Communion and otherness in John Zizioulas' theology of personhood as basis for true otherness, identity and unity

di Jesmond Micallef

John Zizioulas maintains that communion and otherness are complementary. Communion is the basis for true otherness and identity. Otherness is constitutive of God's being, of the being of creation and humanity. Without them there can be no communion in the Church nor in society. This is the challenge of theology today.

Sophia XI (2019-2) 221-245

Introduction

Yves Congar, the renowned dominican theologian, considerd John Zizioulas to be «one of the most original and profound theologians of our epoch» because of his «penetrating and coherent reading of the tradition of the Greek Fathers»[1]. Zizioulas indeed is arguably the most internationally renowned, gifted and influential Orthodox theologians of the contemporary Orthodox Church widely recognized, even by Pope Francis, as one of the most creative and influential academics of recent times[2].

Born in Greece in 1931, Zizioulas originally enrolled in the University of Thessaloniki, but soon transferred himself to the School of Theology at the University of Athens from where he graduated in 1955. He did graduate work in Patristics at Harvard Divinity School with G. Florovsky, G. Williams, and K. Stendahl, and at Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies. He was part of a group of young Orthodox theologians in Greece who were determined to heed Florovsky's call for a «neo-patristic synthesis» in Greek theological studies. In 1965 he submitted his classic dissertation «The Unity of the Church in the Holy Eucharist and in the Bishop in the First Three Centuries»[3] to the School of Theology faculty in Athens, Greece which earned him his doctoral degree. Zizioulas has held faculty positions as Professor of Systematic Theology at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow and was visiting Professor at King's College, London, in the University of Geneva, and the Gregorian University, Rome and Professor of Dogmatics at the University of Thessaloniki School of Theology. In 1973, he was elected a member of the Brussels International Academy of Religion, and in 1993 a member of the Academy of Athens receiving the most prestigious academic honor in Greece. He has also served as Secretary for *Faith and Order, World Council of Churches* in Geneva, and has been a key member in the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue. In 1986, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople honored his contribution to theology and to the modern ecumenical movement by electing him bishop on June 22, 1986. Zizioulas is a key figure in major ecumenical dialogues between the Orthodox Church and the

1 - Y. Congar, *Bulletin d'ecclesiologie*, in «*Revue des sciences philosophiques et theolologiques»* 66 (1982) 88. Zizioulas and his generation (Yannaras, Nellas, Nissiotis, Romanides, etc) represent the second 'prise de conscience' of Orthodox theology, after the Russian theological -philosophical explosion of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

2 - It was published in English under the title: «Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries». The contribution of Zizioulas' dissertation to ecclesiology is considered incalculable even to this day, and serves as a constant point of reference in the contemporary ecumenical movement.

3 - As a title in English it has Eucharist, Bishop, Church.

other main Christian traditions. He is also a leading theologian in the area of *Orthodoxy and Ecology* and he has played a central role in making the Orthodox Church one of the most active religious communities involved with development and environmental issues. His publications reflect the influence of Russian émigré theologians such as Nikolai Afanassieff, Vladimir Lossky and his teacher Georges Florovsky. While basing his work solidly in the Orthodox tradition, he glances at Levinas, Buber, Heidegger, Husserl, Lacan, and other more recent thinkers.

1. Early writings

Zizioulas' highly original and creative thought was first expressed in his well-known article *From Mask to Person: The Birth of an Ontology of Personhood* which attracted world attention. This article on *personhood* is based on the Cappadocian Fathers' Trinitarian Theology and now published, with additional essays, in his famous book *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Among his more recent noteworthy articles one can mention *Human Capacity and Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood* where Zizioulas works out a new understanding of human nature, informed not by the now defunct matrix of «consciousness and rationality», but by the patristic belief in the possibility of *Theosis*[4] and the ensuing relational anthropology. Another important work is centered on *Christology and Existence: The Dialectic of Created-Uncreated, and the Doctrine of Chalcedon*[5]. Here Zizioulas identifies death as the crucial existential problem of humankind, and interprets the salvific Christ event not in juridical terms but in ontological ones. Zizioulas' book *Communion and Otherness* is another work which further builds on the notion of *Otherness* implied by the patristic concept of the person. It was the publisher's best selling title at both 2006 and 2007 annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion. Slowly but surely, Zizioulas' name became a frequent reference in books on Trinitarian and Systematic Theology beyond Greece, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world for example, in Catherine Mowry LaCugna's *God For Us*, and more recently in the book *Persons, Divine and Human: King's Theological Essays in Theological Anthropology*, edited by Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton. The former is the editor of another recent book *Tri-*

4 - *Theosis* (deification, divinization), is a transformative process whose aim is likeness to or union with God.

5 - This was published in the Greek journal *Synaxe* in 1982 and it stirred a controversy in Greek Orthodox theological circles.

nitarian Theology Today a book which provides a rich source of different approaches to Trinitarian theology[6].

2. Zizioulas' point of departure

Zizioulas' *theological* approach differs from that of the traditional Western *substantialist* approach[7]. We can distinguish two basic concepts in Zizioulas' view.
First, his *anthropology* is based on the *ontology of personhood*. It provides a new understanding of the concept of personhood in terms of the Cappadocian Trinitarian theology developing it in the context of modern thought. He departs from an *ecclesiological* interpretation of the notion of *Imago Dei* arguing that because the church is a manifestation of God's being, its members find the perfect image of personhood, which God bestows upon humans as His creation, *in their communal life as the body of Christ*. Zizioulas argues that the image of God's personal being shapes the personhood of the Christ-like human in terms of the relationship both with this *trinitarian* God and with the *world*[8]. *Second,* Zizioulas' *trinitarian* theology is based on *divine Personhood* and not on divine *ousia*. He follows the Greek Fathers in saying that nothing can be said about divine substance (*apophatism*) except that it refers to the *oneness* of God. However the Trinity refers to the *Otherness* of God *ad intra,* that is to the divine Personhood, not to divine substance (to the Threeness not to the Oneness. The Father expresses to the one God only with

