

**Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, edited by Sophia, Bucharest, 2014, 214 p.**

From the preface of the work we learn that the author presents Orthodoxy as a permanent and universal truth. Researcher and theologian as well, Vladimir Lossky treats pertinent and striking themes of moral life, for the contemporary world touched by secularism. The western man was acquainted with schism and its consequences and now, being in the middle of it, the Orthodox Russian meditates and brings up through writing the fact that the world, God's creation, is attached to the Creator through the Holy Spirit and will return to Him with the help of the same Holy Spirit, according to His will, and with a new beginning achieved through the Embodiment of the Word.

Although it has a similitude to a dogmatic lecture, the content of the book differs from a classical one due to the problems touched upon and which are essential for a necessary synthetical explanation of a theologian and not only for that.

Let's see the way the author devises „matter” into chapters, four in number and each having an introduction and a content; the post-scriptum is instead of conclusions.

We should attentively analyse the fact, exposed in the Prologue, in a few pages, called Faith and Theology”, in order to become familiar with the author's specific style.

The basis of theological doctrine is the Embodiment of the Word, which is necessary, decided by God, and the only way in which we are guided toward the Father, through the Holy Spirit. In theology there are gnosis, charisma and peacefulness, on one hand, but episteme, science and thinking, on the other one. To these, „sophia” is added, it passes beyond concepts and systems. Faith, in its turn, is an objective ontological state, which necessitate a preparation for the believer, starting with the Holy Sacraments of initiation, which show the man suited for divine life. Not

everybody teach in Church, some remain listeners and witness of the truth. The difference between theology and philosophy is in the finality of the rational and practical approach. Philosophers' question became answers for the theologians. God reveals Himself, He is personal; He can be encountered, through effort and sincerity, through apophatic, negative cognition. The Son helped us to get to know The Father.

The first chapter begins with the ways of assimilating the later information from the text; the negative and then the positive one. Thus, immanence and transcendence that reveals God can be studied, discussed. Arguments are brought, exemplified in reflections of famous theologian, belonging to the first christian epochs: St. Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagites, John of Damascus. They cannot be compared to the philosophers of the antiquity: Plotinus, Aristotle, Plato when it is about „the discovery” of the Trinity.

The problem of the relationship „I-You”, meaning the personal apprehension of God, which is firstly analysed at the Jewish people, being an authoritarian one from God's part and impossible for the man, when it is about the acknowledgment of His nature. Christianity changes this approach, giving the man the access to the Person and His nature. In Christ, the all are joined together.

The Trinitarian theology in the fragment taken from the Gospel of John, the first chapter saying: „Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and He was the same with God”, is treated through the point of view of the heresies in that period of time: unitarism and triteism. This fact implies the use of a terminology capable to express God's unity in diversity. Certainly there are some words used, like: *ousia*, *homoousios*, *prosopon*, *hypostasis* with explanations from the Parents' teachings, which discover the new aspect of human reality-the Person.

The judicial is insufficient so as the trinitary terms be understood. Two notions taken from St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Basil the Great's teachings, unitrinity and trinity, composed to synthetize the unity of the three Persons, come to shed a light over this approach. From St. Cyril of Alexandria we take a note of two words which name the Creator: Father, which is superior to God because the former is in relationship with the Son.

The Trinity theologians, St. Gregory of Nazianz, expresses this mystery in poetry, making analogies with the rays of the sun.

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Divine attributes, multipatterned energies, called also Powers, specifically, take us to the fact that in God there is no extraposition of cause and effect, but „causality in one and the same nature”.

In the second chapter, entitled Creation, we note that not only in Christianity „ex nihilo” appear. God creates according to his will the world in this way and it is no longer about existence without origin and since ever. It is necessary for the creation itself, it is a free act. It is neither fragmentation, nor reflection but the call of the new. About creation as an act of the Holy Trinity, the author brings up the confessions belonging to the Fathers Basil the Great, Irenaeus, Gregory of Nazianz who clearly explain that nothing is made in the world without Logos.

The Book Genesis is secondary compared to St. John’s Prologue because it is about two new beginnings. Time and eternity are two notions which refer to creation „ex nihilo”. The beginning is an a-temporal moment in itself, whose creative explosion gives birth to time. The human condition is marked by time; angels got to know time the moment they had been created, in this case being a matter of instantaneous temporality.

