as the Son, suffers and dies on the cross,<sup>23</sup> in order to rise from the dead and ascend to heaven to assume the person of the Holy Spirit. “At the Final Judgement, when the universe will be divinized, everything will enter into the indivisible monad.” It will happen because “This successive Trinity remains thus a pure appearance and in no way concerns the reality itself of God: here, nature completely absorbs the persons.”<sup>24</sup> To sum up: according to monarchianism in its Sabellian version, God is not a Trinity, but only reveals Himself as a Trinity, which means: firstly, that there is no consensus between who God is in Himself and what He makes Himself known as in Revelation, and secondly, that with such a vision of God, the possibility of true union with God, understood as divinisation, is negated. Modalism was, however, a tempting proposal, especially since, by situating the reality of God outside His revelation, or should we say revelations, which are equally relative to the impossibility of expressing God’s fullness *ad extra*, it gave the appearance of a truly apophatic attitude, respecting the mystery of God. We will return to the relationship between the Trinity and apophaticism many times in the course of our considerations, however, already on the basis of what we have said so far, it is clear that a truly biblical apophaticism not only does not abolish the Trinity in its divine being, nor does it establish it in God’s self-revelation, but rather it points to the mystery of God’s self-giving in the incomprehensibility of His intratrinitarian being, that is, as He is in Himself. Moreover, it allows God to reveal Himself in His own mystery, without reducing Him to the categories of human reason and human logic, without trying to enclose Him in them, but recognizes and submits to the antinomic fullness that splits all categories. Sabellianism was finally condemned by Pope Callistus,<sup>25</sup> which was also repeated by subsequent synods and first councils.

On the other hand, tritheism in its pure form, opposed to unitarianism, never appeared, as Lossky notes, mainly due to the obvious absurdity of the teaching about

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<sup>22</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Because of the attribution of suffering, crucifixion and death to the Father in the person of the Son, this view also became known as patripassianism.

<sup>24</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 37. The central error of Sabellian modalism consists in separating the linguistic plane in the doctrine of God from the ontic plane, leading to a relativisation of the fact that the Names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit denote real Divine Persons, and not merely relative names given to God by Revelation, which have nothing to do with Him, as pointed out by St. Hilary of Poitiers – see Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 74–75. A contemporary version of Sabellian modalism is that proposed by John Hick with his vision of God as “The Real,” see Ledwoń, “...i nie ma w żadnym,” 282–287; Chrzanowski, “Pluralizm religijny,” 63–78; Strzyżyński, “Teologia apofatyczna.”

<sup>25</sup> See Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 75.

the manifold Trinity, or rather, about three Gods.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, there were strong tendencies that undermined the unity of the Trinity, based essentially on the hierarchical subordination of the Divine Persons, resulting in a refusal to give equal divine worship to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This subordinationist slant of Christian thought was particularly notable before the Council of Nicaea, i.e. before 325, and was conditioned by the application by the Ante-Nicene Fathers of the thought categories of Middle Platonism, or at least those based on it, to consider the Trinity, “so that one could not thereafter distinguished the Son except by subordinating Him. Divinity did not properly belong to Him; He only participated in the divine nature of the Father. The Logos thus became the instrument of the One, and the Holy Spirit in this turn served as an instrument for the Son whith which to sanctify of behalf to the Father.”<sup>27</sup> Among the Ante-Nicene theologians, especially permeated by subordinationism, Lossky emphasises the figure of Origen.<sup>28</sup> However, a clear distinction must be made between the intentionally orthodox subordinationism of the Ante-Nicene theologians, which was merely the result of a deficiency in the categories of thought used by the Fathers, and that of Arius at the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>29</sup> Our theologian sees the crux of the heresy of Arius in the fact that

Arius identified God and the Father, and claimed that all which is not Go dis created. The Son is therefore created, since He is other than Father, and the personal difference results in an ontological break. This created Son creates in His turn the Spirit, and the Trinity reverts to a hierarchy where the inferior serves as an instrument to the superior, and which is shot clean through by that insuperable gap which separates the created from the uncreated. Generation becomes creation, the Son and the Spirit, “grandsons”, who are creatures radically distinct from paternal divinity, and the triad only survives dividing the monad.<sup>30</sup>

Such an approach put the reality of *theosis* into question, because if the Son and the Holy Spirit do not have a divine nature, they cannot carry out the work of divinisation, moreover, instead of uniting with God, they distance themselves from Him. This was also the argumentation of the greatest defender of Christian orthodoxy in

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Lossky, *Orthodox*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 37; see Szczurek, *Trójjedyny*, 181.

<sup>28</sup> When reading Lossky’s writings, one can sometimes get the impression that he is trying to blame Origen for all the evil of various heresies and theological errors of the first centuries, which is not only unfair but also unfounded. Despite the many obvious shortcomings and gaps in Origen’s system, his place in the development of Christian doctrine is irreplaceable, as evidenced by his straightforwardly gigantic influence on later patristics, including the pillars of the East – the Three Cappadocians. On Origen’s trinitology, see Cruzel, *Origen*, 181–204.

<sup>29</sup> Hence William Hill’s (*The Three-Personed*, 41) remark about Origen as a precursor of Arius – despite the truly Neoplatonic connotations of Origen’s thoughts, after all, he was a student of Ammonius Saccas – is misplaced, or at least becomes ambiguous. A similar view can be found in Courth, *Der Gott*, 179.