---

6 - Among the first scholars who wrote about Zizioulas' works, one can mention Yannis Spiteris, who in his book *La teologia ortodossa neo-greca*, reserved about 60 pages on the work if Zizioulas whom he calls as «the theologian of the Christian personalism» (see p. 363-416 of the above mentioned book). In the year 2000 Janusz Syty published his doctoral thesis *Il primato nell'ecclesiologia ortodossa attuale. Il contributo dell'ecclesiologia eucaristica di Nicola Afanassieff e John Zizioulas.* Following the same *eucharistic* theme, Paul McPartlan in 1994 published the book *The Eucharist makes the Church: Henri De Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue*. Another doctoral thesis and a *comparative study* with the title *The Catholicity of the Church*. A. Dulles, J.M.R. *Tillard and J. Zizioulas in Dialogue*, was discussed 2011 at the university of Santa Croce in Rome. As regards the *personalistic* field, a doctoral thesis *Personne et libertè. Une approche de l'oeuvre de Zizioulas* was discussed by Konstantinos Agoras in 1992. Another thesis about the *personalism* of Zizioulas was written by Sergej Bortnyk, entitled*: Kommunion und Person, Die Theologie von John Zizioulas in systematischer Betrachtung*. In 2017 a doctoral thesis was disucssed at Heidelberg and published in Kiev, in Russian under the title: Общение и личность. Богословие митрополита Иоанна Зизиуласа в систематическом рассмотрении. (*Communication and personality. The theology of Metropolitan John Zizioulas in a systematic review*). More than 100 theses (Master and Doctoral) have been written on Zizioulas.

7 - A. Melissaris, *The Challenge of Patristic Ontology in the Theology of J. Zizioulas*, in «*The Greek orthodox theological review*», 441\4 (1999) 468.

8 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood, New York 1985, p. 5.

regard to divine personhood). He grounds the concepts of *communion* and *relationship* on an ontological foundation that lies in the trinitarian being of God, which ultimately means perichoretic communion. Perfect union does not destroy but rather affirms *Otherness* in the triune God, in the relationship between God and human persons, and among the members of the Church. Zizioulas proceeds by pointing to a historical access to this ontological image of communion (the trinitarian being of God) in the community of the incarnate Son, the Church. This so called *from above* theology of communion (since it comes from the divine and proceeds to the human communion) is the foundation of Zizioulas' understanding of the human personhood: the one of the church members first and then the personhood of the humans in the world. He gets this conviction because Zizioulas sees the Church as the image of God's communion in himself as Trinity[9].

3. Freedom and Otherness

Zizioulas' central concern is *human freedom* and *the relation of freedom and Otherness*. His argument is that *Freedom* is not restricted, but is enabled, by our relationships with other persons, for the community in which God includes us and which becomes the place in which our personal identity and freedom come into being. God is intrinsically free and intrinsically communion and this communion and freedom he shares them with us. In his definition of personhood, he moves away from the classical obsession with substantialist ideas about human ontology and defines personhood as *relational ontology*. The uniqueness of the individual person is not found in the substance of the individuum that possesses certain classifiable universal categories but is constituted by the *relationship with the other*. The person is other to the other first, and thus, by standing in contrast to the other, is differentiated as unique. Left to the individual self-as-substance, the self is isolated, in Hell, and ceases to exist. *Personhood,* therefore, is relationality which is evident in the Trinitarian Personhood of God. God is not a unified substance that possesses three modes of being. God is three persons-in-relationship. The church, and all of creation, is thus constituted in relationality.

Ecclesiology forms the centre of Zizioulas' theology. This is based and developed on an *ontology* of the person and derived from a deep reflection on the nature of the Trinity. In the Church the union between the faithful one and the «other» (God and humans) causes *Otherness* to emerge clearly as a matter of being both *distinct* and *in relation*. This ontological approach insists on the possibility of partial knowl-

9 - N. G. Awad, *Personhood and particularity John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton and the Trinitarian Theology of Personhood*, in «*Journal of Reformed Theology*» 1(2010) 4.

edge of the Trinity essence and its description with a «personal ontology». This approach defines the personality through the substantial categories. For Zizioulas, The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the source of the communion of the universal Church, and the promise of real freedom for the world. This communion is actualized by God in the world in the community of the Church. The persons gathered into this communion will come to participate in the freedom of God, and through them the world will participate in this freedom too. Zizioulas' account of human beings is at odds with a great part of the Western intellectual tradition, for which it is a basic prejudice that we cannot both be together and free. This tradition conceives man as an isolated unit, separable from all other beings, where each of us must assert ourselves against others, and against society as a whole. The individual struggles against the many, but cannot ultimately secure his or her own identity. It is not even certain whether the *Otherness* and plurality of the world will survive in the long run. Zizioulas offers quite a different understanding of *communion* and *freedom*. For him these are the promise made by God to man, and the goal of the present and ongoing work of God for, and with, man. Mankind is not yet in possession of freedom. The real freedom and diversity promised to humanity has been inaugurated in the Church, the communion in which all diversity and *Otherness* is being perfected, and through which the diversity and very existence of creation comes.

The *first* insight that Zizioulas gives is that *communion and freedom are not opposed. Communion* means both unity and *Otherness*, difference as well as togetherness. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the criterion and guarantor of this *Otherness*. They are truly other and the source of all *Otherness* who establish and confirm us as different from God, and distinct from one another. The divine persons are the guarantee that there is any distinct thing at all, and that the diversity represented by this creation is not an aberration, but will continue and flourish. God has planted his communion as a community in the world, as evidence of his intention to sustain us and promote our variety and *Otherness.* This community is the Church which is the act of God, actualizing communion and diversity, unity and wholeness, particularity and freedom, for us. Communion is not at the expense of freedom, but freedom and communion together come from God, and taken from God, may be freely enjoyed by man.

His *second* insight is about the existence of the Church and the event of the Eucharistic gathering, two aspects of the act and work of Zizioulas which equally run against the grain of the Western tradition. *One* does not come before the *many*, so *being* is not somehow more fundamental than *plurality*. Diversity is not a merely temporary phenomenon that must eventually disappear. Equally, the *many* are not more fundamental than the *one*: the general and collective do not outweigh the

particularity of any single entity. A world full of particular things and unique people will endure against all threats to its existence.

A *third* insight offered by Zizioulas is that *being* (which we may equally call 'substance' or 'nature') does not precede *relation*. It is not the case that something first is what it is, and then that it enters various relationships; rather *being* and *relationship* are simultaneous.

The consequences that flow from these three insights besides being vast and varied, express realities now being actualized for the world in the Church. Zizioulas' originality comes from his determination to speak from within the Christian tradition rooted in the Bible. He wants the Church to learn from earlier generations of the Christian community, so their neglected views and voices can be heard in the contemporary discussion. Infact, our present self-understanding pits the individual against the multitude and against the institution, but the experience and resources of the Church come to free us from such an impoverishing dualism. Zizioulas believes that the Cappadocian Fathers represent a vital tradition in European thought which uniquely does not subordinate one to many, or freedom to nature.

