Practising Consubstantiality: The Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary between Synergy and Sophia in St Nicholas Cabasilas and Sergius Bulgakov, and in a Postmodern Perspective

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This paper examines the in-depth way Nicholas Cabasilas assimilated Palamite Hesychastic theological anthropology, transforming it into a Mariological humanism of theological provenance, which responds to the humanism of the Western Renaissance. Then it compares it with an analogous tendency in Bulgakov's thought, putting this theological humanism in dialogue with the self-sufficient humanism of the post-modern kingdom of man.

A Long Introduction: Byzantine Individualism and Hesychasm

According to the experts, the conflict between the iconoclasts and the iconophiles, which ended in the victory of the latter, seems to present a key to the interpretation for the understanding of the spiritual state of Byzantium in the period that Paul Lemerle refers to as the 'first Byzantine humanism' in his eponymous book.[1] This era spiritually preceded and somehow inaugurated the period that Steven Runciman calls the 'second (or last) Byzantine Renaissance/Humanism',[2] the period during which St Nicholas Cabasilas lived. The essence of the matter is that the icon defends the completeness of human nature and of the world against the likelihood of an Eastern (Semitic and Asian) 'blending' of this nature in the ocean of the divine nature. In this sense, the spiritual purview of icon veneration (apart from being

[1] In the 'historical' pages which follow, an attempt is made to construct a critique of the works of specialists. See particularly P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantine. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle* (Paris: P.U.F., 1971); C. Mango, *Byzantium, The Empire of New Rome* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); H. G. Beck, *Das Byzantinische Jahrtausend* (München: O. Beck, 1978); S. Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (London: Edward Arnold, 1959); S. Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970; H. Ahrweiler, *L'ideologie politique de l'Empire Byzantin* (Paris: P.U.F., 1975).

[2] This also, not coincidentally, functions as the title of his book, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance.*

the locus where a distinctive eschatological ontology was consolidated, the significant theological and philosophical consequences of which have yet to be studied) also provided a home for a humanism which, apart from anything else, preserved certain fundamental requirements of classical Greek education as well as the whole of medieval 'Greek' Aristotelianism. Iconoclasm is seen as a kind of religious fundamentalism which, upon becoming established, lost no time in silencing that form of education which continued ancient tradition. For this reason, its adherents were accused of a lack of education by their iconophile opponents. After the conflict then, the way was paved for a renaissance which, even before the establishment of Bardas' university, produced scholars such as Leo the Mathematician and Photius. Of course, the other side of the question, according to Lemerle, was that victory went to the leaders of the iconophiles, particularly those of the monks, and this served to reinforce their intransigence.[3] *A posteriori*, this would blight a part of this humanism, depriving it of the chance of flowering fully. It is certainly a fact that the triumph of the iconophiles brought a new set of spiritual values to the Byzantine scene, though this did not mean that the continuum was ever completely broken. These values might perhaps be thought of as elements of 'humanism', and it may be that they needed some creative assimilation.

Byzantine citizens were certainly not all the 'religious man' type, which is the way the Western tradition has seen them (a notion that now also has been translated to the East). Sir Steven Runciman, however, has described the Byzantine love of beauty in its many forms—artistic, natural, or human—as well as their profound zest for life (to an extent which moralists find particularly difficult to digest), a description that certainly undermines the modern stereotypes put forth in both the East and the West.[4] These attributes were linked—in a way which this distinguished Byzantinist considers difficult for the Westerner to comprehend—with a love of withdrawal and asceticism, with the ideal of the vision of God. Cyril Mango, for example, to mention but one such Westerner, seems to have been unable to grasp the difference between the Byzantine monarchy and Western despotism, lumping the whole of the Byzantine world together in his charge of extreme social rigidity and servility.[5] He also speaks of hatred for the material world and a view of the flesh that bordered on Manichaean horror. Naturally, he also mentions the anti-urban attitude of the Church. All in all, Mango had very little understanding of the Byzantine world and its contradictions. In his *Byzantine Civilization,* Runciman wisely objects to any theory of the Byzantine emperor being an absolute and totalitarian monarch, since there were always centres of internal opposition, such as the army, the Senate, or the Church, while Beck has observed the phenomenon of cronyism, which, together

[3] See generally his *Le premier humanisme byzantine. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle.*

[4] See generally his *Byzantine Civilization.*

[5] See generally his *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome.*

with Church sermons, prevented the establishment of completely insuperable social barriers.[6] Such considerations demonstrate the extent to which Westerners really should reassess their criteria if they want to achieve a proper understanding of the unique features of Byzantine society. By the same token, Mango had very little grasp of the Byzantine ascetic ideal and its profoundly positive attitude—in its mature phase—toward history and the world, or toward the spirit of enquiry (*τὸ ἐξεταστικὸν καὶ θεωρητικόν)*, which Gregory the Theologian considered the genuine attribute of theology and which he also felt to be a legacy from Ancient Greek education, featuring prominently as it does in the works of the great Fathers.[7] Lemerle was more perceptive and felt that, at least as regards what he called ethics, Byzantium preserved within its Christianity the best of the Greco-Roman legacy.[8] In this way, the Byzantine person seems, as we shall see later on, closer to today's European than to his medieval Western counterpart, and we can add to that the powerful originality of the Byzantines in artistic expression.

It is, in any case, a fact, as Eleni Glykatzi-Ahrweiler observes, that after this first Byzantine renaissance, intellectuals began to adopt the term Hellene and a Helleno-Byzantine conscience was firmly established, as a sign of the superiority of Byzantine education over that of the 'barbarians'.[9] This marked the end of the ideology of ecumenicity, which had been founded on the great Roman idea as early as the reigns of Justinian I and Heraclius. The depiction of the Byzantine Roman Emperor on the coinage of his state holding the orb and cross would be called into question only when, after the successes of Heraclius against the Persians, the new, great, and henceforth permanent enemy, the Arabs, established their own caliphate on Byzantine soil in Damascus at the end of the seventh century. In his efforts to deal with the Arab threat, Leo III engaged in a populist policy which bolstered iconoclasm, thus making allies of the agricultural population of the hinterland of Asia Minor, and it is at this time that we see the rise of Byzantine nationalism and the institution of a militaristic period. Around the tenth century this would be transformed into the imperialism of a great world power, and it was then that a general sense of the superiority of the Byzantines and their civilization began to be felt, as opposed to the disregard for barbarous, corrupt, undignified and worthless peoples such as the Russians, Bulgarians, and Franks (*i.e.*, Western Europeans). So at this phase the multi-ethnic empire had been transformed for the first time into a Helleno-Christian empire, with a sense of identity and an education system that embraced all, which was distinctly different from the various ideals of the peoples surrounding it.

[6] See his *Das Byzantinische Jahrtausend.*
[7] *In laudem Basilii magni,* PG 36: 508-509.
[8] *Op. cit.*
[9] See *L'ideologie politique de l'Empire Byzantin.*

In this period, the empire was in its first great Christian—and yet Greek—maturity. This was not, of course, accompanied by any equally mature economic or institutional reality, even though this detail might also be thought of as characteristic of the Late Byzantine period. The unwieldy and rigid bureaucratic paternalism of the state, together with a notion of the distribution of wealth but not its accumulation, meant that the taxation system—usually unjust to the point of incoherence—and that of excise duties came close to a breaking point, and this in turn resulted, step-by-step, in an exhausted economy. From as early as the reign of Alexios I Komninos (1081-1118), there was admiration for the economic and technological superiority of the West, though this did not imply the possibility of any substantial dialogue.