<sup>30</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 37–38.

the dispute with Arianism – St. Athanasius, a participant in the Council of Nicaea and later the great apologist of his statements.<sup>31</sup> A council convened by the Emperor Constantine in Nicaea in 325 condemned Arius and recognised the divinity of Christ. However, the final settlement of the Arian case had to wait until 381, when the *Creed* was promulgated at the Council of Constantinople, today referred to as the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*, in which the Church expressed its faith in one divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Apophaticism of the Plurality of God

Thus, “faith, jealously preserved by the Church, seizes in a single movement, with a single adhesion, the unity and the diversity of God.”<sup>33</sup> Unity and diversity, which have coexisted in God for centuries, better: they are God who, in Revelation, becomes available to man and the world in the manner of a radical and total gift. “Our thought must be in continuous motion, pursuing now the one, now the three, and returning again to the unity; it must swing ceaselessly between the two poles of the antinomy, in order to attain to the contemplation of the sovereign repose of this threefold monad.”<sup>34</sup> Lossky stresses that

the contemplation of this absolute perfection, of this divine plenitude which is Trinity – God who is personal and who is not a person confined in his own self – the very thought, the mere “pale shade of the Trinity”, lifts the human soul beyond the order of being, changing and confused, in bestowing upon it this stability in the midst of passion; this selenity, or ἀπάθεια, which is the beginning of deification. For the creature, subject to change by nature, can by grace attain to state of eternal stability; can partake of infinite life in the light of the Trinity. This is why the Church so has defended so vehemently the mystery of the Holy Trinity to unity against the natural tendencies of the human mind, which strive to suppress it by reducing the Trinity to unity, in making it an essence of the philosophers with three modes of manifestation (the modalism of Sabellius), or even by dividing it into three distinct beings, as did Arius.<sup>35</sup>

This contemplation is the apophatic end “to which apophatic theology leads (if one can speak of an end at all where it is a journey towards infinity), this infinite end is not nature or essence, nor is it a person; it is something which at the same

31 See a study on the Trinitarian theology of St. Athanasius by Xavier Morales, *La théologie trinitaire*.

32 On the history of Arian disputes see Gliściński, *Współczesny Ojciec*; Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 88–114, 128–133.

33 Lossky, *Orthodox*, 38.

34 Lossky, *The Mystical*, 46.

35 Lossky, *The Mystical*, 48.

time transcends any notion of nature or person-Trinity.” Thus, as Lossky concludes, recalling the thought of St. Gregory of Nazianzus: “Τριάς- «name which unites things united by nature, and never allows those which are inseparable to be scattered by a number which separates».”<sup>36</sup> This way of talking about God, despite the use of numerical terms, is “rather more the denial or, better, the surmounting of number. Go dis «indentially Monad and Triad», said St. Maximus the Confessor. He is at once unitrinity and triunity, with the double equation of 1=3, of 3=1.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, despite referring to God a certain number, which ultimately cannot be other than “three,” after all.

two is number the number which separatek, three the number which transcendens all separation: the one and the many find themselves gathered and circumscribed in the Trinity. [...] In other words, there is no question here of a material number which serves for calculation and is in no wise applicable in the spirituals sphere, where there is no quantitative increase. The threefold number is not, as we commonly understand it, a quantity; when it relates to the indivisibly united divine hypostases, the ‘sum’ of which is always the unity, 3=1, it expresses the ineffable order within Godhead.<sup>38</sup>

The Russian theologian formulates his view on the basis of the following words of St. Basil the Great: “we do not count by addition, passing from the one to the many

<sup>36</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical*, 47. The term “Trinity” is, of course, of extra-biblical origin. “The term ‘Trinity’ (*trias*) was first used – in a Gnostic text – by Theodotus of Byzantium (end of the 2nd century), and in ecclesiastical trinitology it was probably used by Theophilus of Antioch (second half of the 2nd century), speaking of God-Word-Wisdom, although one cannot see in this formulation the Father, Son and Spirit in the sense of later theology” (Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 68); the fragment in which Theophilus used the term “Trinity” is in his *Apology to Autolytus*, Theophilus Antiochenus, *Autol.* II, 15. In the West, the term “Trinity” was first used by Tertullian – it appears, among others, in several times in his *Against Praxeas*, however, perhaps best, in a clear and unambiguous way, how Tertullian understood and for what purpose he used them, he explains a fragment of his other work *On Decency*, where in the 21st chapter he writes: “Trinitas unius Divinitatis: Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus,” as cited in: Altaner – Stuiber, *Patrologie*, 161.

<sup>37</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 44.

<sup>38</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical*, 48–47. Talking about the possibility of “summing up” the Divine Hypostases is inappropriate for two reasons. Firstly, these hypostases are not types of a species of Divine Hypostases to be grouped under a common term – each is infinitely different in its hypostasis, and only the imperfection of human language and the use of analogy to talk about them in any way leads to speaking of them under the collective name of the “Three Hypostases.” Secondly, each Hypostasis is the whole God and not a part of Him, moreover, the Three Hypostases are not more God than each of them individually, but exactly one and the same, better: the Divinity is one and complete-absolute without prejudice to each Hypostasis and without multiplication in all Three. Michael Palaiologos, in the confession of faith made during the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, which was intended to be a Council of Union after the East–West Schism, confessed: “We believe that each individual Person in the Trinity one true God, complete and perfect” (Denzinger, *The Sources*, no. 461; cited in accordance with the numbering). In the West, these issues came to the fore in the dispute between Peter Lombard and Joachim of Fiore, raised and resolved at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, see *ibidem*, nos. 431–433. Due to the supralogical and supranumeric nature of God, His trinity is pure revealed data, not derivable from anything prior, since there is no such thing, and any analogies found in creation are possible on the basis of the already given Revelation, and not as ways of proving it – see Florensky, *The Pillar*, 420–424.