4. *Ekstasis* and *hypostasis* as two basic aspects of personhood

John Zizioulas has been the most vigorous theologian to advance the divine monarchy of the Father[10]. His reflections on the mystery of the Holy Trinity are sophisticated, subtle, profound, and, yes, controversial. He has been accused of reading back into the Fathers, and into the Church's doctrine of the Trinity, a modern existentialist understanding of personhood. Zizioulas has read deeply in the Fathers, but he reads them not as a historian but as a systematic theologian. He believes that in order to understand what is to be a person, we have to look at God as Father[11] who is the «ontological principle of God»[12], the ground of God's being[13] and of God's unity[14]. Based on the Cappadocian fathers, the concept of person (and therefore personhood) is a *relational* and *ontological* category and does not refer primarily to a self-conscious or individual rational being in terms of a being-in-itself

10 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, ed. by Paul McPartlan, T & T Clark: London 2006, p. 40.

11 - Ibid., pp. 27-65.

12 - Ibid., p. 41.

13 - Ibid., pp. 67-122.

14 - Zizioulas never mentions the Father without the Son and Spirit: the notion of Father is regarded as intrinsically rational.

or being-by-itself. The term *Person* as an ontological concept does not mean *substance* or *nature* but is a *mode of existence.* The concept of personhood implies basically two things simultaneously: *particularity and communion.* The term *Communion* is explained by Zizioulas with the Eucharistic approach[15]. Zizioulas describes the concept of personhood in terms of two terms: *ekstasis* and *hypostasis*. Personhood is constituted by *Ekstasis*[16] a term widely used in the mystical writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus, etc. and etymologically means «standing out from, a movement towards communion», a movement of affirmation of the other, a freedom from the whole, a freedom for oneself in one's own particularity as bearer of the whole[17]. This in turn leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of oneself[18]. *Hypostasis* on the other hand means «the particular being»[19]. Therefore, the concept of *person* is fundamentally different from the individualization of *nature* or *personality*[20]. *Nature* or *personality* exists in itself. A person is constituted within his relationships and the person cannot be conceived by oneself as a static entity. Moreover, nature is about qualities or capacities of any kind which vary from biological, social or moral. Personality means a complex of natural, psychological or moral qualities which can be contained in the individual, especially in individual consciousness. Being a person on the contrary is basically different from being an individual or personality, for personhood is about «hypostasis, that is, the claim to uniqueness in the absolute sense of the term, and this cannot be guaranteed by reference to sex or function or role, or even cultivated consciousness of the *self* and its psychological experiences, since all of these can be classified, thus representing qualities shared by more than one being and not pointing to absolute uniqueness»[21]. Finally, the person cannot exist in fallen existence, but *nature* or *personality* can, because nature is in terms of «this individualized and individualizing Adam in us»[22].

---

15 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* cit., p. 101.

16 - The term *ek-stasis* in this sense is known today mainly through the philosophy of M. Heidegger. Yet, long before him, this term was used in the mystical writings of the Greek Fathers (Pseudo-Dionysis, Maximus) in basically the same sense. See J. Zizioulas, *Human capacity and incapacity,* in «Scottish Journal of theology», 28 (1975) 408.

17 - Thus it does double duty of freedom indicating both freedom for and freedom from oneself.

18 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 213.

19 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, cit., p. 106.

20 - Aquinas is the representative proponent of the individualization of nature. J. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence,* University of Notre Dame Press; 1988, pp. 59-107. Zizioulas refers to the Fall as the individualization of being or fragmentation.

21 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 111.

22 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, cit., p. 107.

Before the fourth century, when the notion of *hypostasis* was identical with that of *substance*, these two words were given the same usage denoting the ultimate particular being in itself since Aristotle. However when in theology the term *hypostasis* ceased to denote *substance* and became synonymous with that of *person*, the significance for anthropology became revolutionary[23]. Zizioulas claims that the ontological identity is to be found ultimately not in *substance*, but only in a *being* which is free from the boundaries of the *self* »[24]. Furthermore, since *hypostasis* is identical with person, not with substance, it exists not in its *self-existence* but in communion. Therefore, communion does not threaten personal particularity but is constitutive of it[25].

5. Three characteristics of the concept of personhood

Zizioulas states that all these observations lead to important anthropological consequences. This concept of personhood sanctified through its use in connection with the very being of God and of Christ, can be summarized in the form of *three* characteristics:

(a) The person is Otherness in communion and communion in Otherness. Because the person is an identity that emerges through relationship in terms of Trinitarian theology, Zizioulas analyzes the concept of person through «I-Thou» relationship. He notes: «It is an 'I' that can exist only as long as it relates to a 'thou' which affirms its existence and its *Otherness*. If we isolate the 'I' from the 'thou' We lose not only its *Otherness* but also its very being; it simply cannot be without the other. This is what distinguishes a person from an individual»[26].

(b) Personhood is freedom. Freedom is the basic presupposition for the constitution of personhood. This freedom is not freedom **from** the other but freedom **for** the other[27]. Zizioulas distinguishes the concept of *other* and *different*: *different* can be understood in the sense of qualities (clever, beautiful, holy, etc.), which is not what the person is about: to be a person implies not simply the freedom to have different qualities, but mainly the freedom simply to be yourself. Zizioulas' purpose is to show that «a person is not subject to

23 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 214.
24 - *Ibid.,* p. 214.
25 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* cit, pp. 106-107.
26 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit. p. 9.
27 - *Ibid.*, p. 9.

norms and stereotypes; a person cannot be classified in any way; a person's uniqueness is absolute»[28].

(c) *Personhood is creativity.* Creativity comes from freedom as its consequence. Because freedom is not from but for someone or something other than ourselves, it makes the person go outside and beyond the boundaries of the *self*. This can be expressed by the concept of *ekstasis.* The affirmation of the other is not limited to the *other* that already exists, but wants to affirm an *other.* This like an artist who through his art brings about a totally other identity as an act of freedom and communion. It becomes a totally free grace of the person. Zizioulas defines this creativity in the following words: «Just as God created the world totally as free grace, so the person wants to create its own 'other'»[29]. A person as a creator brings about a totally other identity as an act of freedom and communion.

6. The ontology of communion as a standard to distinguish two modes of existence

Athanasius develops the idea of communion which belongs to an ontological category. The ontology of communion has been formed and developed within the Eucharistic theology by Ignatius, through Irenaeus, up to Athanasius[30]. This is an ontological revolution subverting the *being-in-itself* of Greek substantialist philosophy. Based on the ontology of communion, Zizioulas concludes: «In summarizing this attempt at a synthesis of Greek patristic thought concerning truth, we can say that the Greek Fathers' main success in this area rests in the identification of truth with communion»[31].

