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Review of Papanikolaou, Being with God (Notre Dame, 2006)

Mary-Jane V. Rubenstein

Wesleyan University, mrubenstein@wesleyan.edu

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Cardinal Ouellet does, indeed, offer the daring proposition that the relationships of family, of husband and wife, parents and children are, through grace, a participation in the intra-Trinitarian love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although bold in its theology of participation—of the redemption of our natural bonds through grace—*Divine Likeness* is modest in its outline of a systematic theology of marriage. The book is as much a theology of baptism and Eucharist as a theology of marriage. It is as much a call to discipleship as to parenthood. Cardinal Ouellet's theological restraint on a theology of family is commendable. Let us go no further in a theology of marriage and family. Let us move toward living into it—toward living into our baptism.

David M. McCarthy
 Department of Theology
 Mount St. Mary's University
 Emmitsburg, MD 21727
 USA

Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion by Aristotle Papanikolaou (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) x + 238 pp.

The last decade has seen a surge of interest among Anglo-American theologians in the work of the great contemporary Orthodox thinkers; in particular, that of Sergei Bulgakov (See Rowan Williams, *Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* [T & T Clark, 2001]; Eugene Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Sources Outside the Modern West* [Eerdmans, 2005]; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Theology in a New Key* [Eerdmans, 2001]). See also John Milbank's declaration that Bulgakov and Henri de Lubac are the greatest theological minds of the twentieth century in *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* [Eerdmans, 2005]). This eastward turn stems from a growing ecumenism, to be sure, but perhaps also from a growing anxiety within neo-Augustinian and Thomistic theology over the ontotheological rut in which it risks finding itself without at least occasional sprinklings of Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Pseudo-Dionysius to keep its substance relational, its persons perichoretic, and its sayings unsaid. Aristotle Papanikolaou has been an active participant in this conversation, not only raising other voices within the Orthodox tradition, but also suggesting different means of approaching the problems at hand. *Being with God*, Papanikolaou's first monograph, accomplishes both these tasks.

This carefully researched, cogently argued book undertakes a comparative exploration of two twentieth century Orthodox theologians: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas. While their emphases and conclusions differ, both authors endeavor to counteract the "western" rationalism sneaking into contemporary Orthodoxy (through Bulgakov in particular) by appealing to the doctrine of *theosis*. The study at hand examines this divine-human communion through Lossky's and Zizioulas's diverging conceptions of the Trinity, demonstrating that divinization rests for Lossky on apophasis, for Zizioulas on eucharistic ontology, and for Papanikolaou on something in-between.

Lossky appeals to the *via negativa* as the only way to secure a trinitarian theology, convinced that the *via eminentia* can only crystallize an un-Christian "ontology of substance". By presenting the soul with persistent affronts to reason (God as one and many, knowable and unknowable, transcendent and immanent), trinitarian apophasis carries the soul beyond the idolatrous bounds of human capacity into "an ecstatic

union with God beyond affirmation or negation, beyond being itself" (p. 18). Lest he be accused of capitulating to Plotinian mysticism, Lossky derives two Trinitarian safeguards from Dionysius and Gregory Palamas. The first is the persistence of particularity in and through the divine-human encounter. The second is a strict separation between the immanent and economic trinities (*theologia* and *oikonomia*), or the divine essence and energies. Lossky argues that deified humanity participates in the latter categories but not the former, leaving even transfigured humanity cut off from the being of God.

With a keen deconstructive eye, Papanikolaou focuses on Lossky's immanent/economic barrier, demonstrating that such an impasse occludes the very *theotic* process it is presumably designed to preserve. Moreover, Papanikolaou points out that Lossky offers an account of kenotic personhood at the level of *theologia*, transgressing his own apophatic boundaries. Most problematically of all, Lossky's effort to free God from human categories leads him to affirm a hyper-essence beyond being, and to identify this hyper-essence with non-being, to which being remains opposed (p. 6). In this manner, Lossky not only remains within, but actually strengthens the very "ontology of substance" he is trying to dismantle. Papanikolaou suggests that this apophatic self-destruction signals the limits of apophatic theology *tout court*. He therefore calls upon John Zizioulas to dismantle Lossky's *oikonomia* / *theologia* divide through the positivism of eucharistic experience.

