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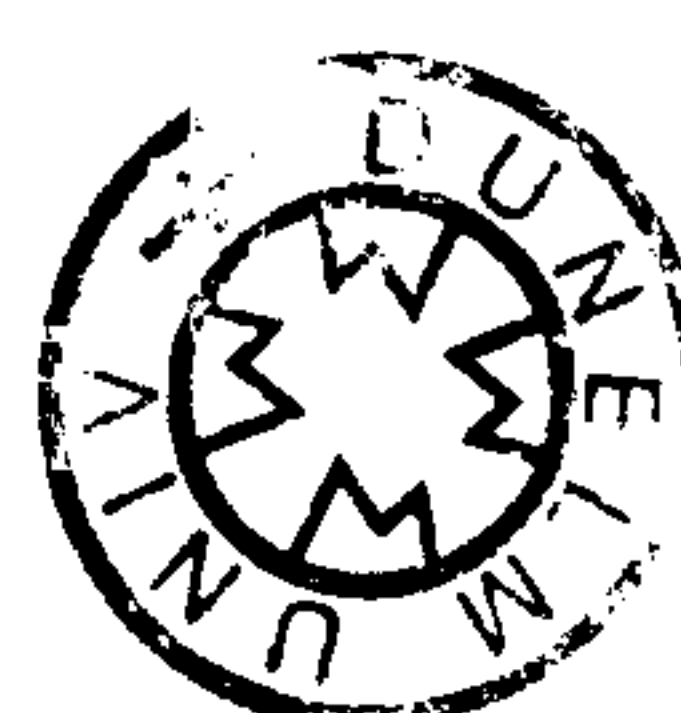
The Early Development of the Thought of Christos Yannaras

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham
Department of Theology and Religion

0 7 OCT 2008

2008



To my parents,
Grigorios and Vassiliki,
Efthymios Kermelis and Andrew Louth,
For the distinctive way they – each of them – have granted Life.

Evaggelia Grigoropoulou

The Early Development of the Thought of Christos Yannaras

When Personalist theology is not endorsed fully as a valid approach to elucidate our understanding of God, man and existence, it is often viewed with feelings that range from wonder and scepticism to serious criticism about the weaknesses and repercussions that it might have. What is seldom examined, however, are the reasons that may give rise to this kind of approach. This is what the present thesis wants to shed light on in the case of the personalist philosopher and theologian Christos Yannaras. It considers the circumstances that gave shape to his intellectual quests even before the start of his career: his involvement in the extra-ecclesiastic brotherhood of Zoë, his gradual disillusionment with it and his encounter with certain Greek intellectuals. It further looks at the conditions that fostered the particular formulation that his theoretical pursuits were to assume, as a result of his own engagement in the intellectual ferment of Europe in the 1960s (Chapter I and part of Chapter II). In Chapter II – as well as in Chapter III (Part I) – we also follow closely the early progress of Christos Yannaras' thought as this is expounded in the two most important of his early productions (*Heidegger and the Areopagite* and *Person and Eros*), in which the course of his thought is already decisively indicated. An indication of the grounds in Christian Tradition for a personalist attitude in theology is presented in Part II of the third Chapter, alongside a short discussion of Yannaras' use of patristic quotations. In its last chapter the thesis demonstrates (following *The Freedom of Morality*) the intrinsically practical aspect of Yannaras' theoretical positions, as this is revealed in the area of Christian morality. The fundamental inspiration of Christos Yannaras' personalist approach with respect to the subject of ontology is revealed as a return to the fundamentals of Church life and tradition.

‘...I write this book only to point out a wrong way,
the way that turns Christ into an idea, a notion, a
dogma, a morality, a social scheme, and thus leads us
away from the redemptive meeting with His Person –
the way of ideology’.

Christos Yannaras, *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν*

Acknowledgments

This work would have not reached completion without the matchless support of my supervisor Professor Andrew Louth. The very fact that it has been realized testifies in a very practical way to the core idea of this thesis: the priority of *relationship* in attaining knowledge and truth. Father Andrew has maintained a relationship of abundant faith and unqualified trust even in days when my writing must have seemed destined to produce a poor crop; he has offered unhesitating reassurance and encouragement, together with discerning insight, and paternal care and love. I thank him for his great perseverance, his committed academic direction, and the seemingly unlimited hours of his time that he devoted to my cause. But above all, I will be always full of gratitude towards him for his concern that I ‘be myself’ and for his untold serenity in carrying the burden.

I owe more than I can say to my parents, Grigorios and Vasiliki, whose love and assistance through all the years have been conveyed in ways beyond acknowledgement. Their contribution spans from their painstaking care ever since my earliest steps into life to their exemplary fortitude in all the adversities of most recent times. They have been an abiding source of nurture and invigoration, not the least in their inspiring hope, ambition and value. I will always hold in reverence their silent sacrifice and am grateful simply that they exist, in itself providing a pillar of support and a shielding ‘sunlight’ for life to grow.

I am deeply thankful to my spiritual father Efthymios Kermelis, for his ample moral support and direction – especially in the early years of my development – and for his continual love and concern. The principles and the attitudes that he sought to instill have always been a source of inspiration and of motivation and can now be seen to have borne some fruit. I thank him for the ‘courage’ he inspired and would like to assure him that I have always been grateful for his silent companionship.

In the course of a long and sometimes difficult journey I have found support from many friends, whom I will not list here lest I omit any because of the ‘multitude of names’. I am thankful to all, both those whose friendship has been lasting and those whose acquaintance was transient.

Last but not least, I would have not embarked on this endeavour without a scholarship from the Greek National Foundation for Scholarships (IKY), for which I am grateful.

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Preface

Christos Yannaras is one of the most eminent thinkers in present-day Greece. A philosopher of existentialist inspiration and a theological expositor of what has been characterized as ‘Neo-orthodoxy’, he can still be described as an idiosyncratic example of his genre that rather escapes a definite labelling. To the western audience he is mostly known, if at all, as an exponent of personalist theology and a strong defender of theological apophaticism, in which he sees the counterbalance to the rationalistic corruption of Christian theology. This, in Yannaras’ view, finds its principal representative in the scholastic systematization of theology that took place in the Medieval Latin West, but which, however, in later times gradually spread and influenced the theology and the spirituality of Eastern Christendom as well. The vehemence of Yannaras’ opposition to the theological and intellectual dimensions of Western civilization has aroused western discontent and led to his position being dismissed as based on sweeping generalization. This anti-western critique, however, Yannaras has turned into self-criticism of his own modern Greek identity where he has found cultural and intellectual elements of deviation from the Eastern Orthodox tradition that have caused him to consider himself, an eastern European man, as profoundly westernized.¹

Yannaras has therefore been a vigorous advocate of the philosophical tradition of the Greek East, Classical and Byzantine, as this found its fulfilment and expression through the theological achievement of the Church Fathers of the Greek East in Christian antiquity and the Byzantine period: notably the Cappadocian Fathers, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. Yannaras sees in the Hellenic tradition of both Classical and Christian times an underlying principle of apophaticism in the approach to metaphysical debate, as a decisive manner for dealing with the questions of ontology and for understanding and advancing to the real or the true. This common basis in the Hellenic and Christian

¹ See his introduction to the English translation of *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Δύση στὴ Νεώτερη Ελλάδα*: ‘The critique of Western theology and tradition which I offer in this book does not contrast "Western" with something "right" which as an Orthodox I use to oppose something "wrong" outside myself. I am not attacking an external Western adversary. As a modern Greek, I myself embody both the thirst for what is "right" and the reality of what is "wrong": a contradictory and alienated survival of ecclesiastical Orthodoxy in a society radically and unhappily Westernized. My critical stance towards the West is self-criticism; it refers to my own wholly Western mode of life’: Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West. Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), pp. xviii-xix.

philosophy of the Greek East prevents identification of the real with the formulations used to allude to it and gives precedence to an experiential substantiation of what is proposed as the existent, inviting in this way to a communal partaking and validation in the search for and description of the real.

Yannaras was enormously inspired by existentialist philosophy especially as this was voiced by Heidegger, in whom Yannaras identified a kind of modern reiteration of the fundamental measures for doing ontology, as the latter found expression in the accomplishment of the synthesis of the Christian faith with the Hellenic philosophical tradition in the Greek patristic heritage. Consequently, Yannaras did not hesitate to adopt existentialist language and apply existentialist terms in his attempt to give a contemporary expression to the ontological principles put forward by the Greek Fathers. This in effect gives Yannaras' work its distinctive mark: the fact that he has aspired to wed contemporary philosophical speculation – as the author became familiar with it mainly through his study of Heidegger – with the tradition of the Greek East and the theological understanding of the Church Fathers.

Yannaras' theoretical quest sets off the ontological issue, the endeavour, that is, to approach and interpret the matter of existence – the beginning and the meaning of the existent. Nevertheless, Yannaras' response to this matter tries to illuminate also all aspects of human life and activity. Thus Yannaras often embarks upon topics that on a regular basis escape the attention of most theologians: politics, economy, art, social issues and current affairs. Yannaras seeks to inform by way of interpretation and cast light on all such aspects of human practice, bringing in a theological word that does not appear as an opposition but as a contribution to issues of contemporary concern (not as ἀντί-λογος but as ἀπό-λογος), drawing on the patristic ontological tradition and the theology of the Church.

His engagement with such a variety of matters of current concern has established him to the Greek world as a wide-ranging thinker rather than a theologian in the narrow sense of the term. Yannaras' philosophical works sometimes seem perplexing, especially to the non-specialized reader, owing to the broad nature of their themes and the elaborate expression of the author, and therefore may not be among his most widely read works. Instead, Yannaras has

become well known and reached a wider audience through his contributions in the media and especially his articles for the press where he has been a regular columnist for many years, in the newspapers *Vima* (1972-1989) and *Kathimerini* (1994-today), where he generally addresses themes of current affairs. In 2002 Yannaras retired from the chair of philosophy at the Faculty of International and European Studies at the Panteion University of Athens where he had been teaching since 1982. Earlier, he had also taught at the philosophical faculty at the University of Crete, as well as in Geneva and Paris. His record of publication is very extensive and still continues during his retirement.

This thesis seeks to illuminate Yannaras' intellectual development up until his ideas took on their essential form in the composition of his early works. It consists, first of all, of an account of Yannaras' life, as Yannaras himself has set it down in his two autobiographical books – *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* and *Τά καθ' ἑαυτόν*. This tells us of his early commitment to the extra-ecclesial brotherhood of Zoë and his disillusionment with it, and explores two Greek figures – Dimitris Koutroumbis and Zissimos Lorentzatos – who provided the intellectual stimulus that enabled Yannaras to break away from Zoë. It also looks at Yannaras' experience during his years of study in Western Europe in the 1960s, which mostly confirmed his sense of the unique value of Eastern Orthodoxy (strengthened by his encounter in Paris with the Russian émigré community) and the bankruptcy of the Western intellectual tradition (confirmed by his reading of Heidegger's analysis of the intellectual history of the West).

In addition, the thesis provides a close study of the three books fundamental to the expression of Yannaras' vision – *Heidegger and the Areopagite*, *Person and Eros* and *The Freedom of Morality* – and explores the development of his early thought – his attempt to identify the falsifications of Christian experience which he had personally undergone and to retrieve those elements of Christian theology that were essential in addressing the contemporary challenge that the modern intellect posed and which are vital if the existent is to have the possibility of being endowed with meaning. A conclusion draws these themes together, by making use of Yannaras' own early celebration of his central themes in his short but beautiful book *Comment on the Song of Songs*.

Yannaras' writings reveal a sharp mind and an exceptional gift in the creative use of language; a spirit resolute but tender, passionate but receptive, and above all wholehearted and sincere.

Chapter I

Biographical Sketch by way of an introduction

When we meet a new person for the first time the next information we often want to know after his name is where he comes from or where he lives. Our mind, that is, seeks primarily for those pieces of data that will help us to place our new acquaintance in context. Especially a person's place of origin not only allows us specify the parameters of locality or space, but also constitutes an important part of the identity of the person we get to know. If, for instance, I ask someone I have just met in which parts of the world he has worked so far, I will obtain some information about his life and his experience until this day, but I will still not quite know *who* he is. It is only when he tells me where he originally comes from that I will begin to form an understanding of the identity of the person I have before me. And still, it is not actually so much the place in which he was born that will make a difference in my shaping of understanding about him, as the place he was brought up, basically where he lived and grew. Even when an individual has an interrupted background of origin up to the present, owing, maybe, to his father's career requiring the family to move places every few years, this very fact will still appear as an intrinsic characteristic of *who* this person is. Basically, to get to know about a person's background is a step towards recognizing and comprehending the person himself.

It follows then from the above that in order to appreciate how someone expresses himself in terms of thought, speculation and ideas, as well as in terms of the means used to express these, it is important to be aware of where he comes from and try to discern those elements that have contributed to shaping him and his preoccupations, questions and framework of thought or theories. Thus I have felt that it would make a difference in assessing Yannaras' philosophical and theological contribution if we look at his background and the conditions that influenced him in becoming the intellectual that he is.

There are two main sources for learning about Yannaras' background and intellectual development - two works in Greek written by Yannaras himself, neither of which, to my knowledge, has yet been translated in another language. The first of them in chronological order - in terms both of date of publishing and of the years of Yannaras' life it recounts- is *Katafugio Ideōn* (Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν - *Refuge of Ideas*), which mainly narrates Yannaras' religious experiences in his youth and his time in the Brotherhood of Zoë. The other one is *Ta kath' eauton* (Τά καθ' ἑαυτόν – *According to oneself* or *From one's point of view*), a work that covers Yannaras' adult years and offers an account of his intellectual development, following through the stages of Yannaras' study and work in Europe and also later again in Greece. In the following pages I will try, drawing on the above-mentioned sources, to provide an account of the framework of Yannaras' early life as well as of his experience as a scholar when he went abroad to Europe. By doing this I mean to bring out those conditions and elements that defined his intellectual profile and which, therefore, will help us to have a better grasp of him as a philosopher and theologian.

In *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* we have an account of Yannaras' experiences of the extra-ecclesial organization or religious brotherhood of theologians (ἀδελφότητα Θεολόγων) in Greece called 'Ζωή' ('Life') and of the years he spent as a member of this body. I reckon that the value of the narrative lies in the information that it provides about the character and the style of Zoë as a religious organisation; so far as Yannaras himself as a theologian and philosopher is concerned, it acquaints us with his early religious background and experiences, awareness of which may then cast some light on Yannaras' own style of theology, its content and how he arrived at the themes of theological interest that he later came to put forward.

The account starts in the year 1926, nine years before Yannaras was born, and it opens with the story of how his parents came to be introduced to, and encouraged to subscribe to, the weekly pamphlet issued by Zoë under the same name. Yannaras' own earliest memories as a child include the delivery of issues of 'Zoë' in the family post. Those religious leaflets once received would pile up unread somewhere not much further in than the entrance door of the

house. It was only from their address labels with the recipient's name on that Yannaras attempted to read his first words - his father's name, who was by then already dead.²

The above detail has not been mentioned idly, since the type of piety and the religious mentality that Zoë represented was something foreign to Yannaras' family environment, even though his family was religious with a deeply faithful mother. For the family was religious in a genuine, natural and spontaneous way that was missing from the environment of Zoë as Yannaras was later to encounter it, and their religiosity - unlike what Yannaras experienced in Zoë - was free from any sense of one-sidedness or conscription in the name of their faith; it was instead naturally incorporated into their life. *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* offers an account of Yannaras' own experience in the brotherhood of Zoë, yet before following Yannaras' narrative of his days in Zoë, it will be useful to give a short outline of what this religious body was.

1. The Brotherhood of Zoë

The Church in Greece in the years that followed the Greek revolution in 1821 and the gradual liberation of the Greek provinces from the Turkish occupation in the 19th century found itself in rather a gloomy setting from a pastoral point of view. Although the population had preserved the Christian faith and had handed it down generation by generation through all the years of the Ottoman occupation, and the clergy had been renowned for their part in sustaining the nation through the four centuries of the Ottoman yoke,³ the Church of the liberated country was in a wretched condition.⁴ The lower clergy and monks had a poor

² *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* [*Refuge of Ideas*] (Athens: Ikaros, 2000, first published by Domos, 1987), pp. 9-10.

³ Over the four centuries of occupation the Church and the nation had been one single entity; the Church had upheld the nation's sentiment and hopes; the Patriarch was the head of the Greek community and represented the Orthodox citizens of the Ottoman Empire to the Sublime Porte; the hierarchs took a leading part in the Greek revolt. Greeks came out of the Turkish rule identifying Church and nation, religion and patriotism, a link that continued strong and was later also fervently fostered by the brotherhood of Zoë. See Christoph Maczewski, *Ἡ Κίνηση τῆς 'Ζωῆς' στήν Ελλάδα: Συμβολή στό Πρόβλημα τῆς Παραδόσεως τῆς Ανατολικῆς Εκκλησίας* [*The Movement of 'Zoë' in Greece: contribution to the issue of the tradition of the Eastern Church*], trans. Fr Georgios D. Metallinos (Athens: Armos, 2002), pp. 31-2, Peter Hammond, *The Waters of Marah*, (London: Rockliff, 1956), p. 25-6.

⁴ For a description of the state of the Greek Church at this time see Hammond, pp. 115-124.

theological education and were therefore able to deliver only a feeble pastoral service, performing in most cases only the most basic of their celebrating duties, neglecting sermons and catechesis. The people accordingly were left uninstructed with regard to Church life and Christian teaching. Bishops took not much better note of their pastoral duties; furthermore their numbers had declined, given the delay on the part of the Ecumenical Patriarch to acknowledge the autocephalous Church of Greece.⁵ Monasteries – no matter how much of a stalwart guardian of the traditions they had been over the years of the Turkish dominion – were also far from prosperous and in a state of decline; the number of monks had been reduced with those who remained generally possessing a low level of learning, while monastic properties had suffered government confiscation.⁶ In general, the background picture of the Church at that time was one of corruption and decline.

It was in such circumstances that there emerged some initiative for religious renewal and awakening. This initiative did not arise from the hierarchy, but primarily from individual laymen and monks. Right at the beginning of the effort of revival, which can be dated back as early as 1839,⁷ we find a layman named Kosmas Flamiatos⁸ who travelled around the Peloponnese preaching, full of zeal to bring about a spiritual awakening. His example soon found imitators: two monks from Megaspelaion – the great monastery of Old Greece in Peloponnese – Christophoros Panagiotopoulos and Ignatios Labropoulos, and later Hierotheos Mitropoulos, a deacon, and his nephew Efsevios Mathiopoulos, who was also a monk in Megaspelaion and a spiritual son of Ignatios Labropoulos and who was to establish – in 1907 – the brotherhood Zoë; they all became apostolic labourers, travelling fervently through towns and villages, preaching, hearing confessions, keeping correspondence with people they had met over their journeys, all in all contributing, in a non-organized way, to an enthusiastic missionary activity and spiritual reform. The most prominent of the missionaries of this time, however, was Apostolos Makrakis, a lay philosopher who had been trained in Constantinople and in Paris and who – together with Efsevios Mathiopoulos – was to play a primary part in the missionary activity in Greece. Makrakis, surrounded by a team of fellow-workers in the

⁵ Hammond, p. 116.

⁶ Hammond, p. 88.

⁷ Hammond, p. 117.

⁸ For a further reading on Flamiatos see Georgios Metallinos, *Δύο Κεφαλλήνες Αγωνισταί Αντιμέτωποι* (Κ. Φλαμιάτος και Κ. Τυπάλδος) [*Two Kefalonian fighters facing each other* (K. Flamiatos and K. Typaldos)] (Leukosia, 1980).

cause of evangelization, founded in 1876 the School of Logos (Σχολή τοῦ Λόγου), in which Efsevios Mathiopoulos, who was ordained priest in the same year, was the chaplain and spiritual father.⁹ Without going into more detail here on Makrakis' wider activity and his school, we will only note that the by then archimandrite Efsevios Mathiopoulos, initially a disciple and one of the closest collaborators of Makrakis,¹⁰ eventually dissociated from his teacher in 1884, continuing however until 1906 to '[give] himself wholly to the preaching of the Gospel and the ministry of the itinerant confessor, while, like his spiritual father Ignatius Lambropoulos, he shepherded and guided hundreds of Christians drawn from every walk of life by means of correspondence'.¹¹

I have made this concise reference to the activity on religious reform in the years that preceded the establishment of Zoë in 1907, in order to show that the founding of Zoë by the archimandrite Efsevios Mathiopoulos was basically part of the missionary work and activity for moral and spiritual awakening and reform that the post-revolution country of Greece had seen to a small extent for many decades already. This activity, as we have seen, can be broadly characterized as a matter of individual initiative and was not much organized, something that will not be the case, however, later on after the establishment of Zoë.

The person who founded Zoë, Efsevios Mathiopoulos, was born in 1849 in a Peloponnesian province, the son of pious parents, and from a very young age he gave signs of a devout disposition. He was just fourteen years old when he joined the life of the monks in Megaspelaion, under the spiritual instruction of Ignatius Labropoulos, and seventeen years old when he himself became a monk there. In 1872, after eight years of monastic life and by then a deacon, he came to Athens to complete his schooling and to study further. He soon became involved in preaching, and applied himself to spread knowledge of the Scriptures and the

⁹ The School of Logos was a private secondary school and an evening school for adults; see Hammond, p. 120-4 for more on the School of Logos and on the activity of Apostolos Makrakis as well as on the conflict in which he came with the official Church. Also, Christos Yannaras, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Δύση στὴ Νεώτερη Ελλάδα* [*Orthodoxy and the West in Modern Greece*], pp. 359-62 for an account on Makrakis and his school, as well as on the extra-ecclesial religious organizations more generally, pp. 348-405 and Vassilios Youltsis, 'Κοινωνιολογική θεώρησις τῶν θρησκευτικῶν ἀδελφοτήτων' ['A Sociological View of the Religious Brotherhoods'] in *Θέματα Κοινωνιολογίας τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας* [*Themes in the Sociology of Orthodoxy*], ed. Georgios Mantzaridis (Thessaloniki: Pournara Publications, 1975).

¹⁰ Maczewski, p. 33.

¹¹ Hammond, p. 123.

Church Fathers. Four years later he became a keen priest and minister. In Athens he also made contact with Apostolos Makrakis and he served as a chaplain, as we saw, in the School of Logos, where his spiritual personality and charisma became even more apparent. The years that followed found Father Efsevios in Corfu,¹² where he was quickly asked to work for the evangelization of the local people, and soon became endeared to them and brought about a revival, while he went deeper into his own spiritual experience and faith. Returning to Athens (1882) and cut off from his old fellow-worker Apostolos Makrakis (1884) he continued for many years the work of an itinerant preacher and with his restless pastoral labour throughout Greece created a renewal of faith while by now people saw in him an important spiritual father and the model of a Christian. The first attempt to create an organized movement for ecclesial renewal was made in 1893 together with his uncle Hierotheos Mitropoulos who in that year was appointed bishop of Patra, in north Peloponnese. They drew together around them a group of clergy and laymen and so created in the diocese a centre for missionary work and the training of future clergy. This first organized endeavour came to an end with the death of Hierotheos Mitropoulos in less than a decade, however it was a decisive experience for the archimandrite Efsevios who came to appreciate that it was essential for a large-scale religious renewal to be based on collective activity with a systematic structure and schedule.¹³

Thus father Efsevios Mathiopoulos set up Zoë in 1907, drawing around him a team of theologians, consisting of both clergy and laymen,¹⁴ he being the spiritual head in the movement. Zoë was set up as a religious association of theologians ('Brotherhood of Theologians'), a body of legal status and autonomous from the jurisdiction of the official Church. This would allow the movement to work independently of Episcopal control for its missionary work and therefore would give the brotherhood the freedom to effect the religious instruction of the people and the ecclesial renewal that the official Church appeared unable to

¹² His arrival in Corfu was the result of the breaking-up of the School of Logos and the dispersal of its members by the Holy Synod; for more on these events see references given above and Maczewski, pp. 38-41.

¹³ The biographical details for father Efsevios Mathiopoulos here are based on Maczewski's exposition: Maczewski, pp. 34-44. For more on the life of the man the reader can also refer to Serafim Papakostas, *Εὐσέβιος Μαθιόπουλος: Βιογραφία* [*Efsevios Mathiopoulos: Biography*] (Athens: Zoë Publications, 1948, 2nd edition).

¹⁴ One of the founding members of Zoë was the lay theologian Panagiotis Trembelas, later a professor in the faculty of theology, University of Athens: Maczewski, p. 44.

deliver, as well as improving the corrupt state in the Church.¹⁵ The extra-ecclesial action of the movement soon attracted criticisms,¹⁶ which at times threatened its very existence, however the brotherhood's basic adherence to the accuracy of the doctrinal theology of the Church led the Holy Synod in 1923 to acknowledge the existence and the missionary activity of Zoë, dismissing the charges that had been made against it. Zoë was a union made up of celibates and throughout the years it maintained its monastic character; its members were committed to the three monastic virtues of celibacy, poverty and obedience, although without any intention of formally preparing its members for monasticism.¹⁷ The members of Zoë had to demonstrate exemplary ethical merit and compliance with regard to their assigned duties, as well as contributing annually to the funds of the brotherhood, as set down by Zoë's Board of Directors.¹⁸

Zoë was set up in order to meet the needs of evangelistic work at that time and with the purpose of making up for the lack of pastoral coverage on behalf of the official Church, as well as to make amends for the lack of order and canonical discipline in the latter. The objectives of the movement were mainly to organize assemblies for catechesis, Christian lectures and the study of the Bible, to create a school for the preparation of preachers – the preaching role of a theologian, the 'ministry of the word', was from the beginning central in how Zoë understood its purpose – and groups for religious discussion, to form Sunday Schools for youths and to promote the diligent students, to support Christian charity and the publication of religious literature and especially of the Bible in the original text. In 1911 Zoë also released her weekly pamphlet after the same name, *Zoë*, the circulation of which developed dramatically with thousands of subscriptions throughout Greece.

¹⁵ See the account on the extra-ecclesial organizations in *Orthodoxy and the West in Modern Greece* quoted above and Hammond, pp. 120-2 for the incidents of simony that had occurred in the hierarchy. Also, the part of father Efsevios' letter of 1879 quoted in Hammond, p. 115, talking of 'spiritual death' and the absence of guides, preachers and pastors is illustrative of ecclesial decline.

¹⁶ See Maczewski, pp. 63-8 and *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp. 352-4; one of the very early voices of criticism of the extra-ecclesial missionary activity, even before any official reaction from the Church, was that of the short-story writer Alexandros Papadiamandis through stories of his such as 'Ο Διδάχος' ['The preacher'], 'Η μακρακιστίνα' ['The Makrakistine', the word referring to the name of Makrakis and means the female follower of him or his movement].

¹⁷ *Orthodoxy and the West*, p. 364. In fact monasticism was seen by the new religious movements in Greece as outdated and not in touch with the true needs of the time; on the contrary, as was the case in Zoë, there was a strong spirit and demand for 'activity', as opposed to the contemplative life of a monk: Hammond, pp. 79, 89-90.

¹⁸ This was so determined in the 4th article of the Zoë' constitution: see the Appendix in Maczewski, p. 256.

However, in the first years of its life, the brotherhood of Zoë did not see any immediate development. Apart from direct opposition – even though isolated – to the movement, it was politically a time of instability and unrest for Greece, with the Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913 and the Asia Minor catastrophe in 1922 creating unfavourable conditions for regenerating activity and progress. 1923 was, as we saw, ‘the year of triumph’ for Zoë as the latter found the official acknowledgement and support from the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, a result that afforded Zoë with recognized religious status so that it could thereafter carry out its work undisturbed by external resistance. The golden age, as it were, of Zoë began after 1929, the year of the death of Efsevios Mathiopoulos, when he was succeeded as head of the brotherhood by the archimandrite Seraphim Papakostas. Between then and 1954 Zoë experienced a radical development; the number of its members increased, the Sunday Schools of the movement grew within ten years spectacularly,¹⁹ the pamphlet ‘Zoë’ outnumbered tremendously in copies any other religious publication of the time and, as Maczewski notes, the publishing production of religious literature by Zoë until 1950 could provide three books for each Greek family.²⁰ Besides, alongside the flourishing of the Sunday Schools, many sub-unions of the movement emerged. The first of them, set up in 1926, was the ‘Association for Inner Mission “Apostle Paul”’ (‘Σύλλογος Ἑσωτερικῆς Ἱεραποστολῆς “Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος”’), which aimed specifically at spreading the Gospel and providing Christian education to the whole people of the country. This group and the brotherhood itself were the foundation from which many other sub-societies were later shaped. The sub-unions that formed in the bosom of Zoë are indicative of the fervour of the movement and made the latter grow into a large-scale body with a highly developed structure. I will for the purpose and space of my exposition here make only mention of what these sub-societies were. Their composition was in the main related not only to the offices held by individuals in the movement and to their years of service, but also to their social background and to their occupation. Thus different people belonged to different associations or branches of the movement of Zoë, each specified with a certain name. To give some examples, such branches were the Christian Association of Scientists (X.E.E., standing for Χριστιανικὴ Ἐνωση

¹⁹ In 1936 the first prize of the international Sunday Schools conference in Oslo was awarded to the Sunday Schools of Greece: Maczewski, p. 51.

²⁰ Maczewski, p. 62.

Ἐπιστημόνων), the association of the students (Χ.Φ.Ε., that is Χριστιανική Φοιτητική Ἐνωση), the sisterhood Ἐὐσέβεια (‘Piety’) which represented the female equivalent of Zoë and was responsible for the training of women to provide for the needs of the female Sunday Schools, student groups and the female boarding houses of the movement; also the association Ἀγία Εὐνίκη (‘Saint Eunice’ – Eu-nike: well-victory) for the women medical nurses, the society of Christian parents (Χ.Ε.Γ.: Χριστιανική Ἐνωση Γονέων), the society of teachers (Χ.Ε.Ε.Λ.: Χριστιανική Ἐνωση Ἐκπαιδευτικῶν Λειτουργῶν) and the society of employees. There were also sub-unions created especially around the time of the war, to attend to the needs caused by the war: the union Πρόνοια (‘Providence’ or ‘care’), which was set up in 1940 to address the needs of children and families affected by the war, and the association Πρόνοια τοῦ Στρατιώτου (‘Care for the Soldier’) which undertook to support those fighting in the front line by mailing to them letters of support, religious books and prayer books.²¹

One can realize from the above that Zoë and all the supervised associations that sprang from it engaged in a wide range of pastoral as well as social work, trying to meet with the needs of the population of Greece over the first half of the twentieth century. The primary aim of the movement was to renew the Christian faith by spreading the word of the Gospel and investing especially in the young generations whom it also recruited from a very young age to serve in the work of evangelisation. However, men and women involved in the movement and devoted to the shared vision for the regeneration of the country fervently offered their services in educational establishments, in orphanages and boarding houses for students and in hospitals run by Zoë. Philanthropic activity coupled with pastoral care and spiritual instruction, thriving production of religious books and periodicals,²² restless work of preachers going all over the country:²³ all these activities of Zoë played a strong part in the spiritual awakening of the

²¹ For more details on the different sub-movements within Zoë see Maczewski, pp. 52-62, *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp. 372-5.