Zizioulas referring to the created existence, describes the fallen existence as the rupture between being and communion[32] while salvation is the recovery of the relation between being and communion.

From the perspective of the relationship between God and man, God created the world so that it would participate in his own glorious life having man participating into a living relationship or communion with him. God gave man His own freedom and the capacity for self-government. But this freedom of man includes a possibility for the fall of man. «Man has the freedom which every other created

---

28 - *Idem.*

29 - *Ibid.*, p. 10.

30 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, cit., p. 83.

31 - *Ibid.,* p. 101.

32 - *Ibid.,* p. 102.

being in the material world lacks, and he exercises it by accepting or rejecting each given event or situation»[33]. When man decided to exercise his freedom by saying *no* to God and makes himself *God*, the fall happens: «In deciding that everything should refer to him, his fall was also the fall of creation»[34]. When created beings deny their ontological reference to God, difference becomes division which can be describes as lack of communion.

Zizioulas lists *three* consequences of the Fall or rupture between being and communion. These consequences are all implicit in the act itself when communion with God was rejected. Zizioulas sees the cause of the Fall on the freedom of human choice rather than God's angered judgement. After the Fall, human personhood is perverted so that it exists only as *individuals*. This distinction between *person* and *individual* is the foundation not only of Zizioulas's anthropology, but also of his Christology and ecclesiology. The Fall consists merely in the revelation and actualization of the limitations and potential dangers inherent in creaturely existence[35].

The first consequence of the Fall is idolatry. Zizioulas explains the reason for this when he says that idolatry is the elevation of created existence into an ultimate point of reference. Since man realizes how much weaker he is, he regarded nature as a god, or indeed as many gods. He began to divinize the forces of nature and then to worship them. This turned into a tragedy for mankind because it defies creation and leads to a dissolution. Zizioulas amplifies this: «When man took God's place and turned himself to nature, all creation became victim to man's delusion. Man and creation have together become confined to a life determined by the laws of nature. Though biological life seems to point towards life without limit, it only takes them in the direction of eventual dissolution»[36].

The second consequence is that truth became linked with the nature or substance of things. The substance or *ousia* of things becomes the ultimate content of truth. The being of things has been recognized before a relationship, and every single being acquires an ontological status on its own merit. The world consists of objects, thus the known and the knower exist as two opposite partners. «Since the being of things is ultimate and prior to communion, and everything that exists posits its own being as something *given* to man the world ultimately consists of a fragmented existence in which beings are particular before they can relate to each other: you first are and then relate»[37].

---

33 - J. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian dogmatics*, ed. by Douglas H. Knight, T&T Clark; London 2009, p. 98.

34 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, cit., p. 58.

35 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* cit., p. 103.

36 - J. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian dogmatics*, cit., p. 98.

37 - *Idem.*

The third consequence is a death or the *dying being*. One biological fact is that death takes place at the end of life. However we know biologically that death is a process that begins at birth. Life bears death within itself. For Zizioulas, from the perspective of the ontology of communion, the biological hypostasis as a natural life is determined by the laws of nature which lack communion with God. Only the ecclesial hypostasis as new life is in communion with God. The ecclesial hypostasis does not exclude the existence of the biological body.

6.1 The emergence of biological hypostasis

For Zizioulas, biological hypostasis is produced by human biological nature: «The hypostasis of biological existence is *constituted* by a man's conception and birth. Every man who comes into the world bears his *hypostasis*, which is not entirely unrelated to love. He is the product of a communion between two people»[38]. This biological hypostasis can be traced back to two *passions*.

The first *passion* is tied to the natural instinct which Zizioulas calls *ontological necessity*. Because the natural instinct or impulse is subject to necessity rather than freedom the person as a being *subsists* not as freedom but as necessity.

The second *passion* is distinguished by two stages: one is called *individualism,* which means the separation of the hypostases; the other is *death*. The earlier stage means the self-affirmation without an ontological relationship with his parents: «The body, which is born as a biological hypostasis, behaves like the fortress of an ego, like a new 'mask' which hinders the hypostasis from becoming a person, that is, from affirming itself as love and freedom»[39]. Death is the final stage of biological hypostasis. Zizioulas distinguishes two kinds of death. One is in the sense of *biology* which belongs to the nature of what is created; the other is the *opposite of real life* in our fallen existence[40], the outcome of the Fall.

Zizioulas thinks that there is a possible misconception about *biological* death. Death is the consequence and punishment for disobedience and the fall[41]. It means that an ethical relationship between God and the world determined the death of man. It seems that God introduced death as part of creation and imposed it on man. Salvation has often been set out in moral and judicial terms. For Zizioulas however, *biological* death has not been caused by man's act of disobedience. Death has always been the natural condition of created beings, and death is inevitable for

38 - *Ibid.,* p. 101.

39 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* cit., p. 50.

40 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion as Otherness,* cit., p. 102.

41 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* cit., p.102.

creation[42]. Because the world came from nothingness, death is only a return to nothingness. Zizioulas discusses death as the opposite of the real life. We can call this *spiritual* death. «Life is always understood as relationship and as communion»[43]. Death also means that the being is deprived of the benefit of existing forever. Death as the state of corruption, destruction and perdition must be understood in relation to the definition of life. Death is an ontological problem for human beings. Zizioulas claims that the problem cannot be put right simply by our obedience: «Athanasius pointed out that if the problem could be solved simply by forgiving Adam his sin, God could have done so. Adam could have repented, and indeed he did weep and regret what he had done. God could have forgiven him, and all would have been well. But Athanasius shows that the heart of the problem was not obedience or disobedience, because this was not a moral but an ontological problem»[44]. The ontological problem determines the significance of death and resurrection of Jesus: Christ is the Saviour of the world not because he sacrificed himself on the Cross, thereby wiping away the sins of the world, but because «he is risen from the dead having trampled death by death»[45].

It is very correct thus to emphasize that the themes of *death* and *life* are the main categories in Zizioulas' theology. Sin is a moral consideration while death is ontological. However he does not begin the discussion of salvation by talking about Sin. His starting point is the distinction between divine being and created being[46].

6.2 The ecclesial hypostasis

Zizioulas calls the new mode of existence formed in the Church as the *hypostasis of ecclesial existence*. The ecclesial existence exists truly in the unbroken relationship with God. The true definition of man is the creature who participates freely in the life of God - not a creature who lives from some resources of his own[47]. According to Zizioulas, «the hypostasis of ecclesial existence»[48] is produced from the new birth of man through baptism[49]. Baptism leads to a new mode of existence, to a regeneration (I Peter 1. 3, 23) and to a new *hypostasis*.