However, the fundamental issue was the unique spiritual situation that had been produced. This situation's characteristics shed light on what followed, and, of course, the important thing is not the frequently mentioned stagnation of academic thought—though experts today agree that this was already a factor in the Hellenistic age. Nor is it, as Lemerle laments, that philosophy had come to be limited to the monastic position, and that the transference of all ultimate purpose and hope to the absolutely transcendental condemned everything in this world, *a priori*, to annihilation.[10] It is unfortunate that almost none of the well-known, professional Byzantinists (with the partial exception of Runciman) have been able to probe the depths of the real labours of the Byzantines. Lemerle argues that the Byzantines never really understood Homer, Thucydides, Sophocles, or Plato and that the sole aim of their education was to acquire rhetorical style.[11] If we accept this, if we agree that Ancient Greek learning was not handed down, even in some not easily discerned way, then it really is difficult for us to understand the profundity of patristic literature. The religiosity which foreigners see Byzantium focused upon was certainly a real temptation from time to time (although perceptibly less so than in the West), but this was not the essence or the point of the Byzantine ideal. Not even the distinction between sacred and profane literature had a religious character, as it has, for example, in the Muslim tradition. More frequently, it had a functional character: the great Fathers knew how to think about and be stimulated profitably by all that profane knowledge had to offer.

That time certainly was marked by the birth pangs of some aspects of our Western modernity. The population of New Rome now had a Hellene, Orthodox conscience, and this was not without its tribulations and dangers, which philologists and historians have rarely been able to elucidate satisfactorily. In particular, this has meant the beginning of a distinct tendency towards a search for individuality for the first time in medieval history—a search which preceded similar explorations in the West. Its beginnings are easily detectable in the work of St Symeon the New Theologian, for example, but it is plainly obvious in almost every aspect of public life

[10] See generally his *Le premier humanisme byzantine.*
[11] *Ibid.*

and creativity a little later in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[12] The essential characteristic of this search (a characteristic which marks the difference between this and its Western parallel some centuries later) is that it takes place within the Greek patristic theology, not beyond or against it. Thus education is upgraded through real research and dialogue, while art becomes more realistic and natural, giving the impression of movement and communication between the persons depicted, along with new bright colours exhibiting the sentimental contrasts and changes; in literature, romance novels are multiplied and everywhere we notice a transition from the ideal to the real and common, from the impersonal to the personal, and from the abstract to the natural.

Thus, to give some examples, in M. Psellos' work we see a re-evaluation of matter and body, a serious consideration of the contradictions within the human soul, or the special attention he pays to the natural details of human personalities in his *Chronography.*[13] In Anna Comnena's work, naturalism along with the decisive exaltation of the achievements and deeds of distinguished individualities does not completely ignore human internal contradictions, something that is more clearly obvious in N. Choniates' work, along with his deep sense of human transience.[14] The re-evaluation of natural being; the affirmation of the concrete human nature; the (unthinkable for the West) personal development of the bourgeois without the simultaneous rejection, on their part, of the religious or the political authorities; the (unexpected for the Western researcher) alliance between townsmen and landowners; the intense individual claim for social vindication along with the power of family support; and the great social mobility together with the absence of a concrete and solid ruling class are some of the prominent characteristics of these early developments, which prepared, step by step, the ground for analogous spiritual evolutions in theology a little later on. I am talking here of Hesychasm, which cannot be *culturally* understood (rather than merely spiritually) without the above remarks.

The difficulty with Hesychasm is that its absorption into scholarship was interrupted suddenly and early. The gradual collapse and eventual fall of the Empire, the resultant decapitation of the scholarship of the Greco-Roman nation in the 15th century, the terrible vicissitudes of the centuries-long, barbarous occupation, and, thereafter, the impositions of the West and the brutal clashes over confessions forced the Eastern Church, for a long time, to put its energies into preservation and conservation. The Orthodox Church in Russia was unable to undertake the task for the reasons described by Florovsky.[15]

[12] For the analyses that follow, see my *Orthodoxy and Modernization: Byzantine Individualization, State, and History in the Perspective of the European Future* (Athens: Armos, 2006), especially pp. 41-59 (in Greek).

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] See his *Ways of Russian Theology,* vol. 1 (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1979).

First, this prevented a real, in depth dialogue after the Hesychast councils between the victors of the Hesychast conflict—the Hesychasts like Palamas, Cabasilas, Kokkinos, and, later on, Markus Eugenikos *et al.*—and the Westernizing opponents and their pupils, who were defeated. Second, it prevented a real and deep dialogue with the West, something for which many Western theologians, with their strong confessionalism, are also responsible. George-Gennadios Scholarios, in the fifteenth century, started a deep, unprecedented, and learned dialogue with the West, but by then it was no longer possible to truly hold such a major spiritual and cultural event within the collapsing Byzantine *intelligentsia.* The same is true concerning people like Vikentios Domodos, the great and erudite theologian of the 18th century, whose work is, ironically, still largely unpublished. There were two appalling consequences as a result of this situation. First, Hesychasm gradually gave the impression of real and substantive opposition to humanism, both classical and medieval, and to the natural, cosmological, and, in part, metaphysical dimensions of philosophy, whereas in fact it represented a drastic reacquisition, critique, and transformation of all these (even though this was formulated largely through thinking and experience, rather than in a systematic manner). It is therefore unfortunate, but true, that a good deal of obscurantism has crept in to Orthodox theology, especially in recent years, making it impossible to hold the potentially invaluable dialogue between Hesychasm and the human sciences and philosophy, which would provide these with new horizons. The second disastrous effect is that Hesychasm was understood as having an *a priori* anti-Western orientation and impetus, something which is of course untrue, since Palamas, along with his cleverer pupils in the centuries that followed, never condemned Augustine or Thomas Aquinas; many Western theologians are also responsible for this supposed hostility since, out of their inability to properly understand Palamas, they created a swarm of monstrous myths about Palamas and Hesychasm, to such an extent that even now all the good and faithful Catholic scholars feel unconsciously compelled to express a sort of theological nausea when they encounter Palamas and his ancient or modern proponents. It is impossible to find even one western scholar who completely rejects Palamas *due to a deep knowledge of his theology.*

On the other hand—and precisely because of having already excluded any vibrant and meaningful communication between Hesychasm and philosophy, science, and ecumenical theology in general—when, in recent years, a scholarly interpretation of Hesychasm was needed, what in fact occurred was the injudicious and uncritical introduction of a truly foreign conceptual framework (or rather spiritual outlook) derived principally from Western Christian Neoplatonism. This has resulted in the interpretation of Hesychasm in terms and ways which risk being at odds with its actual spiritual depths. I, therefore, think it urgent that we work today to seek the authentic patristic and existential criteria for an interpretation of Hesychasm, which, at the same time, highlights its vibrant topicality in the face of modern theological,

philosophical, and anthropological demands. The first steps in this direction have, in fact, already been taken, but there is still a long way to go.

I will make two important points concerning Palamas: the first has to do with the concept of psycho-somatic individuality, in its communion with God, in this life, and the second with this individuality's *koinonetic* dimensions. In both cases, Hesychasm represents not only a genuine offspring of the Greek patristic theology, but also the upshot of the mature Byzantine anthropological quest.