²² It is worth mentioning that Efsevios Mathiopoulos’ *The Destiny of Man* came out in 65,000 copies and had evidently a paramount influence in the religious formation of the time: Hammond, p. 137, *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp. 365-6.

²³ Peter Hammond gives a characteristic example of the ‘typical week-end itinerary of a lay theologian’: p. 130.

population of Greece.²⁴ By the middle of the twentieth century and after the time of the civil war in Greece in the middle 1940s when, as we shall see, Yannaras had his initial encounter with Zoë through the local Christian student groups that were run in the area of Athens where he lived and which he joined, Zoë was well established as a very active movement, widely acknowledged and developing networks through many levels of social life. Especially after the devastating effects of the war for the country, the Christian faith and the values of Christianity were even more promoted as the only secure base upon which the future of Greece, with a genuine civilization, could be built. Gradually, with the contribution of the distinguished jurist Alexandros Tsirindanis, professor in the Law School of the Athens University, the movement shifted in character: it was no longer a movement of merely pastoral work and catechesis, but acquired more and more the social objective of both religious and political renovation.²⁵ In the post-war years the movement worked 'For a New Greece' – now the common slogan of Zoë – and the vision also included the catharsis of the political life of the country on the basis of the values of Christian faith.²⁶ It was at this time in the history of the Zoë that Yannaras' youthful fervour met with the new enthusiastic intentions of the movement and its Christian-Hellenic dream.

2. Yannaras' own experience in Zoë

Yannaras' first contact with the atmosphere and the world of Zoë took place through Sunday School which he joined at an early age and which was organized on a parish level in Athens, where Yannaras' family was based and where he was brought up. The teachers or leaders of those Sunday School groups were young people connected in one or another way with the organization of Zoë, members of the lower ranks of that religious body and appointed by it at the different parishes to deliver catechism and pastoral guidance to juvenile

²⁴ For a fuller picture of the country of Greece in the middle of the twentieth century and the activity also of other religious movements smaller than Zoë, see Hammond, pp. 129-40, 154-66.

²⁵ Maczewski, pp. 57-8, 272-9, *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp. 377-81.

²⁶ The work of Alexandros Tsirindanis *Towards a Christian Civilization*, which became something like a policy guide for the movement, expressed the new direction that Zoë was now following. Yannaras draws a parallel between this new vision in Greece and the idea for a European Christian civilization and the formation of the Christian-democratic political parties in the West at that time, *Orthodoxy and the West*, p. 379.

attendants.²⁷ At that young age Yannaras was not yet fully conscious of the connection of their Sunday School with the world of Zoë; only later would he gradually discover the relation of the two. However, the narrative in *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* reveals clear memories of the practices and attitudes, of the spirit and dominant feelings, of the meetings and the environment of Sunday School in those early days. All these were of a kind that Yannaras would experience more intensely later on when he himself became more and more engaged in the environment of Zoë. We thus read about the prevailing sense that was promoted amongst the young participants of the Sunday School groups: a sense of belonging to a sort of a sect and a feeling of being among the elected. Whoever attended Sunday School was of Christ (τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and equally and simply if you didn't join Sunday School, it meant that you were not a believer in Christ. This was Yannaras' first experience of the dualism represented by Zoë. There were also a series of evident signs that brought about this feeling of being organized and of belonging to a special assembly: from the notebook that the children would have to bring along to the meetings, in which they would have to write the moral teaching and the religious message of the day, to a distinguishing badge that they all had to wear at all times on their shirt collar and the stereotyped songs they practised singing, the lyrics of which put across the members' special beliefs and dedication. This dedication again involved promoting and realizing a certain vision, to which all members of the organization of Zoë, from the lower to the higher ranks, had to attach themselves, and that was to bring about a renewal of the mother country, namely New Greece (Νέα Ἑλλάδα), as they would call it, Christian Greece or the Greece of Christ (τὴν Ἑλλάδα τοῦ Χριστοῦ). The principal feeling enthusiastically experienced among the members of Zoë was that they were participating in an important movement which was to establish a new state of affairs based on the teachings and the morals of the gospel, in other words on the Christian faith, where all people would be illumined and drawn along to become believers in Christ. Even the young children joining Sunday School were being prepared and encouraged to live according to, and work towards, such a project - the Christianization of Greece. At that early age they had to start by turning their schoolmates

²⁷ Through also Yannaras' narrative in *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* it becomes immediately clear that Zoë was a large extra-ecclesial organization with a developed structure and a very large number of members graded in the different ranks and sub-assemblies of the body. Yannaras' description lets a connection and parallel be drawn between Zoë and western protestant associations of a similar kind.

into believers and that primarily meant they had to persuade them to come along to Sunday School. Attendance there was checked, absentees each week were noted,²⁸ and the discussions were always of the same stereotyped and expected style, as were the moral conclusion of each of them and the answers provided to related questions. As for the participants themselves, one was to excel and stand out precisely by conforming to the provided standards. Conformity was in that way the condition for being distinguished!²⁹

Thus from a very early age Yannaras became exposed to the kind of religious environment represented by Zoë, namely through his experiences at the Sunday School as well as in the Christian Unions for students and young people in which he participated as a teenager.³⁰ The main part of *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν*, however, concerns the ten years Yannaras spent living as a boarder in Zoë's boarding house and later as a probationer in the brotherhood, a time stretching from the summer of 1954 to February 1964, that is between the nineteenth and twenty-ninth year of his life. We also read a description of the last days that preceded Yannaras' moving to the Zoë boarding house, in terms of how he reached that choice and what his own as well as his family's feelings about it were. It is clear that for Yannaras it was a hard decision to take, accompanied by feelings of pain and conflict that predominated over those days; conflict both within himself and with the family environment that did not appear at all keen on the young man's choice. His personal inclination had always been to study and follow a career in mathematics and science, however according to the mentality with which Zoë nurtured its young members such an option would mean compromise and weakness.³¹ Zoë maintained that the ones who were indeed strong and genuinely devoted to 'God's work' with which Zoë identified itself would evidently and as a matter of course pursue theological study

²⁸ Hammond notes: '...the teacher would at the end of a lesson despatch his pupils, two by two, to call at the homes of any who through sickness or for some other cause had been unable to be present that day. When the defaulter was run to earth he would be given a brief *résumé* of the afternoon's lesson.' The description shows something of the mentality and the atmosphere in which Sunday School was run, and it adds to Yannaras' own testimony: p. 134.

²⁹ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 16-28,

³⁰ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 61-8, 76-84.

³¹ Yannaras gives some striking examples of parents who somewhat annoyed by the way Zoë recruited young members claimed their children back. The youngster who would clash with his family was praised by the movement in such a way that made the other members of the same age look up on him with awe and consider him a hero: *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 59-60. Equally, resistance by the teenagers to align with the practices of the movement or to take up choices for their life that Zoë even made for them were penalized, *Καταφύγιο*, p. 116.

and join the brotherhood of Zoë as celibates, committing themselves to a life with the objectives and visions of that body. Anything different than that would demonstrate cowardice. Marriage itself was viewed and treated as a compromise and the choice for the weak ones. It was understood to be a rather deficient option of life, allowed condescendingly for the less determined who were unable to bear the load of the dignified celibacy. As for any aspiration or will to pursue an academic education and further knowledge of any discipline other than theology, that would mean that the person interested was simply ruled by a spirit of vanity and in pursuit of worldly distinctions.

Within such an atmosphere and given Yannaras' vibrant temperament and passion for life, he would not be at peace were he to ignore that 'gracious' calling and follow his own talents. Nevertheless, he was at the same time put through an equally traumatic experience by being mentally compelled to opt for something he was not naturally comfortable with, and by suffering in addition a painful situation of frustration and smothered conflict that his decision to study theology and move out from his family had caused them.³²

In his account of the different aspects of life as a boarder in Zoë and the details of everyday incidents that we read in *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν*, Yannaras clearly intends to highlight the following: the distortion that takes place when the Christian faith turns into an ideology, when the Christian belief becomes a system that safeguards the individual instead of being a relational, self-exposing stance towards the desired Other; when the Christian life, instead of being a personal journeying to find the true God, becomes an objectified set of concepts and codes of conduct that imprison and strangle within us the true and free self, the original imprint of God in man. Basically, as the very title of the whole account denotes, *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* is an expression of the phenomenon by which Christian faith turns into just another theory, a system of norms and beliefs that wants to regulate life just as all other theoretical systems have done; where Christian life, instead of being *life* or a challenge for true *life* with all the spontaneity and uncertainty that real life involves, it becomes an *idea* and thus a *refuge*

³² *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 127-144 provide details on how Yannaras ended up studying theology as well as attaching himself, as a young man, to Zoë. The same pages also include descriptions of Yannaras' family setting at that time.

for the egocentricity of the human consciousness that naturally seeks for shelters of ideological and psychological certainty and reassurance.

Yannaras provides some more details on the character of the movement of Zoë, as he had the opportunity to know it further once he decided to ‘devote’ himself to it.³³ The members of Zoë had specific places where they met and where they would also hold services of worship instead of the already existing parish churches, even though they officially continued to belong to the latter. The place of their meetings was in the centres of Zoë, where some hall was shaped in such a way to accommodate also the members’ worship and the celebration of the liturgy, the duration of which was not longer than an hour, emphasis being laid on the preaching. The liturgy often was celebrated for some society of the movement in particular, and then in order to be able to enter it you had to produce your card of membership for that certain society. The structure and the function of the movement of Zoë, in their attitudes and objectives of bringing about spiritual growth and improving the society, as well as in the external aspects of their formation, was taken from Western models.³⁴ Yannaras lets a parallel in his account be drawn with the large Catholic Christian organization ‘Opus Dei’ – for the movement typically identified its widely propagated socio-religious vision of ‘New Greece’ as “Έργο Θεοῦ” (‘The work of God’) – as well as with the German ‘Innere Mission’, even though at that time he was not yet in a position to understand that the title of ‘Σύλλογος ἐσωτερικῆς ἱεραποστολῆς: ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος’, which was put up on a panel at the entrance of some hall in Zoë’s premises, incorporates ‘Innere Mission’ in translation.³⁵

The members in the movement of Zoë were grouped in clearly distinguished single-sex assemblies. There was an intense feeling for them that they were living in or belonging to a strictly one-gender world. The fact as such might not be of a great importance, were it not made to happen and maintained by a certain philosophy and mentality behind it. The mentality

³³ Note that the celibate members of Zoë were referred to as ‘devotees’ or ‘consecrated’ (‘ἀφιερωμένοι’), meaning that they had dedicated themselves fully to the work of the movement.

³⁴ In *Orthodoxy and the West*, p. 356, Yannaras draws on the minutes of the Assemblies of the brotherhood over the years 1934-1936 that show the open admiration for the methods of work of the Western missionaries. Also Hammond makes mention of Zoë borrowing ‘unwarily from the West’, Hammond, p. 139.

³⁵ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 81, 52. For the correspondence of elements of Zoë with Opus Dei see Peter Hertel, ‘International Christian Democracy (*Opus Dei*)’, *Concilium* 193 (1987), pp. 95-105.

was that a person of the opposite gender was to be seen only as the embodiment of temptation and identified with the possibility of committing sin. It is striking to read in Yannaras' narrative about the awkwardness caused in the young boys' gatherings, should there be mention of some female friend or relative, and how any discussion of, or even word alluding to, a female person, still less love, was out of the question.³⁶ Love for a person was presented and identified only with a sinful act, a disastrous enterprise, destructive of the personal integrity and of the chastity that one should preserve. Such positions were promoted by the handbook 'The Chaste Youth' by a Hungarian protestant pastor Tihamer Toth, which was provided for the youngsters of Zoë as *the* source of sexual 'education' or edification. It seemed that none of the young members of the Sunday schools was to escape the feelings of terror and guilt brought about by that book, in relation to sexual relationships and love. No reference whatsoever was made in the catechism the young men received those days to the erotic theology of the Orthodox East neither was there any chance for them to suspect that such a theology existed. But all the more young people in Zoë suffered the absence even of a secularized idealism concerning love. Love to them equalled only sexual relationship and pleasure of the flesh, nothing else.³⁷

The above approach to the sexual conduct was coupled with a generalized practice of uniformity with regards to the external appearance. The code of external style, which had to be strictly followed, involved not only how to dress but also extended to the hairstyle and the growth of a moustache for the men. Not that there were written rules about such things; however the prevailing practice held the place of an unwritten law. The pattern of appearance adopted in the religious circles of Zoë became like a trademark, so that should one come across a member of the movement one would straightaway recognize his or her identity. Such identicalness not only flattened out all sense of personal differentiation,³⁸ but the kind of appearance promoted spelt boorishness and lack of smartness to the young peoples' taste, and crushed the natural desire of an individual to be elegant.

³⁶ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 69-70.

³⁷ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 69-72.

³⁸ Yannaras recalls an incident where he was dramatically reprimanded for using a scarf that he was wearing to protect himself following an operation, but which was totally alien to the dressing habits in the movement, p. 309.

The strictness experienced in the movement about what was and what was not allowed to be worn was furthermore applied to every other expression of conduct. From the way one was to address one's 'brothers' or how one was supposed to sit to what literature it was permitted or not permitted to read: all had to follow certain manners and habits. To conform to all the set standards and ways was an indication of quality of character and of virtue, of goodness and piety. The atmosphere also imposed a serious, stern look and a formality of manner, where smiling or light-hearted behaviour was not in any case appropriate. One can easily understand how such a setting entailed feelings of oppression and the strangling of all spontaneity.

Yannaras had already been exposed to the circumstances described above within the atmosphere of the Sunday Schools since still a young boy and a teenager. His experience had been the same in the Christian youth groups he attended, as well as during the time the children of the Christian groups spent within the premises of Zoë as visitors on different occasions³⁹ or in the farm campus of the movement where the children's and the youngsters' summer camps were accommodated. However, the experience of the world of the movement was even more intense for Yannaras when he became a boarder. Each of the boarders was now allocated a confessor or spiritual father, whom however the administrative leadership would use as a liaison between them and the young members in order to keep a watch over them and regulate them. The content of the confession in this way was going to be a source of drawing information about the moral status of a young member and a basis of calling him to discipline or for taking action towards his correction! The environment in which the young men were living was very much a setting of control, lack of freedom and of puritanical check and restriction.⁴⁰

Another central element of the life of the young devotees in Zoë was the obligation they had to work in the movement every day and practically on a full time basis. Yannaras'

³⁹ Yannaras refers to his attendance – while still a young boy and as a member of a choir – at the inaugurating event of 'Ελληνικό Φῶς' ('Greek Light'), a new association that was set up by Zoë in collaboration with the Palace, to organize the theoretical part of the anti-communist resistance in Greece. The event took place in the presence of King Paul, and Yannaras remembers the amazement and the awe that the sumptuousness and the social pretence of the atmosphere imposed: *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 101-2.

⁴⁰ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 151-2.

memories of the working commitment of those days appear again pretty distressing. There were two main workplaces where the young men were occupied: the secretarial office of the movement, where all the processing work related to the then 200,000 subscriptions to the issues of Zoë was done⁴¹, and the printing and bookbinder workplaces of the movement.⁴² To be chosen to work in the secretarial section, Yannaras explains, was considered to be a privilege, as one there escaped the terrible amount of noise and the dirt that the people in the printing rooms suffered. However, the work in the secretarial service was also very monotonous and mundane and was made even harder to bear by the formality of people's relationships there, the authoritarianism and the strict discipline imposed. The shift of relationships that took place once someone joined the working team was quite striking, as appears from Yannaras' narrative. People, who had known each other for a long time and had been friends up to then, spending joyful times over games and activities together during their adolescent years in the youth groups of the movement, now spoke to each other in a remote and formal way addressing one another as Mr. So-and-so. Every move and action of people in there was watched, and even a frequent absence due to one's need to visit the toilet was noticed and attracted scolding comments: 'What is going on, Mr. Yannaras? Are you ill?' But Mr Yannaras - Yannaras' account continuous – used to find refuge in the toilet, to escape there for a few moments from the uniformity that crushed him and to release his held-back distress by crying.⁴³ The writer's own words have a vividness that no paraphrase can convey:

I was crying because I was really suffocating. I was overburdened by the cold, official style of the people in there, the unbearable boorishness and stony-heartedness, the deliberate and unjustified reprimands that wanted to break down your 'pride'. But I was overloaded, above all, by the sterile, mechanical and mind-numbing job of a scribbler. I did not dare say anything to anyone, because I was advantaged compared to those working in the factory. Still, I felt tortured and broken apart by the thought that all those hours of the supposedly God-pleasing 'work', the most beautiful years of life could have been a time of serious study and significant learning, a time for free reading, for which I was so much thirsting, [could have been] hours to keep up with the languages which I had given up so deeply embittered. ... I do not know if other people have ever prayed in a toilet, but I was screaming silently my despair to God, without thinking of whether it was the appropriate place. I was desperately trying to keep my wilfulness for my

⁴¹ Maczewski gives the number of 165,000, pp. 46, 49.

⁴² *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 146-9.

⁴³ *Καταφύγιο*, p. 149.

‘dedication’, but I found impossible to believe that such a messing-up of my life could have the slightest relation with God and His truth.⁴⁴

Yannaras’ distress during the years he spent in Zoë was related, as seen by now, to his experiences of moralistic mentality, oppressive discipline, flattening environment and life, unfriendly and officious relationships and also the fact that study was the sideline activity during their ‘student’ life. Furthermore, another fact of the life and the atmosphere in Zoë added to the feelings of suffocation and constraint: that was the attitude of contempt towards knowledge that prevailed within the movement. To study and acquire knowledge, to follow even the theological discipline at an academic level, was not considered as very important and emphasis was rather put on how much someone conformed to the style and the objectives of the movement. The disregard for academic education was not only obvious in the movement but it was in fact openly stated.⁴⁵ There had been statements that explicitly despised the value of academic theological learning while at the same time expressing confidence in the superiority of the members of Zoë, who excelled by participating in a brotherhood like Zoë, and were not like knowledgeable theologians who, despite their learning, were not religious personalities and did not want to or could not have the same input in the social and national work that Zoë was accomplishing. In this way the lack of higher education and well-researched knowledge, combined with the feeling of superiority towards others, created a dreadful attitude that led members of Zoë not to take university life seriously, instead forming a rather low opinion of it. The kind of theological edification the members were receiving within Zoë was considered to be the only approach to the understanding of the Christian faith, the correct interpretation of the Christian message. And that theological instruction was mainly of a poor apologetic style, which basically suggested that Christian belief was based on and certified by science and the certainties of science. Science was seen as the basis or the grounds for securing and enforcing the Christian faith. Thus a ‘scientific’ and rational style of apologetics was put forward which proposed the Christian faith as a certainty based on reason

⁴⁴ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 149-150.

⁴⁵ See *Καταφύγιο*, p. 165, where Yannaras refers the reader to the minutes of the 7th assembly of the movement, which took place in 1930.

and well-founded on scientific findings. Therefore Christian faith, resulting from science, was compelling, and this binding faith also entailed the imperative keeping of the moral law.⁴⁶

But even the theology they received in the university did not appear very inspiring. Owing to their working commitments it was not possible for the boarders of Zoë to attend all the lectures and the few to which they could go tended to be the less interesting ones. The theological knowledge offered was fragmentary and disconnected from the substantive criteria of Orthodox theology and tradition, which meant that there was no space for someone even to suspect the relationship of that tradition with real life itself and with being, with the world and history. In other words it seemed that the approach to the subject of knowledge was quite sterile. For example in the field of Patristics, instead of getting in touch with the real thought and the texts of the Church Fathers, the learning was limited to the Church writers' names, to the dates and the titles of the patristic writings. In Yannaras' own striking words, 'preparation for the exams in Patristics meant memorizing a kind of phone book'.⁴⁷ There was no chance of getting acquainted with actual patristic thought, and if ever lines from the Church Fathers' texts were used it was only to support pre-packaged ideas and moralistic objectives. The Church Fathers in this way were brought forward only for moralistic purposes.

Furthermore, the lecturers at the University appeared oblivious to the revival that was flourishing in Europe at that time with regard to the study of Patristics. Yannaras expresses the legitimate wonder whether – even just at the level of academic awareness – names like those of Daniélou, or Henri de Lubac and others, were known at all to the professors in the faculties of theology in Greece, or whether any of the lecturers had come across and read the *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* by Vladimir Lossky, which could be seen as an elementary handbook of the neo-patristic turn in European Orthodox theology; or whether anyone was familiar with even the names of Fr Florovsky's works.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For Yannaras' later response on the nature of apologetic theology see Christos Yannaras, *Ἡ Απολογητική στην Ὀρθοδοξία* [*Apologetics in Orthodoxy*] (Athens: Grigori Publications, 1989, 2nd edition).

⁴⁷ *Καταφύγιο*, p. 168.

⁴⁸ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 168-9. All of chapter 15 of the book demonstrates the contemptuous attitude of the brotherhood towards knowledge and education.

Throughout *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* we come across several striking incidents from Yannaras' time in Zoë, which are illustrative of the oppressive religious formalism and the psychopathological atmosphere, as Yannaras himself calls it, within the movement. There is also clearly apparent the unsatisfied feeling that several of the young men living in the brotherhood of Zoë had, a kind of spiritual thirst and hunger they were experiencing, and which was not fulfilled with the straw-like spirituality and the cheap moralizing they received in the movement. Yannaras' own life in those days, as, we are informed, has survived in the pages of his diary from those years, featured daily distress and sadness, with a feeling of terrible, aching void and a tortured frustration.⁴⁹ He could feel that something had gone wrong, something in the whole mission was not quite right. The young men had given up their personal dreams and aspirations, their families and any personal ambition for their own life and had devoted themselves to a higher and sacred objective. Still they were left feeling emotionally empty and deeply unhappy: deceived about the standards they had set themselves, or rather the ideals they had allowed Zoë to set for them. They were supposedly working towards a social and moral renovation, but even so were moving, as it were, on the margins of real life. The narrow mindedness and the puritanism practised in the brotherhood were at odds with what was going on outside the brotherhood, with the life and practice of the wider society. The devotees of Zoë were often seen as eccentric, belonging to a world somewhat sterilized from real life. And in themselves they felt rather devoid of the spiritual renewal they wanted to establish widely. Yannaras gradually and reluctantly came to realize that there was something wrong at a deeper level, beyond the apparent conservative exaggerations of the leadership of Zoë, beyond their narrow-mindedness and their carelessness or failures in their manners. The reasons for the smouldering failure were felt to be somewhere in the roots of their "Christian" endeavour, in a religiosity mistaken right from the very starting point.⁵⁰

As mentioned earlier above, *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* constitutes a criticism of, and an opposition to, the state of error where, instead of being a personal journey to encounter God or a unique exploration in quest of attaining and realizing our true self in love for God and the world, instead of being the 'way' and the 'life', Christian life becomes a set of objectified

⁴⁹ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 190-2.

⁵⁰ *Καταφύγιο*, p. 189.

certainties and beliefs, which result in a fixed and moralistic pattern of life that imprisons true being and nullifies the real and creative freedom of existence. I will let here Yannaras' own words make the point:

I am sitting and writing this book without believing that I will “enlighten” anyone or that I will “edify” the new generations. I only want to leave behind at least a minimal and weak testimony to the inhuman role that every ideology – religious, political or any other – plays in our life. [I only want] to show – if I manage to – through my own life and experience, how even the most innocent and sincere “devotion” to noble ideals can be only a fixation that is used to house our unconscious self-centredness. And we become blind slaves in the grip of our obsessive faith, unable to distinguish the real from the unreal, the imaginary idols from the reality of life. At least, when in politics or in our social life we substitute thoughts and ideas for reality and when it is there – in politics or economy – that we find the whole meaning of being and life, our fixation (ιδεοληψία) perhaps can operate as a delightful opium and give us the psychological courage to bear persecutions, imprisonments, exiles, tortures, even to stand up as fearless men in front of the firing squad, proud of our ideas. But when our question lies elsewhere, when we do not locate the real in the absurdity of the ephemeral, of decay, of the anonymity of the billions [of people] that preceded us and of those that will follow, when that which we thirst for is a “sign” of personal, eponymous and at the same time catholic life, a “sign” unmoving in the endless passing of time – the still point of the turning world – and when the “sign” has been given but we make it an idea, a world-doctrine (κοσμοθεωρία), morality, “Christianity” (“Χριστιαν-ισμός”) – who can then measure the consequences? All my life I studied theology and philosophy, I became passionate about modern physics and cosmology, I read psychology and a lot of history. And [I did] all this looking into the one and only riddle that puzzles me: [that] of existence that can love restlessly and not die. I found the most complete answer in the Greek fathers of the Church – the most ingenious eye-opener up to now. However, the sense of the certainty that one day, not very far away, my body will dissolve in the ground – this body with the thrill of the senses and the sharpness of mind, the body alone with which I enjoy the beauty of the world, I travel to the longitudes and latitudes of the earth, I smile to those next to me, I gesture, I speak, I listen to music and make love – the sense that my body is meant to become mud cannot be outbalanced not even by the knowledge of patristic theology, nor of course with the vertigo of the information of astrophysics or the findings of psychoanalysis, which compel the mind to acknowledge a Supreme Authority, itself existing and source of all. For thousands of years now, moment by moment thousands of people on earth die and my death will be one of innumerable deaths, another grain in the sand passing through the everlasting hourglass. In such a flow where my life is drawn closer and closer to the inevitable end, no ideology, no knowledge or science, lights up a prop for me to hold on to, to prevent me diving head first in the swirl of meaninglessness. As for schemes of social restructuring and the dialectic process of History, at them without any guilt I the moribund simply roar with laughter. It is only at a name that I stop. Not an idea or notion, but just a name – “sign” of life personal, eponymous and at the same

time catholic: the name Christ Jesus. In the limits of the personal reference that [it] denotes, ideas are ridiculed, notions become useless, the riddle of love and death does not wait for me any more as a Sphinx at the crossroads. And any other word beyond this name seems redundant.

I write this book only to point out a wrong way, the way that turns Christ into an idea, a notion, a dogma, a morality, a social scheme, and thus leads us away from the redemptive meeting with His Person – the way of ideology.⁵¹

In the later years of Yannaras' life in Zoë internal cracks and ruptures in the relationships of people in the movement came to add to the anxieties, concerns and inner reactions that were already developing within Yannaras and others about the style of the religiosity and about the objectives that the movement represented. The internal crisis resulted in a rift that took place in the brotherhood, which was caused by conflicts in relation to the leadership of the organization. Again the narrative is striking in bringing up and describing the circumstances and the events of those days of the split in Zoë, all marked by intense opposition among the members, mistrust and slander.⁵² If there is anything that Yannaras' account aims at through the detailed exposition of the story of the conflict in Zoë, that is not to lay bare or judge any of the individuals involved as such. What he wants to do is to demonstrate what happens when one is hooked on to one's own self and one's own certainties, what happens when faith in Christ, in Christianity, Χριστιανισμό, or any other –ism, becomes an objectified conviction or an idea on to which we desperately cling in our struggle to triumph over the threatening gap that lies under our feet, that is the issue of life, existence and death, and in our endeavour to attain self-reassurance. But following Christ does not actually involve any self-reassurance; it rather involves quite the opposite: to abandon oneself, to 'lose' one's soul,⁵³ to become the last one. The disagreements and clashes leading up to the division in Zoë were in Yannaras' view the result of such pathological religious attitudes in the part of people who would rip their clothes while preaching about love, altruism and sacrifice for the sake of the others, but who ended up breaking their bonds with their 'brothers' and held tight to their self-assuredness and their small or big egoisms. Selfishness proved stronger than anything else, stronger than all the ideas and ideals of love, of purity and of so-called moral standards, simply because one cannot easily disengage from one's certitudes with

⁵¹ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 95-8.

⁵² *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 228-292.

⁵³ Luke 17:33.

which one has been holding, for that is what one, in such a religious mentality as the one described here, has learnt to do in order to be ‘saved’.

It is, in my view, this experience that lies behind the way in which Yannaras goes on to talk as he does about faith, God and the human quest for salvation. He understands Christian life as an abandonment of religious certitudes and a trustful surrender to the One who only loves and who awaits our return to Him, on the model of the father of the prodigal son. In fact Yannaras likes to look into the origins of the terms we employ in our religious and theological language and to bring out their original content. Thus ‘faith’ (πίστις), as he uses it, has not the meaning of conviction but of trust, a content that the word has actually retained in other aspects of the socially organized life, for example in the area of commerce and the trading relationships. Thus ἐμπορική πίστις, for instance, means not commercial belief or idea, but commercial confidence, commercial trust.⁵⁴ Besides, Yannaras’ experience of life in Zoë, with the stiff puritanism and the sterile religiosity described above, left him with a thirst not for ideas and theoretical opinions, of which he had had more than enough in Zoë, but for an honest and humane contact, for communication and communion, which he had bitterly missed. I think this also casts some light on the fact that his work later developed so much around central ideas such as the ‘person’, ‘eros’, ‘existence’ and ‘relational being’, and why his theology, as also his thought in general, is largely articulated in existential terms.

While still a probationer in Zoë Yannaras encountered certain people, such as Dimitris Koutroumbis and Zissimos Lorentzatos, who, through their presence, their theological positions and more generally their ideas with relation to the tradition and the metaphysical had their own influence on, and input to, the inner developments, re-examinations and changes of mind that Yannaras was to experience. But before moving in to the encounter of the members of Zoë with the figures mentioned here, I think it would be valuable to mention briefly one further aspect of the life in the movement for the young men. I have already mentioned at the beginning that Zoë identified itself with the objective of bringing about spiritual growth and improvement of society in Greece. The movement aspired to inaugurate a spiritually renovated

⁵⁴ Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith: an Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, trans. Keith Schram (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), p. 11.