by increase; we do not say: one, two, three, or first, second, third. “For I am God, the first, and I am the last”. Now we have never, even to the present time, heard of a second God; but adoring God of God, confessing the individuality of the hypostases, we dwell in the monarchy without dividing the theology into fragments.”<sup>39</sup>

Lossky also decides on his own, partly original, neo-patristic theo-philosophy of trinity, which is, however, and this must be strongly emphasised, an attempt to understand the revealed phenomenon-mystery of the trinity, and not an attempt to answer the fundamentally false question: why is God triune? (and not, e.g., dualistic or hexahedral?), or an impossible enterprise of extra-revelational arrival at the truth of the Tri-Unity. Let us quote it in its entirety, because as it turns out, many of its *implicite* theses will be explicated in the further part of our work, and only then will its depth be fully comprehensible.

The monad being unfolded, the personal plentitude of God cannot stabilize itself upon a dyad, because two implies opposition and reciprocal limitation. Two would divide the divine nature and would locate within the infinite the root of the indefinite, the first polarity of a creation which would become, as in the gnostic systems, manifestation. Divine reality is therefore unthinkable in two persons. The surmounting of two, that is, of number, occurs in three: not a return to the origin but a blossoming of personal being. Three in fact is not here the sum of an addition. Three absolutely diverse realities cannot be counted; three Absolutes do not add up together. Three, beyond all calculations, beyond all oppositions, establishes absolute diversity. Transcending number, it does not initiate nor enclose a series, but opens, beyond two, infinity: not the opacity of the in-itself, the absorption of a return to the One, but the open-ended infinity of the living God, the inexhaustible profusion of divine life. “The monad is set in motion by virtue of its richness; the dyad is surpassed, for divinity is above matter and form; the triad is enclosed within perfection, for it is the first to go beyond the composition of the dyad”. The mystery that Gregory of Nazianzus evokes in these Plotinian terms opens to us another domain beyond all logic and metaphysic. Faith here feeds and elevates thought beyond its limit unto a contemplation whose aim precisely is but to share in the divine life of the Trinity.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. Apophatic Terminology of the Trinitarian Dogma

It would now be appropriate to look briefly at the terminology used by the Church to express the simultaneous unity and diversity in God, which was no less a problem

<sup>39</sup> Basilius Magnus, *Liber de Spiritu* XVIII, 45, as cited in: Lossky, *The Mystical*, 47–48.

<sup>40</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 44–45.

than the early Christian heresies and was the cause of much controversy and misunderstanding.

The Church used the term ὁμοῦσιος<sup>41</sup> to express the co-existence of the Three, the mysterious identity of the monad and the triad, the simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity of one nature and three hypostases. The term was based on the Greek word “ousia” (οὐσία), which, being a philosophical expression, “[...]” thought it was soon vulgarized to mean, for example, a «property» or a «category». It had

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Lossky, *The Mystical*, 48–49. The term was first used in the official interpretation of Christian doctrine at the Council of Nicaea to express the essential unity of the Father and the Son as to the Divinity: “We believe [...] in our one Lord, Jesus Christ the Son of God [...] of one substance with the Father (which they call in Greek ὁμοῦσιος)” (Denzinger, *The Sources*, no. 54). A number of controversies arose with the use of the term “homousios”: firstly, it was used by Paul of Samosata, preaching the views of adoptionist monarchianism we have mentioned, who understood by “homousios” the identity of the Father and the Son as excluding any difference between them. Secondly, this term was not found in the Bible and in connection with its use in the language of the Christian faith, the accusation of the Hellenisation of Christianity was raised (this accusation will be raised more than once in the history of Christianity, especially by widely understood Protestant theology – contemporary examples include Karl Barth’s criticism of the so-called *analogia entis* or Oscar Cullmann’s desire to dehellenise biblical eschatology by showing the Greek, and thus extra-biblical, origin of the idea of the soul’s immortality and opposing it to the biblical idea of resurrection). Lossky responds to the charge of the Hellenisation of the Christian faith as follows: “But theology must be of universal expressions. It is not accident that God placed the Fathers of the Church in a Greek setting; the demands for lucidity in philosophy and profundity in gnosis have forced them to the purify and to sanctify the language of the philosophers and of the mystics, to give to the Christian message, which includes but goes beyond Israel, all its universal reach” (Lossky, *Orthodox*, 30–31). Moreover, the Russian emphasises that: “The triumph of Christian thought is to have elaborated over the first four centuries, and particularly during fourth, «trinitarian» *par excellence*, a definition which gave to the heathen an inkling of the fullness of the Trinity: this was not the rationalization of Christianity but the Christianization of reason, a transmuting of philosophy into contemplation, a saturation of thought by a mystery which is not a secret to conceal, but an inexhaustible light” (*ibidem*, 38). Thus, on the one hand, we have a certain “providential” universalisation of the Gospel in the language of the philosophy of the time, preserving, on the other hand, a freedom from that Hellenistic thought due to the inadequacy between the mystery of Revelation and the language, any language and any philosophy, attempting to express it: “Revelation sets an abyss between the truth which it declares and the truths which can be discovered by philosophical speculation. [...] The mystery of the Trinity only becomes accessible to that ignorance which rises above all that can be contained within the concepts of the philosophers. Yet this *ignorantia*, not only *docta*, but charitable also, redescends again upon these concepts that it may mould them; that it may transform the expressions of human wisdom into the instruments of that Wisdom of God which is to the Greeks foolishness” (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 49–50). Ultimately, Lossky (*Orthodox*, 35) states: “In a certain way, ancient thought prepares the way not only for Christianity, where it is superseded [*Logos spermatikos* St. Justin Martyr or *praeparatio evangelica* Eusebius of Caesarea – note M.P.] [...] That which is lacking in this thought, that which would be at once a chance of fulfillment and a stumbling-block for it, is the reality of the Incarnation” – where the divine and the human are united without confusion and without separation according to the pattern of Trinitarian unity and diversity. On the Hellenisation of Christianity and the Christianisation of Hellenism, see Klingler, “Tradycja,” 149–152. The in-growth of Christianised Hellenism into Byzantine theology is discussed by Evdokimov, *L’Orthodoxie*, 10–12. On the relationship between Greek philosophy and the theology of the Fathers, see Meyendorff, *Byzantine*, 23–25, who sees evidence for the fundamental dependence of philosophy on the principles of biblical Christianity in the doctrine of the East in the condemnation of Origenism in 553 (the year 543 is also given, although in this case we are dealing with a synod), cf. *ibidem*, 27.