---

42 - *Ibid.,* p. 51; J. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian dogmatics,* cit., p. 102.
43 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 264.
44 - J. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian dogmatics*, cit., p. 102.
45 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* cit., p. 261.
46 - D. Knight, *The theology of John Zizioulas,* Routledge; Oxon 2007, p. 18.
47 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, cit., p. 53.
48 - *Ibid.,* p. 50.
49 - *Ibid.,* p. 56.

The consequence of Baptism is the transformation of personal identity based on the personal identity of Jesus. It means an ontological or personal principle which has been applied from God to man: «As an ecclesial hypostasis man thus proves that what is valid for God can also be valid for man: the nature does not determine the person; the person enables the nature to exist; freedom is identified with the being of man»[50].

Firstly, Zizioulas discusses the case of incarnation. What makes Christ a person is the relationship with the Father through which all his other relationships exist and by which they are determined. In the Incarnation, Christ took on other relationships such as relationships with his mother, his disciples, and the entire people of Israel. *Secondly*, a person's identity is formed through a relationship. «We are persons because our distinct identity is given by our various relationships, biological relationships with our parents, natural relationships with our environment, and a vast complex of other social and political relationships»[51]. Our personhood is received from the whole vast community. When we accept baptism, it means that there is a relationship between us and God. This relationship will eventually determine all other relationships and becomes the most important and ultimate for us. This relationship makes me myself rather than someone else.

Zizioulas speaks about Personal identity. According to Zizioulas, when man loves as a *biological* hypostasis, he inevitably is excluding the others: the family has priority in love over *strangers.* However this is not the case in the ecclesial hypostasis because this constitutes a transcendence of this exclusiveness. «The ecclesial hypostasis is the capacity of the person to love without exclusiveness, and to do this not out of conformity with a moral commandment ('Love thy neighbor,' etc.) but out of his 'hypostatic constitution,' out of the fact that his new birth from the womb of the Church has made him part of a network of relationships which transcends every exclusiveness»[52]. Zizioulas expresses this characteristic when he introduces the concept of *catholicity*. Catholicity permits the person to become a hypostasis without falling into individuality. In the Church two things are realized simultaneously: the world is presented to man not as mutually exclusive portions but as a single whole. Man is called upon to unite every concrete being. At the same time he expresses and realizes a catholic presence in the world, a hypostasis which is not an individual but an authentic person in communion. Zizioulas defines this characteristic on an *ontological* level rather than a *moral* level: thus the eccle-

50 - *Ibid.,* p. 57.

51 - J. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian dogmatics*, cit., p. 111.

52 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* cit., p. 57.

sial hypostasis is not a moral perfection or an improvement of nature or a new hypostasis of nature, but a new creation[53].

6.3 Eucharistic hypostasis as a relational expression between biological and ecclesial hypostasis

In spite of the existence of the ecclesial hypostasis, man does not cease to be born and to die in accordance with his biological hypostasis. In fact, the encounter between the ecclesial and the biological hypostases creates a paradoxical relationship in human existence. In theory, baptism gives man a personal identity determined by his relationship with God. However the ecclesial hypostasis is not entirely realized in man's historical existence. Zizioulas introduces a new ontological category of *Sacramental* or *Eucharistic* hypostasis to express the authentic personhood which is offered historically and experientially by the holy Eucharist which provides a locus where man experiences the transcendence of the ontological necessity and exclusiveness entailed by the biological hypostasis[54]. The Eucharist is the ecclesial identity in its historical realization where man becomes an authentic person[55]. The Eucharist means that man ultimately exists only within Christ[56]. Zizioulas stresses that it is the eschatological character of the Eucharist that expresses the relationship between the *ecclesial* and the *biological* hypostasis. The ecclesial hypostasis is not simply a historical being but points to an eschatological being transcending history. Therefore, the eschatological character of the ecclesial hypostasis contains a kind of dialectic of *already but not yet*. This dialectic appears in the Eucharist which provides a perspective to render man as a person, to see that his true home is not in this world, but in the future[57].

7 The basic meaning of Otherness: uniqueness and relationship

Zizioulas emphasizes the concept of relationship and communion as elements necessary for unity. The central idea is that *Otherness* is essential to Christian ontology to a Christian understanding of being. «*Otherness* as an ontological category for both the Creator and his creation emerges as a logical imperative when cre-

53 - *Ibid.,* p. 58.
54 - *Ibid.,* p. 60.
55 - *Ibid.,* p. 61, footnote 61.
56 - J. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian dogmatics*, cit., p. 116.
57 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, cit., p. 62.

ation is conceived of as an act of freedom» [58]. As Zizioulas puts it, God is radically *other*. «*Otherness* in this case has to be ontological in character or else freedom disappears: the Creator would be bound up radically with his creation» [59]. In Greek philosophy the Creator was bound up with creation. Zizioulas makes it clear that theology, made especially by the works of the Cappadocians (Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Amphilochius) and that of Maximus the Confessor, was a struggle against the assumptions of the Greeks, who saw God the creator and creation as part of the same whole. *Otherness* (that the creator is other than his creation, and creation other than its creator) makes it possible for God and the world to be truly themselves. This *Otherness* is both a consequence of the biblical teaching that the world was created by God from nothing and a necessary condition for God's freedom and ours. After all, a God who needed to create would be in some way dependent on his creation, and this dependence would be at odds with his perfect freedom. *Otherness*, by definition, implies personal *uniqueness*[60]. This *uniqueness* has been formed in the unique relationship in which a certain other is singled out as the unique Other. Uniqueness is not understood in terms of nature, but is rooted in personal existence. Zizioulas analyzes the ground of uniqueness as shown to us by the theology of the Holy Trinity[61]. Otherness as uniqueness is generated in a relationship with the absolute Other[62]. This means that if the existence of a certain being has the general as its ultimate goal, it will be destined to be absorbed by the general. The ultimate goal should always be the otherness of person the ἄλλος. Zizioulas affirms the crucial question for human beings: «is whether in all truth the ultimate goal in our existence is - to put it in terms borrowed from patristic theology - the 'other' not as s ἄλλο but as ἄλλος (otherness of being), that is, not as nature but as person or hypostasis»[63]. The Other must be a person rather than a principle for example morality, a code of behavior, etc. This point can be used to criticize the tendency to reduce religion into a kind of ethics. This raises some important questions: whether the work of the Cross can be morally described through the absolute priority of the Other, whether martyrdom and asceticism are part of ethics, and whether we have such an ethic of *Otherness*.

---

58 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 16.

59 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 315.