Greece, ‘Νέα Ἑλλάδα’, ‘Ἑλλάδα τοῦ Χριστοῦ’, based on the norms and the ideals of the gospel. This goal was propagated to the members and the potential converts from an early age and at every stage. Every individual felt the calling, or rather the obligation of a personal mission, to bring along others to Christ, and that basically meant to attract people to the spirituality the movement represented and convince them about the sacred ‘work’ that was being done in Zoë.

This commitment to working towards the spiritual elevation and the Christianization of society was even more enthusiastically propagated and practised during the years of the civil war in Greece, namely the years of the middle and late 1940s. Yannaras’ memories of those days mention the atrocities reported at the time that were committed by both parties and also the atmosphere present in the youth assemblies and the Christian youth summer camps that he, as a young boy, used to go to. The feeling was that Christian Greece was fighting against atheist communism, and no Christian person should stay unresponsive to that challenge. The nation was fighting for ‘τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πίστιν τὴν ἁγίαν καὶ τῆς πατρίδος τὴν ἐλευθερίαν’ – ‘the holy faith of Christ and the freedom of the motherland’.⁵⁵ Especially at the youth camps where the young people of Zoë spent their summer days the mood that was conveyed to the young members was to take sides with the conservative party of the civilian population and with the armed forces of the government. This was communicated through songs – among which war marches prevailed – prayers and educational speeches delivered to the youngsters. Reference was made also to the persecution of the Christians in Russia and quotations from Marx, Lenin, Bukharin and others were introduced. Those recruited to the work of spiritual edification and revival that was based on Christian ideals needed to be acquainted with the enemy, they should know who the enemy was. ‘For *all* of us were signed up for this war – the soldiers on the front line and us back home with our ideas to enlighten the people’.⁵⁶

Part of the summer routine for the young people of Zoë included dashing out from their camps to hospitals, to meet with the injured men of the war, and also to the shops and the streets, to distribute everywhere possible pamphlets of the movement about the nation’s

⁵⁵ Καταφύγιο, p. 98.

⁵⁶ Καταφύγιο, p. 99.

struggle towards the *New Greece*. Such acts of campaign went on over the wintertime too. The narrative is again striking about how children of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old encountered men who had lost their limbs by running into landmines, men with vacant looks and livid faces, only to deliver a lecture before such a tragedy and to remove secular magazines from the bedside tables of the injured people, replacing them with the Zoë pamphlets. It was important that the visitors kept a record of how many ‘dirty’ magazines they disposed of and how often they told to the soldiers not to swear: attitudes all induced by a one-sided, Manichean obsession to oppose evil, do good and make the Christ-idea conquer.⁵⁷

It took time for Yannaras to realize that all the fever of exhilarating and committed activity against the communists that was taking place throughout all the Zoë movement was planned and promulgated by the Palace. It was only as time went on and by relating his experiences that he became conscious of this fact. However, among his memories of early life there are vivid ones about the special connection and acts of collaboration between the Zoë movement and the Palace, which afforded a kind of secular endorsement to the movement and its work and also made the Church in Greece appear politically devoted.⁵⁸ The Zoë movement thus initiated – in Yannaras’ descriptive words – ‘a discreet romance with the Palace’ by undertaking the spiritual dimension of the anticommunist war. The consequences of such an identification – namely of Christianity, Christians, Christian faith with conservatism and the established civil powers – even to this day remain damaging in the people’s conscience, in their understanding of Church life and faith and in their political stance. This was therefore another strong aspect of the type of Christian life that Yannaras experienced in Zoë: Christian faith seeking for secular acknowledgement and the Church openly joining forces with the powers of this world.

All the feelings of uncertainty and uneasiness, which over time affected many members of Zoë in relation to the objectives of the brotherhood and its work, were like cracks in their faith and confidence in the life in Zoë and in what they were trying to achieve there, and these cracks of discomfort and doubt became even more gaping in the dispute and the split

⁵⁷ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 99-100.

⁵⁸ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 100-6; there is also a reference to the collaboration of Zoë with the palace in *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp. 375-6.

that took place in the bosom of the organization. However, through these cracks there came a light to soothe somehow the bitterness and the chill of the rigid, one-sided and pietistic life of the young theologians and to cast hope for a way out from the overshadowing impasse, and this light was the encounter with such people as Dimitris Koutroumbis and Zissimos Lorentzatos. These people could be described as representatives of the Orthodox consciousness that remained alert and reactive against the pietism and the spirituality – of protestant inspiration – that organizations such as the brotherhood of Zoë embodied and promoted.⁵⁹

In *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* there are only brief references to these men, as Yannaras brings out mainly the circumstances of his personal encounter with them and demonstrates how their presence and their utterances altered not only Yannaras' understanding of things, but brought about shifts for many of the young theologians of Zoë and determined their stance and life-decisions thereafter. Their importance is such that we shall provide a somewhat longer account.

3. Dimitris Koutroumbis

Dimitris Koutroumbis was a lay theologian, living in the southern outskirts of Athens with his elderly mother in straightened circumstances and leading a quiet life of a rather unusual pattern. He had behind him a long personal history and a diverse theological and cultural experience. Born in Athens in 1921, he had become a student of the medical faculty of the University, from which however he never graduated. It was due to an accident that he interrupted his study there and that he got to meet with some Jesuits and join their order as a probationer in the year 1946. In the years that followed he travelled to England and studied philosophy in Heythrop College in Oxfordshire. He also attended lectures in philosophy in the Collège de Mongré in Lyon, where he came across Père Henri de Lubac and his associates,

⁵⁹ In *The Freedom of Morality* Yannaras makes reference to the pietism and the religious/theological distortions – according to Orthodox criteria – that crept into Church life in Greece, under the influence of religious organizations and theological brotherhoods such as Zoë. There he also refers to the weakening of the influence that followed and to the awakening of the Orthodox theological consciousness and the awareness of the Orthodox patristic tradition: Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, trans. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimirs's Seminary Press, 1196), pp. 134-6.

who were embarking on a systematic study of the Orthodox theological and liturgical tradition. Later, from 1950, he taught in the St. Joseph University of Beirut. It was then in 1953 that Dimitris Koutroumbis, seven years after joining the Jesuit order and after learning about the Orthodox tradition as an outsider, returned to his mother Church and moved back to Athens. His activity from thereon was to transmit in Greece his knowledge and experience, by making contact with religious circles and by getting involved in theological discussions of the time. From 1956 he also started publishing articles in religious journals, trying to enlighten people in Greece about the theological contribution of the Russians of the Diaspora, to bring out the theology of the liturgical texts and to recover the focal points of a genuinely ecclesiastical ethos.

Dimitris Koutroumbis is remembered by people who actually met with him⁶⁰ as a person of a profound Christian spirituality, which was reflected in the simplicity of his life, and the warm welcoming and the loving hospitality he reserved for all those who came to visit and to spend some time with him. He is described as a man of great kindness and affection, who was very attentive to everybody's little problems despite the strains and pains of his own life, someone who listened carefully and valued what the other person had to say or what one had achieved in himself by then, in a way that would embrace everybody and make them feel worthy and valuable to serve in the mystery of the Church. He was able to adjust to, and speak in, the style of each person; he used to enter the world of each one, so that he could meet with them and transmit his message, as if he was taking care of each one separately. He had the aptitude to credit the words of each one with importance and built on them through his own contribution, often leading the conversation back to his interlocutors, letting them feel that they had come up with the wisdom of his words and his ideas. Apart from being very perceptive and insightful, Koutroumbis is referred to also as a man of love and humility, one who inspired and encouraged others in their achievements, without ever claiming anything for

⁶⁰ Further to Yannaras' testimony about Koutroumbis – *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp. 470-3 – other people also portray the man in a very similar way and underline much the same qualities and characteristics about him as Yannaras. For such evidence see the obituary: 'In Memoriam Demetrios Koutroumbis', *Sobornost*, 6:1, 1984, pp. 67-77. Also, see the witness by the archimandrite Vassilios Ghontikakis, prior of the holy monastery Ιβήρων in Mount Athos, in his preface of a collection of texts by Koutroumbis, which was published in 1995 under the title *Ἡ Χάρις τῆς Θεολογίας*: D. G. Koutroumbis, *Ἡ Χάρις τῆς Θεολογίας* [*The Grace of Theology*] (Athens: Domos 1995). Archimandrite Vassilios was also one among the young men who used to visit Koutroumbis in his Athens residence and benefit from the encounter and conversations with him.

himself; even on occasions where it was obvious that behind someone's presentation in fact was hidden Koutroumbis' influence or inspiration, the latter would only attribute the originality and the achievement to the presenter himself.

Dimitris Koutroumbis was introduced to the assemblies of Zoë by Fr Elias Mastrogiannopoulos, who was the new head of the movement after the split within it and who was trying to mitigate the protestant character of Zoë and bring to its life and work some orthodox theological ethos. Koutroumbis drove a wedge into the life of Zoë, as Yannaras puts it. He was invited to the premises of Zoë to attend discussions and deliver a kind of theological training to the young theologians of the movement. His contribution was so crucial that Yannaras actually speaks in terms of a pre-Koutroumbis and post-Koutroumbis epoch of theology in Greece.⁶¹ Up until the encounter with him no one from inside the movement was able to suspect the protestant character of the Brotherhood and of its work, and any such comments from the outside were received with annoyance and discontent as unfounded blame and falsehood⁶². What is remarkable, however, in what we read about Koutroumbis, is that he was not a man who made criticisms; instead of finding fault with, say, Zoë he rather spoke of matters in a constructive way and pointed to the positive side, letting his listeners gather from his words what the misrepresentation of things would be. His contribution was to present and speak positively rather than to deliver a negative critique. This was a very different stance from what had been the practice in the world of Zoë; it made an impression and won over the hearts of some of the young men in the movement, to whom such an outlook felt like solid nourishment for their 'thirst and hunger'⁶³, in which the shallowness of the puritanism and the castigating theological teaching and morality that they had been fed with had left them.

Further to the personal example that Koutroumbis was in his own presence, what was equally important and made a difference acting as a catalyst in the minds and the life of the

⁶¹ *Καταφύγιο*, p. 356. Also: Chrisos Yannaras, 'The Master Builder' in 'In Memoriam Demetrios Koutroubis', *Sobornost* 6:1 (1984), p. 72.

⁶² *Καταφύγιο*, p. 314. Yannaras mentions Fotis Kontoglou – the re-discoverer in Greece of the authentic tradition of iconography – and his friends as a source of such allegations.

⁶³ One of Yannaras' earliest collections of texts from those days was published under the title *Hunger and Thirst*; it is expressive of the quest and the yearning he experienced for something substantial and genuine for his Christian life and for a longing for God's life-transforming presence: Christos Yannaras, *Πείνα και Δίψα* [*Hunger and Thirst*] (Athens: Grigori Publications, 1981; first published by Skapani, 1961).

young theologians in the brotherhood of Zoë was the theological word that Koutroumbis delivered as well as the content of the thought that people like Zissimos Lorentzatos spoke. They used a language that appeared alive and meaningful, as relating to real life and experience. It was the encounter with such people that opened the eyes of some members in Zoë to aspects of theology and of the Christian faith that they had ignored up to then. They came to realize the realistic quality of the orthodox tradition, its connection with and relevance to real life; if not to say that they came to discover the orthodox tradition itself. They had been abundantly fed with translations of protestant handbooks and for the first time they were drawn into contact with the Fathers of the Church and the theology the latter represented. Koutroumbis as well as Lorentzatos spoke a realistic word, not abstract notions, neither moralistic exhortations nor mental or sentimental certainties. They discussed theology, the dogmas and the articles of faith with immediate reference to their meaning and relevance in Church life and for the affairs of a Christian. The Church was no longer an ideology or a penitentiary for reforming morals. It was the rehabilitation of Life. Theology did not seem to be a mental exertion any more, a drilling of the mind or cold, meaningless speech. What people had known as abstract, idealized principles and doctrines would now be starting points to cast light on real life, they would relate to the experience of life and to the materiality of things. The history of Church tradition and the people who belonged to it now assumed a meaning and appeared important.

Koutroumbis brought a theological awakening. He introduced and spoke about things that the young theologians in Zoë heard for the first time; Gregory Palamas and the hesychastic tradition, for example, was completely new knowledge to them. Koutroumbis was also aware of the rediscovery of the patristic tradition that was taking place in Europe at the time, and was up to date on the crucially important works of Daniélou, of Henri de Lubac, of Congar, of Louis Bouyer, of Ivánka, of Balthasar.⁶⁴ The reader of Koutroumbis' texts in the volume *Η Χάρις της Θεολογίας* easily notes that Koutroumbis does not present what he writes as his own ideas, but most often speaks through others. He indeed appears informed of the theological developments of his days and knowledgeable about modern theologians and people who have rediscovered the Church tradition and who take on the responsibility to

⁶⁴ *Καταφύγιο*, p. 319.

revive it and cast its light on contemporary life. He draws on, for example, John Meyendorff's study of Gregory of Palamas, Myrra Lot-Borodine and her book on Nicholas Kavalas, on Vladimir Lossky and Paul Evdokimov.⁶⁵ Such references by Koutroumbis as well as his mentions of the Church Fathers naturally marked him out in the eyes of the young members of Zoë, who as we saw had basically encountered teachers at the university who were theologically uninformed and also the general disrespect of Zoë towards knowledge.

Any reading of Koutroumbis confirms that his thought and theology are based on Church practice and draw from the patristic tradition. Often he introduces a theme sparked off by ecclesiastical and liturgical practice, as he does for example when he discusses the Holy Cross, or the Baptism of Christ, or the person of the Mother of God, where he sets off by explaining the content of the relevant feast or by analysing the ἀπολυτίκιον of the day. He also refers to the Church Fathers' teaching: John Damascene and Gregory Palamas, Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, Gregory of Nyssa and Athanasius the Great are all sources Koutroumbis makes use of. Thus, the way he presents his topics is deeply ecclesial. Furthermore, his themes, even the more dogmatic and theological ones, are given in a simple and clear way, while still knowledgeable and informative. Take, for example, the rather extended chapter in *Ἡ Χάρις τῆς Θεολογίας* where he talks about the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.⁶⁶ All the ideas are expressed in an organized way and with clarity. Although he deals with what initially appears as a rather theoretical matter his exposition bears a quite practical and instructive quality. The reader is illumined about the discussed topic both in terms of the doctrine about the Church and in a way that makes sense in practical terms: what it means to be a member of the Church, what the 'mystical' character of the Body of Christ and man's participation in it involves. Theological matters in Koutroumbis appear conceivable, comprehensible and are presented in a language that feels realistic and meaningful, one to which a modern reader can relate. The different theological topics are not approached as abstract and theoretical matters. Koutroumbis' theological word transmits a living experience and his themes are brought up and talked through with the quest to find and

⁶⁵ See *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 159-255 and especially the unit 'Σύγχρονοι Θεολογικαὶ Ἀναζητήσεις' ['Contemporary Theological Pursuits'], pp. 239-250.

⁶⁶ 'Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, Μυστικόν Σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ' ['The Church: the Mystical Body of Christ'] in *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 29-80.

to know their true meaning and importance. In this way what we read is presented as relevant to contemporary reality and present day life. Theology for Koutroumbis is not a science or a theoretical sport that remains unconnected to everyday life and the practical interests of Christians. It is instead, as he clearly states,⁶⁷ the base and the foundation of the Church life, not an intellectual exercise, that is, but closely connected with Christian practice. Equally, the Christian faith itself is not about adopting some kind sentiments or having some noble ideals, rather it leads to an all-inclusive way of living, it is a *way of being* that embraces the whole of the human life, all the aspects of man's existence.

In fact Koutroumbis' interests are not confined to what we would consider as strictly theological subjects. His theological writing touches on modern topics and aspects of life that people would generally consider to lie outside the span of theology. For instance he discusses Marxism in relation to Orthodoxy, or the realm of finance in relation to Christian faith and life,⁶⁸ or, to keep closer to the way Koutroumbis himself puts it, as an aspect rather of Christian faith and life. To manage effectively the material part of the world is a major task for Christians. Christians bear a responsibility not to leave the world in the administration of the devil. Unfortunately, religious faith and financial life, as Koutroumbis argues, have generally been treated in the course of history as completely separate, hermetically sealed off from each other, so to speak, owing to a mistaken understanding of anachoreticism and eschatology. However, the trap of idealism, into which Christianity fell as far as the material nature of things is concerned, needs to be overcome. If we, the Christians, fail to see that man is made of spirit and matter alike, then the Christian confession and the message of the gospel turn easily to beautiful but empty words. Koutroumbis sees in man and human life a strong unity of the material and the spiritual, and he repeatedly points out the danger of falling into either extreme and neglecting the one or the other aspect respectively. Either attitude constitutes a false version of the Christian faith, indeed a heretical deviation. It is a failure in Christianity, Koutroumbis notes, when it becomes a religion of the soul, leaving outside the body. Man is an indivisible and inseparable unity of both soul and body and he is to be saved and restored to the pre-fallen condition as a whole.

⁶⁷ 'Σύγχρονοι Θεολογικαί Αναζητήσεις', p. 240.

⁶⁸ See chapters 'Ορθοδοξία καί Μαρξισμός' ['Orthodoxy and Marxism'] and 'Περί Πτωχείας' ['On Poverty'] in *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 127-134 and 135-138.

It would seem that this overcoming of dualism with respect to man's existence and his life must have been one of the main points of difference in Koutroumbis' theological stance, if not the prime one, that Yannaras and others found appealing. Yannaras had been fed a 'spirituality' within Zoë that set apart the corporeal from the religious element; man's true needs were felt to have no place in the preached kingdom of God, since the latter was put forward rather as an otherworldly reality that did not accommodate the world in the sense of transforming it through God's grace and by restoring it to its true meaning, but rather disqualified the world. Anything human felt only sinful. To be able then to recover unity with relation to one's existence, for a person to feel valued as a whole and to be invited to God's grace and kingdom as a unity of body and soul, formed a new outlook on the Christian faith and the Church life. To such a stance people like Yannaras, who had agonisingly suffered the splits of dualism, were bound to be attracted. In Yannaras' own intellectual approach then we come to see an all-permeating attitude of seeing things and speaking about things in their wholeness.

However, this is not the only case in which we can find a connection between Koutroumbis and Yannaras. Several other matters appear to be common in the thought of the two men. First, when he describes the spiritual relationship between God and humanity Koutroumbis employs the concept of an erotic event. In fact it is not Koutroumbis himself who parallels man's relationship with God with erotic love; Koutroumbis only brings out the relevant parts of the Church Fathers' mind and the biblical tradition which highlight the strong, loving bond in the relationship of God with the world, of Christ with the Church.⁶⁹ There, the creation of humankind as male and female and even the making of Eve from Adam's side and then Adam's love for her are treated as symbols and signs of a mystery: the mystery of the spiritual call and the destination set out for man, which is to love and to unite himself to the True God, and also the mystery of the creation of the 'new humanity', namely the Church, within which God's spiritual calling towards man is realised. The connection of love and desire between a man and a woman and the union of the two are meant to depict the deep and powerful love of God for mankind and God's affection for and loyalty to the Church.

⁶⁹ See the chapter 'Τό Μυστήριο τοῦ Ἀνδρός καί τῆς Γυναίκος' ['The mystery of the Man and the Woman'] in *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 113-26.

The True and Living God is presented and referred to from early on – namely from the time of the Old Covenant – as someone who longs for an intimate and personal relationship with man, as the Groom of the bride, which is the Church, as a spouse and a lover who is full of care and patience. The very relationship of Yahweh with Israel is so close and affectionate that it can be described only in the language borrowed from a marital and erotic context. It resembles the story of a marriage, or even more, is paralleled to an erotic drama.⁷⁰ And then the divine Kingdom is referred to as ‘Marriage’, since it forms a deeply intimate union with God, a representation of which is the Church. Koutroumbis notes that the *Song of Songs* was listed among the canonical books of the Old Testament in order to underline exactly the very fact that the whole Scripture is a Song of Love, the love of God for mankind and of man for God. Yannaras, apparently inspired by this, composed later a *Σχόλιο* (*Commentary*) on the Song of Songs, finding himself in it a strong metaphor to express the experiential and erotic character of the knowledge of God. One can easily draw a parallel between all this and the erotic language that Yannaras employs to speak about God and his creative and providing activity, and also about man and his objective of true, authentic existence. To be authentic for Yannaras is basically equivalent to being erotic, that is to seek out the other and to abandon oneself by self-surrender to the love of the other, to the manic lover who is God; it is the restoration of existence back to the way it was created to be from the beginning: in a unity of love with the Creator God, as a result of freedom. That is how *Eros* is a fundamental ontological category for Yannaras, as it forms the very mode of being within which one truly overcomes fallen nature and attains the mode of the revealed God, which is the mode of personal existence.

This notion of personal existence is another point of contact that we can identify between Koutroumbis and Yannaras. The concept of the ‘person’ possesses in Koutroumbis too a dynamic similar to the one that we see in Yannaras. Drawing from the theology of Gregory Palamas, Koutroumbis sees the human person as a being that exists in communion with God and with other persons, and thus he opposes it to the concept of the individual, which means an existence isolated and closed in upon itself. Koutroumbis explains that God is personal, as, according to the experience and the teaching of the Church, he is not a monad, closed selfishly upon himself and absorbed in his own beatitude, and he is not even a dyad,

⁷⁰ ‘Τό Μυστήριον τοῦ Ἀνδρός καί τῆς Γυναίκος’, p. 121.

which could imply division and compromise. God is Trinitarian, a communion and unity of three persons, each of which exists for and on account of the others. Man then, who is made after the image of God, cannot live selfishly just for himself, but he is meant, if he wants to be a real and perfect man, to live up to his prototype, that is the Trinitarian God. In our modern times the fact that we have lost the sense of the mystery of God has led us to also miss out on the sense of the mystery of the human person. However, the call for man to go beyond his biological individuality and come to live as a person is still present and real, and that is what the Church is for. The Church is a call to become something more than just a totality of individuals; it is a call to become the family of God. The Church is a communion of persons; it subsists as the created image of the Holy Trinity.⁷¹ The way Koutroumbis speaks of the human person shows that he, just like Yannaras, understands it as the expression of the unique and unequalled existence, and also as what one may or ought to become. In Koutroumbis, as in Yannaras, ‘person’ means what is distinctive and matchless, whilst the characteristics, either physical or psychological, that people have in common are qualities rather of their shared nature. Besides, ‘person’ is not always an accomplished reality but is referred to by Koutroumbis as an objective to which man must attain. ‘Man becomes a person when he breaks the chains of his selfishness, when he overcomes himself and offers himself to the others... and stretches out towards God’.⁷² Koutroumbis actually borrows these last words from Paul Evdokimov, a significant figure for Yannaras whom he shall meet later. He also puts forward the latter’s thoughts – which in their turn reflect the language of the Fathers – when he says that ‘person’ or ‘hypostasis’ are actually relative notions to that of the ‘image’. This means that when we say that man is made after the image of God, this ‘image’ has a dynamic meaning and denotes the potential that man has, namely the will and the freedom imprinted in him, to abide by God’s will and become what God wills him to become, and that ultimately is to resemble God.⁷³

⁷¹ ‘Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς καί δύο σύγχρονα προβλήματα’ [‘Gregory of Palamas and two contemporary problems’] in *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 178-82.

⁷² ‘Ἐνα βιβλίο-σημεῖο: Κριτική στό βιβλίο *Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία* τοῦ Παύλου Εὐδοκίμωφ’ [‘A book-sign: Critique on the book *Orthodoxy* of Paul Evdokimov’] in *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, p. 217.

⁷³ ‘Ἐνα βιβλίο-σημεῖο’, pp. 216-19.

This dynamic approach to the concept of the person can also be picked up in the way Koutroumbis sees and talks about the Christian life as a whole. Koutroumbis discusses this in a chapter on Nicholas Kavalas' treatise 'Life in Christ' and Myrra Lot-Borodine's study on this Church Father.⁷⁴ Life in Christ for Koutroumbis is primarily an ontological event, as it entails the renovation of the whole man in Christ. It involves the participation in the risen life of Christ through our partaking in the sacraments of the Church, Baptism, Chrism, and the Eucharist. To live as a Christian is an existential event, as Koutroumbis somewhat apologetically calls it.⁷⁵ It involves not simply an imitation of the life of Christ as if the latter was to be accurately copied, neither just an external keeping of the Lord's commandments, but it rather refers to an inner renewal of the self. A true Christian endures an all-embracing transformation in Christ, through his sharing in the life of the Church, so that he bears Christ, so that Christ dwells in him and is revealed through him, through his words and his thoughts and his actions. Christian life thus is by no means some sort of static observance of a law, an adjustment to a preset pattern of life, but a powerful activity for the Christian, which is always in progress. Consequently, Christian life as an ontological event of inner renovation is reflected also in the realm of the moral. Morality, it follows, is a reflection of the existential renovation of man in Christ, the expression of what takes place in the inner self of the Christian. Koutroumbis puts forward a dynamic perception of morality. Morality for him is an event of dynamic character, an ongoing and always developing condition. Because to lead a moral life is not just a matter of adapting oneself to external moral codes and sets of norms, but is the very event of leading a spiritual life, that is the life of the Spirit. Thus morality cannot be measured and objectively certified and to achieve it is an advancing and never ending process, an always-evolving situation. This dynamic perception of Christian life and of morality is not something that Koutroumbis improvises. On the contrary, he puts forward such positions based on the tradition of the faith, on the mind and the teaching of the Church fathers. This is clear for example, in the chapter about Nicholas Kavalas. The similarities between Koutroumbis' standpoint on the matters presented here and the positions that Yannaras takes up on the same topics are quite apparent.

⁷⁴ 'Νικόλαος Καβάσιλας: Ένας λαϊκός διδάσκαλος της Πνευματικότητας' ['Nicholas Kavalas: A lay teacher of spirituality'] in *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 187-211.

⁷⁵ 'Νικόλαος Καβάσιλας', p. 205.

Also another subject where comparability can be noted between Koutroumbis and Yannaras is the question of the nature of the truly Good. Koutroumbis explains how man, when he was created, was granted the freedom to love God or not, to choose between good and evil, to live by what is righteous or what is not. Man's existence, Koutroumbis explains, reaches its true fulfilment and happiness when he responds to God's loving invitation and thus lets himself be united with God. One could possibly then argue here that to opt for God and the Good is a selfishly motivated act, a move of self-interest. The answer to this, Koutroumbis makes clear in his brief dialogue 'On poverty',⁷⁶ is that the nature of the truly Good is communion, to share it.⁷⁷ According to the doctrinal faith of the Church none of the divine persons of the Trinitarian God exists closed in upon itself and for itself, but each lives for the other persons. In the same way when man lives in God's love and grace and unites himself with God, he is bound to open up and give out what he is and what he has to others and to the rest of the whole creation. The nature of the Good is not to be selfishly retained and enjoyed, but to be communicated and shared. This strikes a chord with Yannaras' exposition of the characteristic of man's worldly or fallen nature as being to appropriate everything, to seize things and use them towards its own ends. Yannaras asserts that this mechanism of the darkened nature applies also in the sphere of the moral; the individual wants to be moral, to meet with certain ethical standards and to live by moral codes, as this sustains the selfish need of the human consciousness to be reassured and certified, by mirroring and justifying itself against such an objectified law. The way out of such an impasse, as Yannaras like Koutroumbis suggests, is for man to abandon himself to God's merciful love and trust Him, who is the only Good, for his life and fulfilment, rather than to hold on to self-centred certainties of being ethical and good.

In general, Koutroumbis' style is very spiritual. His thoughts and his remarks are permeated by a spirituality, which is not just intellectuality; they radiate a sense of the true and real Life. Koutroumbis speaks of a spiritual life, that is of the life of the Spirit; he does not communicate a moralistic word, and he does not discuss Christian life on the basis of morals

⁷⁶ 'Περί Πτωχείας', *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 135-8.

⁷⁷ *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, p. 138.

and norms.⁷⁸ He conveys a frame of mind that is free from the stress of abiding to codes of conduct. He puts across a clear and realistic outlook on what it takes to be a member of the Church and a Christian, and that involves not just adopting some good thoughts and manners or some gentle sentiments but cleaving faithfully to Church tradition and practice and to seek, with humility and trust in God, to become in one's own self and in one's own heart a witness of the Truth that the Church maintains. Thus, repeating what Yannaras notes about Koutroumbis, one can confirm that the latter does not speak sentimentally; rather he puts forward a pragmatic and practical word. He employs neither a legalistic nor a sentimental language, and wherever he adopts terms such as 'love', 'pure heart' or 'desire' for God, these are used in an unsentimental and in a matter-of-fact way. His writings express a spiritual experience and convey a warm reality and a charitable atmosphere to the reader.

I would also say that what makes Koutroumbis' utterances significant is not that his positions appear different and attractive, not even the fact that they create a whole style of outlook on Christian faith and life and an atmosphere that feels warm and charitable, especially to a troubled reader or to a restless and searching mind. These are very much true and also important; however, what made Koutroumbis' contribution a breakthrough in his day was the fact that he articulated a return to the true content of the Christian faith and Church life. Koutroumbis puts his finger 'into the prints of the nails' by detecting and referring to a loss of the correct feeling about the Church that has led people to think of it as a national or even a cultural institution instead of the place where the Logos and the Holy Spirit actually dwell.⁷⁹ He notes that falsifications occurred in Christian theology that resulted in missing out on the Mystery of God and the view of the true God, and that too often replaced true belief in God with 'theological idols'.⁸⁰ He appears critical towards scholasticism and western developments of Christianity.⁸¹ He is, however, optimistic and sees in his day a turning of

⁷⁸ See as a characteristic example how even the idea of God's justice, 'δικαιοσύνη' – a notion that can lend itself for a moralistic interpretation – in Koutroumbis is understood and approached as a rather spiritual category related to the pureness of the heart, and not as a juridical one: *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 151-2.

⁷⁹ *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 45, 254.

⁸⁰ *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 174-5.