Palamas takes as his starting-point the rapture of Paul, since this of necessity poses certain ontological questions.[16] At the time of his rapture, the Apostle was what? Not to be grasped by physical force or rather free of all physical force? He was, answers Saint Gregory, the light with which he was unified. Through this light he knew himself.[17] He did not partake in the divine essence, but he did become uncreated by grace. Most importantly, however, he remained entirely himself; it was a case of the opening up of a particular person to eschatological likeness with God. What is fundamental here is that the specific person who was Paul did not need, for example, to become 'without form' in a Plotinian sense.[18] The real, natural existence of the person, not merely the intellect, but also the senses 'bound together in the Spirit, will see together the invisible light, or better they will become altogether eternal (*συνδιαιωνίσουσι)* through this vision'.[19] Before it gives a new dimension to anthropological ontology, this understanding of the human framework of body and soul, which will become together eternal through vision/participation, also reorients theological gnosiology: this is now the Biblical knowledge/participation, standing against any 'contemplation' of philosophical provenance.

And if Palamas is so severe towards apophaticism—which is a point of pride for every type of philosophical (*i.e.* Platonic) approach to the contemplation of the One—it is because the intellect, as well as sensation and the body, really and naturally take part in the vision 'above feeling and mind'.[20] The vision 'is suffered', not contemplated, and this means, above all, that not an intellectual apophaticism but communion beyond words is suffered[21] as a general passion of *Dasein*, not as Neo-Platonic angst over the absent material existence. Thereafter, of course, apophaticism is adopted, together with cataphatic theology, as a means of preserving this eschatological fulfilling/opening up of existence. Apophaticism here is a sign of the deep and real communion of the actual individual with his or her actual God, and this refers to participation in the divine energies, in Christ, in the Spirit, which, again, is of Biblical provenance.

[16] *Triads 2, 3, 37, Τὰ Συγγράματα*, ed. Panagiotes Chrestou, vol. 1 (Thessaloniki: 1966).

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Enneads* VI, 9, 3, LCL, trans. A. H. Armstrong, vol. 443 (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1967).

[19] *Triads* 2, 3, 50.

[20] *Ibid.*, 2, 3, 25.

[21] *Ibid.* 2, 3, 26.

In this sense there are two features which we might say are fundamental for the structuring of this new participatory eschatological ontology of existence: first, is the importance of the body along with the soul's passible part. Indeed, in Barlaam's deprecation of *Dasein* (in *Triads* 2, 2, 8 and particularly *Triads* 11-13) there is a patent Neo-Platonic echo which considers that attachment to the energies of the body and the passibility of the soul are darkness for the (rational) soul. Palamas, on the other hand, considers the body to be receptive to deification and divine communion since it already has 'signified spiritual intentions'.[22] The body participates in prayer[23] through which the 'energies of the Spirit' are put into action[24] (and the fulfilling of the commandments is a joint action of the soul and body.[25] Furthermore, Saint Gregory reacts[26] to Barlaam's philosophical definition of impassibility as a necrosis of the passibility of the soul by demanding a *metathesis*, a transformation, and not a dissolution of the soul's 'passive' power of feeling and desiring. It is tempting here to recall the Stoics and their astonishing findings regarding the emotions and the psycho-physiology of the feelings. With its central theme being the concept of deficiency or privation, Stoic theory came to the conclusion that it is not possible to remove the passibility of the soul from people. Reason itself is not merely divine, but is also a psychological function. And yet, despite these discoveries, natural man is to be rejected with even greater violence than before. The Stoic sage is in reality, impassive, someone who has set at nought the passible part of his soul. Palamas is at the very opposite pole. Thus, the Hesychast father accepts the inclusion in Being, in a Biblical fashion, of all wisdom and all the profundity of the actual, indefinability and multiplicity, body and spirit, the complex and the unspoken, beauty and mystery, feeling and reason, suffering and emotion, light and darkness, material and history, love and hate, music and serenity, contemplation and communion, providing all of them with an eternal future in Christ, so long as they are transposed by Being in the Church.

The second, this time a *koinonetic* point that I am going to make, is connected to ecclesiology because it is in the mysteries, culminating in the Eucharistic manifestation of Christ, that the individual vision of God is founded (see, for example, Homilies VII, 8; XXXVII, 10; XVII, 16, *et al.*),[27] and not in the personal efficiency of a pious individual. And at this point Saint Gregory shows how profoundly he absorbed Symeon the New Theologian, Maximus the Confessor, and, through the latter, Dionysius the Areopagite. This is why he sought to give an ontological foundation to anthropology, cosmology, and his ascetic teaching, through ecclesiology,

[22] *Ibid*., 2, 2, 10.
[23] *Ibid*., 2, 2, 16.
[24] *Ibid*., 2, 9, 22.
[25] *Ibid*., 2, 2, 20.
[26] *Ibid*., 3, 3, 15.
[27] In *Έλληνες Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ έργα,* trans. P. Chrestou and ed. E. Meretakes, vols. 9-11 (Thessaloniki: Πατερικαὶ Ἐκδόσεις 'Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς', 2004-9).

which he lived—entirely anti-metaphysically—as 'Eucharistic ontology' (*i.e.*, as an existential application of consubstantiality, on the ecclesial level).[28] In this sense, Palamas' vision of God is an ongoing process of communion. The philosophical union, then, is not entirely real; there are two ways of ascent to the One, he says.[29] The first is that of the philosophers, which he calls 'imaginative' precisely because it is only intellectual, without the body, which, being material, is abandoned. On the other hand, Hesychast ascent is real because it occurs through the Holy Spirit and because it involves 'every kind of creation'.[30] An individual can reach God only by bearing with him, in a *koinonetic* way, the whole of the material creation, so that 'the image of God will be complete'.[31] The vision of the uncreated light is due to the alteration of the particular person into the body of Christ. This, in final analysis, is the difference between a philosophical existence (even if it considers itself Christian) and a real, full, ecclesiological existence: the former 'contemplates', the latter 'participates in'. This is also the meaning of the sharp distinction between contemplation and communion with God, according to Palamas: 'the saints do not merely contemplate, they also commune with divinity, by grace'.[32]

This re-evaluation of the bodily, the material, and the cosmological dimension in general, along with an ontology of dialogical reciprocity, which does not absorb individuality (and *vice versa,* in a way that makes the one unthinkable without the other) are the final upshots of this *anthropology of participation,* which forms the very core of Hesychast theology. It seems thus plausible to claim that, through Hesychasm, the Greek patristic anthropological proposal has reached its culmination. And it is precisely this legacy that is substantiated and further explored in Cabasilas' Mariological thought, as we shall see next.

Mary the Theotokos between Synergy and Sophiology, Cabasilas and Bulgakov
I) Cabasilas' Hesychastic Mariological Humanism

Some fifty years ago, the well-known Protestant scholar, Hans von Campenhausen, was still able to assert in the Introduction to his *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* that,

> The aim of the present work is to open up a path through this scholastic wilderness, the so-called 'Mariology' of the early Church. It cannot be seriously

[28] See the First Study of my work, *Church in the Making An Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality*, 21st Century Greek Theologians 1, trans. Norman Russell (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), 15-108.