an ontological resonance, derived as it is from the verb εἶμι, «to be», and could be well used to stress the ontological unity of divinity [...].<sup>42</sup> However, the use of this term within Christian dogma, however, did not happen unproblematically, by a mere transfer from the philosophical and social language of the Hellenes to the language of the Christian faith. After all, “ousia” had its rich history and a specific semantic connotation. This term was often used by Aristotle, who in Book V of his *Categories* gives the following definition: “That is principally, primarily and and property called οὐσία which is stated of no subject and which is in no subject – for example this man, or this horse. We call ‘secondo ousia’ (δεύτεραι οὐσίαι) those species wherein the ‘first ousias’ exist with their corresponding description: thus, ‘this man’ is specifically man and generically animal. Man and animal, then, are called ‘secondo ousias.’<sup>43</sup>

There was also another non-philosophical word in common use, with a similar meaning to “ousia,” namely ὑπόστασις, which meant that which actually lasts, exists, and therefore existence (from the verb ὑφίσταμαι – to exist, literally stand under).<sup>44</sup> John of Damascus, in his *Dialectic*, juxtaposes these two terms, analysing their meaning.<sup>45</sup> It turns out that these terms were almost synonymous, and could mean both existence in a general sense and refer to individual substances. To confirm this, Lossky cites the position of Theodoret of Cyrus, according to whom secular philosophy does not distinguish between “ousia” and “hypostasis” due to their synonymy.<sup>46</sup> According to our author, “this relative equivalence was conducive to the development of a Christian terminology: after all, there was no previous context that could have disturbed the balance between the terms by which the holy Fathers wished to emphasise equal dignity: in this way the risk of giving meaning to an impersonal being could be avoided. In practice, ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis’ were originally synonymous; by giving each of these terms a separate meaning, the Fathers were free to root the person in

<sup>42</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotelis, *Cat. V*, as cited in: Lossky, *The Mystical*, 50. On “ousia” (substance) in Aristotle’s philosophy, see Krąpiec, *Arystotelesowska*. The difficulty involved in directly applying Aristotle’s “ousia” to God was brilliantly expressed by St. Thomas Aquinas when he pointed out that “God belongs to no genus” (*Quod Deus non sit in aliquo tenere*). This thesis was developed in decisive places in both the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*. The key concept therein is the ‘genera,’ that is, the ten categories of the Aristotelian table. The categories, which include substance, quantity, quality, relative, place, time, action, affection, relative position and being in a position (of something) are an enumeration of the types of existence and predication. They list all the ways in which being is or can be at all. The way specifies being, but at the same time this specification limits and determines it. Thus, when Thomas states that ‘God belongs to no genus,’ he emphasises that existence does not belong to Him in any way. He is existence prior to all attribution. God is not ‘being’ in the way that all other beings are. Consequently, He is outside the realm of all possible conceptual judgement and predication. He cannot be comprehended or pronounced” (Dzidek, *Granice*, 35); Mrozek, “Kategorie,” 413–456.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Lossky, *The Mystical*, 50. “In everyday language, is designated subsistence, but among certain Stoics, it had assumed the sense of a distinct substance, of the individual” (Lossky, *Orthodox*, 41).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Joannes Damascenus, *Dialectica* XXXVIII–XXXIX, XLII.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Theodoretii Cyrenensis, *Immutabilis*, Dialogus I, 7–8.

being and personalise the ontology.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, the genius of the Fathers led to the fact that what was synonymous came to mean the general – “ousia” and the particular – “hypostasis” in their simultaneity and equality in God, according to the above mentioned testimony of Theodoret.<sup>48</sup>

„Ousia, in the Trinity, is not an abstract idea of divinity, a national essence binding three divine individuals, as humanist for example is common to three men. Apophaticism gives in the metalogical depth of an unknowable transcendence the Bible envelopes it in the glorious radiance of the divine names.”<sup>49</sup>

With the term “hypostasis”<sup>50</sup> there was a great breakthrough in thinking – so the Fathers, contrary to the previous Greek thought, preferring unity and what is

<sup>47</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 41. Even the Council of Nicaea in 325 used the terms “hypostasis” and “ousia” synonymously, which led, especially in the period up to the Council of Constantinople in 381, to many linguistic misunderstandings. This was especially the case with translations from Greek into Latin and vice versa: the Greek “hypostasis” was translated by the Latin “substantia,” which resulted in accusing the East of tritheism; on the other hand, the Greeks saw modalist connotations in the Latin “persona” – see Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 267–272.