⁸¹ See *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 174, 245 and generally the chapter on Gregory of Palamas. On the other hand Koutroumbis does not hesitate to acknowledge and praise the Roman Catholic Church for the openings it made to the contemporary world through the Second Vatican Council: *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 257-66, and 267-72. He

Christian faith and theology to their roots. ‘Christianity becomes again ecclesial’, he says; ‘theological thought turns again towards the sources of Christian life, that is the Liturgy, the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church’.⁸² One can imagine that certain positions taken by Koutroumbis could have been quite or even very challenging in his day, given that the kind of spirituality and theological mentality put forward by Zoë was prevalent in theological circles and to a large extent throughout the Church in Greece, due to the pastoral and missionary work that members of the brotherhood had undertaken throughout the country. For example, when Koutroumbis says that morality is a matter of creativity on behalf of the free and fulfilled person rather than submission to external law,⁸³ or when he comments on some exaggerations of asceticism and of religious activity that were noticed in his days,⁸⁴ one feels that he sharply alludes to practices fostered by Zoë which dominated Church life at that time. Furthermore, Koutroumbis’ remarks that Christianity is not a religion of just the soul, that Christians have the responsibility not to ignore or neglect the ‘non-spiritual’ matters of the world and his attitude towards the event of human love and his deep respect towards marriage and towards the couple’s life in which he saw an image of the life of the Trinitarian God: all these must have appeared as quite alien to people who had undergone their religious education in circles like Zoë. Also, as I have mentioned earlier, Koutroumbis was knowledgeable of recent intellectual developments in general and up to date with modern theologians in particular and with people who, also on an academic level, had rediscovered the Church tradition and had taken on the responsibility to revive it and cast its light on contemporary life. This fact about Koutroumbis must have marked a striking difference from the attitude and mentality of the academic theologians in Athens, for example, to whom Yannaras refers as uninformed and quite closed off in their falsely self-sufficient intellectuality.

In fact through his essays in *Ἡ Χάρις τῆς Θεολογίας*, Koutroumbis makes reference not only to traditional sources of Church faith and life such as the Fathers, but also to several contemporary voices in the sphere of theology, all of whom shared parallel views and brought out a similar kind of stance with regard to themes such as the nature of the Church, the

goes even further to praise the example of the Church of Rome, as an expression of humility that all Christian Churches must imitate.

⁸² *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, p. 240.

⁸³ *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, p. 292.

⁸⁴ *Χάρις Θεολογίας*, pp. 208-9.

character of the Christian life and of Christian spirituality.⁸⁵ One cannot fail to notice how great an impact the more spiritual insights about Christianity and Orthodoxy – brought out again in recent years through the rediscovery of the neptic and mystical tradition of the Church Fathers and also the interest in liturgical theology and the monastic life – have had on modern theological minds and on thinking people in general. In the thinkers that Koutroumbis quotes theological matters appear in quite a different light from the moralistic ‘twaddle’, according to Yannaras’s expression, that remained foreign to people’s real needs and anxieties. Theology now appears connected to life and is other than ‘the Thomist-rationalistic understanding of dogmas’ and ‘the legalistic version of “orthodoxy” that was measured, in an Anselmian style, to the letter of the Holy Canons’.⁸⁶

4. Zissimos Lorentzatos

Whenever Yannaras speaks about the early years of his manhood, there is another name, next to Dimitris Koutroumbis, which commonly comes up – more than anybody else’s, that of Zissimos Lorentzatos. Yannaras refers to him as a figure who had a great impact on his own intellectual and spiritual formation. Yannaras became aware of Lorentzatos while he was still an active member of Zoë and a boarder in the brotherhood, and more particularly towards the later years of that time. As we have seen, for Yannaras then it was a rather unpleasant time of bitterness, of spiritual hunger and of scepticism about his experience in Zoë and what the brotherhood really represented. At the same time other young members in the brotherhood shared Yannaras’ feelings. Dimitris Koutroumbis and Zissimos Lorentzatos are not mentioned by Yannaras simply as of decisive significance for his own intellectual development. They are also presented as voices of the time that uttered a decisive and groundbreaking word for many, not least for those who had been mostly nurtured on the spirituality of the extra-ecclesial bodies like Zoë and who had experienced dissatisfaction and felt its spiritual poverty.

⁸⁵ Apart from the names of Meyendorff, Lossky, Evdokimov and Lot-Borodine that we mentioned earlier, Koutroumbis also draws on people such as Georges Florovsky and Alexander Schmemmann, on Léon Zander (*Χάρις Θεολογίας* pp. 295-304), Lev Gillet (*ibid*, pp. 291-3), Claude Tresmontant and his contribution in the reassessment of biblical metaphysics (*ibid*, pp. 245-6), Louis Bouyer (*ibid*, p. 226), Pierre Struve (*ibid*, p. 290) and others.

⁸⁶ *Καταφύγιο*, p. 350.

Lorentzatos came from a different walk of life from Koutroumbis; the latter, as we have seen, was a theologian and came from a working class family, Lorentzatos was a literary critic and a great man of letters, descendant of a professional family of Athens. They both converged, however, in their attitude towards the fundamentals of life and also shared similar reflections on their Christian and Hellenic roots and an analogous stance towards the true content of the tradition of their motherland.

As we have already presented in some detail the life, thought and personality of Dimitris Koutroumbis, the portrait of Zissimos Lorentzatos will be drawn more briefly. Lorentzatos was a great critic and essayist who lived from 1915 to 2004 and was prolific as a writer until his very last days. He was born the son of Panagis Lorentzatos, professor of Classical Greek Literature at the University of Athens, and he was brought up in Athens, where he also received his education. In the year 1949 he moved to France, where he registered at the Faculté des Lettres in the Sorbonne. He spent the following years between France, Greece and England, where he worked for the Greek Service of the BBC, until in 1956 he returned to Greece permanently.

He had connections and friendships with many people on the intellectual scene in his own days, such as Georgios Seferis and Odysseas Elytis in Greece, Philip Sherrard in England and Alexander Schmemmann, whom he met during a visit to the Seminary of St Vladimir's in New York, and whose book *For the life of the World* he had also translated into Greek. To give just a few examples of Lorentzatos' productivity, among his works are translations and essays on Edgar Allan Poe, Ezra Pound, T.S.Eliot and William Blake, and on the Greek side he wrote and published studies on Homer, Dionysios Solomos, Alexandros Papadiamandis, Constantinos Kavafis and Georgios Seferis and the architect Dimitrios Pikionis – to mention only a very few.⁸⁷

Zissimos Lorentzatos died recently, in 2004, and he is still today remembered and referred to by people who came to know him. Thus he is mentioned as a man who, even though he had a wide network of people that he knew and related with, did not mingle very

⁸⁷ For a full account of Zissimos Lorentzatos' life see N.P. Paisios, 'Χρονολόγιο Ζήσιμου Λορεντζάτου 1915-2004' ['Chronicle/Timetable for Zissimos Lorentzatos 1915-2004'], *Νέα Εστία*: 1786 (Feb. 2006), pp. 330-350. Also in the same issue there is a full list of Lorentzatos' works: Dimitris Daskalopoulos, 'Βιβλιογραφία Ζήσιμου Λορεντζάτου (1931-2005)' ['Bibliography of Zissimos Lorentzatos (1931-2005)'], pp. 351-397.

much in the marketplace. He is described as a figure who kept himself to himself and was quite isolated in his place on the north side of Athens, where he used to spend most of his time reflecting and writing.⁸⁸ The last is not at all to be taken as some expression of social arrogance, but rather as a style of life that expressed Lorentzatos' abstinent and wiry temperament and saved him for his literary work which was marked by clarity and sobriety.

Lorentzatos' main focus of work was the study and the criticism of poetry, but also more widely of literature and not least the analysis of the history and theory of art in general. What we have available from Lorentzatos so far is in the main what he published when still living, and thus what is known about his thoughts and positions is basically based upon that material. A significant part of his work, however, is said to be still unpublished,⁸⁹ so what we already have under his name is in fact only part of what he actually wrote. Zissimos Lorentzatos also wrote some poetry. However, as he himself put it, he was chosen to praise poetry rather than create it himself.

Accounts of Lorentzatos' life and work commonly refer to an inner change that took place in him, and place it in the years between 1953 and 1961. This was the time when Lorentzatos met Philip Sherrard and became exposed to all the new stimuli and knowledge that his friendship with the latter had to offer. Within his connection with Sherrard, Lorentzatos got to read Ananda Coomaraswamy, René Guénon, Blake and Yeats, writers who clearly had an impact on him.⁹⁰ The two men also travelled together to Mount Athos in 1957.⁹¹ This was the only trip Lorentzatos made to Athos, but it is still acknowledged as an event that put the finishing touch to his transformation. His critics consequently speak about an inner border and intersection that is noticeable also in Lorentzatos' work. This esoteric border is specifically identified by many with 'The lost centre', 'Τό χαμένο κέντρο', which is considered to be Lorentzatos' classic work, written in 1961 and included in an honorary volume for the poet Georgios Seferis.⁹² The year 1961 is thus regarded as a milestone in Lorentzatos'

⁸⁸ Avi Saron, 'Λορεντζάτος ἐπὶ Κηφισιᾶ', ['Lorentzatos in Kiffisia'], trns. Georgia Vamvounaki-Raffan, *Νέα Ἑστία*: 1786 (Feb. 2006), p. 217.

⁸⁹ Clairi Mitsotaki, 'Ἡ οἰκονομία τῆς κρίσιμης στιγμῆς' ['The economy of the crucial moment'], *Νέα Ἑστία*: 1786 (Feb. 2006), p.226.

⁹⁰ Stavros Zouboulakis, 'Ἡ ἀπόφαση τῆς ποίησης' ['The decision on poetry'], *Νέα Ἑστία*: 1786 (Feb. 2006), p. 213.

⁹¹ 'Χρονολόγιο', p. 338.

⁹² Zissimos Lorentzatos, *Μελέτες* τόμ. Α' [*Studies*, vol. A'] (Athens: Domos, 1994), pp. 331-419.

career, as his inner change is largely manifest in the positions he takes in his writings starting from 'The lost centre'.

In particular, the new manner of thought that Zissimos Lorentzatos appears to embrace from that time in his life onwards, and which seems to colour all his thought thereafter, is his metaphysical attitude and his evaluation of not only the classical Hellenic, but also the Byzantine, tradition. And it is this that provides the connection between Lorentzatos' work and the context we are looking at here.

As I have already said Lorentzatos discusses mainly poetry. His reflections and critiques, however, do not regard strictly poetry or – more generally – literature, nor – even more widely – just art. By starting most often from the milieu of literature the ideas he expresses are of a more comprehensive nature as they touch upon the theme of tradition, of metaphysics, of life itself. In other words, Lorentzatos' reviews, for the most part on various poets and their work, comprise the man's observations not only on the handling of language and on art – a form of which is poetry – but even further on human history and culture, on the current condition of cultural, political and ecclesiastical life, on faith and religious tradition, on the very question of life and metaphysics.

Poetry itself for Lorentzatos is not merely a kind of aesthetic writing and expression, but he finds in it metaphysical significance, since poetry 'is meant to save us'.⁹³ Lorentzatos maintains that poetry used to be of a prophetic character and thus it has a function of rescue, which Lorentzatos perceived that in his days, however, had been lost and thus poetry became simply aesthetic. He also says that because of this we have ended up paying attention to the words and not to the message, to how things are said and not to what we really mean to say.⁹⁴ Therefore poetry, being only aesthetic, does not serve its purpose, which is to communicate metaphysical meaning and to transmit life, and has become pointless and empty.

In fact this kind of critique by Lorentzatos is directed more generally to art as a whole and not only to poetry and literature. It is art in general that has become aesthetic rather than being metaphysical. He thus talks of a crisis in art, which is not an aesthetic but a

⁹³ Saron, p. 218.

⁹⁴ Thanasis Hantzopoulos, 'Ποῦ εἶναι τὸ κέντρο, ποιὰ ἡ ἀπώλειά του;' ['Where is the centre, what is its loss?'], *Νέα Ἑστία*: 1786 (Feb. 2006), p. 249.

metaphysical crisis,⁹⁵ meaning that art has ceased to derive from life and to serve life. It is incomprehensible for Lorentzatos how life and art can be separate spheres.⁹⁶ He observes, however, that the unity between art and life has been lost, and art has turned into a fragmented activity of humans that primarily seeks to please, rather than to communicate our experience of life and to edify. For Lorentzatos this is a symptom noticed widely in modern times, namely from the Renaissance and thereafter. Furthermore, this symptom does not appear only in art, but is even more generally a symptom of modernity and of civilization as a whole.⁹⁷ He very stylishly uses a metaphor of a boat in a storm:⁹⁸ the boat represents the art which suffers the storm, that is the wider cultural crisis, and it is by managing the general crisis of our modern times that art itself will find again its true role and place. The boat does not bring about the storm, and thus the crisis in art is not to be overcome from art itself as from within; we first need to tackle the general crisis of our modern civilization, and by doing so all the ‘unhealthy’ aspects of it will consequently be amended.

The crisis of modern Europe that Lorentzatos refers to and more generally of modern civilization is namely the fact that man has become the centre of this civilization. We have ended up in a man-centred development (άνθρωποκεντρικό πολιτισμό), where man has taken the place of God: hence Lorentzatos’ essay ‘The lost Centre’.⁹⁹ ‘The lost centre’, that is, refers to what used to hold the place of man’s metaphysical reference and it is where we need to return, what we need to recover. We need to return to the original, to the source, to the root, to the mother tradition.

When Zissimos Lorentzatos speaks in favour of the tradition he means to appeal to the core of what the tradition in its historical continuity represents: both the Classical-Hellenic culture as well as the later Christian-Byzantine one incorporate a strong unity of belief and practice, of metaphysical faith and life, ultimately a strong unity and ‘catholicity’ of life. Lorentzatos’ essential observation is that this unity is largely missing in modern times. Present-day humanity experiences a state of fragmentation in life which results from the fact

⁹⁵ Hantzopoulos, p. 248.

⁹⁶ Yiannis Dimitrakakis, ‘Τέχνη και νεωτερικότητα: Ο Ζήσιμος Λορεντζάτος και η μοντέρνα λογοτεχνία’ [‘Art and modernism: Zissimos Lorentzatos and modern literature’], *Νέα Έστια*: 1786 (Feb. 2006), p. 242.

⁹⁷ Hantzopoulos, p. 250: The crisis of the modern world and civilization is of spiritual, metaphysical character.

⁹⁸ Hantzopoulos, p. 247.

⁹⁹ Hantzopoulos, p. 252.

that we have distanced ourselves from what the life-serving tradition had to teach us and have replaced it all with the present-day worldview that deifies reason. Thus Lorentzatos seeks to find in modern poetry and art cases of poets and artists who dissent from the modern worldview (κοσμοείδωλο), which places man in the very centre.¹⁰⁰ And he finds such examples, for instance, in Yeats and T.S.Eliot, in the Greek short-story writer Alexandros Papadiamandis and the architect Dimitrios Pikionis.

The fact that art is now displayed in museums – for example Christian icons in the Byzantine museum – is for Lorentzatos an expression of the modern fragmentation of life. He observes that we have lost the true content of the tradition and thus tradition is now dead remains without any other interest than the purely aesthetic and historical. In such a perspective, as it has been said, Lorentzatos' appreciation of the heritage of tradition does not pass 'through the spectacles of historicism but through the telescope of eschatology'.¹⁰¹ He does not seek to restore the past for the sake of it or go backwards, but to illumine and afford meaning for the present.

As we have seen, researchers who look into the person and the work of Lorentzatos speak about some esoteric change in the man. They tend to describe this change in terms of a movement of interests that took place in Lorentzatos, which is depicted in his works and is identified with a turn he made from art to religion and from aesthetics to metaphysics. However, in my understanding, to talk of a shift of interests in Lorentzatos from art to religion, for example, is not quite accurate. Lorentzatos never stopped being not merely interested but *devoted* to art. Therefore, it is not a shift of interests that took place in him, but rather a change or an enrichment of criteria in assessing things. In the later part of his life and his productions Lorentzatos continued to discuss art, aesthetics, and poetry, but he took a new stand towards all these, in re-defining them and elucidating their true content and their essential value. He looks for the true role of poetry and more generally of art, for their actual function and *raison d'être*. Lorentzatos looks for the true *logos* in art. Lorentzatos' change is a turn towards finding and bringing out the unity between art and life. Lorentzatos' criticism touches upon the dissociation, the split that has taken place widely in modern culture and life,

¹⁰⁰ Dimitrakakis, p. 240.

¹⁰¹ Dimitris Triantafylopoulos, "Ένας τῶν "ἐκτός" μιλάει γιὰ τὰ βυζαντινὰ μνημεῖα" ['One of the "outsiders" speaks about the Byzantine monuments'], *Νέα Ἑστία*: 1786 (Feb. 2006), pp. 268, 281.

between the true content of life and human activity, between the metaphysical and the practical, the truth of the metaphysics that once used to inspire and underlie and to give a reason to the arts and art itself. What Lorentzatos consequently suggests for humans is to rise above, to overcome this dissociation of the practical and the spiritual. The latter has actually and over the times been lost, hence Lorentzatos' *Lost Centre*; the spiritual centre, that is, what used to define human life and afford to all human activity meaning has been misplaced, or even replaced by a materialistic attitude and by man who has now become the centre himself. The element of unity is what Lorentzatos appreciates, for example, in Pikionis – who saw in matter and architectural construction not simply a functional purpose, but the embodiment of an attitude to life itself.

Lorentzatos is concerned with the 'ἐμπράγματη μεταφυσική', the practical, we would say, or applied metaphysics. He sees the Orthodox Christian tradition – 'for us, at least, who live in this part of the world', he says – as the only vein through which live metaphysics can run.¹⁰² The notion of tradition holds, therefore, a vital place for him; he sees tradition not as something fossilized but as something alive that is handed down from generation to generation and needs to be kept living, that is – as every living organism – to grow and prosper. Hence he is very critical of exaggerations of a historicism that abolishes the new without discretion for the sake of the old. Also, his insistence on the essentials of Hellenism and Orthodoxy does not foster a nationalistic attitude; in fact it annuls it, when he says that the conveyor of this tradition is he who engages with it, not he who just inherits it conventionally.¹⁰³ Lorentzatos is able to discern the value and the ethos of every civilization. He perceives continuity in the Greek-Orthodox tradition from the Classical through the Christian to modern Greece, and he is critical of the import of the 'western lights' to Greek reality in modern times.

All such elements are also highly central and important for Yannaras. If Koutroumbis' contribution enlightened the theological criteria for Yannaras and helped him appreciate the patristic heritage, the input by Lorentzatos rounded this off by casting light on the significance

¹⁰² Μελέτες τόμ. Α', p. 246.

¹⁰³ Μελέτες τόμ. Α', p. 419.

and the meaning of the wider cultural Greek-Orthodox formation in dealing with metaphysics. Besides, the main spirit that permeates Lorentzatos' remarks and thoughts, the quest for the lost unity in human life, freed from the fragmentation of the human experience that the dualistic mode creates, seems to me that which was the vital aspect that put the finishing touch to the inspiration the young Yannaras – himself at a time of distress and questioning around the essentials of life – found in Lorentzatos. The proposal or search for the wholeness of human life, the missing unity in life between belief and action, theory and practice, which gives meaning to life and lets our experience and all we do make sense, is a common attitude in Koutroumbis, Lorentzatos, and all the people whom these two presented or praised through their work. And this is what also connects them all and brings them all – even though from different pathways and each one at a different position – back to the tradition and lets them meet upon it; the fact, that is, that they all seek to preserve or to restore in their times the very element of 'catholicity' and order between theory and praxis, between the way of thinking or the metaphysical faith and the practice of life as expressed in all aspects of human activity, be it arts, politics or even financial life and social structure. After all, as we have seen, Lorentzatos does not discuss only art and the decline of it, but his concerns touch upon a more general crisis: we have seen the image of the boat that represents art storming in the wider cultural tornado.

It is precisely, therefore, Lorentzatos' criticism of contemporary alienation from the originals in all ways (linguistic, cultural, ecclesiastical) and his appeal to the essential deposits of life that provided the insights that Yannaras needed.

5. Yannaras' break with Zoë and move to Western Europe

Further to the introducing of Dimitris Koutroumbis to Zoë there were also efforts made by Father Elias Mastrogiannopoulos to open up new experiences for the theologians of the brotherhood, in terms of a theological edification, and let them be exposed to new voices. Thus Fr Elias organized a large theological assembly every summer to which he invited people like the Orthodox theologians from France, Fr John Meyendorff (at that time working on his

thesis on Gregory Palamas) and Elizabeth Behr-Sigel.¹⁰⁴ In relation to this activity Yannaras' notes: 'The immediate meeting with these people and the discussions with them was an even more eye-opening experience than the reading of texts. We had the chance to meet for the first time with people who embodied the atmosphere, the style and the ethos of the – to our eyes legendary – Russian Diaspora. People fully belonging in their time, smart, educated, vigorous, informed in all, and at the same time with passion for a theology that was questing its genuine verification in its engagement with the current and dramatic impasses of the Western World',¹⁰⁵ The influence of the encounter with the above persons was essential for Yannaras himself and for other theologians of the movement of Zoë who left the brotherhood in short time.

Yannaras broke with the brotherhood of Zoë in the winter of 1964. He was already 29 years of age by then and had spent ten years of his life as a boarder and later as a probationer in Zoë. Just before he left the brotherhood he had expressed the idea that, in order to work through his dilemmas regarding his dedication to it, and to get a clearer view of his future decisions, he would seek funding and get away for a couple of years, to study abroad; Germany seemed a realistic option. The immediate response to his suggestion from Fr Elias Mastrogiannopoulos, who was Yannaras' spiritual father and to whom Yannaras had chosen to entrust his thoughts, was totally shattering. In an almost theatrical demonstration Fr Elias expressed his disapproval and utter refusal even to discuss the idea. For Yannaras, however, Fr Elias' reaction, despite the initial devastating shock it caused, eventually resulted in his decision to leave Zoë.¹⁰⁶

It is then through *Τά καθ' ἑαυτόν*, the other main autobiographical source mentioned at the beginning, that we learn about Yannaras' life in the years that followed. Yannaras went in fact to Germany, where he spent the first three years after leaving Greece, and then later to

¹⁰⁴ For a reading on Elizabeth Behr-Sigel see Olga Lossky, *Vers le jour sans déclin: une vie d'Élisabeth Behr-Sigel* (Paris: Le Cerf, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ *Καταφύγιο*, p. 344. It is worth to note the expressions of resentment and disrespect some people in Zoë had shown in relation to the presence of Koutroumbis and Behr-Sigel, as they are characteristic of the reaction to the renewal Fr Elias tried to bring: *Καταφύγιο*, p. 349. Similar contempt applied further to the monks of Mount Athos, and members of Zoë were allowed to visit there only to get more subscriptions for Zoë!

¹⁰⁶ *Καταφύγιο*, pp. 387-9.

France, to Paris. His experience of life and study abroad was really significant for him, and it is necessary to draw out those elements from it which show how he connected with what he met in Europe, how he related to the philosophical traditions he encountered there, how he got the stimulus to go into the kind of discourse that became characteristic of him; how he came to look into, develop and discuss metaphysics and ontology in personalist terms, placing in the centre of his whole outlook notions like 'being in truth', 'person', and 'Eros'.

As Yannaras himself admits, all his work is an expression of also his own 'personal quest and fight for [his] existential problem'.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the kind of philosophical themes that he involved himself in resulted also from a personal questioning and speculation and were not at all irrelevant to his experiences of life. The title of the first book that he had published, *Hunger and Thirst* (Πείνα και δίψα), as he himself says, could have been repeated as a subtitle on all his subsequent works, expressing the fact that each of them was a cry of personal hunger and thirst, an ardent wish for Eros. Given the experience he was bringing with him from the extra-ecclesial brotherhood of Zoë, one first thing that struck him was the connection he could now draw (while a student in Germany) between that experience and the new settings in Europe that he was encountering: 'I was living the life of a Roman-Catholic boarding-house; I – the only foreigner – was sharing the confined every-day life of the German students. It was one more revelation: I had met in Greece the distorted religiosity of the extra-ecclesial organisations, and for the first time I felt myself in contact with those who first taught this distortion'.¹⁰⁸

Gradually Yannaras came to understand that there were two different worlds in terms of Christian religious experience: on the one hand a feeling for Church life as a mystical festive leap untouched by ideology, and on the other hand a Christian experience of life as an ideological conscription monitored by discipline and obedience in every little aspect of life.

Yannaras' own words describe best how the problem came into focus for him:

I was uncovering little by little the vital lead: My own experiences of westernised religiosity were coming to match, in a revealing way, their historical and social prototype here in the West. I could see more and more clearly the issue of my time, the question I had to clarify, first and foremost for

¹⁰⁷ Christos Yannaras, *Τά καθ' ἑαυτόν* (Athens: Ikaros, 2005), p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ *Καθ' ἑαυτόν*, p. 42.

myself, in my life: Orthodoxy and the West, Greece and Europe, Tradition and Ideology, Church and Religion.¹⁰⁹

While studying in Germany Yannaras came across the name and the work of Heidegger, and he was very quickly carried away by the style of Heidegger's writing and how Heidegger was wedding together a poetic language with philosophy. Familiar with Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Yannaras found inspiration there for the title of his first book: *The Metaphysics of the Body*. Yannaras' initial interests, so to speak, were to see the contradictions and to overcome the challenge of the dualism that had confused and horrified him since his childhood; he wanted to look into the borders of the soul and the body: 'Where does the soul end and where does the body begin? A look or a smile, the voice or the charm of a movement: are these of the soul or of the body?' And furthermore, some equally perplexing issues: why the contempt, why the suspicion and the fear towards the human body, and how have these been passed down as the fundamental nature of Christianity? How much Platonism and Manichaeism are hidden in this dualism that had taken over?¹¹⁰ Such questions had to be examined, for Yannaras, against what was taken by many to be the "womb" of the most severe dualism, against one of the most austere and formal texts of Christian asceticism. For Yannaras this would be the *Ladder* of John of Sinai.

In Germany too, Yannaras found out how western he had been: 'My "armour", my way of thought (νοο-τροπία), was second-hand from a European department store. I did not even have the awareness of modern speculation: my education reached as far as the "evidences for the existence of God"'.¹¹¹ He then came to the understanding that the metaphysics of modern Greeks was a blend of Roman Catholic scholasticism and protestant moralism.

Very soon Yannaras found that he had to face the challenge of demythologisation. 'Entmythologisierung' was of supreme importance in those years in Germany: the belief in the Christian God had to be freed from all mythological elements. According to the modern analysis, the stories of the Bible had been narrated in a certain historical context and therefore

¹⁰⁹ Καθ' ἐαυτόν, p. 43.

¹¹⁰ Καθ' ἐαυτόν, p. 45

¹¹¹ Καθ' ἐαυτόν, p. 48.

their message had been dressed in fictitious garments. It was not possible any longer, under the experience of modernity and the weight of the intellect's critiques of religion and theism, to ignore the challenge and to retain unquestionably what was now understood as objectified naive theological conceptions. It was, therefore, the task of demythologisation to ask what it was that the biblical writers were trying to say in a mythological way and then to clarify the message of the gospel (the *kerygma*, κήρυγμα) by interpreting and re-presenting it anew and uncontaminated from false conceptions in terms of a twentieth-century world-view. However, all that demythologisation was aiming at and could accomplish, to Yannaras' understanding, was to shatter the "objectivity" of metaphysics also in the theological realm; still the ontological questions gaped unanswered. Demythologisation might secure God's "subjectivity", which was otherwise undermined by the act of identifying objects of human conceiving with the wholly Other and by accepting revelation to be contained and possessed by a certain time in history. Even so, demythologisation seemed, as it were, to build new matter upon the old, unchanged frame. The fundamental questions of being, God and existence, which were set afresh there where the account of theism ended up, were not substantially and adequately addressed by the historical critique. Again in Yannaras' own words: 'Either I could understand Heidegger better than the great Bultmann, or I had illusions of explosives there where the other was building towers.'¹¹² What Yannaras saw in Heidegger was something that exploded the whole tradition of western philosophy. For the ultimate of human thought and critique that Heidegger and the existentialists represented at the time, the issue of metaphysics was not a matter of reiterating the subject matter of the gospel using a fresh, modern language. The question was not to reiterate the content of religion in a modern way; not to equip the old skeleton-bones of metaphysics with a new flesh, but to acknowledge that the structure itself had now collapsed. The development of Western metaphysics had led to the death of God, and that was a blunt fact that had to be honestly faced. Nietzsche's madman, seeing through all modern metaphysics, had bravely declared that God had died. It was an irrevocable outcome of the course of the human intellect that needed not to be overlooked: God was dead! That is, the notion of God, the idolatrous image of God that was put forward even by what had passed for Christian theism – ever since the development of scholasticism – could not survive and be believed in any longer. 'Years went by', Yannaras'

¹¹² Καθ' ἐαυτόν, p. 49.

account continues, ‘before I became sure how naturally incapable the “great” theologians of the West were of posing ontological questions. Rationalism is not a school or a method. It has the entrenched reflexes of a defensive hermitism. The explosive problematic of Heidegger and Sartre remained (and remains) incomprehensible for the West. So did the message that Nietzsche’s “mad man” was putting across. What was certain was that the philosophers were in the vanguard; the theologians were following: Bultmann following Heidegger, Moltmann following Bloch’.¹¹³

Yannaras soon came to realize that the true answer to demythologization was already there, in the position of apophaticism that had always been a vital part of the eastern tradition. The issue was not to look for a way of moving from one way of saying things to another, since any language one might end up using was bound to be inadequate for describing the reality of God. The key, for Yannaras, was to acknowledge this very inadequacy and agree on the conditional quality of all theological expressions. The apophatic approach with regard to the knowledge of God for the great theologians of the East meant that theological language could not be a conceptual language that sought to identify the transcendent reality with the terms used in that context and even less to exhaust that reality in any theological utterances about it. The consciousness that accompanied all theological discourse was that the language best used to serve its purposes would rather be a poetic, prophetic language expressed in imagery. ‘The conceptual, historical, mythical, pictorial expression is only a definition-outline (ὄρος-ὄριο) of the truth. ... You do not need to demythologise anything, when you refuse to identify the expression with its meaning; when what is important about knowledge is the whole experience of the *relationship*, not the fragmentary nature of understanding’.¹¹⁴

It follows naturally from this how for Yannaras the idea of *relationship* came to occupy such a central place in his theoretical approaches. It is through relational practice that we reach a true knowledge and understanding of the reality that surrounds us; it takes immediate personal involvement to get to know and experience what lies beyond us. The jump beyond the impasse that modernity had to face, the existential *salto mortale*, so to speak,

¹¹³ Καθ’ ἐαυτόν, p. 49.

¹¹⁴ Καθ’ ἐαυτόν, p. 50.

beyond the void that is gaping wide open under man's feet – since the notion of God on which he once stood is now gone – is, Yannaras will say, the opportunity of the relationship.