[29] *Πρὸς Ἀκίνδυνον*, IX, 11, 36, in *Ἕλληνες Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, Γρηγορίου Παλαμά έργα* 5, ed. P. Christou and E. Meretakis (Thessaloniki: Πατερικαί εκδόσεις 'Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς', 1986).

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Πρὸς Ἀκίνδυνον,* VI. 12, 38.

> disputed that the early Church, at any rate during its first few centuries, knew no real Marian doctrine, that is, no thematic theological concern with Mary's person and her significance in the scheme of Salvation. Nevertheless, the flood of publications relating to the subject is now beyond computation, and under the pressure of present Catholic dogmatic interest it is still rising.[33]

It is of course simply impossible for the student of the Greek patristic tradition to take such an assertion seriously. Though the term 'Theotokos' can be found only a little later in texts,[34] the discussion of Virgin's role in salvation starts early in patristic thought, in Ignatius, Justin, and Origen.[35] I am not, of course, going to give an account of the extremely rich Greek patristic Mariology in this paper. It suffices to assert that in the final period of Byzantine thought, this entire heritage was re-explored and re-thought according to the new anthropological terms described above. Cabasilas was, as it is widely admitted today, a convinced Hesychast and a distinguished humanist at the same time, and thus his account of Mariology follows the thread of a deep and wise Christian humanism, which can be thoroughly meaningful also for our times. On the other hand, the views of Bulgakov, as I have claimed elsewhere,[36] are, up to a certain point, the product of modern philosophical humanism. Indeed, his Sophiology is incomprehensible without this dimension. Thus, it is important to put Cabasilas and Bulgakov in dialogue.

Cabasilas' Mariological thought is articulated in his three homilies, *On the (Theotokos') Birth(I), On the Annunciation(II),* and *On the Dormition(III).*[37] I have eleven interconnected points to make:

> 1) In order to understand Mary's achievement, the discussion starts with the human struggle against sin. As Cabasilas claims, the power against sin was inherent in human beings, but no one had fully activated it until Mary. Evil seemed to have become identical with human nature, and that means that this nature seemed to have disappeared under the distortion brought about by it. In the author's words: '*καί ἦν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐν οὕτω μυρίοις σώμασιν*

[33] Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, Studies in Historical Theology 2, trans. F. Clarke (London: SCM Press, 1964), 7.

[34] It appears in Alexander of Alexandria for the first time in a letter about 320, see Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History, I, 4, 54, GCS 44, 23, 3*. It also appears in the works of the following thinkers: Athanasius, *Orationes adversus Arianos,* PG 26: 349C; 385A; 393AB; Basil, *In sanctam Christi generationem,* PG 31: 1468B; Gregory. Nazianzen, *Lettres théologiques,* Source Chrétienne, ed. P. Galley, vol. 208 (Paris: Cerf, 2013), 42; Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem Natalem Domini* (PG 46: 1136C); Ambrosius, refers to her as 'Mother of God' in *Concerning Virginity*, II, 2,7, *NPNF,* ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 10 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publisher Co., 1896); and then of course in the works of Cyril of Alexandria after the Council of Ephesus.

[35] See G. Gharib, *Testi Mariani del Primo Millennio,* 4 vol. (Rome: Città Nuova, 1988-1991).

[36] See Loudovikos, *Church in the Making,* 206ff.

[37] All of which can be found in *Η Θεομήτωρ,* ed. P. Nellas (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1974).

ἀφανής', [and man was obscure (invisible, non-manifest), though he existed in myriads of human bodies].[38]

2) The Theotokos manifested this given power against sin in its fullness by struggling against evil and succeeding in staying untouched by it.[39] This was done by her '*ἔρωτι Θεοῦ καί ρώμη λογισμοῦ καί γνώμης εὐθύτητι καί φρονήματος μεγέθει*' [Through her love (eros) of God, the power of her thought, the straightforwardness of her will and the greatness of her spirit].[40] Thus she made manifest on her part the integrity of human nature as it was created by God. And that was necessary, according to Cabasilas, for God to add 'immobility' towards evil in order for him to be able to continue the work of humanity's salvation through Christ. Here the basic characteristics of this theological humanism are present: all parts of human soul move through Mary's personal will toward God.

3) This movement of her whole nature to God, was made *not without grace* ('*καί τήν χάριν εἵλκυσεν*'),[41] but without any *special grace,* beyond the usual grace human beings are accorded. Her inner motivation was 'pure gratitude'.[42] On this point Cabasilas takes the chance to argue, on the one hand, against any form of absolute predestination, claiming that it is against the nature of virtue not to be absolutely free, as a result of our *prohairesis* and personal will. Since humans are endowed with rationality and freewill, it is impossible for virtue to be against human nature: the purpose of virtue is precisely to save the integrity of human nature, not to diminish or abolish it.[43] On the other hand, these views concerning Mary's need to attract divine grace seem not to be easily compatible with the doctrine of the immaculate conception, which had already appeared in the West through, for example, Bonaventure.[44] The author, however, who expressed this doctrine in the best theological way in that period of time was, I think, Duns Scotus: 'To the question was the Bl. Virgin conceived without original sin? I say that God could have brought it about that she was never in original sin. I declare this to be possible, because grace is equivalent to original justice so far as divine acceptance goes, so that because of this grace there is no original sin in the soul that possesses it'.[45] This

[38] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 64. All the translations of Cabasilas' texts are mine.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*, 66.
[41] *Ibid.,* 72.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*, 76-8.
[44] See St Bonaventure, *Mirror of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (The Catholic Primer's Reference Series, 2005), 9: 'Oh, how far from this woe of them that are born was the most holy nativity of Mary, who was not only free from original sin, but also from the fuel of misery, in so far as it leads to sin, for she was conceived without stain.'
[45] Scotus, *Ordinatio III, dist.3, qu.1,* in *Opera Omnia,* vol. 9, eds B. Hechich, B. Huculak, I. Percan, and S. Ruiz de Loizaga (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 2006).

is the theory that claims that the merits of Christ could be applied to Mary by means of 'anticipatory redemption' (or 'pre-redemption'), in anticipation of her future role as the mother of the incarnate God.[46] The first problem with this position is that it cannot be explicitly or implicitly found anywhere in Greek patristic texts without stretching them. On a theological level now, the problem with this 'eschatological'[47] anticipatory redemption of Mary is that it tends to abolish real history; history is something that *has to happen indeed and in absolute freedom.* It is a serious misunderstanding of Orthodox anthropology, as well as eschatology, to think of the Virgin's conception as if 'the light of the end of times [is] breaking into history and transforming its categories'.[48] This notion arbitrarily changes Mary's conception into one that is immaculate, thus transforming her, through this irresistible grace, into an automatically graced person, who, without having any other possible choice, serves the one who saved her without her giving her consent or ever having been asked! Even if we admit that God foreknew her wholehearted consent, (and he certainly foreknew it), he could not automatically fulfil it. As a *historical human person,* Mary had to demonstrate her absolutely free *prohairesis*/gnomic will and not have it just assumed (or replaced) by God's irresistible will. And it is only through this freewill that she is pre-purified (*προκαθαρθεῖσα*) by the Spirit according to Gregory Nazianzen's oration,[49] which is followed by many other Fathers. It is important to stress here that this pre-purification has nothing to do with Mary's conception, but only with her giving birth to Christ. The eschatological intervention of grace *co-operates* with human will, and the Virgin's will, and does not conquer it, as we shall see in our author's text immediately hereafter. Otherwise, we are all already saved, or not, regardless of our deeds. And then we need the doctrine of predestination to help us to understand God's arbitrariness. Unless we find a way to safeguard human freedom, the dogma of the immaculate conception, according to any protological or eschatological interpretation, will be a problem for ecumenical theology. It is only in this way, I think, that the dogma of the immaculate conception can be accepted, though in a different form, by Orthodox theology, as I shall argue below.