60 - The Person is an identity that emerges through relationship (*schesis*, in the terminology of the Fathers); it is an «I» that can exist only as long as it relates to a «Thou» which affirms its existence and its Otherness. If we isolate the «I» from the «Thou» we lose not only its *Otherness* but also its very being; it simply cannot be without the other. This is what distinguishes the person from the individual.

61 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 157.

62 - *Ibid.*, p. 68.

63 - *Idem*.

Zizioulas is of the opinion that the application of otherness to morality creates a logical difficulty, because otherness is generated from unique relations rather than the self alone or its nature[64]. *Otherness* is a notion that excludes generalizations of all kinds. Ethics on the other hand operates with general principles which belong to a general category of beings. However, it is difficult to comprehend *Otherness* by a general category of beings like essence or nature. Therefore, Zizioulas claims that we cannot regard and treat all «others» as absolutely and truly Other from the perspective of ethics. In other words, we can only understand others as absolutely and truly others «in Christ» or ontologically.

7.1 Otherness as constitutive of human person

Personhood is inconceivable without freedom, this freedom of being other. Person implies not simply the freedom to have different qualities but mainly the freedom to be yourself. This means that a person is not subject to norms and stereotypes and cannot be classified in any way. He is unique in absolute.

Yet one person is no person. Freedom is not freedom from the other but freedom for the other. Freedom becomes identical with love because God is love since He is Trinity. We can love only if we are persons, allowing the other to be truly other and yet be in communion with us. If we love the other not in spite of his or her being different but because they are different from us, we live in freedom and in love. The other becomes a condition of our freedom. Freedom is not from but for something other than ourselves. This makes the person *ek-static* that is going outside ourselves and beyond the boundaries of the self in order to affirm the other.

Consequently for Zizioulas, there is an internal relationship between the triad of Communion, *Otherness*, Freedom and *to be the other*. All communion must make Otherness a primary and constitutive ingredient; it makes the other free, not only having *the freedom of will*, but also of having the *freedom to be the other*[65]. Ontological *Otherness* is the presupposition for the *Other* to be *Other*. The Father as personal cause generates *Otherness* because God is the source of all *Otherness.* Zizioulas analyzes two facets of *Otherness* in the frame of the *Otherness* and the human being. He says that:

(a) The human being is defined through Otherness. The human being's identity emerges only in relation to other beings: God and the rest of creation. Freedom is a presupposition. The human being is distinguished from the animals by his or her freedom. Rational capacity is often regarded as man's distincti-

64 - Ibid., p. 69.

65 - Ibid., p. 19.

ve characteristic but it needs to be qualified by freedom which means the drive to ontological *Otherness* with respect to God, animals and other human beings. At the social level, classes or qualities of any kind lack ontological *Otherness.* The human being who has freedom for *Otherness* refuses to be identified as a member of class or group, or a category of natural or moral qualities.

(b) *The drive of the human being towards Otherness is rooted in the divine call to Adam*. The call implies three things: *Relationship, Freedom,* and *Otherness* all of them being interdependent. A call involves a relationship and it must involve *Otherness*:«The *Otherness* is not the result of self-affirmation; it is an *Otherness* granted and is not self-existent, but a particularity which is a gift of the *Other*»[66]. If there is no God, there is no man, and there is no freedom for the human being to be the ultimate other: «Freedom without God would lose its ontological character; it would be reduced to freedom of the will»[67]. It is God who is the initiator or the subject of the call. The human being does not spring automatically from just any relationship. Instead, *Otherness* is a unique gift which comes from the *Other* or God. If the human being is constituted as other by a call from the *Other,* this call requires a response. The identity of man is constantly formed through the response to this call of the *Other.*

7.2 Personal communion in Otherness

The Church, as a Eucharistic way of being, is the place where human beings can obtain *Otherness in communion*. Communion is explained by Zizioulas through the liturgical or sacramental approach, mostly through the Eucharist[68]. Communion is an ontological category: «The ontology of communion [is] formed within the current of Eucharistic theology that connected Ignatius, through Irenaeus, up to Athanasius»[69], but it is also an event. Communion and *Otherness* are not only limited to the *Eros*[70].«On the contrary, communion and *Otherness* are supposed to permeate and pervade our lives in their entirety. They are to become an attitude, an

66 - *Ibid.,* p. 41.

67 - *Ibid.,* p. 42.

68 - J. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, ed. by Luke Ben Tallon, Bloomsbury, T & T Clark 2011, pp. 2-96.

69 - J. Zizioulas, *Being and Communion*, cit., p. 83.

70 - By *eros* Zizioulas means a movement, an *ek-stasis* from one being to another. See J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., p. 70.

ethos, rather than an ethic and a set of principles»[71]. Zizioulas applies the ascetic life of the desert Fathers as a concrete example to explain the co-inherence of communion and *Otherness*. The Fathers provide an ontological ground for our attitude to the *Other* insisting that the *Other* should be kept free from moral judgment and categorization, protecting his or her personal uniqueness while recognizing the reality of evil on our existence. «The *Other* is not identifiable ontologically in moral terms, for he or she would cease to be truly *Other* if placed in class or category applicable to more than one entity. By being a person, the *Other* is by definition unique and therefore unclassifiable. Only in this way can one remain truly and absolutely, that is, ontologically, *Other*»[72].

This kind of attitude of the ascetic Fathers is based on the relational and ontological aspect: «one is truly oneself in so far as one is hypostasized in the *Other* while emptying oneself so that the *Other* may be hypostasized in oneself. The death of self is the condition for salvation. This condemnation of the Self is tied up with one's positive attitude to the *Other*, with the liberation of the *Other* from his or her evil qualities. Therefore, the *Other* has priority over the self, he must not be judged; he must be stripped of his moral qualities; he must be simply himself and loved for who he is»[73]. Ethics according to Zizioulas operates with a classification of human beings as either good or evil. Those who beings who participate in the fall are sinful. According to the ethical principles, the *Other* is so identified with his or her qualities that he or she appears to be affected ontologically by these qualities. Evil cannot be identified with the evil-doer. Ascetic life which bears the evil of the *Other* testifies to this truth, which is affirmed by the sacrificial love of Christ.

Forgiveness is a merely psychological matter - a sheer forgetting, not a removing of sin - which is not what Christian forgiveness means[74]. Even when it is said that God no longer remembers our sins, the meaning is not psychological but ontological, since whatever God does not remember ceases to exist (Hebrews 10.4). Thus, the Christian ethos of *Otherness* does not allow for the acceptance or the rejection of the *Other* on the basis of his or her qualities, natural or moral, but on the simple basis of each person's ontological particularity and integrity. By being a person, the *Other* is by definition unique and therefore unclassifiable. This kind of view of communion suggests that *Otherness* implies demoralization or a-moralization of human life[75]. This means that the worth of human life cannot be assessed

71 - Ibid., p. 81.
72 - Ibid., p. 82.
73 - Ibid., pp. 82-83.
74 - Ibid., p. 86.
75 - Ibid., p. 82.

only from the moral perspective, thus preserving one's personal uniqueness and dignity, regardless of one's moral achievements.