In such a way, as he notes, apophaticism led him to the realism of the *relationship*. And consequently the latter brought him to *Eros*, as the fulfilling potentiality of the former. For a relationship to be a source of true knowledge it needs to be *erotic*. This means that the agents involved in a relationship do so in a “self-exiting” way, in other terms in a loving and self-denying way. It takes a commitment to be kenotic to find and meet with the real other person or the Ultimate Other. It means that you need to leave aside all your prejudices and pre-understandings, and even more all your self-defences and ‘armours’ so as to be able to see things as they are. This is, in a way, similar to that of an erotic event, where all preset conditions will collapse to open the way for the embrace of the loving other. In this way Yannaras likes to identify *Eros* with authentic existence, true being and true knowledge. For Yannaras *Eros* ultimately refers us to the very being of God, the way in other words in which God reveals himself and makes himself known: as ultimate and kenotic love.

Subsequently, as the chain of Yannaras' succeeding developments in the realm of his theoretical quests unfolds, *Eros* led him to existential otherness and freedom. This means that to be *erotic*, to be self-denying and to stand out of oneself, is an act that takes place only by free choice. In the fallen state of things every individual experiences its existence engrossed, so to speak, within it, and it takes an act of free and conscious choice to deny one's ways and stride out to meet with the other. This very journey in the ‘wilderness’ of the other brings out the reality as much as the importance of *otherness*. For Yannaras, in contrast to the fearful threat of ‘the other’ prevailing in the philosophy of the existentialists, otherness is a joyous opportunity for establishing a relationship and from there for celebrating communion, the loving sharing of life. In this way finally, from otherness and freedom, Yannaras will reach the notion and the ontological priority of the *person*. The *person* is that ontological category of existence that fulfils *Eros*. To be a person means that one achieves a mode of being qualified with all those elements that make being *erotic*. A person is thus self-exiting, self-denying, and so on within the quest of authentically relating with the other. Since the person is relational, and given the precedence of the relationship described earlier here with regard to achieving knowledge, Yannaras ends up talking about the ontological priority of the person. This means that to start with one gets to relate oneself as a distinct existence from other people and the

world around one; it is through personal encounter and experiential exchange with what surrounds us that we embark on the journey of true knowledge. Nature does not exist abstractly as such, but only in certain personal beings. And it is through them that we get to approach the wider and more inclusive idea of nature. God himself, as related in the Christian tradition, is personal; he is made known through a personal revelation and as certain persons. Furthermore the very existence of each of us is dependent upon the relationship of two other persons. In such a way Being itself is manifest for Yannaras as personal.

The first pioneer in Yannaras' pursuit of the themes described above was to be John of the Ladder. The fruit of this guidance was the *Μεταφυσική του σώματος* (Metaphysics of the Body). John of the Ladder referred Yannaras to the apophaticism of Denys the Areopagite. A second book came out of this study: *Heidegger and the Areopagite*, which basically comprised an assessment of the differences between apophaticism and agnosticism-nihilism. From Denys the Areopagite Yannaras moved on to read Maximus the Confessor, to whom the ancient comments or scholia on the Areopagite have been (mostly wrongly) ascribed. Maximus fascinated Yannaras. The fruit of the encounter this time was the treatise *Person and Eros*. Heidegger always remained a challenge for ontological realism. However, 'the fence that Heidegger did not have the courage to jump, Maximus was striding over with the ease of a giant'.¹¹⁵ Maximus consequently encouraged Yannaras to study the language of Aristotle. And from there on, to look at Gregory Palamas, who carried on from Maximus, and who shed light for Yannaras on the 'Thomistic falsification of Aristotelian realism'.

Starting his study from the *Ladder* of John Climacus, Yannaras' objective, as mentioned earlier, was to look into the dualism of the spiritual and the material, the soul and the body: a dualism that Yannaras came to see exemplified in Cartesian rationalism, that eventually drained the bodily of all significance. Yannaras now sought to represent his thought here in terms drawn from the existentialist ontology of Heidegger, gamely finding Greek equivalents for Heidegger's terminology.

Yannaras here attempts a first sketch of a Greek Heideggerianism that will be pursued in great detail in later works, such as *Person and Eros*. The human body is the place of

¹¹⁵ *Καθ' ἑαυτόν*, p. 50.

Dasein, ‘being there’, ἐνθαδικότητα, and existence is manifest in an ecstasy – a ‘standing out’ of the body – towards the other: a movement that takes place in freedom. Therefore, in the *Ladder*, Yannaras finds the conditions of self-centredness – rationalist or existentialist – radically overturned. The body is the natural reality of *practised* relationships. Such practice – ἄσκηση – is seen as an exercise in freedom, not an imposition to be endured. Yannaras begins to develop a dialectic of *nature* and *hypostasis*, introduces the notion of the person, πρόσωπο, and speaks of an ‘apophaticism’ that identifies τό ἀληθεύειν – being in truth – with τό κοινωνεῖν – being in communion.

The next literary step of Yannaras was the publishing of *Heidegger and the Areopagite*; this was the result of research supervised by Luise Abramowsky¹¹⁶ and it comprised a systematic comparison of the differences between apophaticism and agnosticism or nihilism. He had been let down with his submission of *Metaphysics of the Body* in the faculty of theology in the University of Athens,¹¹⁷ but he came back to write it all over again later in Paris, to submit it as a doctorate of philosophy in the faculty of Letters. At the same time he kept putting together his materials for a systematic expression of a ‘person-centred’ ontology. To the challenges that Heidegger was setting, there were now added those of Sartre. For Yannaras this new encounter was an exciting experience; in the latter’s own words Sartre represented ‘probably the most crucial theological thought of the century – theological as the negative of the picture – far more metaphysical than the western theologians’. For Yannaras, that is, Sartre appeared as a theologising mind and voice, even though a proclaimed atheist, in the sense that his nihilism was the other side – the negative print – of an experiential theology.¹¹⁸

The years that Yannaras spent in Paris – three continuous years there and another two of discontinuous dwelling – were very fruitful also for another reason: his discovery of the French scholars of the medieval period, mainly Gilson and Chenu, and also the encounter with

¹¹⁶ Καθ’ εαυτόν, p. 64.

¹¹⁷ Καθ’ εαυτόν, pp. 62-4.

¹¹⁸ Καθ’ εαυτόν, p. 72.

the works of Erwin Panofsky and Georges Duby.¹¹⁹ All these became immensely illuminating, for Yannaras, in his study of scholasticism and for his understanding and interpretation of the development of the cultural differences between the Greek East and the Latin West. To Yannaras' understanding the diverse routes in the progress of the civilizations of these two worlds emerged from a differentiation in their ontological approach. Yannaras could see two worlds, two different traditions and cultural structures. On the one hand stood Hellenized Christianity, which had retained the same approach to the theory of knowledge that was present in classical times: an approach that was to identify true being with being in communion. On the other side was the civilization of the West which was based on and was the result of a shift that had taken place in the realm of ontology; the change consisted in the move from the Greek meaning of 'Logos' to the Thomist understanding of *veritas* or *essentia*. This shift for Yannaras could cast light on the development of the civilization in the West that now ended in nihilism. Therefore for him it was illuminating to be able to pin down and clarify how the deviation from the theory of knowledge as it stood in classical times – the identifying of *being in truth* with *being in communion* – and from the theory of knowledge in Hellenized Christianity brought medieval Europe to split from the Greek tradition, and overthrew the terms of Greek civilization with reference both to the theory of knowledge and to ontology. Also, how from the requirements of the new theory of knowledge, namely the requirements for self-centred rational certainties, follows the phenomenon of dogmatism, and how dogmatism led to the formation of totalitarianism – an atrocious and novel episode in history. And to what extent can the person-centred, ontological realism of the Byzantines stand today as a proposition for getting out of the nihilistic impasse; how can that tradition be worded in the language of modern speculation, how it can converse with Heidegger and Sartre, with the theatre of the absurd, with surrealism in painting and poetry, with the principles of Political Economy, or with the language of quantum mechanics? For Yannaras even the attribution of a different meaning to *ratio* by Aquinas, the radical overthrow of the Greek meaning of *logos*, and the way *veritas* or *essentia* were approached and presented over and over again in Aquinas' works, were enough to cast light on the whole religious, philosophical, social and political structure of western medieval times, on the Cartesian

¹¹⁹ Yannaras mentions two certain works of these scholars that for him became key books for his understanding of a whole epoch and civilization, M.D.Chenu: *La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle* and Etienne Gilson: *La philosophie au moyen âge: Καθ' ἑαυτόν*, pp. 73-74.

recapitulation of scholasticism and on the imprisonment of modern naturalism within the conditions of medieval ontology.¹²⁰

The picture of Yannaras' time and experience in Europe over the years of his life that we look at here would be incomplete did we not mention his encounter with the Orthodox population in Paris. To come across the 'Orthodox Paris' was a powerful experience for Yannaras and it was specifically the Orthodox communities formed by the Russian émigrés that had a great impact upon him.¹²¹ Unlike the assemblies at the Greek and the Russian cathedrals that existed rather out of a hereditary custom and which used to come together in a style of secular socializing that served also to maintain quaint customs of a nationalistic character, the Russian parishes of the émigrés constitute an altogether different case. These parishes conveyed an Orthodoxy which had none of the characteristics that Yannaras had come across so far: it was neither an ideology nor an association nor an administrative institution and it was not even the school of theology that the Russian émigrés had founded. Their Orthodoxy was the very parishes themselves, the living body of the community of persons gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist and thus to form the Church. These parishes brought out a spirituality, a sense of life and a reason why they existed all quite different from what Yannaras had known of similar congregations up to that time. In Paris, Yannaras notes, he became aware, for the first time, of what the nature and the meaning of a Church parish is: an actual community of people that come together primarily due to the need for communion, each of them bringing to it his/her own self and otherness, no matter how much more or less virtuous or sinful they may be, and without the concern to conform to uniform codes and appearances. They were not characterized by a fixed expression of piety as other pietistic groups he could recall from his days in Greece and Germany. The two French-speaking parishes of Russian Orthodox in Paris were live communities of generous fellowship, of simplicity in peoples' relationships and unvarnished manners. They were living bodies with

¹²⁰ *Καθ' ἐαυτόν*, p. 74.

¹²¹ Yannaras refers specifically to two such French-speaking communities to which he became more connected: the one that met in the basement, the 'crypt' of the Russian Cathedral, at rue Daru close to Étoile, and the other at rue St. Victor, at the 5th arrondissement of Paris. This second parish had transformed a previous shop to a church, which accommodated an iconostasis decorated by Leonid Ouspensky (*Καθ' ἐαυτόν*, pp. 91, 93). Yannaras also makes reference to the famous and less famous Russian theologians of this time, mainly scholars of different tracks who had found refuge in Paris and engaged themselves here with the serving in the Church life and the teaching of Orthodox theology.

a strong consciousness of the Eucharistic character of their gathering together and free from a customary type of religiosity that was simply a matter of inheritance. Also, he was struck by the prayerful atmosphere and devout serenity of these two Church communities, in contrast to the flamboyant style and aristocratic wealth that a visitor would sense in the Greek or the Russian cathedrals. The orthodoxy and the Church experience of the people at the crypt and the other French-speaking Russian Orthodox parish he knew were organically bound to real life. The Russian émigrés had brought to Europe something like a revolt. The theology that they presented did not remain on the sides of interest and life as just another, partial theological-church tradition that was ideologically more correct or more spiritual, more mystical, than other traditions. The contribution of the great Russian theologians in France was that they had a realistic proposal of life to counter-present against the European impasse, a proposal of existential meaning. In this way they gave flesh again to the skeleton-like language of academic and moralistic theology. On the whole the encounter with these Orthodox communities in Paris and the experience of the event of the *parish* to Yannaras was a constructive, revelation-like occurrence.¹²²

Yannaras' experience of Paris also included the rebellion of May '68 which, as Yannaras notes, was not in the least a claim for economic gains or trade-union demands. It was a protest for freedom from the captivity of the consumerist way of life. It was an outcry for creative life and freedom, real freedom, where one can stand up for and manage the place of one's work and of one's life, where one can find the neighbour and companionship. May of '68 demanded a new ethos. However, the demand remained ontologically unsettled, and therefore utopian, a nostalgic utopia. The European self-questioning could not go further than the phenomenology of the symptoms. For Yannaras the events and the developments of those days were a practical study in ontology, a practical review of the ontological lines / definitions and their importance for the meaning of everyday life.

This is in a general sense the way in which Yannaras's thoughts developed until they took shape in the form of a doctoral thesis which he submitted to the faculty of theology at the university of Salonica and also later at the Sorbonne, a thesis called *Person and Eros*.

¹²² Καθ' ἐαυτόν, pp. 87-94.

Yannaras had been attracted to the contribution of thought made by Heidegger and Sartre; he found Sartre even more appealing owing to his 'disarming honesty'. In Yannaras own words:

Even Heidegger protected himself behind academic formality, even though he constructed his philosophical word poetically. Sartre dared to expose himself, to cry out. Systematic thought did not fit him; he laid his anguish bare in theatrical plays, in novels, in free prose. He committed himself to desperate struggle, he went down to the streets, to demonstrations for social demands, he was thirsty for action. In almost every one of his lines I felt his claim for empirical certainty of an ontological character. ... He would not be reconciled with rationalist replacements of the real and the experiential, opposed to the self-delusion of identifying the real with just the social phenomenology (p. 104).

For Yannaras these two existentialists represented a courageous expression of the fact that the whole structure of modern civilization was founded on the repression and disregard of the ontological question; the existentialists 'were tearing away the comfortable screen, they were provoking openly voluntary blindness'. Neither the rationalist language of theology nor the language of naturalism and mechanistic psychology appeared adequate to sustain empirical nihilism, the absence of meaning for existence and for the world. They did not address the question of the origins of being, of the issue of the origins of freedom or necessity. The fundamental questions of man's existence and life remained unanswered, since the answers that had seemed convincing before had given way to uncertainty and absence of meaningful solutions; therefore there was needed some nerve to be able to state honestly the ontological nihilism that had emerged and that could be felt.¹²³ To Yannaras, Heidegger and Sartre represented such a daring spirit.

Yannaras felt that the same realism and bravery in expressing reality could be identified in the language of the Greek fathers of the Church. Furthermore, he found that in addition they led towards an answer, and their greatest effort was to distinguish and shed light on the difference between empirical facts and 'imaginary reflections', between what could be experientially approached and certified and that which was a rather unreliable or misleading

¹²³ For Yannaras, attempts to fill the gap of the riddle of the existence such as those arriving by philosophising sociologists or sociologising philosophers, as he calls them, like Habermas, Appel, Derrida, Althusser, Lyotard, were rather comic, as they were annoyingly unrealistic in the way they constructed and tried to impress with deceitful and non-sustainable structures of substantial non-meaningful expression: *Καθ' ἑαυτόν*, p. 105.

invention of the human. In this way Yannaras considered that there were the following challenges lying ahead: to try and answer the ontological problems of Heidegger and Sartre by drawing on the experience and knowledge of the Church, but also using a language that would engage with and be convincing to Heidegger and Sartre. Also, to try and build a bridge between the age of the Church Fathers and the modern one, clearing up all the rust that had accumulated in between. Both tasks appeared to be really ambitious and challenging, if not an endeavour that would take a whole lifetime. Even so, as Yannaras notes, it was worth a try at least, with the hope that others, more competent, would later appear to take these efforts further.¹²⁴

According to his own account in *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* and *Τά καθ' ἑαυτόν*, this was how Yannaras was led to embark on the series of works that were to mark out his career as a Greek intellectual and philosopher. The earliest fruits of these include the works already mentioned – *Heidegger and the Areopagite*, *The Freedom of Morality* and, especially, *Person and Eros* – which will form the basis for the rest of this thesis.

¹²⁴ The preceding two paragraphs summarize what Yannaras says in *Καθ' ἑαυτόν*, pp. 105-6.

Chapter II

Heidegger and the Areopagite

When Yannaras came to Western Europe there were mainly two elements from his background that he was carrying within himself and which were going to play their part in the later formation and expression of the philosophical and theological mind of the man. First, Yannaras was bringing with him the experience of religious devotion with a moralistic approach to Christian faith and life; this was what he had been edified with in the brotherhood of Zoë. The tenet of being virtuous and keeping the moral law, the attitude of measuring every single move of man's everyday activity against the articles of the moral code, written and unwritten, was what was principally put forward by the organization. In the spirit of the teaching presented there, Christ was primarily a conceptualised ideal and the mission for the members was to implement that ideal not only in their own lives but, equally importantly, to as many other people around in the society as they could, who had not yet had the fortune to have this Christ-idea formed in themselves. To live up to the moral law was crucial and was what primarily counted for the objective of applying the Christ-idea. To a large part emphasis used to fall on being good and that meant being moral, which was specified in a narrow way by measuring oneself against restricted standards of external behaviour. There was no similar emphasis on liturgical life, for example, or on the practice of prayer and the inner spiritual development of the person. Such aspects were seen rather only as parts of the good moral life that a Christian should demonstrate; they were not put forward as the heart of Christian life, as what life in the Church basically involved. The main ingredient of Christian life, as it were, was the ethical, the morally pure conduct of Christians, reflected mainly in social and welfare activity. In *Καταφύγιο Ἰδεῶν* there are several illustrating examples of the expression of this moralistic style of life practised in the groups of Zoë and we have seen some in the relevant paragraphs of the previous chapter.

Secondly, when Yannaras went abroad he was also carrying in himself the spirituality he had seen practised by his family and mainly by his mother. This was an experience quite detached from the idea of the religious law and more inspired by participation in the liturgical

life of the Church and trust in Church practice and tradition in a way that the latter were organically fitted in the current, at the time, reality of people's lives. Faith in God and trust in Christ were a natural thing to do, or rather a way to live, bound comfortably with people's real life. Here there was not any Zoë-like stress on external appearance and behaviour; Christian life did not feel like an externally-imposed frame into which people had to fit by squeezing in and strangling their individuality. Instead, to be a believer was a joyful choice and an opportunity for opening up further possibilities for an authentic life, and Church life was experienced as a festivity.¹²⁵ Following from this twofold experience Yannaras was keen to know where truth and falsehood lay in the different forms of religious practice that he had experienced. The Christian education he had received since a child through the circles of Zoë, and the great vocation to remain a celibate dedicated to the work of the brotherhood which had been propagated to the young men, including himself, but which he had personally now suspended, followed him as a problem to resolve. Yannaras found himself troubled by the question of what was true and faithful to Christian teaching and tradition, what was genuine and what was not in the type of Christianity that he had experienced in Zoë, and which had also gradually spread and had coloured widely the Church in Greece.

In Western Europe Yannaras encountered, as we have already seen, the protestant Christian world, and very soon he started to draw parallels between this new setting and his past experience in Zoë, and to realize what, to his understanding, had gone wrong in the religiosity of the latter. Also, arriving at Europe in the early 1960s Yannaras came upon the intellectual developments going on at that time and the frame of mind that characterized European thought in those years. Yannaras found himself facing recent developments in European thought both on a theological and a philosophical level, as the Western Europe of the 1960s presented a twofold setting for him. First, on a theological level, there was a prevailing spirit of doubt and reform, largely expressed in the theme widely diffused and discussed in those days of the 'death of God'. Secondly, the Europe of the 1960s was dominated by the philosophy of existentialism, to which, as we shall see, Yannaras was very

¹²⁵ See 'Τιογή' [Celebration] in *Καθ'ἑαυτόν*, where Yannaras illustrates through his memories of his family life in his young years, how metaphysics for him was before anything else experienced as a festive event, an experiential certainty of celebration and joy, pp. 35-7.

soon attracted. In the following section I will try therefore to describe briefly this European setting.

1. The religious scene of the 1960s

The 1960s was a significant time in the history of Western Europe. The 1960s was for the Western world a period of striking change at all levels, from pop music to politics to religion, culminating in the revolts in universities that bordered on revolution in 1968.¹²⁶ This change and development did not exclude – in fact it was to some extent brought about by change in – the realm of religion and a shift with regard to the power that Christian faith in particular and the Church had over people and their life. In fact change in relation to religiosity had occurred as early as in the 17th to 19th centuries, which had seen religious tolerance and pluralism.¹²⁷ The signs of religious transformation in modern times were even more apparent over the 19th and the first half of the 20th century through all the countries of Western Europe – even though with variations from country to country – with evidence of changes in the role and the status of the Christian religion: decline of Christianity, secularization of public institutions such as education, fall of society's religiosity and detachment from Christian faith and practice. The decade of the 1960s then is marked by historians as the culminating, as it were, period, and a milestone of change in western societies, a 'hinge decade, separating the 1940s and 1950s from the 1970s and 1980s'.¹²⁸ It was a period that witnessed a dramatic collapse in religious practice and Christian religious culture and values – a time signified by great decline of the social importance of religion, drop in church-going, and decrease in the level in which people associated their life and their choices with Christian ethics, as the matter of faith in God became more and more irrelevant.¹²⁹ Also economic prosperity contributed to social and cultural changes in the life of communities, families and individuals, including a loosening of Christian identity on

¹²⁶ The decade we refer to is often described by historians as the 'long 1960s', extending from 1958 to 1974. See the introduction in McLeod, Hugh, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹²⁷ See introduction in *Religious Crisis*.

¹²⁸ *Religious Crisis*, p. 258.

¹²⁹ For an overview of the historical changes related to religion and the status of Christian faith in society in modern times Europe see McLeod, Hugh and Ustorf, Werner (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *Religious Crisis* as quoted above.

developing populations.¹³⁰ The 1960s was a time of intense doubt and disbelief with regard to Christian religion, where the general public did not succeed to Christian faith unquestionably but grew more and more into skeptics and even atheists. In general, the characteristic of modernity where social and political life become more and more autonomous from religion, as well as the main changes that modernity signifies – the advance of science and technology, rationalization, individualization and freedom, nationalism, economic development – all form the picture of the ferment that marked the 1960s.¹³¹

Consequently, the environment that Yannaras encountered when he arrived in Western Europe was in broad terms characterized by open rejection of Christianity and religious indifference in the general public, and the understanding of society not any longer as a Christian society but as a pluralist or secular one.¹³² Developments accordingly were taking place in theology too, since theology tried to engage with the widely felt ramifications and conditions of modernity. Themes of 1960s Christianity were characterized by self-criticism on part of intellectuals in respect of the triumphalism, dogmatism and legalism in terms of which Christian belief had been interpreted, and religious doubt was widely stimulated by many theologians themselves.¹³³ The most dramatic expression of such criticism in the English-speaking world, which had a huge impact, seemed to be the publication of *Honest to God*, written by an Anglican bishop and former academic John Robinson, and which was introduced as an attempt to make sense of Christianity in the contemporary age, by exploring new ways of thinking about God and of interpreting the Christian faith in language and ideas appropriate to the twentieth century. One way in which theology engaged with this involved widespread acceptance of the notion of the ‘death of God’ in modern Western societies – a response of a theme that had developed in German Protestant circles in the 19th century and had culminated in the thought of Nietzsche. As far as morality was concerned there was a new attitude which distanced itself from legalistic ethics and thinking, taking account of needs of the actual

¹³⁰ *Religious Crisis*, pp. 122-3.

¹³¹ The description of the changes is based on Yves Lambert’s discussion on the factors that contributed to religious change in modern times, Lambert, Yves ‘New Christianity, indifference and diffused spirituality’, *The Decline of Christendom*, pp. 63-78, particularly pp. 66-9.

¹³² At the same time McLeod notes Dominic Sandbrook’s remark that ‘Although the sixties are often seen as a secular, even post-religious, age, in few decades of the twentieth century were religious issues so hotly and enthusiastically debated’, *Religious Crisis*, p. 83.

¹³³ *Religious Crisis*, pp. 83-92.

situations of real life and discussing morals by being more adaptive to real life circumstances ('Situation Ethics'). There also seemed to be a new drift in theology that favoured 'action' in 'the world' and placed an emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility and promoted a positive view of science.¹³⁴ This led Christians – both Catholic and Protestant – to become involved in social and political movements, something that was understood as an important and expected aspect of being a Christian.

The 1960s also saw the convoking of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) by Pope John XXIII – an explicitly pastoral council called to face the unprecedented challenges of modern societies. The convening of Vatican II expressed in the most vivid way the mood for reform so intense at that time. The council's basic objective was to initiate reforms that would address contemporary issues and integrate more the laity, even though in practice this was hardly the result of the changes introduced.¹³⁵ The reforms aspired to 'modernize' the Church and theology and address modern issues of life, expressing a focus on the present life and its themes rather than on the hereafter. Vatican II wanted to deliver a revised proclamation of Christian faith and teaching, without however altering the substance.

Yannaras, himself a theologian, was very much in tune with the atmosphere of the time and the need for theology to make sense and speak in a relevant language to the modern world. Therefore from the very beginning in his scholarly work he sought to address modern intellectual concerns and deliver his theological word in ways that would appeal to the religiously sceptical or indifferent mind and to secularized man. Yannaras, however – as we have seen through his own account in *Τά καθ' ἑαυτόν* – felt that the theologians were not in fact in a position to appreciate the significance of the changes at the time and that they did not therefore engage with modern challenges effectively. On the contrary, he found that the philosophers were those who took up the true challenge of modernity and addressed it bravely and creatively. Thus Yannaras appeared very soon inclined to relate and interact more with the response expressed by the philosophy dominant in Europe at that time, namely existentialism.

¹³⁴ *Religious Crisis*, p. 101.

¹³⁵ *Religious Crisis*, p. 94.

2. Existentialism

During his time in Germany Yannaras became acquainted and involved in particular with the thought of Heidegger, which for him was a new discovery. Later, during his time in France, he continued to be exposed to the thought and the positions of the existentialists; Sartre was still writing and lecturing and very much a part of what was going on intellectually in Paris at the time. Yannaras became fascinated by the work of Heidegger and Sartre, as he found in them an acute description and critique of conceptual systems, of the philosophical trends of rationalism and empiricism, and not least of philosophical idealism and moralism, and of the failure and bankruptcy to which they had led. Yannaras' religious experience in Zoë came to seem just another example of such a system of ideology, deprived of the touch of real life. Instead this unvarnished awareness of the actual experience of human beings was – Yannaras found – present and intense in the response of the existentialists, who represented at the time a reaction against the falsehood and pretence to which the Cartesian model of thought and conduct in modern times had gradually and inexorably led human consciousness, and which also was reflected strongly in the area of metaphysics. The Christ-ideal that Yannaras had experienced in the religiosity of Zoë, and to which I referred earlier above, was what Heidegger was now calling the 'highest value' into which God had been turned and which Heidegger identified as the hardest blow against God, a blow even more damaging than the problem of the impossibility of God's being known or the problem that his existence could not be proved.¹³⁶ The reduction of God to the idea of the highest value was what brought about – inexorably – nihilism.

Basically, Heidegger and Sartre, following in this from Nietzsche, held fast to the proclamation of the death of God, that is of the bankruptcy of the idea of God – as it had been maintained in the systems of thought up until then – and consequently of the end of the values underwritten by the divine. Their philosophy was ending up in nihilism. They pronounced nihilism to be the only true result of faith in a conceptualized God and world of morals to which the earlier concern with pure reason and idealism had led. The centre of all experience for the existentialists is human existence, which, despite any human effort and beyond

¹³⁶ Christos Yannaras, 'An Orthodox Comment on the 'Death of God'', in A. M. Allchin, ed., *Orthodoxy and the Death of God: Essays in Contemporary Theology*, Studies supplementary to *Sobornost* 1 (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1971), p. 43.

anything good that could take place in a man's life, would have eventually to face the reality of death and nothingness. And in fact death did not only mean the biological end of life, but represented also an ontological experience of pain, of despair and agony, the reality of failure and loss in man's social and emotional life, in human relationships and in all aspects of human activity. After all, existentialism – at least as expressed by Sartre – arose from the distressing experience of European man in the outbreak and then the aftermath of the Second World War and addressed an audience in whose souls there prevailed pain, frustration and despair in the light of the political and moral crisis of the time and in the face of the failure of any values to sustain stability and justice between the nations.

Sartre himself delivered a lecture in Paris, in 1945,¹³⁷ in which we can identify some key points of the positions of the existentialists, which illustrate the type of philosophical views and ideas that Yannaras encountered during the time he spent studying in Germany and later in France.

Sartre's lecture formed a defensive response by him to criticisms of his time that charged the existentialist development as being a negative movement issuing in despair about human reality, and promoting quietism among humans, instead of encouraging hopeful creativity and action. Sartre, being a Marxist himself, needed to defend his existentialist views before the communists; for a philosophy that would otherwise appear as not leading up to or serving the communist vision would not be of any value to the Marxists. Taking up Sartre's exposition then, we soon come to understand that the first of the basic pronouncements of the existentialists is that 'existence precedes essence'. Basically, for the existential philosopher there is not such a thing as a human nature or essence. There is no predetermined fundamental nature of man, given that, as an atheist existentialist would maintain, there is no creator of man behind human being, who would fashion humans as any other craftsman might model their creation or their artifact.¹³⁸ Sartre presents his well-known example of the paper knife¹³⁹,

¹³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1997).

¹³⁸ Even a Christian existentialist as for example Kierkegaard sees the 'existence precedes essence' dictum as a priority of subjectivity. The subject itself exists first and has priority over any generalized description or idea about existence; the subject is an ontological category and it is through which we step out into existence and we come to experience life and reality and acquire knowledge. In this way Kierkegaard's existentialism – and the philosophy of other existentialists – can be seen as a reaction to Hegelianism, an idealism that proposed the application of an ontological system through which we are allowed to know and understand and explain everything, and which lets us have the answers on how and why things are the way they are. See Nikolaos

which is crafted to serve a certain purpose. The concept of a paper knife, that is, pre-exists in the mind of its creator. The idea of the paper knife, with all the appropriate features and qualities that a paper knife should have in order to be what it is – a real paper knife – exists before the actual object is made. The object is thus produced according to a certain model that somebody has already envisaged. For the existentialist, however, there is no such parallel in the case of humans. Man is not made after some pre-existing model, but he simply is what he makes of himself. Sartre analyses how a person's choices of life and his actions make that person what he appears to be. Again, following the philosopher's characteristic example, a coward is described as such by his actions, and he is not so until he takes steps that allow us to confer on him that description.