4) Thus God has been made manifest through the Virgin for the first time in his image, Cabasilas continues, and 'she helped God to show his goodness' (*'τῷ Θεῷ πρός τήν τῆς χρηστότητος ἐπίδειξιν μόνη τῶν ὄντων ἐβοήθησεν*

[46] See M. O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 321.

[47] As J. P. Manoussakis—so far the only explicit Orthodox proponent of the dogma of the 'immaculate conception' of whom I am aware—calls it. See his *For the Unity of All* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 12ff.

[48] *Ibid*. This is Manoussakis's proposal.

[49] *In Theophania,* PG 36: 325.

ἡ Παρθένος').[50] Here we see this deep understanding of *synergy* (Mary *helped [ἐβοήθησεν]* God) based precisely upon the integrity of the divine image in man, an image which is precisely *freedom.* Man needs to exercise his freedom in order to open himself to God, in order for God, in turn, to express his goodness. God needs human freedom in order for his goodness to be exercised upon creation in the right way, i.e., freely. Synergy thus means freedom for both man and God, according to Cabasilas. In these lines, there perhaps exists a way to understand, from an Orthodox point of view, the Virgin's immaculateness. The Virgin received a very special grace, due to the sanctity and the prayers of her parents, Sts Joachim and Anna. She was the divine response to their saintly prayers. She began her life as a saint in the sense that she had already been given—through grace—the divine gift of a proper disposition of her *prohairesis.* Her parents' synergetic dedication to God nourished the integrity of her total dedication to him. Her dedication to God, however, should not be viewed as the effacement but rather as the reinforcement of her own synergetic self-offering to God. Thus her conception was immaculate indeed, though not in the sense of a mechanical absence of ancestral sin, but in the sense of her parents' total divine devotion, which formed and reinforced the synergetic inauguration of the final abolition (by Christ) of sin and death through her total divine devotion to God.

5) Through her loving freedom, Mary reached 'a divine love which consummated any other human desire' and through this she reached the 'possession of God' (*Θεοῦ κατοχή*), and 'coition with God' (*Θεοῦ συνουσία*). And because of that: '*τοῦ Θεοῦ πρός ἑαυτήν στρέφει τόν ὀφθαλμόν· καί τῇ παρ' αὐτής ὥρα καλήν τήν κοινήν ἀπέδειξε φύσιν· καί εἶλε τόν ἀπαθή καί ἦν ἄνθρωπος ὁ διά τήν ἁμαρτίαν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀπηχθημένος*' [She turned the eye of God towards her; and through her beauty she showed the beauty of the common human nature; and thus she attracted the dispassionate God and he became man because of her, he who was hated by men, due to their sinfulness].[51] What a bold and brilliant statement! Here we have the apogee of synergy, an event of loving dialogical reciprocity. This is Cabasilas' *humanism as synergy.*

6) Thus Mary's adherence to God came out of her burning desire and was fully psychosomatic;[52] she gave everything she had to God in order for him to assume all humanity through her.[53] Due to this devotion, she does not even ask the archangel if she is ready for such a thing—to give birth to the Son of God;[54] she only asks for the way this can be done since she is a virgin.

[50] *On the Theotokos' Birth,* 108.
[51] *Ibid.,* 124.
[52] *Ibid.,* 136.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*

Because of this deep devotion, her body has become spiritual, in the sense Paul gives to this term, since it is wholly the abode of the Spirit.[55] She had been already 'enhypostasized' in Christ, and thus she cannot die, she cannot undergo material corruption.

7) Let us now attempt a closer examination of Cabasilas' *theo-humanism*. God, our author claims, created human beings in order to take from the human race a mother when he would like to be born as human ('*ἀλλά τοῦτο ζητῶν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα γεννηθῆναι δεῆσαν τήν μητέρα παρ' αὐτής λάβῃ*').[56] To become the 'theotokos' is then human eschatological culmination, the reason for God to create humanity. In a similar way, all the world existed in order to offer a mother to God: 'the world existed for Mary's own sake'.[57] The utmost humanism is identified here with the utmost divine participation, precisely as the antipode of what Charles Taylor called the 'self-sufficient humanism', as we shall see below.[58]

8) This leads St Nicholas to an even bolder assertion: 'the Theotokos,' he says 'was made mother of whom she was worthy to become the mother' ('*Μήτηρ ὑπῆρξεν οὐ γενέσθαι μήτηρ δίκαιον ἦν*').[59] Concerning now the Incarnation: 'this had to happen even for the sake of the Virgin, and only in order for her to rightly become the mother of God' ('*Ὑπέρ γε τοῦ τήν Παρθένον Θεοῦ δικαίως ἄν ὑπάρξαι μητέρα, μηδέν ἧττον χρῆναι τοῦτο γενέσθαι*').[60] Upon this strange 'equality' between God and man is established what I have called 'dialogical reciprocity',[61] something which seems to be the opposite of any anthropological passivity; God seems to see man as his equal and gives himself thoroughly to man instead of just ordering him or dictating his existence through any sort of predestination. But this is precisely the quintessence of the Maximian or Palamite understanding of *Life in Christ,* to recall the title of Cabasilas' masterpiece, which echoes his two masters' teaching in a personal and creative assimilation.[62]

9) This also leads Cabasilas to see the Theotokos as an image of the Church, and, subsequently, to use repeatedly ecclesiological expressions that refer to

[55] *Ibid.,* 204-6.
[56] *Ibid.,*150.
[57] *Ibid.,* 168.
[58] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 21.
[59] *Ibid.,* 154.
[60] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 156.
[61] See my work, Nikolaos Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology. Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), ch. 5.
[62] It is of the utmost importance to note Palamas' use of hesychastic terminology to delineate Mary's life. See J. Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, trans. G. Lawrence (London: Faith Press, 1964), 232-6.

the Theotokos.[63] The Theotokos, prefiguring the Church, is the *locus* where the hypostatic union between created and uncreated initially takes place.