7.3 Transformation of the relationship with the Other

Zizioulas' understanding of communion with the *Other* is operated under a metaphysical principle of the *Other* as having primacy over the Self. Here he follows Maximus the Confessor in saying that ascetic life aims not *at the spiritual development* of the subject but at the giving up of the *Self* to the *Other*, at the erotic ecstasies of the I, that is, at the attainment of love and of the virtues and *theosis* thus giving priority of the *Other* over the *Self*[76]. «This is why the Maximian advice to listen carefully to nature is so much wiser than our personalists' advice to dominate or to possess it! But the ascetic tradition of Christianity also knows well that one needs a deep ascetic experience in order to truly liberate its personal will in the Spirit»[77].

The *Other* may be hypostasized in oneself and *hypostasization* constitutes the essence of communion. It means that the purpose of this kind of communion is to let the *Other* be the *Other.* Therefore, a communion in *Otherness* provides a possibility for us to build up personal relations in a community. It is impossible for every particular being to survive death (truly be) except in and through this kind of communion with the *Other*[78].

7.4 Negligence of the Other and Individualism

What we see in the West is an individualism which shaped the story of[79], creating tensions, challenges, changes that many notice and discuss. The independence of the individual remains one of the most jealously guarded principles of western civilization. In our culture protection from the other is a fundamental necessity be-

---

76 - *Ibid.,* p. 84.

77 - N. Loudovikos, «*Possession or wholeness? St. Maximus the Confessor and John Zizioulas on person, nature, and will*», in *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013) 265.

78 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,*cit., p. 85.

79 - «The rupture of the proper relationship between humanity and nature is due to the rise of individualism in our culture. The pursuit of individual happiness has been made into an ideal in our time. Ecological sin is due to human greed which blinds men and women to the point of ignoring and disregarding the basic truth that the happiness of the individual depends on its relationship with the rest of human beings. There is a social dimension in ecology which the Encyclical brings out with clarity. The ecological crisis goes hand in hand with the spread of social injustice. We cannot face successfully the one without dealing with the other». See http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2015/06/18/0480/01050.html#ziziou.

cause we feel the threat of the Other. Individualism is fundamentally the consequences of the Fall because at the beginning all things were created for communion. In communion with God, the diversity of beings, distinguished in space and time, are not separated but united in distinction. Each human being is bound by a particular body that behaves like a fortress of an ego, preventing us from realizing the relationality between the *me and you* that constitutes true personhood and man's personal identity[80]. Although the body is a necessary part of the human being, the means through which we interact with the world around us it is also the means of downfall an opposing counterpart to the truly personal.

Society forces us and even encourages us to consider the *other* as our enemy before we can treat him or her as our friend. Communion with the other is difficult and it is not spontaneous. It is built upon fences which protect us from the dangers implicit in the other's presence. «We accept the other only in so far as he or she does not threaten our privacy or in so far as he or she is useful for our individual happiness»[81]. It seems that one must withdraw from building relations with the other in order to guard his identity which has been formed. This makes relations and identity an uneasy balance, but it is a balance which is necessary. In the West the individualist concept of person together with the theological and philosophical anthropology have characteristically been framed to ask questions of the *self* rather than the question of the *other*, ignoring The *Other*. From a perspective of epistemology, the *Other* has to be reduced to something for the self to recognize. This individualization is seen as death which denies the true source of life and thus communion with God. Redemption reverses individualization by restoring communion.

Zizioulas suggests that particularity is not found by *erecting barriers to others* but only when communion or relatedness *to others* become the *very basis* of a person's particularity because persons do not exist and then relate but they exist and relate *simultaneously*[82]. The fear of the *Other* is even expressed in our fear of the *Other* par excellence, namely God. In essence the fallen condition of humanity is a loss of *personhood*, the communion with God and others. Human existence became now under the dominion and presupposition of separation and division.

Zizioulas seems to hugely concerned with the impact of individualism on today's ecclesiastical life. He is anxious about the possibility of individualistic piety and pride through ascetic practices, which do not create true Faith but may breed

80 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as communion,* cit., p. 27.

81 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, cit., pp. 347-361.

82 - J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, cit., p. 51.

spiritual elitism and individualism[83]. To him this kind of spiritual superiority and religious individualism makes people seek individual salvation and renders the need for the church or parish superfluous. While making observations and comments on individualism in the Church, Zizioulas explains that this culture can be reckoned because of the fear of others. It is an exclusive attitude towards others in society. The fear of *Otherness* has consequences and cultural implications because respect for *Otherness* has always been an important principle in civilized societies. When there is a lack of communion for *Otherness*, it is difficult for there to be an outcome of «a satisfactory culture»[84]. An ethos of *Otherness* is what counters individualism[85].

8. The self prior to the Other resulting in an impersonal relationship

Zizioulas criticizes the history of Western philosophy, asserting that it puts priority of the self over the other. «When Parmenides declared 'being' to be identical with 'knowing', ontology and epistemology became dependent on each other. This led ancient Greek philosophy to the idea to what Levinas called the idea of *sameness*, which he described as *totalitarian ontology*»[86]. This strips the *Other* of his or her *Otherness* or humanity.

The human being as biological hypostasis is limited by his biological nature. He is often afraid of the others and continuously defends himself against the encroachment of his subjectivity by the others. Since every person is basically identified with his function in the society, the relations of the members of society are largely functional and such relations are not relations of persons as persons, but only as workers. They are relations of the functions which different persons perform in the cooperative association and the bonds of relation between individuals which constitute them are impersonal. Each isolated individual uses all his capacity to secure his own satisfaction and to preserve his own life. However, these egocentric individuals are still rational beings in terms of the instrumental reason. A society which is constituted by isolated individuals can only be held together by a common purpose, such as economic prosperity of the society. Moreover, the social order is mainly maintained by a common obedience to law.

---

83 - J. Zizioulas, *Eucharistic communion and world*, Bloomsbury, T & T Clark, 2011, p. 82.

84 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* cit., p. 14.

85 - *Ibid.,* p. 88.

86 - *Ibid.,* p. 43.