The fact that man's existence is not predefined or charged with a concrete purpose, as for example in the case of a knife – where the material and the attributes of it are determined before the knife is made so as to correspond to its purpose of use – does not simply mean that human existence has no purpose. An existentialist would argue that the maxim 'existence precedes essence' does not simply mean that human nature has no purpose, since many physical objects may have no purpose either, and few would argue that everything has a purpose.¹⁴⁰ 'Existence precedes essence' means that human nature – whatever that means – is not something set and permanent that dictates human development and behaviour; on the contrary, there is ongoing possibility for the latter to be altered and adjusted, in such a way that man, through his decisions, his choices and acts, can always develop and even change who he is. Therefore, statements such as 'X is coward' or 'Y is a criminal' are not credible for an existentialist, if used to determine the nature of one's being. In the words of Sartre, 'man is not what he is', meaning that human existence cannot be exhausted by any such descriptions, as there is always an ongoing process of becoming and changing towards something. Man can rise above what he is and direct how he shall become.¹⁴¹

It follows that the first quality the existential philosopher sees in man is that of responsibility. In fact 'subjectivity' in existentialism is more or less a synonym of human responsibility as well as of human freedom. The term, that is, refers to the quality of being a

Nissiotis, *Υπαρξισμός και Χριστιανική πίστις [Existentialism and Christian Faith]* (Athens: Minima Publications, 1986), section on Kierkegaard and especially pp. 44-54.

¹³⁹ Sartre, p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ David E. Cooper, *Existentialism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2nd ed. 2000), p.69.

¹⁴¹ Cooper, p. 69.

human subject, which in turn bears primarily the characteristic of responsibility for its own existence and which is also free. Man is responsible for his actions and the choices he makes, and for what he makes of himself. And he is not responsible only towards himself but – the existentialist upholds – towards all his fellowhuman beings. A person's deeds do not only shape that person into what he comes to be, but also form a model or an example of behaviour for other people as well. When someone makes a choice for a certain action, Sartre explains, he in effect pronounces his action to be legitimate for other people to take too. Somebody cannot assume that others will not take up his behaviour also. That is because by selecting to act in a certain way man ought to understand that he legitimizes his action as a permissible and justifiable one.¹⁴² In that way man's role and his choices of life are accorded a great deal of importance and responsibility.

Furthermore, the existential philosopher does not accept the idea of determinism. He does not see man compelled to take a certain step of action by reasons and causes that are outside his realm of responsibility and free will, and therefore the freedom of the human subject is another fundamental position of existentialism. That is how subjectivity stands primarily for freedom, and that is what is meant by the other famous existentialist pronouncement that 'man is condemned to be free'. Man is bound to have to choose between different possibilities of action and to make decisions, as there are not any pre-packed answers or ready-made solutions in real life situations, and to have to make choices basically means the exercise of human freedom. The fact that man has to make decisions and choices is what Sartre describes also as abandonment and it furthermore involves what the philosopher refers to consequently as anguish.¹⁴³ In the circumstances of real life there are often not any easy answers for what a person should or should not do; in other words, it is not always obvious what is right and wrong or moral and immoral. Thus to assess the circumstances presented by life and each time to decide upon which action is appropriate often involves an intense sense of ambiguity and doubt. Therefore, the human agent experiences what Sartre calls 'anguish', in other words the distress and agony that, due to the uncertainty of life situations, the decision-making entails. There is a strong sense of risk, then, and responsibility, and man

¹⁴² Sartre, pp. 30-1.

¹⁴³ Sartre, pp. 30-2.

often finds himself standing on a borderline between different choices that can be equally imperative. One consequently needs to interpret the conditions of the circumstances one may be facing and the possibilities of action in a particular situation and to determine which choice out of the potential or available ones would be valuable. The anguish that this process involves does not function – according to the existentialist – as a deterrent for action and does not lead to quietism; it is rather the very qualification of action, as it points to the fact that it is impossible not to choose. Even not to choose – the existentialist insists – would still be a choice. Anguish thus signifies the complexity of having to choose among multiple options and the burden of human freedom for making a choice as well as the pressing need that a choice is actively made and realized.¹⁴⁴

Thus ‘existence precedes essence’ for the existentialist also has effects in the realm of morality. The existentialist sees the human agent in a context where man is left alone and he is the only one and fully liable for his choices. Man’s actions are not induced by any apriori values, and certain values we may revere often are too vague in terms of our circumstances in practice and therefore need to be interpreted in action based solely on our instinct.¹⁴⁵ Man is in this way entirely responsible and without any excuses for his deeds. As Sartre puts it succinctly, ‘man is the creator of his morality’.¹⁴⁶ Basically, for existentialism there are no apriori values on the basis of which man can judge what is ethical, nor any golden rule to determine what is the correct decision to make and what is the right thing to do. Furthermore, for the atheist existentialist there is no God who could validate apriori ethics. Since then there are not any such standards already available, man needs to invent his morality. Therefore morality for existentialism involves invention and creativity.¹⁴⁷ Man, that is, invents what is moral; he creates a morality at the very time of making his choices. There are no absolute rules that determine in advance what right action is. Sartre illustrates his thoughts upon this point using another example – this time from the realm of artistic creation, especially as understood by his modernist contemporaries. In art, he says, there are no fixed or supreme principles

¹⁴⁴ Sartre, pp. 31-2.

¹⁴⁵ Sartre, pp. 34-36, where the French philosopher also brings up his well-known example about his student’s dilemma, who needed to choose between going to fight and staying with his mother, and his anxiety over working out what would be the right thing to do.

¹⁴⁶ Sartre, p. 49.

¹⁴⁷ Sartre, p. 49.

according to which art is done. The code of aesthetics is essentially created at the same time as a piece of art is produced. There is, for example, no specific concept of what a painting should look like before it is created; there are no preset aesthetic values against which a painting would fall short. The painter creates in the freedom of his expression and it is by doing so and through his work that he presents and forms what is only then and afterwards valued as aesthetic. The same, existentialism holds, applies in human behaviour. In human life there are no pre-decided standards to judge human action or to dictate what the correct thing to do is – especially given the complicated circumstances and the dilemma-like situations with which life often present us. For example, the Christian doctrines of ethics, Sartre says, need to be interpreted. No one can give an answer to the apriori ethical norms. We need to work out in practice what is the right thing to do and to interpret the norms as we try to apply them in action as ‘...values are uncertain ... [and] too abstract...’.¹⁴⁸

Therefore – the existentialist philosopher takes the argument further – it would not be appropriate to think of and to describe someone’s activity or choices as irresponsible, as there are not certain and abiding norms upon which to base such a judgment. In the absence of supreme ethical standards, there is no principle in terms of which a choice of human behaviour would be seen as transgression. What basically matters then for an existentialist is the trait of freedom in which humans make their choices and decide upon their acts. What an existentialist can evaluate about a man’s choice is whether it is made in freedom, which also means in freedom from self-deception and therefore with honesty. The existentialist’s judgment on other people then is not a moral one but one based on facts, a judgment of truth.¹⁴⁹ Existentialism values the quality of free commitment on behalf of the human agent.¹⁵⁰ To perform an act of open and responsible choice is what counts in the mind of the existentialist philosopher, and in fact it is this exactly that affords authenticity in human activity. To be authentic for existentialism, in other words, means to exercise our freedom in the decision-making process and in the shaping of our lives. The use of human freedom does not deliver us to anarchy, Sartre argues, but involves responsibility in the manner we have already described above. At the same time, a responsible attitude means that man tries to be

¹⁴⁸ Sartre, p. 36.

¹⁴⁹ Sartre, pp. 50-1.

¹⁵⁰ Sartre, p. 53.

genuine in his options about how to act and how to live; first and above all he needs to be honest with his own self and rule out misapprehensions about him and avoid deceiving himself. In other words, an existentialist is someone who fights bravely and unceasingly against false consciousness and towards discovering, knowing and realizing his true self. It is in this way that existentialism defines authenticity and that it puts it forward with regard to human life. And it is in this line of approach that human life and man's actions are not measured against some moral standards – which for the existentialist do not exist as *apriori* anyway – but they are validated in terms of the freedom and the responsibility the individual takes. In other words, human activity is valued against the authenticity with which it is realized, or else against the overcoming of the false consciousness of the individual.

The existentialist philosopher does not feel satisfied with the standard account of the world, where man stands as a spectator of reality, and where all his knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world derives from his observing this world, himself being as a subject disassociated from the world. The existentialist emphasizes – in relation to his view of the world – the element of human involvement. The world for an existentialist is a human one, which means that the world as we know, perceive and understand it is the world that we humans are involved with. Existentialism maintains that we know the world as *ready-to-hand*, that is our knowledge and understanding of the world cannot escape our encounter with it, cannot be free of our involvement with things. *Present-at-hand* knowledge of the world, that is the view we get when we take a step back from things and look at them as spectators, the existential philosopher holds, comes after, is never the first way we know things, but a purely supplementary way, as it were, we need to take basically out of necessity, when things in the ready-to-hand encounter go wrong, and therefore we need to take a distance from things and study them by disassociating ourselves from them, so as to settle the breakdowns. To make this more specific, and following an example brought up in David Cooper's account on existentialism,¹⁵¹ we would not concern ourselves with the structure or the technical aspect of the pen we use to write with, until it ceases to write any more; it is then that we would take it to bits, examine its structure, and so on. So the present-at-hand examination of things is not our basic attitude towards them, as – following another pertinent

¹⁵¹ Cooper, p. 62.

example employed in the account we just mentioned – the surgeon’s examination of our bodies is not the primary encounter among human beings. All in all, the element of human involvement, the idea that the world around us is a world that we view as very parts of it ourselves and not as outside spectators is a key point in the existentialist’s viewpoint of the world.

It is possible by now to identify attitudes in the mindset of existentialism that can be in some way paralleled with elements in the outlook that Yannaras came to develop and to express in his own work in relation to man and human life. In the observations and the views of the existentialists Yannaras must have generally found a dynamic insight into man’s existence, which he had experienced as missing from the static-moralistic religiosity of Zoë, and which however he considered was closer to the mind of the Orthodox tradition as preserved through the life and the works of the Church Fathers. First of all, this element of dynamic movement was expressed in the existentialist attitude, where human being as an entity is in a process of constant development and becoming something that is not yet. What a person is at a given time – the existentialist maintains – results from the decisions he has made, and ‘man is not what he is’, since there is for him the possibility to make choices and consequently changes, and thus rise above what he is and determine for himself what he shall become. According to the existentialist’s view, our true self is not hidden inside us, but is rather a goal. This, we can say, squares with the stance that lies at the heart of Christian life and which sees the Christian enterprise as a dynamic process of continuous advancement and spiritual progress. Even the state of spiritual perfection for a Christian is not perceived as a motionless condition that someone attains once and for all, but as a limitless situation of infinite advance.¹⁵² It is not difficult to recognize then a parallel between the existentialist view of human existence and the Orthodox theological understanding of the human person as it has been put forward in the twentieth century.¹⁵³ The theological mind, that is, sees in the human person the idea of motion and dynamic movement as a structural element of man’s

¹⁵² See Mega Farantou, ‘Η πίστις ως υπέρβασις’ [‘Faith as Transcendence’] in *Δογματικά και Ηθικά* (Athens, 1983), pp. 235-41, where with the opportunity of a reference to the life of Photius the Great the author discusses the nature of Christian faith and repentance, *μετά-νοια*.

¹⁵³ Mega Farantou, ‘Θεός και σύγχρονη πραγματικότητα’ [‘God and contemporary reality’], in *Δογματικά και Ηθικά*, p. 31.

being. The etymology offered for the Greek word for 'person', πρόσωπο, as πρὸς + ὄψη – meaning 'towards the face' or 'facing' – signifies and expresses this understanding and strikes a correspondence with Heideggerian 'ex-istence'. The human person is not viewed just as a chunk of matter, static and fixed, but is seen more like a dynamic reality, as something that is realized in the encounter with what stands outside itself; moreover – in the mind of the Christian tradition – man is viewed as a being with the potential to develop and grow towards perfection through the exercise of human freedom and the active course of Christian *ascesis* within the ongoing participation in the life of the Church. In Christos Yannaras' thought and discussion about existence this view of the person occupies a central place. Yannaras himself took up very keenly this existentialist idea of personal existence and in his own work he put forward the notion of the person mainly in terms of moving-towards the Other and of standing-out of oneself, thus connecting intrinsically the existence of the person with concepts such as self-transcendence, ecstasy and communion, aspects that we will have the chance to explore further in the next chapter.

In connection with the above the existentialist evaluates the present time in the light of the future, in terms of what it is that man is heading to. One's present behaviour can be explained or identified only in the light of what one is in the process of becoming. According to Heidegger, 'The primary meaning of existentiality is the future'. It is the future that 'first of all awakes the Present'.¹⁵⁴ This existentialist approach to time mentioned here adds to the sense of dynamic development towards something not yet existent that is present in existentialism and to which we referred earlier. Without trying to overstrain this view in an attempt to match it with Christian thought and the understanding of time there, our impulse would not err if it discerned in it an echo of the eschatological element attributed to time in Christian theology. Christian faith and instruction does not seek to abduct man from the present time; it does not depreciate the value of the present, and does not ask to disorientate man from current reality by offering him visions of a utopian future or of the afterlife. However, the Christian mind likes to strike a balance, where as much as the present is valued man is also encouraged not to be reduced to the present or simply plunge into it. For Christians there is an eschatological prospect for everything that goes on in the present time, the prospect

¹⁵⁴ Cooper, p. 73.

of the 'Kingdom to come'. In other words there is the prospect of the fulfilment of the 'here and now' in the light of what is not yet accomplished. Thus, we can say, the present time also in a Christian's life acquires meaning or is inspired in view of what is yet to come, of what lies ahead.

Yannaras' work then is not at all foreign to nor far from this aspect that we discuss here. Yannaras' emphasis, as we will see, on apophaticism as a fundamental attitude of Orthodox theology, links closely – even though not very explicitly – with the eschatological character of Church life and experience. When Yannaras underlines the apophatic character of the knowledge of God, which – closely related for Yannaras to the reality of personal existence – is never a fully secured knowledge but an always-practised aim and anticipation for man, he in fact touches upon its eschatological character; for the knowledge of God will only be complete in the eschaton, the last day of the Church: '...now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known'.¹⁵⁵ In other words the knowledge of God as comprehended within Orthodox theology, and which is Yannaras' response to modern nihilism, is not very much else than the Kingdom of God, which the members of the Church can taste even in the present day, and in the anticipation of which they live and pray. These all are ideas which we will have the chance to explore more extensively later; what is worth noting here however is that the notion of time is grasped and discussed by Yannaras in ways that can be paralleled with elements of existentialist perceptions on this matter.¹⁵⁶ Whatever actual points of identification and/or difference with existentialism there may be, what interests us here is the way in which – as in existentialism – Yannaras also discusses time in relation to existence and development or change. In particular, he employs the notion of time in the context of his analysis about personal existence, and links closely the experience of time with the reality and the uniqueness of the personal relationship, speaking thus of the non-dimensional present of the personal relationship. For Yannaras' personal existence, the experience of time is not simply a series of successive moments but involves a sense of quality that introduces the idea of the eternal,

¹⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

¹⁵⁶ Time is one of the themes – alongside others such as space and spatiality, logos, language and the nil – that Yannaras takes up in distinct sections in his treatise *Person and Eros*, a work that sometimes seems to echo Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

where past, present and future are all one.¹⁵⁷ This is how theology sees the reality of God, in whom the limits of time as we know them in our human experience are annulled. Yannaras is then very keen to highlight and put forward this dynamic approach to human experience, where the limits of time – as well as of space – are overcome within the context of ec-static personal being; expressions of this we find in the theology about liturgical time and the Church practice of worship for example, where the whole of the creation and the world – dead, alive and not yet born – are taken up in glorification and prayer and embraced as one. Or even in the fundamentals of the Christian revelation and faith, according to which ‘ὁ ἄσαρκος σαρκουῖται· ὁ Λόγος παχύνεται· ὁ ἀόρατος ὁράται· καὶ ὁ ἀναφής ψηλαφάται· ὁ ἀναρχος ἄρχεται...’¹⁵⁸ : here the time limits are removed as the present is professed to now hold the eternal. All these are positions with which Yannaras very much identifies within his work and is keen to bring out and highlight.

The idea of the human being as a dynamic category always in the process of becoming, which in the theological context is consequently associated, as we will see, with the notion of communion, brings us to another point of contact between Christian theology and the philosophy of existentialism: the position of the existentialist that man discovers and knows himself through others, that self-knowledge is achieved through the experience of ‘inter-subjectivity’, that human subjectivity becomes aware of itself through the mediation of others¹⁵⁹ can be paralleled with the theological analysis of the human person – which is so fundamental in Yannaras – that someone becomes/ is a person precisely through the act in which and to the extent that he relates to and shares with others. For the existentialist the communal character of man’s being is an essential aspect of human existence.¹⁶⁰ The existentialist emphasizes the communal character of existence, man’s being-with and for others.¹⁶¹ Also, to know and understand oneself is not achieved by turning inwards and searching inside oneself, but by reflecting on the relation of oneself to the outside world. Self-

¹⁵⁷ See section I.5.c of next chapter.

¹⁵⁸ One of the στίχοι for Vespers 26 December.

¹⁵⁹ Sartre, p. 45.

¹⁶⁰ Cooper, p. 109.

¹⁶¹ This in existentialism is stressed alongside the other and equally significant aspect of human being, that of individual self-expression and struggle against ‘mass existence’, which, however, can also be seen as another version of the theological pronouncement about the uniqueness and the unrepeatable character of each personal existence.

knowledge is not an inward but an outward movement.¹⁶² For the theological mind too a human person is not a human monad; man is truly a person when he stands out of his self-centredness and opens up and unites in a communion with the Other, this ‘Other’ being God first and all the world subsequently. Salvation in Christian terms is not seen as a self-accomplishment. One is not saved alone; it is the participation of man in God’s glory that brings about salvation.¹⁶³ In other words, it is a message of unity that lies in the heart of Christian life; the message of communion on man’s part with God, a communion depicted in the unity of the whole body of the Church. For Christian ecclesiology each Christian is a member of Christ, a member of the body of the Church, and for someone to see where he stands in relation to God he needs to see where he stands in relation to the body.

Also, following from the existentialist view of the world as a human one and as a ‘referential totality’, man is not regarded as separated from the world, but in integral unity with it. For existentialism ‘There is not a world *and* ourselves, standing in a causal relation, for without ourselves there is not that ‘referential totality’ which constitutes our world’.¹⁶⁴ This again can refer us to the Christian position about the close unity between man and the world, portrayed for example in the event of the Fall, where not only man but through him the whole world around him was affected and, similarly, in man’s deification the creation around him participates as well. For Christian theology the unity of the Church and of the kingdom of God is not made up solely by humans but embraces the whole of the creation. Yannaras’ thought, too, lines up very much with such an outlook, when he sees in man’s personal existence a fundamental expression of the human thankful and loving response to the creation.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, another vital point that Yannaras’ theological mind seems to share with existentialist philosophy is the rejection of dualisms. A crucial issue to overcome for existentialism – as indeed for all the rest of philosophy – is that of alienation. The existentialist

¹⁶² Cooper, p. 97.

¹⁶³ This is a commonplace in Orthodox Spirituality; e.g. see Kallistos Ware, *Ἡ Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία* [*The Orthodox Church*] trans. Iosif Roilidis (Athens: Akritas Publications, 1996), p. 41.

¹⁶⁴ Cooper, p. 75.

¹⁶⁵ For Yannaras individualism (i.e. the failing of personal existence, the inability for ‘κοινωνεῖν’) lies at the heart of the phenomenon of the forest fires in Greece in the summer of 2007. See his relevant article in *Ἡ Καθημερινή*, July 2007.

sees that various forms of dualism (eg. mind versus body, reason versus passion, and so on) bring on this sense of alienation from the world, to which we are anyway prone; therefore the existential philosopher is critical of and hostile towards dualisms.¹⁶⁶ Yannaras must have found in the existentialist opposition to dualism a more genuine expression of his Christian heritage than the one he had experienced in the intensely moralistic and dualistic religiosity of Zoë. Through the paths of his European experience Yannaras came to realize and appreciate the theological instruction of his Orthodox tradition that there is not good *and* evil, as evil in the teaching of the Fathers has no hypostasis, since it was not created in the first place; therefore evil is viewed only as the absence of good.¹⁶⁷ Consequently Yannaras' work is characterised by a negative response to dualism and by the quest to overcome dualistic partitions in relation to man's existence, life and the material world. Closely then related to this is also Yannaras' attitude to the theme of morality. Morality, as we shall see in the fourth chapter, is for Yannaras fundamentally linked again to the ontological category of personal existence and to man's existential stance; how man deals with the matter of his existence as a whole, with life and death and human freedom. Christian morality for Yannaras does not involve predetermined answers and solutions that apply to all situations that the reality of life may present us with, but it rather involves a journeying on man's side for the discovery of his authenticity and the identity of his personal existence. This is another crucial point of view in Yannaras' approach and understanding of Christian life and can easily correspond to the quite fundamental existentialist position about the role of human responsibility and the fact that for the existential philosopher there are not pre-packaged solutions for what one ought to do and how to live and make choices; for the existentialist, as we have seen, man creates his morality, and any a-priori values – if there are any – need to be interpreted in practice.

In general the elements of existentialism that were most likely to appeal to Yannaras at that time were those that characterized the general attitude and mood of the philosophy, namely the strong realism and honesty with which the existentialists addressed the matter of existence on the one hand, and also – as at least Sartre in his lecture maintained against adverse allegations – the idea that existentialism was in the end a doctrine of optimism and

¹⁶⁶ Cooper, pp. 22-3, 35-6 and 'Dualisms Dissolved' pp. 79-92.

¹⁶⁷ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 4: οὐκ ὄντα γάρ τὰ κακά, ὄντα δέ τὰ καλὰ, and endlessly repeated in the patristic tradition.

action.¹⁶⁸ For existentialism man needs to face himself; nothing can save him from himself, meaning that man ultimately needs to encounter his true circumstances, overcome any false consciousness about his existence, see himself bare and have a genuine attitude towards the experience of his reality. Hence the existentialist reacts against the attitude of ‘...most people... [who prefer] to be “distracted” from and “anaesthetized” against the prospect of their deaths’.¹⁶⁹ Instead, the existential philosopher puts the human being face to face with his death and sees man as a being-towards-death; death, therefore, is viewed as a possibility, that is as a way of being, a way of living in relation to the prospect of death. The realism in addressing openly the facts about life and existence and in fighting a false consciousness was something that Yannaras had very much missed in his experience of the ‘ideological refuge’ that the religiosity of Zoë had offered him, and it was therefore a quality in which he could now find inspiration. In this unvarnished honesty of the existentialists and the sheer realism in their attitude to being and existence, Yannaras could gradually recognize an attitude that reminded him rather of the Christian mind as this was handed down in the Fathers’ tradition: the teaching on remembrance of death, on exercising vigilance in the practice of life and on attending to the truth by repudiating oblivion (note ἀ-λήθεια, the Greek word for truth signifies the absence of λήθη, that is of forgetfulness or oblivion). How much closer to the actual Christian exhortation for abandoning religious hypocrisy and attaining to honesty towards God and the self was Yannaras to find the stance of the existentialists than that of the pietistic type of religious devotion he had experienced in Zoë!

We have mentioned already that Sartre liked to defend existentialism against charges that viewed existentialist philosophy as pessimistic. What was widely seen as the gloomy side of existentialism Sartre described as realism, and he maintained that existentialism was rather a movement of optimism, especially as it sees man fundamentally holding a possibility of choice in life.¹⁷⁰ In particular what was widely received as a depressing side of existentialism, and to which Sartre instead referred as realism, is the position that one should have a pragmatic view of the potential and the results of one’s activity, without holding hopes that

¹⁶⁸ Sartre, p. 56.

¹⁶⁹ Cooper, p. 137.

¹⁷⁰ Sartre, p. 25.

others will continue one's work and take one's actions further; besides man needs to acknowledge bravely the limitedness of his actions, in terms of the passing of time, and often of their narrow effects.¹⁷¹ Man needs to recognize that his activity may not bring about spectacular results; still – and this affords to the philosophy a bright tone – the existentialist can even so find meaning in his very activity despite the incomplete character of his actions. Sartre – also in defence of existentialism before the judgment of the Marxists – says that '[existentialism is not] a philosophy of quietism since it defines man by his action'.¹⁷² Man holds his destiny within himself. Thus the existentialist proposes 'an ethic of action and self-commitment'.¹⁷³ The meaning and the value that the existentialist sees in human efforts derive from the very fact that man stretches out to his potential of action and life and realizes himself. When individuals do what they can, meaning that they do to the full what they can, this very choice accords value to their activity. To do one's best, to live out and realize and become the most one can do is, at the end, all one can do, and beyond this one could not go anyway. So existentialism seems to prompt human beings to live out the fullness of the potential their humanity holds.

Not surprisingly this was just another aspect of the existential philosophy in which Yannaras could find equal attraction and with which he could engage. Again, such a stance could feel – with no exaggeration – that it was voicing better the true spirit of the Christian vocation and life than the expressions of Christian religiosity Yannaras had been presented with in his Zoë experience. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the activity of the organization of Zoë was very strongly characterized by an attitude – which was intensely propagated to all the members – that it was the brotherhood's mission to inaugurate a large-scale spiritual renewal for the whole body of the Church and for the entire nation. Yannaras himself had been carried away by such an enthusiastic vision that had appealed, largely at the beginning, to his pure and passionate youthful spirit. However, through time and experience he had reached the realization that such visions live only in the sphere of idealization, which stays remote from the real life of humans, from the pragmatism of human failure and from the reality of issues that men encounter in every age. Thus he came to see the ideological

¹⁷¹ Sartre, pp. 39-41. Sartre delineates this as despair, which, however, relates also to the acknowledgement that 'man is nothing else but what his life is'.

¹⁷² Sartre, p. 44.

¹⁷³ Sartre, p. 44.

Christian visions that aspire to bring change to the world rather as a fallacy, while the true Christian spirituality of the authentic Orthodox tradition that he gradually discovered was a quite different story. In the tradition of the Church the members of the body of Christ do not take up the message of the Gospel in any conviction that through their good deeds or righteous life they will manage to change the world or bring about dramatic transformations in human reality. Human history would have many examples to prove that such hopes would be simply unrealistic. Neither are Christians on the other hand called to faith with the mere objective of being somehow selfishly saved, while neglecting or disregarding the fate of the rest of the world around them. Before the absurdity of the world's reality and existence the Church invites man to the other 'absurdity' or foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18) of faith in God, not in order to change or save the world, but out of a grateful and loving response to what has been experienced as God's love and offer to mankind. Thus a Christian takes up his faith with humility hoping to find grace and be saved through the life of the Church and not hoping that *he* will save the Church in any way.¹⁷⁴ The members of the Church live in faith, and exercise themselves continuously in their spiritual struggle, conscious of their human shortfall, and therefore with humility and with trust in the mercy of God, knowing that this is the most they can do and without building hopes that this will make some big difference on the large scale, neither expecting or demanding that those who will come after them will necessarily take their example further. The triumphant attitude of Zoë, Yannaras felt, was not a very faithful expression of authentic Christian spirituality, which – in the expression of the Church tradition – is characterized rather by the sacrificial element, not a triumphant one. This is the kind of Christian spirituality, in line with the mind and the teaching of the Fathers' ascetic tradition, with which Yannaras could identify, and which he could at that time recognize more in the reserved optimism and the honest commitment of an atheist existentialist than in the ideological faith and the pietistic devotion of a religious Christian.

The honesty and the realism of existentialist philosophy had a great appeal to Yannaras. However, the answer to nihilism, the answer to the deadlock that the western mind seemed to have reached, for Yannaras lay somewhere further than what the pure intellect

¹⁷⁴ Note that the 'save the Church' attitude was instead typical of Zoë. We recall that the brotherhood had been set up independently of the official Church, precisely in order to fulfil unhindered the correction of failings of the official Church.

could present, and it emerged from the tradition of the Church Fathers' theology and their experience of the divine life. In *Heidegger and the Areopagite* we have Yannaras' scholarly response to the intellectual setting he encountered in Europe; this work is Yannaras' own account of what he made of this European setting. First published in 1967, it is an early expression of the author's philosophical and theological thoughts and positions, as they started to take shape under the stimuli and the inspiration that his experience in Western Europe at the time of his study there provided him with. It provides for us an exposition in which we find the first articulation of Yannaras' views that will later become entrenched and fundamental aspects of his whole work; therefore we will go on here to explore *Heidegger and the Areopagite* in some detail.

3. Nihilism and the absence of God

Heidegger and the Areopagite is the first scholarly published work of Yannaras and one of the earliest fruits – second after the *Metaphysics of the Body* – of Yannaras' course of study and research. The very title strikes a contrast between two names of people that would seem apparently unconnected, both in terms of their context and their time. It is then Yannaras' task in this book to bring together these two names and the tradition that each of them represents. And he does so, as we will see, by unfolding for the reader the rationale, as it were, of the philosophical and the theological standpoint of Heidegger and the Areopagite respectively. The former is generally known and identified as an existential philosopher working in the theoretical aftermath of modern nihilism; the Areopagite's name is widely referred to in the realm of Church tradition and Christian scholarship in connection with the theme of apophaticism, or else apophatic theology.¹⁷⁵ Thus Yannaras basically lays out what he made of the matter of nihilism, as he came across it during his time in Germany, and, based on his own background, theological heritage and tradition, which he sees – for the purposes of

¹⁷⁵ The Areopagitical Writings – which scholarly research regards as pseudonymous, owing to the fact that their writer was not really St Paul's convert, Dionysius the Areopagite, and which have consequently been consigned to the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century – have been very influential in the course of Christian theology as this developed both in the Eastern and the Western part of Christendom, mainly for their notion of hierarchy or the cosmic and ecclesial order and for their theology of the transcendence or unknowability of God. See further Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989).

this book – summarized in the *Areopagite*, he offers his response to this matter.¹⁷⁶ Nihilism represented at the time the ultimate development, as it were, of the human intellect in the sphere of philosophical thought and speculation, which also had undoubtedly a powerful impact in the realm of religious life and faith. Faith in the very existence of God was challenged. The Christian God did not appear a very reliable reality any longer; in fact it was not felt now to be anything of a reality, but rather an erroneous belief, a misleading notion. God was pronounced absent and in his place was substituted nothing – the nihil. Theology had to face earnestly this new setting and to construct a meaningful response. This is exactly what Yannaras wished to do in *Heidegger and the Areopagite*. It is important to remember that *Heidegger and the Areopagite* was written out of the Western experience Yannaras shared of the 1960s: the period when Protestant theology tried to take seriously the ‘Death of God’ and responded by a programme of demythologization. As we have seen, Yannaras thought the Western response was dangerously superficial and found a radical response in the Fathers – especially in the *Areopagite*.