<sup>48</sup> It seems that the final definition and distinction between the “hypostasis” and “ousia” in relation to the Trinitarian mystery was made by St. Gregory of Nyssa, see Gregorius Nyssenus, *Ad Petrum*. On the authorship of this work, attributed for a long period of time to St. Basil, see Grodecki, “Autor i data,” 121–131. In the West, the terminology became established with Tertullian’s “una substantia tres personae”; see especially XII, 6–7 of his *Adversus Praxean* – it is precisely this terminological precision that Joseph Moingt (*Theologie trinitaire*, 399) considers Tertullian’s most important achievement and the greatest contribution to the development of the theology of the Trinity – it does not mean that this formula immediately and without reservation was accepted in the official pronouncements of the Church.

<sup>49</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 41. Thus, by no means an Aristotelian “ousia,” “the divine nature is like a sea of essence, indeterminate and without bounds, which spreads far and wide beyond all notion of time or of nature” (Lossky, *The Mystical*, 36). On the use and understanding of the term “substance” – “ousia” in the theology of the early Church, see Pietras, “Pojęcie Bożej substancji,” 122–140.

<sup>50</sup> The word “hypostasis” was probably first used by Origen to denote – express distinctions in God, see Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 82. The Eastern Fathers ultimately opted precisely for the term “hypostasis,” while in the West the term “persona” was used, the equivalent of which in Greek was “prosopon.” The East saw the danger of Sabellianism in this term, because it was Sabellius who used it to define the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three modes of one substance. This understanding, moreover, was fostered by its theatrical roots – it meant the role of an actor, expressed by the mask such actor wore. However, as Andrea Milano (*Persona*, 61) notes, such a meaning appeared only secondarily, and originally these words meant “that which can be seen,” what is “conspicuous,” and thus expressed a certain only directly perceptible intuition; on the so-called “prosopographic exegesis,” see Andersen, “Zur Entstehung.” The Greek Fathers considered “prosopon” to be a term too weak to convey the real and not merely superficial “otherness” in God, which not only did not function in the milieu of Greek thought, and consequently in that language, but which had to be necessarily emphasised in antinomic unity with “homousios” in God, cf. Lossky, *Orthodox*, 41. “These misunderstandings were nevertheless dispelled. The term hypostasis, as expressing the notion of person in the concrete sense, passed to the West. The term *persona*, or πρόσωπον, was received and suitably interpreted in the East. Thus, in the freeing of men’s minds from natural limitations due to differences of mentality and culture, the catholicity of the Church was made manifest” (Lossky, *The Mystical*, 52). Despite the mutual recognition of the terminological differences while maintaining the identical meaning and designation, “it turned out that finding good translations was not (and still is not) an easy task, since even the Council of Vienne (1311–1312) used the juxtaposition of the two terms, ‘hypostasis’ and ‘person’ (*hypostasis* and *persona*), treating them as synonyms” (Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 270).

general-universal over plurality, and thus what is diverse-different, they placed unity and plurality, and thus generality and particularity-otherness on the same-absolute plane in God, using synonymous terms, obviously subjected to Christian reinterpretation, and granted them ontic equality and equal meaning. Moreover, the complete *novum* of Christian thought is that “hypostasis” in a Trinitarian perspective

that a true advancement of thought emerges-it no longer contains anything individual. The individual is part of a species, or rather he is only a part of it: he divides the nature to which he belongs, he is the result of its atomization, so to say. There is nothing of the sort in the Trinity, where every hypostasis assumes in its fullness divine nature. Individuals are at once opposite and repetitive; each possesses its fraction of the nature; but indefinitely divided, it is always the same nature, without authentic diversity. The hypostases, on the other hand, are infinitely united and infinitely different: they *are* the divine nature, but not possess it, none breaks it to own exclusively. It is precisely because each one opens itself to the others, because the share nature without restriction, that the latter is not divided.<sup>51</sup>

Noteworthy is Lossky's emphasis on the infinite nature of the distinction that exists between the Divine Hypostases – if these are the Hypostases of the Infinite God, or rather, the Infinite God exists only in these Hypostases, better: these Three Hypostases are Each fully and all together one Infinite God, then not only unity has infinity, but also difference-otherness.

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On the concept of “person” in the early Church and in later theology, see, inter alia, Pałucki, “Pojęcie «osoby»,” 137–158; Szczyrba, “Teologiczny kontekst.” A detailed analysis of the formation and specification of the term “person” in the context of trinitology, especially in Western theology, along with his own proposal on the issue, is carried out by Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, 74–216. It should be mentioned that due to the change in the meaning context of the term “person,” especially in the modern period – it is mainly about shifting the emphasis from the ontic dimension of the person towards the subject-psychological direction (a person is a conscious, free and self-possessed subject) – there is no shortage of thinkers in Western theology who propose not to remove the concept of “person” from the ecclesiastical nomenclature, but to reformulate the personalistic terminology towards one that is similar in meaning to the Greek “hypostasis.” The proposals of Karl Barth in his “Seinsweise” and Karl Rahner, who suggested the term “Subsistenzweise,” have become particularly well-known and discussed in recent years, cf. Piotrowski, “Traktat,” 277–282. Rahner's proposal along with all its aspects is of particular interest, and corresponds largely to the intuitions of Eastern theology and is rooted in the trinitology of the early Church – on this issue in Rahner's thought see, inter alia, Wilski, “«Osoba» w formule”; Hilberath, *Der Personbegriff*. Among the strong defenders of the concept of “person” in trinitology and opponents of introducing other terminology, one can mention the Polish theologian Czesław Bartnik (“Osoba w Trójcy”). In Orthodox theology, the thought of John Zizioulas is particularly noteworthy in this context, cf. Leśniewski, “Misterium osoby,” 77–97; Kowalczyk, “Dio esiste,” 81–102.