The most important question, however, seems ultimately to be *how the Virgin achieved such spiritual progress.* Cabasilas' answer is, once again, original and inspiring. The Theotokos 'gave human prayers a way to heaven, by destroying the wall which prevented this from happening' (*'Οδόν ταῖς εὐχαῖς εἰς οὐρανόν ἔδωκεν τό διεῖργον καταλύσασα τεῖχος*').[64] Cabasilas is explicitly following Palamas here, who, in his *Homily 53,* considers the Virgin as the first Hesychast, discovering the 'prayer of the heart' in the Temple. The Theotokos, in other words, assumed human prayers in her prayer. She assumed human desire for life eternal, incorruptible, and meaningful in her own desire, and this means that she actively unified, for the first time, all of the human race in herself and offered it to God. She *practiced the consubstantiality* of all creatures in God, thus prefiguring Christ's perfect realization of consubstantiality of all creation through his salutary economy—consubstantiality is the essence of divine life, *analogically* transferred to creation *in Christ*, as the essence of his work of salvation.[65]

10) This is further explained by the great Byzantine theologian, when he writes that the Virgin, 'out of all humanity of the ages, she alone abode as the divine altar. And she offered herself as a purifying and preparatory sacrifice for all human kind before the great victim' (*'Διά τοῦτο τῶν ἐκ τοῦ παντός αἰῶνος ἀνθρώπων, τό θυσιαστήριον ὤκησε μόνη, θυσία προτέλειος τις και καθαρτήριος προ του μεγάλου θύματος ὑπέρ παντός προσενεχθεῖσα τοῦ γένους'*).[66] The Theotokos' sacrifice[67] was to unify all human prayers (*i.e.*, pains, impasses, deaths, and divine desires) in her own desire and prayer by emptying herself (*i.e.,* by eliminating her narcissism, her *philautia*), through a kenotic imaging of Christ's absolute *kenosis* on the Cross, and thus prefiguring the christological consubstantial gathering of all beings in the Church. The Virgin's spiritual glory is that she started in loving freedom as a human God's very work of redemption and offered all creation in her to him, which allowed God's free love to respond through the Incarnation, fulfilling this

[63] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 176, 202.

[64] *Ibid.,* 54.

[65] On the notion of Christological consubstantiality, see my work, Loudovikos, *Church in the Making,* 45ff, 213-231.

[66] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 186.

[67] Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), following Louis Massignon and Timothy Winter, tries to create a strange convergence between the Theotokos and Mohammed, who are both, according to Winter, 'bearers of the Word' (301-305). While I agree with Kearns (and Massignon on whom she draws) that both the Abrahamic and the Marian prayer 'are sacrificially motivated by the necessity of otherness at the heart of what one tends to regard as one's own' (304), I cannot find sufficient evidence in the sources provided by the author for a similar sacrificial understanding of the Islamic prayer.

work so that everything can be recapitulated in Christ, who thus transfers *analogically* the divine *homoousion* to creation.
11) Thus we see that the fundamental elements of Hesychasm are creatively digested by Nicholas Cabasilas: the psychosomatic adherence to God along with the *kenotic and thus koinonetic/ecclesial way* of this devotion. The one is unthinkable without the other, and each one of them happens through the other. On the other hand, it is clear that, as a great humanist, Cabasilas finds a way to address, through his Mariology, the rising Western humanism of his time in a deeply theological manner: humanism can remain humanism, glorifying humanity in its fullness without losing its purely theological sources of synergy and participation—this is the lesson Cabasilas teaches his contemporary intellectuals.

II) Bulgakov's Sophiological Mariology

Having called her 'the soul of creation, more precisely the soul of the soul: for humankind as Adam, as lord of creation, is the soul of the world, and the Mother of God is the soul of human race',[68] Bulgakov does not hesitate to exalt the Theotokos even higher: 'Alone of God's creatures found worthy of being inhabited by the Holy Spirit, She is the human hypostatic image of the Holy Spirit. One can say that, in this sense, She is the Holy Spirit not incarnate but manifested in a human hypostasis. There is no, and can be no, greater and fuller manifestation of the Holy Spirit.'[69] In other words, 'She is the peak of the world, which touches heaven. She is sanctified by the entire power of the Divine Sophia, of the revelation of the Holy Trinity. She herself remains the creaturely Sophia'.[70] Or differently, in summarizing all these in his well-known handbook *The Orthodox Church*:

> […] in her is realized the idea of Divine Wisdom in the creation of the world, and Divine Wisdom in created world. It is in her that Divine Wisdom is justified, and thus the veneration of the Virgin blends with that of the Holy Wisdom. In the Virgin there are united Holy Wisdom and the Wisdom of created world, the Holy Spirit and the human hypostasis. Her body is completely spiritual and transfigured. She is the justification, the end and the meaning of creation. She is, in this sense, the glory of the world. In her, God is already 'all in all'.[71]

[68] See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush. On the Orthodox Veneration of Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co, 2009), 112.
[69] Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb,* trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 411.
[70] *Ibid.*, 411.
[71] Bulgakov's *The Orthodox Church* was first published in English in 1935. Quotation here from the revised translation, Lydia Kesich, trans., *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary

Regardless of the loose, poetic manner of Bulgakov's expressions above, and despite its shortcomings, it is clear that, as one can perhaps claim, the Theotokos as an image of Sophia or the Holy Spirit does what the Spirit or, better, Sophia, as the Spirit's uncreated energy, does in this world[72]: she gathers beings together in God and offers unified creation to God. Of course, this is a *possible* interpretation since Bulgakov does not say this clearly in the above passages. But if my interpretation of the Sophiologists' intentions is right, namely that the purpose of their theological enterprise is ultimately to decipher the meaning of consubstantiality,[73] then what Bulgakov wants to say here is not very far from Cabasilas, though the latter seems to do this in a considerably clearer, deeper, and more convincing way. The reason for Cabasilas' theological superiority is that he is adamant that the Virgin does what she does only through participation. On the other hand, Bulgakov at times gives the impression that Mary—as a 'human hypostatic image of the Spirit', 'Divine Wisdom in the created world' etc.—is forever and in a pantheistic fashion in sole possession of this image.[74] This is Bulgakov's assimilation of Western transcendental subjectivism, which demands the metaphysical autonomy and self-determination of the creature—though without losing communion with God, as I have claimed elsewhere.[75] The problem is that if the creature already has something uncreated in it, then why is there a need for this absolute distinction-in-communion between created and uncreated according to the terms in which Chalcedon used to explain the Incarnation?

On the other hand, and despite the above shortcomings, Bulgakov, like Cabasilas, clearly endorses synergy; this saves him from a complete panentheism (or pantheism), and, secondly, it is because of this endorsement of synergy that he is so against the dogma of the 'immaculate conception'. As he writes: 'in her, *original sin* preserved its *entire power* with all its fatal consequences—weakness and mortality of the body (for death is only the final revelation of this weakness)'.[76] Thus 'the immaculateness and sinlessness of the Ever-Virgin, refer not to her nature but to her condition, to her *personal* relationship to sin and her personal overcoming of it'.[77] In other words, the Virgin 'by her origination from Adam, having in herself all the power of the original sin as an infirmity, she remains free from every *personal sin,* of every participation in the work of evil, with the help, of course, of divine grace';[78] And, in order to leave no doubt about his endorsement of synergy, he concludes:

Press, 1988), 118.

[72] Bulgakov insisted on the identification of Sophia with the uncreated energies during the last period of his career, though this has remained unnoticed by his modern Western and Eastern admirers. See his *The Burning Bush*, 138, 153-56.

[73] See my work, Loudovikos, *Church in the Making,* esp. 205-11.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*, 206, 220-22.

[76] Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush,* 10.

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] *Ibid.,* 34.