In the following pages I will look closely at Yannaras’ account in his above work, since by this we will build up another account – alongside that of his biographical development – of the direction which Yannaras’ intellect followed during the time of his study in Western Europe and from which, in his more mature years, there developed the kind of understanding of the personal that we find in his later writings. *Heidegger and the Areopagite* is in a way a prelude to Yannaras’ vast volume of published work in which the reader gets the first disclosures of a philosophical and theological speculation that kept growing with consistency and persistence of thought in his subsequent years.

Yannaras’ exposition in the first part of *Heidegger and the Areopagite* basically forms an analysis of the different developments that the theoretical approach to knowledge followed in the Western and Eastern milieu of the world respectively over the centuries. The variance between the two worlds in the theoretical understanding of what constitutes the truth, in other words – as Yannaras himself puts it in the introduction of his book – the different approach to

¹⁷⁶ It is not by chance that Yannaras dedicates his book *Heidegger and the Areopagite* to his mother, ‘to whom [he] owes the “first theology”’ (Yannaras’ actual inscription). It is evident that the author’s production is an effort to recover and present what he sees as the heart and the true content of the tradition that he as an Orthodox represents.

epistemology, and consequently to the method of apophaticism, comprised the very starting point for the diverse evolution that the philosophical mind followed in the East and the West through the centuries. Yannaras identifies the results of this fundamental difference not just in the different course which European metaphysics followed in the West and the East; the theoretical difference did not remain simply a notional one, but was also represented in the different forms that the social, political and cultural strands of human activity and history then acquired, ending up in the opposition of the Western European to Eastern Orthodox civilization and culture.¹⁷⁷

The key point in understanding the different course of the philosophical and the metaphysical developments that we will discuss here lies, Yannaras argues and as we have already briefly seen, in the change that the original approach to and understanding of *logos* underwent in the West.¹⁷⁸ As handed down from the classical heritage *logos* signified the inner logic or coherence of reality, which was known and understood through a relational reference to things. *Logos* stood for the kind of inner consistency and structure of what was there or of what was real; in other words *logos* could stand for the truth of things, which was approached within a referential totality of immediate involvement with things. Thus *logos* was the ‘common logos’ of Herakleitos, and it represented the practice of *κοινωνεῖν*, that is of sharing or of being together, of being involved or being part of and of having in common. In the classical understanding this mode of the common being, the *κοινωνεῖν*, also specified the potential of knowing the truth and the practice of being true, of truthfulness, *ἀληθεύειν*. In other words the general stance was that the truth was achieved to the extent that or as much as being in common was realized; *κοινωνεῖν* was the way to *ἀληθεύειν*.¹⁷⁹ This attitude

¹⁷⁷ Yannaras’ *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Δύση στὴ Νεώτερη Ελλάδα* gives an account of the development of theology in which the author sketches in broad strokes the differences between the Eastern and the Western Christian milieus, especially as these differences can be detected in the development and the history of Greece in modern times.

¹⁷⁸ Christos Yannaras, *Χάιντεγκερ καὶ Ἀρεοπαγίτης ἢ περὶ ἀπουσίας καὶ ἀγνωσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ* [*Heidegger and the Areopagite or on the absence and unknowability of God*] (Athens: Domos, 1998), p. 22.

¹⁷⁹ For a longer analysis by Yannaras on the connection between *ἀληθεύειν* and *κοινωνεῖν* see *Ὁρθός λόγος καὶ κοινωνικὴ πρακτικὴ* [*Right Reason and Social Practice*] (Athens: Domos, 1999, first published 1984), pp. 188-210. This is, however, much more than a philosophical position; note the way Lorentzatos appeals to this in his article on Papadiamandis: *Μελέτες* τόμ. Α΄, p. 247.

towards logos or truth was fundamentally crucial for the shaping of the whole outlook that man would adopt towards the reality of life, cosmos and God. What interests us here is that within that outlook, as Yannaras argues, man was not the condition for reaching an understanding of the real or for arriving at the truth. The measure, the criterion was the participation in the totality of the things, the ‘being part of’ or ‘being in common’, the *κοινωνεῖν*. Yannaras’ next point then is that the scholastic tradition in the West actually overturned the Aristotelian premise for knowledge and of the category of *logos* as this was held in the Hellenic tradition. *Logos* ceased to represent that inner coherence of things and the relational knowing or the communal reference to things and came to mean what we up to this day understand simply as logic or reason. Thus the scholastics moved away from the Aristotelian approach to knowledge, even though they thought they were entering more deeply into the Aristotelian heritage, and sought to validate the truth and consequently the matter of God and of the existence of God on the basis of the faculty of human reason, understood narrowly as the intellect’s ability to construct logical arguments. This constituted an alienation of the Hellenic way of attaining knowledge and comprised what Yannaras calls a ‘historic temptation’ for the Western mind, philosophy and metaphysics.¹⁸⁰

This historic temptation of the West found its prime expression in Descartes.¹⁸¹ With Descartes we have the consolidation of the content of *logos* as *ratio*. In other words logos, reason, becomes narrowed down to denote the rational ability of the human subject to approach and define the truth. Most notably, this ability of the human reason comes forward as a power fully adequate in itself to attain the truth. This means that logos, with this narrow meaning of reason (*facultas rationis*), is now brought to the fore as the ultimate principle on the basis of which we certify the accuracy of knowledge and we arrive at the truth. The immediate consequence of this is that man’s intellect becomes the measure to work out and understand all things and that accordingly God becomes now part of a system of thought; God is identified with the highest, the most refined notion, which is approached and understood through the rational capacity of the mind and on the basis of systematized and logically certified conceptual advances. In other words the God presented by the human intellect, the

¹⁸⁰ Heidegger, p. 21.

¹⁸¹ Yannaras – quoting in this Heidegger – sees Descartes dependent on the scholastic tradition and he lists a series of names whom, in their expression of this tradition, Descartes followed: Augustine, Campanella, Anselm of Canterbury, Hugh of Saint-Victor, Bonaventura, Thomas Aquinas: Heidegger, p. 21.

God that men's rationalism approaches and puts forward in a manner of well-ordered, analytical affirmations ends up, basically, as a rational principle which can be logically verified. God ends up as an idea, even if the highest one. He appears in other words to be a rational product, a logical conclusion; He is the outcome of a rational and methodical consistency. The God of the scholastics thus had little to do with the reality of life. God became a noble concept that answered the need of the human *ratio* to identify God with the *prima causa*, the primal and creative principle of the worldly order. However, such an approach to the matter of God placed the foundation stone for a quite idolatrous account of God, a version of God as an idea, in other words an entity created rather by man, and not the Creator. God was identified perhaps with the mostly advanced and dignified idea and was understood as the principle of the highest supremacy; still, however, He was in the best case mainly a concept, the product of rationalization. Such an approach, however, undermined the kind of God proclaimed in the scriptures, which was a divine Logos directly engaging with the reality of human history and life, a God who connected immediately with the actual world and human corporeality, a God who was known as a historical and close presence. Instead, the conceptually verified God was not any longer a real presence to be related to and experientially known, but rather a distant God, a fine concept, a logical creation that answered to the rational requirements of man's methodical mind. Eventually, the existence of God was not a revealed truth; it was not an experienced presence, as it had originally been put forward in the Gospels. For the scholastic theological mind God's existence was a principle rationally established, it was a consequent conclusion of western rationalism. The latter had sought to validate and to sustain belief in the existence of God on the basis of conceptual and methodically structured verification.¹⁸²

Yannaras' analysis goes on to acknowledge the fact that this conceptualized God whom human thought had established was to be progressively disputed and considered from the point of view of cause-and-effect. It was inevitable that sooner or later the divinity of a God-idea would be called into question. A God that could be perceived and reasoned by the human mind, the divinity, that is, of a God that could be conceived and captured in demonstrable conceptions by the human intellect inevitably came to be severely criticized. It

¹⁸² Cf. Heidegger, pp. 19-22.

was not possible to trust the divinity of the transcendental God who was set up as a perfectly substantiated conception by a being, which was the created man. Faith could not sustain a God that ended up being the product of human creation, an entity invented by another entity, that is, by man. The divinity of a perfect being or of a perfect notion that was conceived by a limited being and mind represented in man was not possible to be upheld for long. Sooner or later there would be some Nietzsche to proclaim God truly absent and dead. Nietzsche, that is, – Yannaras acknowledges – through his kerygma of the death of God, did not put forward some atheist conviction of his own. Nietzsche's public statement that God was dead and that the churches were but his burial place was not a personal belief that the philosopher aspired to disseminate. Nietzsche's account was not propaganda, but only a prophetic announcement, as Heidegger would later identify it and as Yannaras recognizes too.

What we have seen so far is that what we can narrowly understand and define as *ratio*, human reason or logic, became, in the field of Western metaphysics, the leading and exclusive instrument and way to advance towards true knowledge, to know the truth. Ratio was accepted as a self-sufficient knowing agency or method and it was applied as such. In this way the truth was defined on the basis of the possibilities of reason to approach and to expound it. Reality was determined according to the capacity of pure reason to describe it, and then knowledge, in other words what would derive from the labour of the intellect, was also verified through the agency of reasoning/logic. This simply meant that man was rendered the only measure and the ultimate defining power of reality, of the matter of existence and of true knowledge. The dominance, that is, of pure logic or rather its absolute authority led in this way to the absolute mastery of man and created the 'superman', since man's reasoning ability gained ascendancy over God himself. Therefore Descartes, even though he reckoned that his system marked an advance for European metaphysics, in reality, as later criticized by Nietzsche and also endorsed by Heidegger, initiated the problem of the refutation of God and established the 'superman'.¹⁸³

In the first part of *Heidegger and the Areopagite* Yannaras sets out an analysis of the historical course of Western metaphysics. This analysis basically sees European metaphysics

¹⁸³ Heidegger, pp. 22.

as a series of intellectual advances or developments with an inner consistency, developments which led step by step to the very overthrow of the metaphysical system itself, and to the refutation of God whom initially that metaphysical structure seemed to defend. Theology did not escape that setting. With the intellect being in the lead in developing metaphysics, theology consequently became a systematic edifice, a structured scheme of doctrines and ideas that presented, as it were, the ‘geography’ of God. Descartes perhaps was the first to create the presuppositions for this, but he was not the only one who contributed to the fashioning of theology as *scientia*. In the analysis that Yannaras follows here, the positions and the work of Spinoza – who identified one single substance called indifferently nature and God – and of Leibniz – with whom the autonomy of human thought culminates in demonstrating the famous ‘proofs’ for the existence of God, in a way parallel to the manner in which the sciences would attain their authority – are also seen to have been of a critical character for turning theology into a well-ordered system of knowledge that could now – because it was systematized – claim a status similar to that of the now highly developed natural sciences.¹⁸⁴

So all three philosophers, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz are understood, in Yannaras’ analysis, to be decisive figures in the historical course of the European mind, all of whose contributions gradually but consistently added to the same effect that occurred later in time: an atheistic nihilism, the negation of God.

The philosophers mentioned so far, Yannaras goes on, represent the time of rationalism, the phase in the history of the European intellect where *ratio* is the sovereign apparatus, as it were, for doing metaphysics. However rationalism is only the first stage in the epoch of the *intellectus fidei*. The common denominator of all the phases in this new age in which faith in God aspires to take up the authority of a logically valid theoretical system is the

¹⁸⁴ *Heidegger*, pp. 23-7. In the understanding of the tradition with which, however, Yannaras identifies himself and which he felt he represented at the time of his encountering the European setting, theology is not a science or it cannot be only a science in the sense the latter has been exercised in modern times; in modern times theology indeed sought to imitate the positive sciences, on the grounds of the advance the latter could present. See Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Theology, however, as it becomes apparent in the second part of *Heidegger and Areopagite* is a matter beyond any systematic study and investigation, if it is to remain honest and truly a word or logos about God. It is what becomes available in the life of the Church, what becomes known in prayer. Theology is the fruit of prayer, as the famous statement of Evagrius tells us (‘if you are a theologian you will pray truly and if you pray truly you are a theologian’: *On Prayer* 61). In the ecclesiastical understanding of the term, theology is what God informs us about as we take steps to get to know and come near Him. This may well incorporate all the scientific knowledge that we can possibly have, but is not identified solely with it, it may well take it into account but goes beyond it.

sole dominion of the human subject; as we noted earlier with regard to rationalism, man is the decisive factor, the measure for reaching true knowledge, for arriving at the truth. Therefore a next stage following rationalism, but still characterized by the same ‘monism of the subject’, was empiricism. With empiricism the prior condition for validating knowledge is not the subject’s mental power but the experience allowed or provided by the human senses. The burden in other words for knowledge to qualify as true knowledge now falls on the information the subject can gather through the employment of the senses. This new fashion in the history of philosophy is referred to as positive empiricism and is based on the traditional idea that what exists in the mind was previously let in, as it were, by the senses. The experience of the senses is now regarded as the sole way of obtaining valid data for growth in knowledge and for approaching to the truth. It is apparent, therefore, how positivist empiricism, by exalting the role of the senses, remains trapped in the same presupposition of the scholastic epistemology that rationalism had served, which was to assign to the individual subject the exclusive power to administer knowledge and the truth.¹⁸⁵

It is a commonplace to say that intellectual developments in the history of philosophy take place gradually and usually take a long time to become effective, and it is also true that the transition between the different trends is not a clear-cut movement from, as it were, one trend completely to another, but more like a blending process. It happens rather in a way so that elements of the different phases may at times co-exist, or that single voices that articulate the spirit or the principles of a certain period may have lived in terms of time in a previous age. Having this in mind, we could say, with regard to what we discuss here, that it seems as if rationalism prepared the ground for the inexorable death of God and then positivist empiricism came to finish him off by strengthening the exclusive autonomy of the subject’s capacity to decide upon matters such as that of existence and truth. Even more, since with empiricism the emphasis now falls on what can be approached through the human senses and, consequently, since only what can be verified through the direct experience of the senses is trusted as truly existent, rationalist metaphysics is stripped from all grounds of credibility; the existent is now identified solely with what is accessible through empirical observation. Given that for empiricism only the physical world perceived by the senses is believable and therefore

¹⁸⁵ *Heidegger*, p. 27.

existent, the death of God is only at the threshold. Quite predictably then the sciences turn to the exploration of the empirical world resigning from any effort to investigate what lies beyond the terrestrial order. At the same time metaphysics aspires to attain a more epistemological content and status. In both cases the new conditions that human thought has imposed render the matter of God irrelevant.¹⁸⁶

Yannaras then goes back in his exposition of the historical development of European metaphysics to explain that the event of the Reformation in the sixteenth century was essentially a reaction against the beginnings in the late Middle Ages of the philosophical and the theological setting that we have tried to describe here so far, and which was the reference of humans to a rationalized God. The Reformation was a protest against the rationalism that had been imposed in the realm of Christian faith; it was an opposition to the analytical theology that was presented as an objectively true set of beliefs and which had principally introduced God as a notion or a set of notions, as the conceptualized supreme being that could be objectively validated. The Church of the Pope was at the time the institutionalized expression of this scholastic form of theology and it was therefore this Church with which the Reformation did battle.

However, Yannaras explains, the Reformation itself basically remained in the same trap of the 'monism of the subject' which characterized rationalism, while battling the latter, which otherwise it wanted to defeat. The Reformation, Yannaras goes on, reacted against the rationally objective validation of metaphysics by putting forward the importance of man's faith.¹⁸⁷ It maintained that God was not reachable by human reason and that in fact the Christian God was a hidden God. He was not a God directly known, but one who had disguised himself in the event of the Cross. So God's divinity had been hidden on the Cross, while the Cross was at the same time the only way in which God had chosen to present himself. Therefore, in the theological approach the Reformation put forward, it takes faith and only faith to recognize God and to know him. *Sola fide* is thus the new dictum in the period of the Reformation; faith alone is now put forward as the tool to unravel the mystery of God. Consequently individual faith is the absolute possibility for the subject to know and to draw

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Heidegger, p. 28.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Heidegger, pp. 33-5.

near to God. The Reformation thus, Yannaras notes, laid emphasis on the psychological or emotional participation of the individual in the mystery of the Cross, as the guarantee for achieving knowledge of God. However, the *theologia crucis* in the period of the Reformation and the sovereign role of personal faith carried on the same attitude as the scholastic theology did before: the assumption that the knowledge of God is a matter of individual achievement that can be realized within the limits of the subject's potentialities. Yannaras considers that also the mystics of the Post-Reformation years – whether Protestant or Catholic – took the same line; he mentions Jakob Boehme and Angelus Silesius, and characterizes their position as that the divine world becomes known through the man-microcosm and his tangible experience rather than through abstract conceptual structures of objective proofs.¹⁸⁸

In Yannaras' understanding, then, the anti-rationalism of the Reformation culminated in the movement of pietism that developed within Protestantism at the end of the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth century with parallels in the Catholic world.¹⁸⁹ This simply means that the religious experience of the individual person assumed priority over theological formulations and doctrinal faith, since religious experience was considered the only place, as we saw, where God became approachable. Religious practice, then, was what mainly mattered, and it actually involved the spiritual renewal of the individual, which was interpreted more and more in moralistic terms. Consequently, with pietism the emphasis falls on the observance of the moral law while the authenticity of the religious life is measured by compliance to the standards of a moral life. Morality in this way was put forward and understood not so much as the fruit of the spiritual renovation of the person, but rather as its presupposition. Therefore morality, identified with obedience to the Christian law, became a central aspect of religious practice and thus assumed prior significance. In this way pietism put forward a type of moralistic religiosity. Other aspects, then, of the modern setting, Yannaras argues, such as the importance that modern mentality placed on the factors of efficiency and usefulness with regard to all the aspects of human activity, contributed to strengthening the role of pietism in a social way: pietism appeared acceptable for the reason that it promoted the Christian religion as a socially useful thing. Christians engaged with practical welfare activity for the public and presented the gospel as empowered and convincing owing to its social

¹⁸⁸ Heidegger, p. 35.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Heidegger, pp. 36-7.

objectives, which were, in general terms, to eliminate evil in society and to make the world a better place.¹⁹⁰

Yannaras rounds off his exposition of the historical process that led to the ‘death of God’ by referring to three more critical philosophers: Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Kant is brought in as a thinker who developed out of the mood of Protestant pietism and whose *Critique of Pure Reason* undermined any metaphysical notion of God and laid the foundation for God as an essential principle that is required if morality is to make sense.¹⁹¹ God, this means, has to exist because his existence justifies the empirical conflict of the human consciousness between the ethical categories of good and bad, as well as man’s moral exertion in deciding what the right thing to do in life is. God thus is the necessary principle in a system of ethics and Christ is the personified Good.¹⁹² With this ethical approach to the matter of God however, Yannaras notes, Kant initiated just another form of the man-centred atheism – moralistic atheism. In so far as the history of the Western intellect is concerned, man is once again the axis for constructing interpretations about the True and the Real on the basis of isolated aspects of his experience, namely this time the ethical requirements of the human subject. Human individuality is still the centre and the means for understanding divine reality.

According to Yannaras, Fichte then takes over Kant’s critique and regards the moral requirements of the subject’s consciousness as the place to detect the content of all revelation. With Fichte the Ego remains the fundamental presupposition for the achievement of all knowledge. It is on the basis of the consciousness of the Self and its distinction from the outside world, which constitutes the non-Self, that the human subject attains all cognitive and ethical achievements. In other words, it is again human individuality which is the embodiment of all true knowledge with regard to all aspects of human experience, including the issue of God. Fichte does not accept God’s existence as an absolute reality but sees it only linked with man’s moral conscience.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Yannaras elsewhere argues that the exemplary systematisation of the social structures found in western societies, with their perfectly administered ruling systems and organizational efficiency is a reflection of, and has its roots in, this rationalistic attitude of shaping life by adjusting to standards of well-ordered human activity in terms of efficiency and usefulness. *Right Reason and Social Practice* offers an analysis from a sociological angle of the note of rationalism in the shaping of Western European civilization.

¹⁹¹ Heidegger, pp. 36-8.

¹⁹² Heidegger, p. 38.

¹⁹³ Heidegger, pp. 38-40.

Like Fichte, Hegel recognizes in the dialectical feature of the human intellect the ability to understand objective reality and to identify itself. The dialectic power of the self-consciousness that allows the subject to distinguish and define itself as opposed to the outer world is for Hegel the only basis for acknowledging that the Absolute reveals itself in finite reality and also for classifying human subjectivity in relation to the infinite.¹⁹⁴ To put it in other words, if the Self did not have the ability to reach an elaborate understanding of itself and outside reality through a process of synthesizing the data and the positions presented to it, God would be a meaningless or empty concept. Basically God is disqualified from any autonomous existence, and that is here also on the basis of the absolutized role of the human subjectivity. Hence the positions of all the philosophical approaches presented here by Yannaras, that is, of Kant, Fichte and Hegel, also fail to sustain religious faith and they eventually contribute towards the Death of God and atheistic nihilism.

All the phases of the intellectual development described here so far which characterized Western metaphysics have, according to Yannaras, one and the same thing in common: human individuality becomes the centre and the absolute means for understanding and discussing the matter of God. It is man in his restricted intellectual and empirical potential that constitutes the decisive factor and sets the principles for defining God's existence. Consequently, the human subject seeks to define its relation with the divine reality in a way that provides the individual with moral reassurance. Such a human quest found its expression in the phenomenon of pietism and the moralistic model of the Christian life. However, all these attempts to expound the issue of God's existence and to justify religious faith in fact only result in an anthropocentric edifice, which eventually fails to maintain its credibility and collapses, giving way to the philosophical Death of God.

Therefore Nietzsche's statements about the death and the absence of God¹⁹⁵ arrived not as a personal proclamation but as a historical realization. In Nietzsche's delivery of his message we have an act of just giving voice, honestly and courageously, to what had happened

¹⁹⁴ *Heidegger*, pp. 41-2.

¹⁹⁵ *Heidegger*, and following him Yannaras, acknowledges that Nietzsche was not the first to talk of a dead God, but rather the first to do it conscious of what that meant, of the results that were to follow, see *Heidegger*, pp. 43-4.

historically in the area of the philosophical intellect and of religious faith, to what had already taken place in European metaphysics. Nietzsche was by and large regarded as a blasphemous atheist. However, in reality it was simply that he was the only one bold enough to speak out what he perceived as already completed, what had already been realized over the course of time in the sphere of philosophical metaphysics. And the statements that Nietzsche put forward about the death of God would inevitably overthrow the whole system of values for the European mind, since Nietzsche's statements basically attacked the very presuppositions of the European consciousness, God as the primal Cause and as the highest authority upon which social life and moral conduct had been structured.

The new intellectual phase, then, that the straightforward announcement presented in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*) introduced and which humanity had now to face was nihilism. For Yannaras, nihilism, the philosophy of nothingness, basically rejected the 'conceptual idols' of God, in other words it denied God as identified with the rationalistic concepts of scholastic theology and theistic philosophy. Nihilism did not in itself represent some kind of destructive attitude that wanted to bring down all the values in a spirit of manic destruction. To be a nihilist did not mean to disqualify all the good that was there in the finest of human beliefs and principles. It was rather an open and earnest admission that the so-called values and fine beliefs were not really such. Nihilism was a consequence of man-centred metaphysics and opposed it; it abandoned anthropocentric notions about God and thus left the 'place' of God in human thought empty. The concepts that once used to define divine reality and were identified with God were now annulled; their content – God created by the human intellect – was not there anymore, he had been invalidated. The God of Western metaphysics had died.

To sum up Yannaras' view of the historical development of the Western intellect: first rationalism, by putting forward intellectual certainties, aspired to replace the living Church experience, but only provoked its rational overthrow and prepared the ground for the ascendancy of empiricism; empiricism then strengthened the authority of the individual and consequently, in the long term, brought about nihilism. Similarly, the ways of Roman Catholic fideism and of Protestant pietism resulted in utilitarianism, where values were assessed practically and used as means to effect social and moral objectives. This in turn led gradually

to the demolition of all values, through a process of growing uncertainty and lack of conviction for the traditional hierarchy of values.¹⁹⁶ Therefore European metaphysics and Christian theology were inevitably run down.

Yannaras sees, then, in Heidegger someone who takes up Nietzsche's nihilist kerygma fearlessly and acknowledges openly the bankruptcy of Western metaphysics and of Christian theology as that was represented by scholasticism. Heidegger recognizes the leading role of human subjectivity in the development of Western metaphysics and the dominating authority of reason. He accepts that the efforts made by Kant and Hegel to limit the primacy of reason in verifying the existent did not really manage to break through the limitations of the subject. Even with Kant and Hegel the human subject remained the measure and the centre in determining the matter of existence, and consequently ontology and theology stayed anthropocentric.¹⁹⁷ For Yannaras, that is, Heidegger represents a modern philosopher who openly recognises that the monism of the subject has characterised the advance of Western metaphysics and who consents to the fact that modern times have been defined by the way that humans have been doing ontology, that is, in an anthropocentric manner.

The analysis, however, of the historical process of the European intellect by Heidegger is presented, Yannaras notes, on the basis of a significant distinction. Heidegger, here following Nietzsche, differentiates historical Christendom, in other words the historical presentation of the Church that was often a presence of and a quest for social and political authority, from the actual Christian message and faith that was originally put forward in the scriptures. Whether Nietzsche really meant anything by this distinction, whether it was really a way of limiting the criticism he was bound to receive, is not our concern. Yannaras takes this distinction seriously. In the light of such a distinction Nietzsche's pronouncement about the death of God can then be interpreted as not substantially a statement of an anti-Christian nature. Nietzsche's criticism was not in fact directed against the Christian message of the Gospels, simply because the message of the Gospels was not the same as the historical reality of Christendom. In other words, Nietzsche's kerygma was a criticism of the historical alienation and distortion of the Christian faith in the West. Through his critique Nietzsche

¹⁹⁶ Heidegger, p. 54.

¹⁹⁷ Heidegger, p. 51.

actually targeted the departure of the Western Churches from, or their abandonment of, the Christianity of the first centuries presented in the New Testament. Nietzsche's nihilism did not thus envisage the actual God of the early Christian experience, but rather the historical formulations of Christian theology that had been shown to fall short of its original content. Accordingly, Heidegger's analysis also acknowledges that a Christian presentation, a life that presents itself in the name of the Christian God, may not be truly Christian, and vice versa, that a life not obviously connected with the course of historical Christianity may in fact be Christian. Moreover, the death and absence of God pronounced in modern times does not suggest the absence of the God of primal ecclesial experience. The absence of God is an event or an insight that relates only to certain historical formulations of Christianity in Western Christendom.¹⁹⁸

Consequently, Yannaras takes Nietzsche's kerygma as in reality seeking to preserve a more divine view of God, an understanding of God more divine than the notional idols of theistic metaphysics. In Heidegger's analysis, then, Yannaras comments, European nihilism is seen as an effort to *preserve* the divinity of God. The philosophy of nothingness does not seek to annul what metaphysics would see as a truth 'beyond' the world of the senses. It rather aspires to invalidate the anthropocentric systems or views that were falsely and misleadingly identified with that reality 'beyond'. Nihilism, in other words, does not mean that there is no longer any God to believe in, but rather that the images of God believed in so far were not worthy of God and therefore not credible.¹⁹⁹

Nihilism, then, in Heidegger, Yannaras explains, opens the way anew for a true metaphysics.²⁰⁰ Heidegger, as we saw, makes a distinction between the 'dead God' pronounced by Nietzsche, that is the God of Western metaphysics, and the God presented in the Christian Gospel. Consequently the modern 'nothingness' does not mean the complete inability to proceed to any formulation about God or the denial of any qualities of God whatsoever. The modern 'emptiness' of the place of God, the un-definability of God, rather leaves space for reaching a more theological view of faith about God than the conceptual-rational approaches and interpretations allowed us to reach. In *Heidegger and the Areopagite*

¹⁹⁸ Heidegger, pp. 56-9

¹⁹⁹ Heidegger, pp. 59-60.

²⁰⁰ Heidegger, pp. 60-4.

Yannaras wants to show how Heidegger's approach to the matter of the existent opens the way to a true ontology, in a manner similar to what had been expressed in the field of Christian theology already in the first centuries of the Christian East. Basically, Yannaras argues, Heidegger does not understand Being as the first and causal principle for beings, he does not see Being, that is, as *something* that *is* or *exists*; in other words Heidegger does not identify Being with a sort of entity, even though superior as it would be in all ways. This is because Heidegger starts off by examining Being and beings not on the basis of their relationship – which approach renders Being the cause of beings and leads to an understanding of them in terms of cause and effect – but instead on the basis of the difference between Being and beings. Thus beings reveal themselves to us, while Being remains hidden. Beings, as it were, emerge at the surface of existence as phenomena; they disclose themselves as coming into view from oblivion (ἀ-ληθεύουν), thus beings are what we can see and observe. Being on the contrary stays veiled and unknown (in λήθη). It is in the nature of Being to be concealed and the only way we can catch a glimpse of it is through beings.²⁰¹ In other words a being is a *way* of Being. Therefore, what does not come forward as a being, what remains hidden, is not necessarily 'nothing'. If being is what presents Being as just a *way* of Being, then nil or the non-being, in other words that which does not disclose itself, is not automatically identified with 'nothing'. Nil is thus rather another *way* of Being, as being is a *way* of Being. 'Nothing' is not in this way identified with Being itself, but rather belongs to the mode (τρόπος) of Being, is another aspect of the *way to be* (τρόπος τοῦ εἶναι). This means that the question whether that which does not disclose itself is really 'nothing' or not remains open. In other words God is certainly not a being, a tangible entity; however the question of faith in Him still remains open.

The attraction that Yannaras seemed to experience to Heidegger's analysis of the state of Western metaphysics and the philosopher's approach to the metaphysical problem can be interpreted in this dual way: first, Heidegger represented for Yannaras, as we have mentioned again, an honest voice that admitted openly the bankruptcy of Western metaphysics, something that, for polemical reasons, Yannaras was perhaps all too ready to embrace.

²⁰¹ Heidegger, p. 60.

Heidegger, as well as Sartre, and in a way the existentialists of those days in general, voiced openly an issue that was there but which the great theologians, as it were, had not been able to recognize and face: that the traditional beliefs, as they had developed and been presented through the centuries up to modern times, could not be sustained any longer, and as a result of this man found himself helplessly alone, having to redefine the truth about grave matters such as that of his existence, of where he comes from and where he goes, of the meaning of life and of how to make choices and reach decisions or, in other words, of the grounds upon which to judge what the right thing to do is, of the reason or the absurdity of pain and of death. Secondly, Heidegger, with his interpretation of the matter of Being and beings, seemed to offer a different ground for a metaphysical approach from what Western metaphysics had seen so far. Heidegger's method refused to determine Being in any other way than to say that Being is that which stays unknown and hidden. Being, as we already explained earlier above, discloses itself only in beings, which are *ways* of Being, but it cannot be associated absolutely with any of the things we know. Heidegger's philosophy refuses to furnish Being with any of the descriptions applied to beings. Such an approach did not allow for any sort of worldly or human-experience-based formulations to be connected with Being as such, and thus left open the possibility of assuming a more holy, as it were, or superhuman view of the transcendental. In Heidegger's philosophy, to put it in other words, the transcendental was said and allowed to be really so. It was beyond all ability of man whatsoever to know, to define and to speak about it. Heidegger's understanding of Being imposed upon man or at least invited from him modesty and silence.