<sup>51</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 41–42. “Purged of its Aristotelian content, the theological notion of hypostasis in the thought of the eastern Fathers means not so much *individual as person*, in the modern sense of this word. [...] The philosophy of antiquity knew only human individuals” (Lossky, *The Mystical*, 53).

[...] that the Father is not Son or Holy Spirit, that Son is not Father or Holy Spirit; that Holy Spirit is not Father or Son; but Father alone is Father, Son alone is Son, Holy Spirit alone is Holy Spirit. The Father alone begot the Son of His own substance; the Son alone was begotten of the Father alone; the Holy Spirit alone proceeds at the same time from the Father and Son. These three persons are one God, and not three gods, because the three have one substance, one essence, one nature, one divinity, one immensity, one eternity, where no opposition of relationship interferes

– this is how this truth was expressed by the Council of Florence in the *Decree for the Jacobites*, *nota bene* the next Council of Union after the schism.<sup>52</sup>

For the Fathers, indeed, personhood is freedom in relation to nature [...] Every attribute is repetitive, it belongs to nature and is found again among others individuals. Even a cluster of qualities can be found elsewhere. Personal uniqueness is what remains when one takes away all cosmic context, social and individual-all, indeed, that may be conceptualized. Eluding concepts, personhood cannot be defined. It is the incomparable, the wholly-other. One can only add up individuals, not persons. The person is always unique. The concept objectifies and collects. Only a thought methodically “deconceptualized” by apophasis can evoke the mystery of personhood. For that which remains irreducible to every nature cannot be defined, but only designated. It is only to be seized through a personal relationship, in a reciprocity [...].<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Denzinger, *The Sources*, no. 703. The last sentence of this fragment was read by many as a conciliar legitimisation and confirmation of the Western doctrine of the Divine Persons as relations – classical scholastic and neo-scholastic theology distinguished four relations in God: fatherhood, sonship, active spiration and passive spiration based on two origins: generation and *origination* – cf. Granat, *Bóg Jeden*, 348–390. Interestingly, Granat takes a sceptical position on the aforementioned fragment of the conciliar document, as well as on other statements by the Magisterium and theologians: “The doctrine of the existence of relations in God is not formally defined by the Church [...]” (*ibidem*, 380).

<sup>53</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 42–43. “This irretucibility cannot be understood expressed except in the relation of the Three Hypostases who, strictly speaking, are not «three» but «Three-Unity». In speaking of three hypostases, we are already making an improper abstraction: if we wanted to generalize and make a *concept* of the «divine hypostasis», we would have to say that the only common definition possible would be the impossibility of any common definition of the three hypostases. They are alike in the fact that they are dissimilar; or, rather, to go beyond the relative idea of resemblance, which is out of place here, one must say that the absolute character of their difference implies an absolute identity. Beyond this one cannot speak of hypostases of Tri-Unity. Just as the Three is not an arithmetic number but indicates in the Triade of pure difference – a Triad which remains equal to the Monad – an infinite passage beyond the dyad of opposition, so the hypostasis as much, inasmuch as it is irreducible to the οὐσία, is no longer conceptual expression but a sign which is introduced into the domain of the non-generalizable, pointing out the radically personal character of the God of Christian revelation” (Lossky, *The Theological Notion*, 113). The aforementioned freedom of a person in relation to nature will, as it turns out, be the basis for addressing many of the extremely difficult theological issues concerning God’s relation to His self-giving *ad extra* and not only in Lossky’s thought, but, at the same time, it strongly questions the consistency of the apophatic approach, especially when it comes to questions of intra-Trinitarian relations in the Russian’s view – see Woźniak, “Metafizyka i Trójca,” 285, n. 49.

Thus, “Hypostasis” appears as a radically apophatic concept, concealing the mystery of absolute otherness in its infinite uniqueness and fullness.

### **Summary: the Apophatic Character of the Trinitarian Antinomy as the Foundation and Source of Christian Apophaticism**

Lossky stresses that “and this indivisible [divine – note M.P.] nature gives every hypostasis its depth, confirms its uniqueness, reveals itself in this unity of the unique, in this communion in which every person, without confusion, shares integrally in all the others: the more they are one the more they are divers, since nothing of the communal nature escapes them; and the more they are diverse the more they are one, since their unity is not impersonal uniformity, but a fertile tension of irreducible diversity, an abundance of a ‘circumincession without mixture or confusion’ (St. John of Damascus).”<sup>54</sup>

