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## **The Influence of the Concept of V.N. Lossky's Personality on a Christian Personalism of the 20th Century**

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*In this paper we consider two approaches to the understanding of the personality in the Christian personalism of the 20th century and analyze its strong and weak points. The author turns to the works of V.N. Lossky, Ch. Yannaras, archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) and metropolitan John (Zizioulas).*

*Keywords: personality, individual, essence, personalism, human-divine communion, divine energies, apophatic approach*

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V.N. Lossky, a son of N.O. Lossky, is a Russian religious philosopher and theologian. Lossky's views had a significant influence on the development of Christian personalism in the 20th century, in particular on the views of Christos Yannaras, archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) and metropolitan John (Zizioulas). There are two main approaches to understanding of the personality in the Christian personalism of the 20th century: apophatic approach (Lossky, Yannaras, Sophrony (Sakharov)) and ontological approach (Zizioulas). In the basis of the first approach there is the thesis of the unknownability of the Trinity essence and cognition of the Trinity personal existence through the energies. The second approach insists on the possibility of partial knowledge of the Trinity essence and its description with a «personal ontology». It should

be noted that there is no contradiction between these two approaches, but the first approach focuses on the description of the personality through the categories of energy; the second approach defines the personality through the substantial categories.

In the works of V.N. Lossky there are two interrelated apophatic definitions of «personality»: a personality as irreducibility to the essence and a personality as an image of God. Personality's irreducibility to the essence means that we can not define the personality through natural qualities: intelligence, character, appearance, etc.; it presupposes that individual behavior is free from natural determinism. Apophatic definition of the human personality as irreducibility to the essence has the following weak points. First of all, it is impossible to talk

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about the personality as an image of God that is unequal to its essence, because the concept of the image of God initially suggests a certain nature, in which the image can be showed. Secondly, understanding of the personality as the personality that exceeds creaturely life means understanding of the personality as the personality that is of uncreated, divine-human nature and that occupies an intermediate position between divine and creaturely life.

If we reject the concept of personality as irreducibility to the essence, the definition of personality as an image of God that is developed by V.N. Lossky is undoubtedly interesting. In contrast to the first definition, understanding of the personality as an image of God harmoniously combines the personalism of the Russian religious philosophy of the 20th century and the ideas of the patristic anthropology. Convergence of the concepts of personality and image of God allows V.N. Lossky to express the experience of the Communion in the personalistic terms. It does not contradict the patristic tradition, but on the contrary allows reconsidering the experience of the eastern mystical theology in the categories of modern philosophy.

According to V.N. Lossky, it is possible to give a positive definition of the personality through its properties or energies: uniqueness, immortality, freedom, integrity and creativity. We can not describe the personality through rational concepts, but we can intuitively apprehend the essence of personality during the interpersonal communication. In our opinion, the definition of the personality as irreducibility to the essence makes V.N. Lossky use the Palamite concept of energy in order to give a positive definition of the personality; there is a close link between apophaticism in understanding of the Trinity, definition of the personality as irreducibility to the essence and usage of the term «energy» in the works of V.N. Lossky. We can also trace it

in the works of Ch. Yannaras and Sophrony (Sakharov).

Christos Yannaras after V.N. Lossky identifies the personality as an image of God and as irreducibility to the essence. When he talks about the Trinity, he makes a distinction between the essence and personality and also makes a distinction between the personality and human nature on the analogy of the Trinity existence. "God is God because He is the Personality and His existential does not depend on anything else, including the nature or essence. Personality does not depend on the essence; therefore, the personality is a mode of essence existence" (Yannaras, 1992). Yannaras identifies human essence as a biological origin – essence is determined by the instincts; it allows him to talk about irreducibility of the personality to the essence. On the other hand, it leads to a dichotomy between the spiritual and material, to the opposition of spirit and body in his works that is not typical to the patristic anthropology that asserts the unity of human essence as a unity of soul, spirit and body.

As well as V.N. Lossky, Yannaras shows that the uniqueness of the personality cannot be determined conceptually, but it is knowable during the communication. "It seems difficult to define it and the definition is possibly unattainable. Even in the case with humans, when physical individuality creates "personhood" and the personal elements of human nature are concrete and immediately accessible, it seems hardly possible for us to define objectively this thing that forms personhood and makes the personal character existent" (Yannaras, 1991). The existence of the personality is learnt through its relationship with other people and through communication. The personality is constituted through the attitude to another person; in contrast to V.N. Lossky Ch. Yannaras emphasizes this idea. Thus, Yannaras defines the personality through

the concept of energy and affirms, first of all, the unknowability of the Trinity nature, and secondly, irreducibility of the personality to the essence.

According to Sophrony (Sakharov), God who is unknowable in his nature is revealed for humans as a Personality, the principle of personality is the main principle of existence. The Trinity nature is unknowable, but the Trinity is comprehensible as a unity of three Images, the personal existence of God is the single source of the knowledge of God. Sophrony (Sakharov) makes a distinction between essential and personal existence of the Trinity, the personality is not restricted by the essence, but determines the essence, because it does not exist beyond the hypostasis. Human as an image of God has his own personality. Despite of the difference between divine and creaturely essence, the fellowship between God and human is possible.

Personal human existence means human ability to become similar to God; Sophrony (Sakharov), as well as V.N. Lossky, defines the personality as an image of God that is irreducible to the essence: «Personality is not the subject of the natural determinism: it transcends the earth boundaries and moves in the field of other dimensions» (Sophrony (Sakharov), 1985). Personality represents the spiritual origin that is different from the biological nature.