'And so, the Mother of God by the power of her personal freedom and the grace of the Holy Spirit is completely free of every personal sin during and after her birth.'[79] Even clearer in his *The Bride of the Lamb,* he asserts that

> […] therefore the separation of the Mother of God from the human race by the mechanical 'privilege' of being free of original sin contradicts this love and, in a certain sense, does not exalt but diminishes Her holiness. The voluntary acceptance of the destinies of the fallen Adam with original sin in the name of sacrificial love prefigures the Incarnation, with the reception not only of human nature but also of the death on the cross.[80]

Here the author follows the patristic line of the pre-figuration of Christ in the life of the Virgin, and he describes her spiritual struggle as a reception not only of the human race, but also of Christ's cross, through synergy with divine grace. This allusion to Mary's solidarity with human beings—and this is, as far as I know, the only passage where Bulgakov says so clearly something like that—makes us think that he would not disagree with Cabasilas' position. However, this position of solidarity is described in a more advanced way by Cabasilas and this description involves, as I have claimed, the Maximian-Palamite idea of consubstantiality, thus creating an exceptional Mariological humanism, which can be discussed *par excellence* also in modern terms today.

Concluding Discussion: The Theotokos in the Kingdom of Man in a Secular Age

Two significant books will help us help us to articulate this final discussion concerning the importance of the above Mariological humanism for our epoch. The first is Charles Taylor's masterpiece *A Secular Age*,[81] and the second is Rémi Brague's

[79] *Ibid.,* 44-45.

[80] *Ibid.*, 186n15. This line of thought, explicitly against the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, was also followed by Lossky, *A l' Image et à la Ressemblance de Dieu*, ch.11, trans. M.Michailides (Thessalonica: Rigopoulos, 1974), 198. Florovsky also did not approve this dogma. In his *Creation and Redemption,* trans. P. Pallis (Thessalonica: Pournaras, 1983), 205, he avers that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is the offspring of 'an absolutely inadequate doctrine of the original sin', and it represents an 'unsuccessful terminology', which obscures the truth of the Catholic faith. He claims that the 'privileges' of divine maternity are not due to a 'non participation in the original sin'. The fullness of grace was given indeed to the Blessed Virgin, and her personal chastity was preserved only by the constant help of the Spirit. But this was not the abolition of sin. Sin was destroyed only upon the cross, and no exception was possible, as sin was simply the common and general condition of all humanity. Thus it seems that the three greatest Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century—Bulgakov, Lossky, and Florovsky, (followed by Popovich and Staniloae)—were explicitly against the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in the form promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church in 1854. That means that Mary's holiness has to be discussed in a different theological way, focusing upon what the Theotokos really *does* and not simply who she *is*.

[81] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). I use here the excellent Greek translation by Xenophon Comninos, trans. *Μιά Κοσμική Εποχή* (Athens: Indiktos, 2015), but I consulted the original book when I need to use the author's precise expressions

recent *Le Règne de l'Homme. Genèse et échec du projet moderne*,[82] which is, I think, in a certain continuity with the former. Taylor defines the modern self as the 'bounded self—I want to say "buffered self", against 'the "porous" self of the earlier enchanted world'.[83] The 'porous' self is permeable by the demonic or divine powers coming from outside, while

> […] for the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them […] As a bounded self I can see the boundary as a buffer, such as the things beyond don't need to 'get to me', to use the contemporary expression. That's the sense of my use of the term 'buffered' here. This self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it.[84]

The first apostle of this disenchanted, rationalized buffered self was the Reformation ('Reform' in Taylor's words), which prepared the way for the substitution of humanism for belief. Radical Protestantism, by rejecting any higher, self-denying vocation, prepared—through insisting on a demanding and disciplined personal morality aimed at an effective moral ordering of society—the western world for the exile of the sacred in favour of an instrumental rationalized/characterological morality: the subject can finally be moral of his own.[85] This brings about 'exclusive humanism'. As Taylor avers, now 'first the goal of order is redefined as a matter purely of human flourishing. We no longer see the pursuit of it as a way of following God, let alone glorifying him. And secondly, the power to pursue it is no longer something that we receive from God, but it is a purely human capacity'.[86] Now we are interested in nature for its own sake: by sharply distinguishing natural from supernatural, Thomas Aquinas, according to Taylor, had already prepared the autonomous conception of the former and the denial of the latter.[87] Thus, through the disenchanting Reform, we reach an individual religion of an individually constituted virtue,[88] along with an instrumental organization of society; this is the modern 'disembedding', where community ceases to be hierarchical/existential and takes the form of an individualism of rights, mutual service, and benefit.[89]

Thus the four pillars of the modern anthropocentric turn are, according to Taylor, the eclipse of any ulterior purpose of life, the disappearance of grace, the

or terminology. Hereafter I refer to the English original book as ASA, and to the Greek translation as MKE.

[82] Rémi Brague, *Le Règne de l'Homme. Genèse et échec du projet moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).

[83] ASA, 37-38; MKE, 65ff..

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] MKE, 125-135.

[86] ASA, 84; MKE, 136.

[87] MKE, 144-5.

[88] MKE, 227.

[89] MKE, 262-3.

fading of any sense of mystery, and, finally, the disappearance of any sense of a possible transfiguration of man by God, beyond immanence.[90] A radically immanent ethic now matches with a general culture of 'authenticity' and expressive individualism, where everyone is called to discover his 'authentic' self and enjoy it; the lack of transcendental meaning is replaced by efforts to find an anthropocentric meaning either in nature (Rousseau), or in beauty (Schiller, Göthe, Hölderlin), or in the sense of generosity (Shaftesbury), etc.[91] As Taylor avers,

> […] this is a culture informed by an ethic of authenticity. I have to discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual and on his/her existence. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The basic mode of spiritual life is thus the quest […] It is a quest that can't start with a priori exclusions or inescapable starting points, which could pre-empt this experience.[92]

This 'undemanding spirituality',[93] creates even small communities—the New Age movement is certainly involved here.[94] This instrumental individualism of the autonomous flourishing, through expressive authenticity, along with an instrumental use of society and the natural world, which ultimately considers life as a self-sufficient immanent order, form the 'immanent frame',[95] where the only possible value is totally submitted to what Isaiah Berlin called 'the self-authorization',[96] and the only transcendence accepted is Nussbaum's 'transcendence […] of an internal and human sort'.[97]

On the other hand, Taylor is, again, right when he criticizes Christianity for having abolished valuable facets of spiritual life, and given birth, for example, to the process that he calls 'excarnation', which is 'the steady disembodying of spiritual life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, and lies more and more 'in the head' […] Rather I am saying that Christianity, as the faith of the Incarnate god, is denying something essential to itself as long as it remains wedded to forms which excarnate'.[98] It is obvious from what I wrote in the introduction that I totally agree with Taylor, though I have found strong evidence that in the mature Christian East things were substantially better.[99] Another of Taylor's objec-

[90] MKE, 340-3.
[91] MKE, 390, 457, 461, 476ff.
[92] ASA, 507-8.
[93] ASA, 512.
[94] MKE, 767.
[95] ASA, 539ff.
[96] ASA, 582.
[97] ASA, 627.
[98] ASA, 771.
[99] My book, Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self. The Mysticism of Power and the Truth of Nature and Personhood* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata 1999, in Greek), was mainly

tions is that 'the link has been made between nominalism and the rise of mechanistic science, as also the growing force of the new instrumental stance of human agency […] All these help generate the powerful modern ontic dualism: Mind over against a mechanistic, meaning-shorn universe, without internal purposes such as the older cosmos had', says the author, drawing upon Milbank's and Pickstock's work. The same authors inspire Taylor's final proposal: to re-discover the hierarchy of being and a philosophy of analogy that can re-open the way 'for a certain understanding of our (limited) access to a knowledge of God'.[100]

The problem is how we are going to achieve this analogy? Is this merely an *analogy of essence* leading simply to a limited knowledge of God, or it is an *analogy of energy*, as I have claimed elsewhere, leading, through the ascetical struggle against *philautia/narcissism,* which is the presupposition of *synergy*, not only to a knowledge, but also to the transference of God's mode of existence, as a *dialogical analogy of consubstantial life*, in creation—man actively realizing, in Christ, divine consubstantiality within creation.[101] Cabasilas' Theotokos seems, in my view, to move towards this direction.