In this last statement, the author of the *Dogmatic Theology* refers to the doctrine of intra-Trinitarian perichoresis, that is, the mutual indwelling, staying without confusion or fusion of the Divine Persons, so that “each one of the persons contains the unity by this relation to the others no less than by this relation to Himself.”<sup>55</sup> Lossky summarises Damascus’s view with the following comment: “Indeed, each of the three hypostases contains the unity, the one nature, after the manner proper to it, and which, in distinguishing it from the other two persons, recalls at the same time the indissoluble bond uniting the Three.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus, in formulating the dogma of the Trinity, the apophatic character of patristic thought was able while distinguishing between nature and hypostases to preserve their mysterious equivalence. In the words of St. Maximus, “God is identically Monad and Triad”. This is the end of the endless way: the limit of the limit less ascent; the Incomprehensibility reveals Himself in the very fact of His being incomprehensible, for his incomprehensibility is rooted in the fact that God is not only Nature but also Three Persons; the incomprehensible Nature is incomprehensible inasmuch as it is the Nature of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; God, incomprehensible because Trinity yet manifesting Himself as Trinity. Here apophaticism finds its fulfilment in the revelation of the Holy Trinity as primordial fact, ultimate reality, first datum which cannot be deduced, explained or discovered by way

<sup>54</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Joannes Damascenus, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 8. The author points out that despite a certain undoubted dissimilarity of human hypostases, their unity is smaller, because we do not find mutual indwelling of human beings in each other, despite one nature, perceived in an analogous way, cf. Joannes Damascenus, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical*, 54.

of any other truth; for there is nothing which is prior to it. Apophatic thought, renouncing every support, finds its support in God, whose incomprehensibility appears as Trinity. Here thought gains a stability which cannot be shaken; theology finds its foundation; ignorance passes into knowledge.<sup>57</sup>

To sum up the whole of our considerations, it should be stated that the apophatic antinomy of the Trinity as one truth in all the truths of Christianity makes apophatic antinomy extend, more: it is the basic structure of all reality, as well as theological thinking based on the Trinitarian antinomic logic.<sup>58</sup> “It is the Trinity, and this fact can be deduced from no principle nor explained by any sufficient reason, for there are neither principles nor causes anterior to the Trinity,”<sup>59</sup> and the linguistic expression-pointing to the Trinity is possible only with the use of an apophatic unity-antinomic language, hence the apophatically synonymous antinomy of “hypostasis” and “ousia” in their self-transgression immersion in the mystery of the Trinity.<sup>60</sup> Using the language of Pseudo-Dionysius, it should be rather said: in the mystery of

<sup>57</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical*, 63–64.

<sup>58</sup> A great enthusiast of antinomic thinking was Pavel Florensky in the 20th century (see *The Pillar*, 106–123, 411–412), demonstrating, among other things, the inadequacy of logic based on the scholastic principle of identity; *ibidem*, 465–467. “We might ask whether the subsequent controversies did not arise because people partly forgot the properly divine «logic» which is always simultaneously one and threefold, quite surpassing the fallen rationality, the process of which remains binary” (Clément, *The Roots*, 72).

<sup>59</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical*, 47. “The Trinity is therefore not the result of a process, but a primordial given. I has Its principle only in this, not above it: nothing is superior to It” (Lossky, *Orthodox*, 47).

<sup>60</sup> “What will subsist beyond all negating or positing, is the notion of the absolute hypostatic difference and of the equally absolute identity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And in the same time triadological terms and distinctions – nature, essence, person, hypostasis – still will remain inaccurate, despite their mathematical purity (or perhaps because of this purity), expressing above all deficiency of language and failure of the mind before the mystery of the personal God who reveals himself as transcending the every revelation with the created. Every Trinitarian theology which wishes to be disengaged from cosmological implications in order to be able to ascribe some of its notions to the beyond of, to God-in-Himself, ought to have recourse to apophasis” (Lossky, “Apophasis and Trinitarian,” 16–17). An interesting remark is made by Pseudo-Dionysius who, in addition to the “unifying” Divine Names referring to the entire Divinity, which are transcended by way of apophasis, also distinguishes the super-substantial names distinguishing and concretising the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which absolutely must not be exchanged one for the other or combined, cf. *De divinis* III. They, too, must be transcended by way of apophasis, since they are taken from the world of creatures; however, the truth which they both wish somehow to touch, somehow to approximate, somehow to express, can never be transcended, because there is nothing to transcend, and that is the mystery of the Trinity in Its Trinitarian antinomy: “In his treatise *Of the Divine Names*, in examining the name of the One, which can be applied to God, he shows its insufficiency and compares with it another and «most sublime» name – that of Trinity, which teaches us that God is neither one nor many but that He transcends this antinomy, being unknowable in what He is” (Lossky, *The Mystical*, 31); see Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis* XIII, 3. Cf. also Joseph Ratzinger’s epistemic-linguistic remarks on trinitology as negative theology, which, among other things, emphasises that all concepts used within the language of Trinitarian theology fulfill their function only through self-crucifixion – a conclusion that is not only dogmatic but also historical, since any concepts used by the Church in expressing the mystery of the Trinity were previously condemned by the Church, see Ratzinger, *Einführung*, 117–118.

the Super-Trinity, not that God is greater than the Trinity, and therefore above It – after all, there is no God beyond the Trinity, but because even the name of the Trinity does not reflect It – the Divine Trinity – trinitarian antinomic mystery.<sup>61</sup> In short: the antinomic nature of the Trinity becomes the hermeneutical key to perceiving the Trinitarian antinomic ontology, epistemology, logic, etc., because the antinomic Trinitarian unity – the Trinitarian antinomic unity is the only law of existence, the unconditional source.<sup>62</sup>

According to a modern Russian theologian, Father Florensky, there is no other way in which human thought may find perfect stability save that of accepting the trinitarian antinomy. If we reject the Trinity as the sole ground of all reality and of all thought, we are committed to a road that leads nowhere; we end in an aporia, in folly, in the disintegration of our being, in spiritual death. Between the Trinity and hell there lies no other choice.