The personality has potential: «when we are meeting with the Personality of God there is actualization of something in our nature that was only a potentiality in the beginning – the personality» (Sophrony (Sakharov), 1985). Human was not born as a personality, but has become a personality through the experience of the Communion; the fullness of personal realization as the image of God is related with grace and deification. In contrast to V.N. Lossky, Sophrony (Sakharov) insists on the possibility of overcoming the differences between the personality and the

essence as the spiritual and biological origins as a result of deification. According to V.N. Lossky, the personal irreducibility to the essence is saved in the eschatological perspective.

Sophrony (Sakharov), as well as V.N. Lossky, talks about the unknowability of the personal human existence and the impossibility to define the personality through philosophical or scientific concepts. Thus, Sophrony (Sakharov) defines personality apophatically, he does not use the concept of the essence, but uses the outside manifestation of the personality – through the energies.

In contrast to V.N. Lossky Zizioulas does not refer to the concept of energy in order to define the concept “personality”. He insists that the essence of the Trinity is partially cognizable through the «personality categories» (the concept of person, personal fellowship). Communion between human personality and the personality of God occurs not with the help of divine energies, but is the communion of two essences and has an ontological character. According to Zizioulas, V.N. Lossky's apophaticism can lead to the ontological monism, the identification of the Trinity with substance, therefore it is necessary to describe the ontological existence of the Trinity in terms of personality.

Zizioulas talks about the natural and ecclesiastical modus where human hypostasis or human personality exists. The biological modus of hypostasis is subject to the ontological necessity, he is mortal; Zizioulas writes about its two fundamental principles – the body and Eros: “The biological base of human hypostasis is fundamentally attached to the necessary properties of its “nature” (Zizioulas, 1985). Biological existence of hypostasis is also connected with the human individuality that is revealed primarily in the consciousness of own exclusiveness and opposition to others. Thus, the subordination to the ontological necessity

and individuality are the main features of the biological existence of hypostasis.

The purpose of the biological modus of existence is the personality that can appear only in the ecclesiastical modus. "Ontologically nature precedes the personality, dictates its rules by instincts, and thus, radically destroys freedom" (Zizioulas, 1985). Zizioulas understands the relationship between the essence and personality in human in a different way than V.N. Lossky. He understands the personality not as irreducibility to the essence, but as the impossibility to identify the personality and biological hypostasis. "The ascetic character of the ecclesiastical hypostasis does not mean the denial of the world or biological part of existence, it denies the biological hypostasis. Ascetical theology accepts the biological essence, but has a desire to hypostasize it in the non-biological form" (Zizioulas, 1985). Realization of the personality is impossible as long as a human hypostasis remains in the modus of biological existence. According to Zizioulas, the difference between the personality and the natural origin in human being does not mean irreducibility of the personality to the essence; Zizioulas expresses this difference through the difference between two moduses of the human existence.

Ecclesiastical modus of human hypostasis is possible through the new human birth after christening. Christening makes people free from the ontological necessity and changes the attitude towards the world and other people. Hypostasis of ecclesiastical existence is determined by the personal relationship with God and other people that is based on the principles of love and freedom. The person stops being an individual that opposes himself to others, he acquires the catholic existence. "With reflection in the human existence, the catholic existence allows people to identify and implement the catholicity of their presence in the world through their own hypostasis that points not to the individuality, but to the

true personlaity» (Zizioulas, 1985). Thus, the personality realizes itself through communication, like the Images in the Trinity: the personality is possible when there is another personality next to it. The true personality overcomes the biological nature of love; now love is not determined by Eros and subjectivity, but applies equally to all people. According to Zizioulas, the fullness of the personality realization is also connected with eschatology and the future life; he shows it with the category of «Eucharistic hypostasis».

According to Zizioulas, participation in the Eucharist sacrament suggests that the personal communion of God and humans has an ontological character, i.e. the divine and human nature both take part in the communion. In contrast to V.N. Lossky, Zizioulas does not refer to the concept of energy during the definition of the Communion nor in Christology. He relies on Christology and shows that it is possible to explain the communication between the divine and human nature without usage the concept of «energy». "The incarnation is not the event in which the divine energies are communicated in their fullness to the human nature; it is the event in which human nature itself exists, is, in the personality of Christ" (Papanicolaou, 2003 ).

According to Zizioulas, Eucharist, the understanding of the Eucharist as the union with the Christ's body with the participation of the Holy Spirit leads to the personal ontology of the Cappadocian Fathers. In ancient philosophy the ontological understanding of personality was not possible due to the fact that the individual existence was considered as temporary and transient in comparison with the permanent essence of things.

In our point of view, it is possible to draw the link between the apophatic approach to the personality and the definition of personality as irreducibility to the essence: on the one hand, apophaticism confirms the unknowability of the

Trinity essence, on the other hand it confirms the impossibility to determine the personality through the ontological categories. Ontological approach eliminates the definition of personality as irreducibility to the essence. The ontological and the apophatic approaches both have its weak points. First of all, the definition of the personality as irreducibility to the essence have a conflict

with the understanding of the personality as the image of God, and secondly, it leads to the conception of the divine-human nature of human. The disadvantage of the ontological approach is that the ontological difference between the divine and human nature disappears during the definition of the Communion in the ontological categories.

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## **Онтология личности в современном восточно-христианском богословии: Вл. Лосский и И. Зизиулас**

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*В этой статье рассматриваются два подхода к пониманию личности в христианском персонализме XX века, и анализируются их сильные и слабые стороны. Автор обращается к работам В.Н. Лосского, Х. Яннараса, архимандрита Софрония (Сахарова) и митрополита Иоанна (Зизиуласа).*

*Ключевые слова: личность, индивидум, сущность, персонализм, богообщение, божественные энергии, апофатический подход.*

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