9. A kind of communion not threatening Otherness

According to Zizioulas we can distinguish two kinds of *Communion* and of *Eros. This helps for the* reconstructing the concept of *Otherness* in *communion* and thus experience *Otherness* as uniqueness. The *first* Eros «is a movement, an *ekstasis*[87], from one being to another»[88]. This movement can be found in nature itself, as the ancient Greeks and modern romanticism have described. It is an *ekstasis* of the self and an expression and fulfillment of nature's inherent energies. This kind of *Eros* does not stem from the *Other* and is not ultimately destined to the *Other.* About the *second* kind of *Eros* Zizioulas writes: «For *Eros* to be a true expression of *Otherness* in a personal sense, it must be not simply ecstatic but also and above all hypostatic: it must be caused by the free movement of a particular being and have as its ultimate destination another particular being»[89].

Zizioulas contrasts these two kinds of *Eros* in Platonism and in the Patristic understanding. In the case of *Eros* as presented by Plato, the other is not a constitutive ontological factor, because love is attracted irresistibly by the good and the beautiful which take the form of ideas. Thus the concrete particular is used as a means to an end, and which eventually is sacrificed for the sake of the idea. This means that though the erotic movement appears to be related to one particular being, this being is not unique in an absolute sense. In contrast, St. Maximus describes *Eros*, as a movement of *ekstasis*, which is constantly intensified and does not stop until it reaches its goal, namely when the loving one «has become entire in the whole of the beloved one and is embraced by the whole, willingly accepting in freedom the saving circumscription»[90]. Zizioulas thinks that *Eros* is described here as a free movement from a free being to another free being. Its final destination is Communion. In this ultimate state of *Eros* which is seen as an *embrace* or *circumscription,* the two beings still retain their ontological integrity. However this movement is driven by a purpose different from a *natural one*: The cause and the ultimate purpose of the *erotic movement* (found in nature, ideal, or even the relationship of love itself) is nothing else than the concrete *Other,* in whom the erotic movement stops and rests»[91]. These two kinds of *Eros* are naturally connected to two kinds of love. Zizioulas explains clearly the doctrine of love as an ontological

---

87 - The term *ek-stasis* in this sense is known today mainly through the philosophy of M. Heidegger. Yet, long before him, this term was used in the mystical writings of the Greek Fathers (Pseudo-Dionysis, Maximus) in basically the same sense. See J. Zizioulas, *Human capacity and incapacity,* cit., p. 408.

88 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* cit., p. 70.

89 - *Ibid.*, p. 71.

90 - *Ibid.,* p. 2.

91 - *Idem.*, p. 72.

concept by distinguishing the *natural* love from the God's love[92]. His distinction of two kinds of *Eros* is to emphasize that the uniquely loved being is a hypostasis or person rather than an idea[93].

10. A Trinitarian model for the coexistence of *Otherness* and communion

The doctrine of the Trinity gives us some revelation concerning our existence. The Cappadocians locate the real distinctiveness of Father, Son, and Spirit in terms of its relation of origin, and describe the uniqueness of each as personhood (hypostasis). By *hypostasis* they meant any concrete existing being in Greek philosophy. As long as *hypostasis* and *Ousia* were used interchangeably in Trinitarian theology, theology can be built on the ground of totality and crystallized into a system where the individual is not apprehended in its *Otherness* but in its *generality*. When *hypostasis* is identified with personhood, it means that the ultimate reality is personhood rather than substance. This is a departure from Greek cosmology which describes a personal God who is love and freedom, rather than some impersonal principles, the Ultimate. Only this new ontology could save theology from the control of classical Greek philosophy. According to the Cappadocians, God the Father is the cause of everything and He is the source of *Otherness.* In terms of the personal originating principle, God the Father begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit and ultimately also the world. Every particular exists in communion with others. «Since a person is defined by relation of origin, the divine persons are never thought of as separate from other, as discrete individuals»[94]. The Trinitarian mode of existence is «the highest, most perfect realization of personhood and communion: being-for-another and from-another, or love itself»[95]. Its communion is the personal expression and concrete existence of God. It is different from the unity of the divine substance which is the starting point of Augustine's theology. Because personhood manifests a being as being-in-relation, not being-in-itself, it can escape the concept of personhood as consciousness. The communion among persons upholds the essential equality of persons. It is not a movement within the sameness. One notices that because Levinas' theory does not depend on the Trinitarian God, but on one Infinite, it is difficult for him to integrate the notions of communion with *Other-*

92 - *Ibid.*, p. 278.

93 - *Ibid.*, p. 75.

94 - C. LaCugna, *God for us,* Harper, San Francisco; 1993, p. 246.

95 - C. LaCugna, *God for us*, cit., p. 246.

ness[96]. It is only through the ontology of personhood grounded in Trinitarian that theology is able to combine personal communion with *Otherness*.

Thus to conclude, the first thing that emerges from a study of the doctrine of the Trinity is that *Otherness* is constitutive of unity, and not consequent upon it. The Trinity reveals that *Otherness* is absolute. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are absolutely different, none of them being subject to confusion with the other two. And most significantly, *Otherness* is not moral or psychological but ontological. Each person in the holy Trinity is different not by way of difference of natural qualities (such qualities are all common to the three persons), but by way oft he simple affirmation of being who he is. «As a result, finally, *Otherness* is inconceivable apart from relationship. Father, Son and Spirit are all ames indicating relationship. No person can be different unless he is related. Communion does not threaten *Otherness*; it generates it»[97].

JESMOND MICALLEF
PhD a Malta S.Th.D e al P.I.O. (Roma) Facoltà di Scienze Ecclesiastiche Orientali
padrejesmond63@gmail.com

96 - Interestingly enough, Levinas implies enigmatically that that presence of God has a special obscurity. God for him remains absolutely anonymous until God's Word is heard through the non-phenomenality of the Other' face. As a result, God is encountered non-phenomenally as a trace on the Other's face. Only a life of coming to responsibility through time (diachrony) brings unity between human free will and God's immemorial act of obliging the self to be truly responsible. Levinas' non-phenomenology sees God as a trace coming to mind in the Other's face. Through his kind of ethical reduction, theology is challenged to deepen its reflection about God's nature in relation to the suffering neighbor. In this light, any reflection upon the triune drama of the Resurrection must eventually coincide with religious encounters of ethical responsibility. As a result, a non-phenomenological analysis would hope to inspire Christian theology to be a living testimony of Christ's kenotic life in the Paschal Mystery. See G. J. Morrison*, The Triune Drama of the Resurrection Levinas' Non-Phenomenology*, in «Irish Theological Quarterly», 68 (1).5-6.

97 - J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, T & T Clark, London 2006, p. 113.