<sup>61</sup> The antinomic thinking, according to Lossky, emphasises the primacy of the “apophatic method. [...] The antinomy is a sign that even the ‘positive way’ in theology carries within itself apophaticism as the ultimate truth about knowing God. Thus, it indicates that cataphatic expressions in theology refer beyond themselves, towards a Reality that is ultimately inexpressible and incomprehensible. [...] Lossky talks about the transformation of reason, or even its ‘conversion’, to which the encountered antinomies are supposed to induce. [...] Although Lossky insists that he does not negate the value of theological knowledge, it seems that the role of reflection on the truths of faith may be to bring one to the threshold of what is only authentic theological cognition: the mystical experience, of being filled with incredible light” (Persidok, “W trosce,” 151–153). Lossky should in no way be attributed with an attempt at an apophatic criticism of Revelation or theology – see Woźniak, *Różnica*, 428–436. He emphatically states that “[...] the incomprehensible God reveals Himself as the Holy Trinity, if His incomprehensibility appears as the mystery of the Three Persons and the One Nature [...]” (Lossky, *The Mystical*, 239). Thus, “ultimately it is Trinitarianism that is apophatic and apophasis that is Trinitarian” (Płóciennik, “Teopoietyczno-apofatyyczny,” 155, n. 113). The Russian thus appears as a strong defender of a specifically Christian understanding of apophaticism from within the Trinitarian self-revelation of God, which constitutes the *specificum christianorum*.

<sup>62</sup> “If the antinomy of unity and plurality, which is at the heart of the dogma of the Trinity, is the source and central antinomy, then the second antinomy, also concerning God, but this time in relation to creatures, is very close to it. Just as the Trinity in its deepest mystery is the irreducible antinomy of unity and trinity, so in reference *ad extra* it appears in the Eastern theology as the antinomy of incompleteness and distinction between the unattainable *essence* and the communicable *energies*. Both antinomies (unity-diversity and non-complexity-distinction, corresponding to the two distinctions nature-Persons and essence-energies) must necessarily be preserved for soteriological reasons – only they ensure that the truth of man’s divinisation is maintained.” The essence-energy antinomy obviously indicates the neo-Palamite foundation of Lossky’s thought; the co-existence of these antinomies in God, or rather the existence of God in the manner of these co-antinomies, certainly deserves a separate study, while two issues should be emphasised in this context: the logical primacy of the antinomy of unity-diversity and the independence of the antinomy of essence and energies in God from His relations *ad extra* – the Trinity exists in its essence and energies independently of the creation and would have existed so even if the creation had not existed, a fact that Andrzej Persidok missed – see Lossky, *The Mystical*, 74–75; Lossky, *Orthodox*, 32. “Thus the theology of the Eastern Church distinguishes in God the three hypostases, the nature or essence, and the energies. The Son and the Holy Spirit are, so to say, personal processions, the energies natural processions. The energies are inseparable from the nature, and the nature is inseparable from the three Persons” (Lossky, *The Mystical*, 85–86). Thus, ultimately, talking about the primacy of one antinomy over another, if only in a logical sense, would also require clarification.

This question is, indeed, crucial—in the literal sense of that word. The dogma of the Trinity is a cross for human ways of thought. The apophatic ascent is a mounting of calvary. This is the reason why no philosophical speculation has ever succeeded in rising to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This is the reason why human spirit was able to receive the full revelation of Godhead only after Christ on the cross has triumphed over death and over the abyss of hell. This, finally, is the reason why the revelation of the Trinity shines out in the Church as a purely religious gift, as the catholic truth above all other.<sup>63</sup>

However, this recognition is possible only in faith, as consent to the absolute mystery, expressed from the position of personal commitment to it in the way of worship: “Thus the Trinity is the initial mystery, the Holy of Holies of the divine reality, the very life of the hidden God, the living God. [...] All existence and all knowledge are posterior to the Trinity and find in It their base. The Trinity cannot be grasped by man. It is rather the Trinity that seizes man and provokes praise in him. Outside of praise and adoration, outside of the personal relationship of faith, our language, when speaking of the Trinity, is always false.”<sup>64</sup>

According to Lossky, the Trinity is therefore an absolutely transcendental assumption and source of being, thinking, speaking, an apophatically antinomic assumption, accessible only contemplatively in His gracious Revelation,<sup>65</sup> which at the same time infinitely transcends in every (created) respect.

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<sup>63</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical*, 65–66. Cf. Florensky, *The Pillar*, 39–52, 106–123, 420–424.

<sup>64</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox*, 46.

<sup>65</sup> “The goal of this antinomic theology is not to forge a systems of concepts, but to serve as a support for the human spirit in the contemplation of the divine mysteries. Every antinomic opposition of two true propositions gives way to a dogma, *i.e.* to a real distinction, although ineffable and unintelligible, which cannot be base on any concepts or deduced by a process of reasoning, since it is the expression of a reality of a religious order. If one is forced to establish this distinctions, it is precisely to safeguard the antinomy, to prevent the human spirit from being led astray, breaking the antinomy and falling then from the contemplation of divine mysteries into the platitude of rationalism, replacing living experience with concepts. The antinomy, on the contrary, raises the spirit from the realm of concepts to the concrete data of Revelation” (Lossky, “The Theology of Light,” 52).

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