Papanikolaou argues that because Zizioulas is not wedded to the *via negativa*, he is able to develop a much fuller doctrine of the Trinity, which furthermore manages to elude the metaphysical confines Lossky reinscribes. Zizioulas accomplishes this by means of a joint appeal to Athanasius's relational theology of substance and to Basil's unification of the individualistic *hypostasis* with the more communal *prosopon*. Preventing Zizioulas from falling into the western sin of rationalism is his insistence that this thoroughly relational ontology is *revealed*, and (contra Lossky) not at the height of *apophasis*, but rather through the experience of the Eucharist.

By far the most beautifully written sections of *Being with God* are those concerned with Zizioulas's eucharistic theology which, for Papanikolaou, counters the Losskian dangers of individualism, impersonalism, and substantialism. Papanikolaou writes, "while Lossky emphasizes the ascent of the human person toward union with God, for Zizioulas, union is a relational event realized within the eucharist. In the eucharist, the baptized faithful are constituted as the Body of Christ, and, thus, as participants in the life of the triune God" (pp. 30–31). What this means is that divine-human communion occurs not merely at the level of *oikonomia*, but also at the level of *theologia*, constituting the human person relationally in communion with the relationally constituted persons of the Trinity. This is not to say that the entirety of the divine being is communicated to Eucharistic humanity; on the contrary, Zizioulas preserves the ontological distinction by positing a third category between God's knowable "that" and God's unknowable "what"; that is, God's "how", or mode of existence, in which the church participates through the Eucharist. By virtue of this mediating *tropos hyparxeos*, Zizioulas is able to say that the immanent Trinity is, in fact, communicated and known through the Eucharist, but not exhaustively so.

Once he has traced the detailed contours of Lossky's and Zizioulas's trinitarian theologies, Papanikolaou proceeds to chart a course between them. Remaining closer to Zizioulas than to Lossky, Papanikolaou affirms the centrality of the Eucharist, the non-duality of *oikonomia* and *theologia*, and the unity of *prosopon* and *hypostasis*. He also shares Zizioulas's suspicion of apophaticism. The only major criticism Papanikolaou raises against Zizioulas concerns the latter's excessive reliance on the *monarchia* of the Father to secure the relations among the persons of the Trinity. In place of *monarchia*, Papanikolaou supplements two kinds of relations: a reciprocal causality between and among all the persons (which also allows him to sidestep the

persistently thorny *filiouque* issue), and a Losskian account of kenotic personhood (pp. 151, 154). Papanikolaou argues that when personhood is understood kenotically rather than monarchically, and all the persons can be said to “cause” each of the others, “personal freedom is no longer defined simply by the Father affirming his free will to exist, but becomes a matter both of *ekstatic* movement and reception” (p. 153). Anthropologically, this means that deified humanity likewise enters into kenotic, receptive communion with others, so that at the level of divinity as well as humanity, “the person fulfills himself in the gift of himself” (p. 109).

While each of Papanikolaou’s critiques and reconfigurations is well substantiated, this final effort to piece together a Lossky-inflected, Zizioulian personal, relational ontology can be a bit confusing. This is not because there is anything inherently wrong with theological *bricolage*, but rather because it is difficult to tell what is at stake for Papanikolaou in affirming or rejecting the different elements he teases out of Lossky and Zizioulas. In other words, although the logical moves are all clear, even a sympathetic reader (perhaps especially a sympathetic reader) is left asking what it is that’s so important about relation, communion and personality; and what is so bad about monarchy, substantialism, or apophaticism. For example, in the midst of his critique of monarchy, Papanikolaou mentions fleetingly that there are feminist critiques of divine power to which Zizioulas neglects to attend (p. 126), but then proceeds to neglect them himself, discussing neither feminist, nor liberationist, nor process theologians’ critical perspectives on monarchy and omnipotence. This is puzzling, considering the work Papanikolaou has already done on the intersections of trinitarian and political theologies, and furthermore leaves the reader wondering what exactly is motivating this critique, apart from a rather dry desire to avoid the unorthodox position of subordinationism. To be sure, there does seem to be an ethic of care undergirding Papanikolaou’s quickly-sketched anthropology of *ekstasis* as reception, but the impetus for and details of such an ethic—not to mention such a politic—never quite emerge.