In the creation order which is spiritually cosmic and geocentric, there are some explanations concentrated, concerning the stages and days of the genesis. When it comes to man, the accent falls on the image and similitude and everything that results from these two notions and meanings. Man’s place and purpose, his part in the universe, the hope for salvation, are gradually analysed subjects and some terms are used which take us into a geographical domain, in a special context, because the man is a personal being who lives in relation with universe. An emphasis is put on the role of love and on the relationship freedom-impulse-dignity. The goal of freedom, according to Gregory of Nazianz, is that good should truly belong to those who choose it. Man’s mission is achieved through the synergic act between Grace and freedom.

In the Christian anthropology the theme of the Fall and sexuality is revised, that is „the clothing in skin”, giving a new perspective upon the laws of birth and death. An Adam in whom nature could have been connected to Grace, who could have helped keeping an eternal youth and not knowing about death, an Adam who could have come out of „the infantile unconsciousness” and give a positive answer to God, with obedience coming from love, these are some of the ideas with which this chapter closes.

In the third chapter the theme of the evil following the original sin, present in the world, is analyzed; it is connected to the everlasting dualism in Christianity. God has no opposite. The Fathers sustain that evil is an imperfection, it is not a nature, it is an inadequacy and that it has an antagonistic activity towards God. Evil is linked to the freedom of the human being and through it human nature was corrupt but in the case of angels, the evil behavior remains an individual problem. The refusal of responsibility targets, finally, God, blamed at the beginning by Adam. The relation spirit-soul-body is perverted by the acceptance of non-values, that is kindness and the beauty of the fruit.

Between the Fall and the Annunciation and then to the Descent of The Holy Spirit, we can identify the stages which concern the preparation and the beginning of mankind's salvation. The Old Testament belongs to the preparatory history of mankind to receive Jesus Christ. The New Testament opens the era of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, a superior stage, in which the Church, after the Descent, experience show Grace and liberty in the Holy true Spirit work together. Sin persists but it can be stopped by an alliance-relationship with God and then with Christ Himself and the New Law. There are sufficient data and names given to exemplify.

The deep sense of the Embodiment can be observed in a metaphorical vision over the changed nature, restored through Grace. It was „an accepted risk” in history, which always makes liberation possible, without harming liberty at all.

The last chapter exposes the Christological dogma, the dogma from Chalcedon, with explanations referring to the „image of God” and „the image of the Slave”. The state of descendance, expressed by Isaiah the Prophet, „ the shame”, the passions do not destroy the holiness of the divine nature. The Nestorianism and the Apolinarism are remembered in the themes of the two energies and two wills, the monophysite and monotelist ideas to be treated later, all of them being „compromises” of some characters after whom these currents were named, afterwards being considered heretics and their endeavors ignored. A simple monk, Maxim, opposed to these ideas, establishing a teaching which is presently used in the treaties of Orthodox theology. His anthropology helped to establish the following decisions of the ecumenical synod from Constantinople, in the year 681, where duality and unity in Christ was explained and also the role of assuming the condition and obedience to the Father, in a certain historic moment,

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at the beginning of the transition from Adam to the New Adam. Redemption and Resurrection, the last themes of the chapter and of the work itself, are thought to be the phases of the same great redemption work. Christ's Dignities are shown in these acts, belonging to the economy of the Son. Death has no power over man, and out of the resurrected Body, light begins to flow. The practical aspect of the mission of the Church in the world begins and finished with Christ.

Vladimir Lossky's book has got a Post scriptum entitled „Image and likeness". In these few pages, some ideas from the content are resumed, emphasis being put on Christian's personal lives dedicated to Christ, on the importance of renouncing at the chimera of the individual freedom, having as purpose the knowledge of God's true image. Some Father's ideas are resumed as well, ideas regarding human nature, ideas which should spiritually nourish, avoiding the drama of temptations which is of no use for the man to travel by.

A predilection for the Fathers of the Church is to be observed, but also for those near to our times, like Seraphim de Saroy, Tihon de Zadonsk, who knew the true teaching and put it into practice, leaving useful ideas for his successors; there are themes linked to asceticism and true living in the Orthodox spirit.

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