Let us now switch to the other book. Brague, in his own way, sheds a different light upon Taylor's story. What constitutes man in modernity is, according to him, first, 'the construction of concepts' (Kant), and then the imagination (Eriugena, Cusanus, Paracelse),[102] leading to the domination of nature,[103] where man becomes 'a god on earth' (G. Bruno);[104] we thus have the 'kingdom of man', according to Bacon, [105] where man, according to Descartes, is the 'master and possessor' of nature,[106] while, according to Kant, the ego is the proprietor of the world, and, according to Fichte, man is the lord of nature, which is his servant.[107] *Progress* is the fundamental dogma of this new human, both theoretical and practical, wisdom, which is given a scientific basis by both Darwin and Marx;[108] the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment do away with original sin, grace, and salvation,[109] thus culminating through Comte with the 'religion of humanity',[110] while, according to Vico, history is the kingdom

dedicated to the discussion of the roots of excarnation in East and West and the ways the patristic tradition has to overcome this. It is only in this light that the discussion of what Christian selfhood really is can start. The book will appear in English soon.

[100] ASA, 774.

[101] See Study Five of my work, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 217-229; see also Loudovikos, *Church in the Making*, 213-33.

[102] Brague, *Le Règne de l'Homme*, 54-5.

[103] *Ibid.,* 63

[104] *Ibid.,* 71.

[105] *Ibid.,* 92.

[106] *Ibid.,* 102.

[107] *Ibid.,* 134-6.

[108] *Ibid.,* 157.

[109] *Ibid.,* 116.

[110] *Ibid.,* 120.

of human creation.[111] Humanism becomes pragmatism, materialism, empiricism, realism, and ultimately it is identified with atheism.[112] Man becomes, in Péguy's words, 'autotheos' (*autothée*).[113]

Curiously enough, this leads, according to Brague, to despising the human being as an imperfect being,[114] and, on the other hand, the supposed domination of nature turns into a domination of man over man.[115] This leads ultimately to a 'transhumanisme', the need for re-constructing human nature and thus correcting its inherent imperfections.[116] Predicted by Nietzsche, this starts on the social level with Fascism, Nazism, and Communism[117] and concludes with the temptations of modern genetic technology;[118] man is something that must be surpassed.

Now the consequences of this evolution are noteworthy. On the one hand, it is nihilism, a divorce of Being from Good. The Enlightenment protested in the name of nature, but the nature thus discovered was not the paradise of harmony but a battlefield of sheer antagonism and indifference. This created modern pessimism, along with an inclination towards correcting, surpassing, neglecting, disobeying, and experimenting with nature.[119] On the other hand, since nature resists human interventions, this culminates with an irresistible new domination of nature over man as instinct, pleasure, death. From humanism we ultimately reach anti-humanism, arriving at man's private surrender to the dark sides of nature.[120] According to Sartre, human nature no longer exists, since God, the one capable of thinking of this nature, does not exist and suicide thereby becomes an 'absolute necessity' (Hartmann, Dostoyevsky) since no eternity is waiting for us.[121] The final drama of the modern Western secularized man, consists in not admitting either a wise external *Physis,* which could dictate its wisdom to man, as it was for the ancient Greeks, or the Biblical God, who acts in history, transforming it into his own kingdom. Modernity destroys both the above sources of truth, claiming an unwise *autonomy* for man as a decisive and pernicious independence from both.[122] However, in order for man to survive, Brague concludes, he needs someone who can affirm his value and dignity, and this cannot be just a perishable human being; in other words, he needs the One who declared, in the sixth day of creation that everything was 'very good'.[123]

[111] *Ibid.,* 127.
[112] *Ibid.,* 156.
[113] *Ibid.,* 174.
[114] *Ibid.,* 193.
[115] *Ibid.,* 203.
[116] *Ibid.,* 213.
[117] *Ibid.,* 221.
[118] *Ibid.,* 237.
[119] *Ibid.,* 243ff.
[120] *Ibid.,* 248ff.
[121] *Ibid.,* 258ff.
[122] *Ibid.,* 267ff.
[123] *Ibid.,* 270.

Brague is remarkable precisely for having so convincingly shown that human value can be obtained and secured only through and in God. Anthropocentric humanism ends up with anti-humanism, exclusive love for humanity turns out to disdain humanity, and autonomy results in sheer heteronomy, either as struggle for domination or as submission to the techniques of correcting or surpassing nature. Both Taylor and Brague agree that the drama of modern secularized Western man consists in the lack of transformation through participation in a reality that surpasses createdness and gives it eternal meaning and life. Both are against modern individualism, though it is not, as I believe, individualism that harms modern man, but rather a certain mode of individualization, which precludes what I have called *dialogical reciprocity* (*i.e.*, a way of changing narcissism into desire for consubstantiality). The opposite option is what I have recently called *the self-referring subject,* which submits the other's otherness to his own conception and use of it, thus creating *non-real* relationships with the other. However, dialogical reciprocity is a way which cannot be psychological, but must be spiritual and ecclesial. Furthermore, the degradation of the social in the West has also some other deep theological and philosophical roots, much older than Reformation, as I have attempted to show elsewhere.[124]

The human bodily dimension is essentially absent from Western Christianity, and the (wrongly) so-called 'spiritual' life has become an 'intellectual' life, which modern neuropsychology has shown to be imaginary, as Gregory Palamas also claimed some centuries ago. But if Thomas Aquinas—strangely enough, after his affirmation of the meaning of body *in this life*—has so strongly supported the view that it is impossible to see God in this life, precisely because of the existence of the body,[125] and if Augustine has defined man as willing thought[126] many centuries ago, then how can modern Western man theologically conceive of corporeality in an absolutely positive way? It was only psychoanalysis, Nietzsche and Phenomenology, and, of course, modern Neuro-psychology, which allowed for something like that to happen in the West.

This decisive spiritual corporeality, along with the consubstantial understanding of individuality in a context of divine participation and dialogical reciprocity, is the great theological and anthropological gift of Cabasilas' Mariological humanism for today's world.

[124] See Loudovikos, 'Being and Essence Revisited: Reciprocal Logoi and Energies in Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas, and the Genesis of the Self-referring Subject', *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 72. 1 (2016), 117-146. See also Loudovikos, the Third Study in *Church in the Making,* 161-70.

[125] See my work, Nikolaos Loudovikos, 'Striving for Participation: Palamite Analogy as Dialogical Syn-ernergy and Thomist Analogy as Emanational Similitude', in *Divine Essence and Divine Energies. Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy,* ed. C. Athanasopoulos and C. Schneider (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 2013), 122-48.

[126] See Loudovikos, *Closed Spirituality,* 33-50.