Papanikolaou’s position on apophatic theology is similarly mysterious. Ultimately, he makes the bold, counter-intuitive claim that Zizioulas’s *avoidance* of “the apophatic turn” allows him to overcome the “metaphysics of substance” that Lossky unintentionally reaffirms (p. 142). Yet two problems present themselves here: first, Papanikolaou never quite establishes what is *wrong* with the broadly “ontotheological” tradition in the first place. Despite the *Mitsein*-haunted title, this book avoids any direct discussion of Heidegger, and assumes, without demonstrating as much, that an experientially-grounded, relational ontology will necessarily dismantle the equation of God and being—even when Zizioulas explicitly identifies God with “‘what always and truly is’ ” (p. 96). This is not to say that Zizioulas’s trinitarianism could *not* trouble the ontotheological waters, but such a claim would ideally be examined through Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics. Secondly, while Papanikolaou demonstrates quite elegantly that Lossky capitulates to a kind of substantialism by affirming a “hyper-essence” beyond being, or non-being beyond being, it is not clear that this is a failure of apophaticism so much as it is a failure *at* apophaticism. After all, if Lossky had extended antimony all the way into the divine life, he would have surpassed even the distinctions between being and non-being, essence and energies, and *theologia* and *oikonomia*—by means of *apophasis* itself.

One senses, however, that this move would not satisfy Papanikolaou, even if it did successfully elude metaphysical confines. This is arguably because “overcoming ontotheology” is not Papanikolaou’s central concern. Opening out a personal, relational, trinitarian ontology is. So while he does not quite say as much, it could be that Papanikolaou’s chief reservation with respect to *apophasis* is not its failure to overcome an “ontology of substance”, but rather its individualism, and perhaps even its typically elitist, masculinist individualism at that. But again, these are not critiques that

Papanikolaou raises directly. One is almost left wishing he had compromised a bit of his systematic integrity for the sake of addressing some of the larger questions his analysis opens. As the contemporary dialogue continues to develop between Orthodox and western theologies, why is *theosis* such an important doctrine, and why now? What is wrong with the way modern theology, or modern ecclesiology, or modern capitalism conceives of humanity and divinity, and how might being-with-God transform those conceptions? How, in other words, might Papanikolaou's very compelling, equally convincing theo-anthropology of difference and self-giving *work* in the world? Perhaps all this is to say that the book's deepest silence opens onto its greatest possibility: that a personal, relational ontology might bring into communion not only the eastern and the western, the apophatic and the trinitarian, but—at long last—the mystical and the political.

Mary-Jane Rubenstein
 Wesleyan University
 Department of Religion
 171 Church Street
 Middletown, CT 06459
 USA

Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology by Paul D. Molnar (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005) xiv + 384 pp.

Professor Paul D. Molnar has written a very fine book on one of the most important yet neglected doctrines in contemporary theology. The significance of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, for Molnar, is rooted in the theological work that it undertakes, namely description of the ways in which the God of the Gospel is free and therefore neither dependent on history nor on his revelation in history in order for him to be the one he is. Molnar writes, "On the basis of revelation we do indeed know that God would still be the eternal Father, Son and Spirit without the world, even though he freely created the world and has acted to save the world in his Word and Spirit" (p. 4). It is Molnar's contention that only a doctrine of God which is normed by God's reconciling act in the history of the covenant can deliver theology and therewith the doctrine of God from the Cartesian notion that his relations with the world are constitutive of who he is and therefore essential to him. Despite its somewhat polemical tone, Molnar's text renders a valuable service to theology, to the extent that it challenges contemporary theology and its practitioners to take more seriously theology's center, that is, God as he encounters us in his crucified and risen Son, and to reflect more rigorously upon how that centre is a fit witness of himself in Word and Spirit, grounding all knowledge of himself in himself.

It should be of no surprise to readers of Molnar's previous book and many articles that the themes pursued in *Divine Freedom* are those which have been near and dear to his theological heart for some time, and that his orientation to these themes is one which is deeply formed by the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth. Molnar's text is really one which argues from the point of view of Barth over against many of Molnar's own contemporaries, both Protestant and Catholic. For it is Barth who underwrites Molnar's criticisms of, for example, G. Kaufman, C. LaCugna, S. McFague, E. Johnson, and, especially, K. Rahner. Following Barth, Molnar criticizes the above theologians, for each in their own way does not allow for an immanent Trinity in which God can be said to be by himself or, similarly, pay little more than lip