Yannaras seemed to have found this analysis immensely attractive, as he felt that in fact the same attitude had been already expressed in the theological tradition of the Christian East. Reading Heidegger, Yannaras felt that the philosopher's position found echoes in the stance presented in the Eastern Christian tradition since the early days of the Church and especially through the ideas of the so-called Areopagitical texts. This stance is namely the theology of apophaticism. Therefore, in the second part of his book *Heidegger and the Areopagite* Yannaras presents the apophatic theology of the eastern Christian tradition and shows how it bears on the matter of God as discussed here. Heidegger might well have been surprised at the way his analysis was being made to serve Yannaras' espousal of the Eastern Christian tradition. However, he himself prepares the way for such an approach when he

reaches back behind the tradition of Western metaphysics, inaugurated by Plato and Aristotle, to the pre-Socratics, especially Herakleitos, where he finds hints pointing to his analysis of Being and his notion of truth as ἀ-λήθεια – un-concealedness.

4. Apophaticism and the unknowability of God

When it comes to the apophaticism of Christian theology Yannaras appears ready and confident to make another distinction, reflecting his understanding of the East and the West as two separate milieus in terms of their philosophical and theological developments. This time he sets apart the form that theological apophaticism assumed in the Eastern Church tradition from the type of apophaticism that has been commonly practised in Western theology. Thus Yannaras finds that apophaticism in the theology of the Christian East is not quite the same thing as the apophaticism that has been followed in the Western realm of Christendom.²⁰²

Apophaticism for the West, Yannaras argues, has been pursued within the same frame of mind that characterized European intellectual history, a summary of which Yannaras offers, as we saw and sketched out above, in the first part of *Heidegger and the Areopagite*. This means that apophaticism as practised in the West was just another expression of the philosophical outlook of the European intellect, namely what Yannaras refers to as the ‘monism of the subject’.²⁰³ As we have seen already, the whole of the European intellectual advancement has been characterised by the fact that the human subject was always the starting point for doing philosophy and metaphysics. Man, sometimes with his fully authoritative *ratio*, sometimes with his deified senses, was in every case the condition, the decisive factor for defining the real, the existent, the One or the Supreme that supposedly lay beyond all human experience. Apophaticism then, as practised by the systematic theologians of the West, according to Yannaras, was only another aspect of the attitude of defining the transcendental

²⁰² In *Right Reason and Social Practice* Yannaras discusses apophaticism not in theology but in terms of philosophical thought and the practice of political activity. Also *Τό Πητό και τό Ἀρρητό* [*What can be said and what cannot be said*] (Athens: Ikaros, 1999) is an analysis by Yannaras of the function and the limitations of rhetoric to express or indicate the actual experience or knowledge to which it refers; an analysis of the limits of language as identified in the interval between names and their meaning.

²⁰³ This is not originally in fact Yannaras’ expression, but one that he borrows from Yvon Belaval, see *Right Reason*, p. 220.

on the basis of human means. Basically what the apophaticism in the West involved in general was a rejection – or negation – of the qualities of beings when referring to the reality of God. Thus, for example, since worldly things exist in time and are determined by it having an end, the element of time is denied to divine reality, and thus God is beyond time and knows no end (ἄ-χρονος, ἄ-τελεύτητος). Apophaticism, in other words, meant to refuse to confer on God attributes that belonged to created beings. This, however, was done in such a way that God could still be described and referred to in terms of what could be known and defined; God was just the reversal of it. This found expression in the development of branches in theology such as *theologia naturalis* and *theologia negativa*, which Yannaras sees as the aberration on the part of Western theology from true apophaticism.²⁰⁴

Apophatic theology as it has been put forward within the Eastern Christian tradition, Yannaras asserts, is not just associated with the use of negative language in relation to God's reality. Instead, it involves a further and more comprehensive resignation from any hope of designating the reality of God in the categories of reason, whether affirmative or negative. To be apophatic means to acknowledge the complete impossibility on man's part to know the very nature or the substance of God.²⁰⁵ The substance of God remains beyond any capacity of human knowledge, approach or understanding. God's being is a reality completely other from all our experiences, it is beyond the categories of space and time, only in terms of which we are able to understand beings or anything at all that exists. It is beyond our capability, therefore, to form any idea about how God is in Himself.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Other Orthodox theologians, however, would not be so dismissive of Western apophaticism. Bishop Kallistos, for example, writing on the English hermit of the early 14th century Richard Rolle, finds an apophaticism that in his words is not a relative but a radical one, and asserts that he would have been wholeheartedly endorsed by the Cappadocians in his exposition of the transcendence and incomprehensibility of God ('God is beyond our understanding because we are created. He can never be comprehended by us as he is in himself: p. 182): Kallistos of Diokleia 'The Holy Name of Jesus in East and West: the Hesychasts and Richard Rolle', *Sobornost* 4:2, 1982, pp. 163-184, where also further examples of people and texts – for example *The Cloud of Unknowing* – of a western origin (in particular of 14th century England) are brought up as expressing an apophatic stance.

²⁰⁵ This is the case not only for the Areopagitical texts but according also to other Church Fathers, as is clear from the references Yannaras makes to the patristic tradition, for example drawing from St Maximus and St John Damascene.

²⁰⁶ In this Yannaras is voicing a position expounded by many other Orthodox theologians, for example Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae. Vladimir Lossky, also based on the Areopagite, put a strong emphasis on the radical character of apophaticism in the Eastern Church that wants to maintain the complete unknowability of the 'unfathomable depths of God' and the absolute character of the 'divine incomprehensibility': Vladimir Lossky, *The mystical theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957), especially chapter two, on 'The Divine Darkness', pp. 23-43. Though Yannaras cannot have met Lossky, who died in 1958, Lossky must have been a mentor and guide for Yannaras, as the latter himself acknowledges: Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with*

We will come back to this distinction Yannaras makes in relation to theological apophaticism further on, after a short digression we must make here to spell out a crucial differentiation that we find in the course of the Eastern Church tradition which is also presupposed for Yannaras' discussion of apophatic theology and the knowledge of God. Yannaras is anxious to make clear that the apophatic theology of the Church does not imply, and is not the way to, agnosticism. There is, as it were, a 'safety valve' in the theology of the Eastern Church. Alongside with the conviction expressed by the apophatic theology of the Greek Fathers, according to which it is utterly inappropriate to try to specify God as such, there is also an important distinction made by the Greek theologians: the distinction between God's essence and God's energies.²⁰⁷ The Christian tradition may have defended the complete unknowability of God ever since the time of the Areopagitical texts, but it has not ended up in agnosticism. Christians did not set off to believe in or to proclaim a mystified kind of God. Their God was a personal God, in other words, a God who revealed Himself to humans directly on various occasions within history, ever since the days of the Old Testament. God's personal revelation, then, for Christians, culminated in the historical person of Christ in whom his disciples and every other faithful Christian from there on recognised the Son and Word of God. However, none of the ways in which God revealed Himself made God's Being or substance as such available to man's knowledge. The theological formulations of the Church expressed this fact by means of the 'ineffable but real distinction' that needs to be made 'between the unknowable essence and the self-revealing energies of the Divinity' or, as Dionysius puts it, between the 'unions' and 'distinctions' in God; the latter are God's 'processions (πρόοδοι) beyond Himself, His manifestations (ἐκφάνσεις) ... or forces (δυνάμεις)'.²⁰⁸ In terms of their results the energies of God are also referred to as 'being-imparting' (οὐσιώσεις), 'life-imparting' (ζωώσεις), 'wisdom-imparting' (σοφοποιήσεις).²⁰⁹ The energies of God are the way in which God reveals himself, they are

God. Trinity, Apophaticism and Divine-Human Communion (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 198, n. 4.

²⁰⁷ This distinction became famous in the hesychast controversy, as employed by St Gregory Palamas. Palamas traced the distinction back to the Fathers and Yannaras does not hesitate to accept Palamas here.

²⁰⁸ *Mystical theology*, p. 72.

²⁰⁹ *Heidegger*, p. 100.

the course through which God allows himself be identified; in them ‘everything that exists partakes, thus making God known in His creatures’.²¹⁰ It means, therefore, that all we can approach or get to know of God is his energies, that is those ‘actions’ of Him or ‘movements’ through which He relates to the world – in the main God’s creative and providential energies. In Yannaras’ words, we can therefore form some idea of the *way* (τρόπος) God is, through his creation, in a similar way that we can understand something about the personality of an architect or a musician through what they create, whether a house or a piece of music.²¹¹

For the Christian theological tradition the very nature of the Godhead, God’s being as such remains unknowable for humans. God’s nature is a reality of absolute unknowability and incomprehensibility for created man. Even though the essence of God cannot be known, God, however, reveals himself through his energies and man has the possibility to know not God’s nature but God’s *way* of being. This is a possibility that man has due to what theological language calls the energies or activities (ἐνέργειες) of God. The energies of God, in other words, are the ways through which God discloses himself and becomes accessible and known to us; the divine energies are the channels, as it were, through which man gets to have a grasp of the presence of God and to know what God is like: not the essence of God but the *way* God is. And for the theological tradition of the Church the Christian God has been known as a personal God; theological language specifies the way that God ‘exists’, or rather the way we know God, as a personal way. The phrase ‘way of existence’ (τρόπος ὑπάρξεως) is, as we shall see, central to Yannaras’ understanding of what it is to be personal.²¹²

Yannaras explains that we name the way that God exists as personal based on our experience of man’s personal existence: we get to know man’s existence in the multitude of personal individualities, that is in the existential otherness personified in each unique and unrepeatable human person. And each human person discloses itself to us through a series of acts and expressions, which are the human energies. These are common to all people since

²¹⁰ *Mystical theology*, p. 72.

²¹¹ It is characteristic of Yannaras – in relation to the distinction between ‘essence’ and ‘energies’ that we refer to here and also in his discussion about the uniqueness of each personal existence – to bring up the example of artistic creativity; he typically takes the names of Van Gogh and Mozart, where the work of the artists, as a result of their creative energy, is evidence about its creator, without being identified either with the creator himself or his energy of creating, see e.g. *Heidegger*, pp. 101, 105.

²¹² This distinction between essence and energies remains important for Yannaras and he returns to it frequently. See his article, ‘The Distinction between Essence and Energies and its Importance for Theology’, SVTQ 19 (1975), pp. 232-45.

they are shared by the common human nature, however they are realized in the case of each individual in a totally distinctive, matchless and inimitable way.²¹³ Thus, as Yannaras puts it, by participating in the energies that exemplify the otherness of each person – for example the energy of speech, of thought, of imagination, or of will and so on – we get to know each individual existence and are able to distinguish their personal distinctiveness.²¹⁴ In a similar way, *mutatis mutandis*, by participating in the divine energies we get to know God as personally existing, that is, as a presence of otherness, distinct and free from any predeterminations. Moreover, we get to know God as the presence of a Triad, of three distinct hypostases, which are at the same time the one and single God. The fact, Yannaras comments, that the Christian God is a Trinitarian God indicates that what we humans describe as God's personal existence is nonetheless free even from our conventional image of 'person' as 'individual existence'. Therefore even this way of referring to God is not to be conditioned by the limitedness that the terms carry from their use in the conformity of our reality. In a similar way Lossky notes that when the Areopagitical texts refer to God not just as 'One' or 'Unity' – terms that Plotinus had used to describe the divine – but as 'Triad', this is in fact a way of preserving the unknowability of God. 'Trinity' alludes to the fact that God is neither one nor many, and that He transcends even this antinomy and all the names we may use about Him, remaining beyond knowledge in what He is.²¹⁵

It is once again pointed out, in this way, that no wording or formulation (λεκτική διατύπωση) can adequately provide us with true knowledge of God. The knowledge of God lies beyond all possible specifications of an objective character and takes place only in our direct participation in the divine life revealed to us in the Church and through God's energies. Therefore this knowledge has been described by the Patristic mind as an 'ascent towards the divine incomprehensibility' or the darkness of God. It is rather a 'knowledge' of ignorance in which by unknowing we know what surpasses understanding.²¹⁶ It is the state that theological language also delineates as mystical union with God that involves not a method of the intellect

²¹³ Heidegger, p. 105.

²¹⁴ Hence we recognize the music of Mozart, or we see a painting and say 'This is Van Gogh': *Elements of Faith*, p. 45 and elsewhere.

²¹⁵ *Mystical Theology*, p. 31.

²¹⁶ Cf. *Mystical Theology*, p. 28.

but the abandonment of all created categories: purification, κάθαρσις. Lossky, nevertheless, clarifies that for the Eastern tradition mysticism and theology are not separated or opposed. There is no sharp distinction between them; one is necessary for the other or impossible without the other. This saves mysticism from being taken as equal to agnosticism; hence we can talk of the ‘mystical knowledge’ of God. Besides, unlike gnosticism for example, knowledge for the Church is the means to the end, which is union with God. Thus theology as formulated in the doctrines of the Church is the foundation of Christian spirituality.²¹⁷

However, no matter how we specify in our human language this idea we get to form about God, we should still be conscious of the fact that none of our formulations can define God’s reality as such. Nothing we say can identify or exhaustively express what God really is. Even doctrinal theology – for example the teaching of the Church concerning Trinitarian theology – does not give an objective presentation of God’s Being; it is rather an apparatus of a descriptive or indicative nature in relation to God, that puts forward what or how we ought to believe with regard to God in order to have a more orthodox, that is truthful, rather than a falsified understanding of Him and thus to be saved. To put it in a different way, the doctrinal formulations are rather meant to have the function of a rule or a standard that delineates the way to be followed with regard to the faith, leaving out or eliminating convictions that would be deceptive; they are not at all utterances of an exhaustive character, nor do they offer any objective or fully comprehensive description of God’s being.²¹⁸

Hence the need for apophaticism, which, Yannaras points out, is understood – within the Eastern theological approach – as the refusal to accept that the truth can be exhausted in any formulation. Here, therefore, we have not simply the negation of qualities of the created order in relation to God, but the all-embracing negation of identifying the truth with any way of talking – whether positively or negatively – that we use to refer to the truth. Apophaticism here, in other words, is the resignation altogether on the part of the knowing subject from any

²¹⁷ *Mystical Theology*, pp. 8-11.

²¹⁸ See *Mystical Theology*, pp. 39-40, on how even cataphatic theology leads to apophaticism. Also, *Heidegger*, p. 117 and Andrew Louth ‘The influence of Denys the Areopagite on Eastern and Western spirituality in the fourteenth century’, *Sobornost* 4:2 (1982), p. 187: ‘... cataphatic and symbolic theology ...leads beyond itself, for it points to a God who is unknowable. The very words the sacred Scriptures give us to praise God with, the very rites and ceremonies the sacred Tradition has handed down to us, point beyond themselves to an ineffable mystery ... the Divine Darkness, where the soul knows God by unknowing in an ecstasy of love’.

‘objective’ setting down of the Truth.²¹⁹ Apophaticism takes an utterly different stance from that of the positivism of knowledge; it rejects any manner of ascribing absolute authority to any methods and procedures that are applied in order to arrive at or convey valid knowledge.²²⁰ This does not mean, Yannaras makes clear, that apophaticism in theology fosters arbitrariness or irrationality by turning its back on the principles of logic and the coherent formulation of knowledge. Apophaticism accepts the methods of the philosophical approach to knowledge, but does not see these methods as the only effective ways of providing us with convincing truths. This however, Yannaras says, has been the path down which the West went. Western theological thought deviated from the true attitude towards knowledge by taking the means of attaining to knowledge – such as *theologia naturalis* and *theologia negativa* – as absolute methods that lead to binding truths.²²¹ Scholastic and neo-scholastic theology put forward the claim that it is possible for us to know God in an analogical way, and in order to sustain this suggestion it fell back on the Areopagitical texts. Such a proposal, Yannaras admits, had its theoretical origins in Aristotle’s teaching on analogy. However, Aristotle, Yannaras explains, did not apply this principle of analogy to ontology. He did not draw from such an analogy any conclusions about the existence of beings, in other words about the relationship of beings and Being. Aristotle, that is, did not go on to speak of Being or to draw knowledge about Being from beings, as the scholastics did.²²² The crucial section of the Areopagitical texts upon which the scholastics sought to base the teaching of the analogical knowledge of God, Yannaras explains, does not really uphold such a suggestion.²²³ The knowledge of the substance of God is fully ruled out in the Fathers, and analogical knowledge is suggested only in relation to God’s distinctive qualities or energies. Besides, the created order that allows us to describe in an analogical way God’s properties is only a reflection of these properties and by no means is it identified with God’s energies as such. This allows, Yannaras goes on, space for the factor of human freedom and for the

²¹⁹ Heidegger, p. 71.

²²⁰ See how Lossky also appeals to this, and his point that apophaticism is an attitude and not just a branch of theology: *Mystical Theology*, p. 42.

²²¹ Heidegger, p. 72.

²²² Heidegger, p. 73.

²²³ Heidegger, pp. 74-6. See also Vladimir Lossky, ‘La notion des “analogies” chez le ps. Denys l’Aréopagite’, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 5 (1930), pp. 279-309.

element of man's personal readiness to approach or to receive the analogical knowledge to which the created images only point.²²⁴

In this way Yannaras makes space, as we will see, for his discussion on the theme of personal participation in the knowledge of God,²²⁵ in relation to which he later on defines the apophaticism he sees practised in the East as the apophaticism of the person as opposed to the apophaticism of Western theology, the apophaticism of the scholastics, which he accordingly calls the apophaticism of the substance.²²⁶ I will explain briefly what this distinction by Yannaras means.

Western theology acknowledges that it is impossible to know the substance of God and therefore it denies all known properties with regard to God's essence. The apophaticism of western theology then is the negation of attributing qualities taken from our worldly experience to God's substance. This stance, Yannaras points out, is expressed through negative theology and the apophaticism of the great scholastics, such as Anselm and Aquinas, who were the main 'architects' of the analogical knowledge of God in the West.²²⁷ For Yannaras this constitutes what he describes as the apophaticism of the substance, as it is exercised within a framework where God is still understood as 'something', as the highest of what we could ever think of, which however we acknowledge that we are not in a position to fully understand and possess knowledge of and define. God in a way is already there as a part of our system of thought, but because it is the highest and greatest and most supernatural we could ever conceive, we opt to keep silent about it and not seek to fully represent it by any descriptions; in other words we realize that we need to be apophatic. But we are so in a way that still allows us the confidence for things we *can* say in relation to God, such as that God is transcendental, or that God is beyond knowing.

The apophaticism of the East, however, Yannaras would argue, is an altogether different story. There, apophaticism does not refer to the fact that we cannot attribute any of

²²⁴ Heidegger, p. 79.

²²⁵ Further on knowledge as participation see the section 'Knowledge of God as personal participation' later in the present chapter.

²²⁶ *Τό πρόσωπο και ό έρως* [*Person and Eros*] (Athens: Domos, 2001, 4th edition), § 7.

²²⁷ *Person and Eros*, p. 39. Yannaras sees the apophaticism of the scholastics and of the mystics of the West as simply the other side, as it were, of the same coin of the affirmative and analogical determination of Being. This, however, may not represent a faithful reading of the apophaticism of Aquinas; see Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays*, trans. Daniel O'Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 1957).

the worldly qualities to a supernatural reality, but that even to refer to God as a supernatural reality falls short of the truth of God. Apophaticism in the East means that we acknowledge as inadequate any possible statement about God, even to say that God is beyond knowledge. For the East – due to the distinction between God’s essence and energies to which we referred earlier – God is beyond comprehension and at the same time within knowledge, but it is not possible for that knowledge to be exhaustively expressed in any human way or fully communicated through language, hence apophaticism. Furthermore, to get to know God at all is only possible through personal involvement. Knowledge of God is approached only on a personal basis, through a personal engagement; it takes a direct relating, a relationship. Yannaras, consequently, calls the apophaticism practised in the East ‘apophaticism of the person’, which means that God is known within a personal encounter and as a personal presence; as a personal presence and experience He can be neither known nor expressed exhaustively. God here is not understood and put forward as the ultimate cause or substance, but is rather known as a presence, he reveals himself as a presence within a personal engagement undertaken in the life of Christians. This is very similar to the way Stăniloae understands apophatic theology.²²⁸ For the East, therefore, apophaticism represents the realization or the fact that anything at all we say to refer to the experienced God, any formulations we attempt to describe what we know as an encompassing experience, is inadequate to relate that experience. Thus for Yannaras’ distinction ‘apophaticism of the substance’ means that we cannot define God, any way of describing God needs qualification; for the East apophaticism rather means that we cannot define our *experience* of God, we cannot exhaust our *knowledge* of Him in any definitions. We realize that there is nothing that we can say which will be adequate to denote God’s reality. Nothing of what we can say referring to God and our spiritual experience is fully accurate in an exhaustive way. We basically cannot exhaust or adequately express in any statement what we mean to share as an experience of God – therefore, in the end, the invitation ‘Come and see’ of the fourth gospel.

Yannaras is aware of the danger in this way that we appear to pass to agnosticism or to some obscure mysticism; therefore he notes that personal knowledge is not a completely non-communicated knowledge. The knowledge of God as a result of personal engagement does not

²²⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, trans. Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), pp. 103-17.

take place in isolation and it is not an individual matter,²²⁹ but takes place with and through that personal involvement of others too, that is in the body of the Church. The personal knowledge then which is shared within the body of the Church is formulated in dogmas and articles of faith, and thus the truth that we experience and that we cannot exhaustively communicate is not an individual and mystifying truth; it is a shared and common truth, a knowledge we all get to know, the knowledge of the whole body, which however each member shares in personally, in a personal engagement and participation. Besides, the dogmas we formulate to express our Church experience are not of any exhaustive nature with regard to the reality of God that they refer to, or with regard to the actual knowledge of God Christians may have. The Church experience that is, in which each one of us participates through a personal engagement, cannot be ultimately worded or replaced by any descriptions, hence the constantly applied stance of apophaticism. We could say, then, that the ‘Come and see’ that we mentioned already summarizes the whole attitude of the apophatic theology in the East, which, Yannaras wants to underline, serves not as a way to describe God although in a negative way, but as a dynamic starting-point for the realization of a personal relationship,²³⁰ since it is only on the basis of personal experience, on the basis of each distinct person’s existence that God can be approached and related to. It is therefore the ‘apophaticism of the person’, the apophaticism that points to and at the same time emanates from a personal engagement, which involves the participation of more capacities and not just reason.²³¹ This is how relationship, then, in Yannaras becomes a fundamental category for knowledge.

For the apophatic theology of the East, therefore, even to say that ‘God is personal’ or ‘God is unknowable’ is only a matter of indicative references and thus inadequate, and it is impossible to exhaust what we actually mean to suggest, the experience that we mean to share. It ultimately falls short of the truth of God, the divine reality that we mean to suggest.

²²⁹ Yannaras would identify this attitude for example in Protestantism, where relationship with God is seen rather as a private affair and the person is saved on the basis of their own faith.

²³⁰ See for example Lossky’s discussion about the person of the Mother of God: it is only through participation in the life of the Church that we can understand the devotion the Church offers to the Mother of God. Lossky appeals to the ‘silence’ required in being able to adhere to this devotion: Vladimir Lossky, ‘Panagia’, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 195-210.

²³¹ ‘...when we speak of empirical relationship, we refer to the special capacity of the human subject to approach the knowledge of reality by means of a general faculty of apprehension, that is to say, a coordination of several factors in the event of knowledge (such as sensation, understanding, judgement, imagination, abstraction, reduction, emotion, intuition, insight, etc.)’, *Heidegger*, p. 88.

Apophaticism in the Eastern theological tradition is not to give negative attributes – to say what God is not – and not just to keep silent – on the grounds that we do not know what God is – but to realize and acknowledge that whatever we say, even the negative definitions we may use, or even to say that our silence best describes it, falls short of what we have experienced and known. In the mind of Eastern theology silence in relation to God is not a passive silence; it is not a silence imposed because we cannot possibly comprehend God and are too inferior to God to say anything accurate about Him. The silence of the ‘apophaticism of the person’ is rather an active silence, that recognizes that there is more to know than what we can speak of, there is more there to share and also to explore than what we can describe or say. It is not a silence we keep because we don’t know what to say, but a silence we choose to take up even though there are things we could say, but those very ones we recognize would be partial and inadequate to what we actually mean to express and for this reason they could perhaps be misleading. Therefore there are times when we choose to speak and times we choose to keep silent, things we can say and things that we choose not to, for we know that once we do they will not be the same as what we had known or wanted to communicate.

Accordingly, the theological language that communicates the experience of God’s knowledge is a particular language, of an apophatic character in its very make-up rather than in its apparent forms. Yannaras emphasizes the fact that apophaticism in Orthodox theology is also expressed through the use of contrary terms with relation to God known as antinomies (συνθετικά αντίθετα): for example ineffable word, intellect without intelligence, being beyond being (λόγος ἄρρητος, νοῦς ἀνόητος, ὑπερούσιος οὐσία).²³² These are introduced so that theology stays free from objectified definitions and escapes the limits of conceptual language and meanings. The use of pairs of contrary expressions that complete each other, Yannaras notes, alludes to the transcendence of all literal meaning of their content through a logical antithesis and thus allows for the possibility of personal participation in the reality they mean to denote. The language used in theology is not a literal language but rather a symbolic one; it does not represent the truth in a factual way but rather invites to the immediate experience and the experiential verification of it. The use of the antinomies does not lead to absurdity but rather allows our human, conventional language to ‘create’ or work

²³² *Heidegger*, p. 83.

through images, where the quality described is neither the one nor the other; the reality of God is neither the one nor the other. The language of theology is rather a poetic tongue that seeks to express the truth in terms of poetry and imagery rather than to articulate it in terms of a matter-of-fact discourse or through conventional concepts. Theological expressions are apophatic for they mean to release our understanding from all conceptual conformities; the use of contrary terms in particular transmits a particular dynamic and seeks to annihilate 'conceptual idols' and thus to point to the complete otherness of God.²³³

We could illustrate this by reflecting on the way Orthodox theology speaks in terms of God's *glory*. The people of God know Him as glory. God's presence is felt in the lives of the saints as a glorious presence; the vision of God is often spoken of in terms of the vision of the light of Tabor. Even the icon of the Transfiguration shows Christ illumined; Christ is depicted with a flame of light surrounding Him, which in the technical language of the icon makers is called 'δόξα', 'glory'. That is, God is revealed as light, those who achieve deification see him as light, and deification is identified in one aspect as the view of the Glory of God, that is of the non-created light of God (θέα τοῦ ἀκτίστου φωτός). We see thus that the Orthodox experience speaks of or refers to the view of God as something that can only be experienced personally and, moreover, can be described and referred to only partly. That is why there is no fully objective language similar to that of the sciences to describe the knowledge or the view of God. Theological language speaking of the 'glory' of God or of the non-created light still aspires to use terms that indicate an *otherness*, the otherness of God's reality, which because it is *other* always slips away from the significance and the actual meaning of any words and terms involved to refer to it. Theological language finds ways to refer to God's knowledge and revelation that escape from the possibility to be objectified or taken literally. The theological terms involved are still terms and words of human and created language, however they retain a kind of antinomy: they tend to hold in themselves the contradiction of the truthfulness of the reality they refer to and at the same time of the impossibility for that reality to be held and expressed in any human terms. Thus the experience of God in the lives of holy people is

²³³ Heidegger, pp. 82-3, 86-7 and *Elements of Faith*, pp. 17-8. In Heidegger, pp. 83-4 Yannaras also notes that even the reference to God as the First Cause of beings can bear a part in the abandonment of conceptual necessities when it is used as an image and not as a certifying definition.

firmly described as the view of the ‘uncreated light’; however, the very expression of ‘uncreated light’ as such – no matter how real and meaningful the language terms involved may be in themselves and as separate words – has no apparent or objective meaning. The very idiom appears rather perplexing and odd. Still, for those who have known God as ‘uncreated light’, the phrase makes some very good sense, and preserves at the same time the very core of their knowledge, the fact that God is completely other and therefore referred to in ways that appear rather strange or unnatural. Theological language alludes to the complete otherness of God.

5. The Nihilism of theological apophaticism

Because we acknowledge that the theological language we use in relation to God – either in the form of affirmations or of negations – is only a symbolic language, a language that makes use of images taken from the created world that we know, and uses them only as sketches to refer to the reality of God, Yannaras then speaks of what he calls μηδενισμός or the ‘nihilism’ of theological apophaticism. By this he refers to the stance of the Orthodox tradition that was expressed as early as in the Areopagitical texts and which discourages the human mind to identify any of the intelligible images with the reality of God. The nihilism of the apophatic attitude, in other words, is constituted in that it nullifies any possible perceptible effigy of God.²³⁴ By no means does the apophaticism of the Areopagitical texts and the Fathers, however, suggest or lead to agnosticism. The ecclesial life is the milieu where God is known in a personal and experiential way, and this ecclesial experience is no doubt communicated by means of human language. However this language is only a conventional way of expressing our Church experience and therefore we should always be conscious of its symbolic character. Even the meaning conveyed by terms such as ‘deity’, ‘spirit’, ‘sonship’, ‘fatherhood’ and so on are not to be taken as autonomous concepts.²³⁵ This, Yannaras suggests, could actually be seen as an early expression of demythologization,²³⁶ where God is the nil, meaning that he cannot be regarded as a being; the possibility of forming an

²³⁴ Heidegger, p. 90.

²³⁵ Heidegger, p. 95.

²³⁶ Heidegger, p. 92.

understanding of God's reality through our worldly experience is completely ruled out. God is non-existing, *μηδαμῶς ὄν*, in relation to what we can understand at all as existence and name as such on the basis of our experience of created beings, based on our perception of the created order.²³⁷

Thus what Yannaras calls the 'nihilism of the theological apophaticism' opens the way to a 'more divine idea about God' – as in Heidegger's quest – since it outlaws the real obstacle to genuine knowledge of God which is the self-confidence of anthropocentric natural knowledge.²³⁸ Consequently, it naturally leads to the ontology of the 'person' since it is acknowledged that God is known only as a personal presence through His personal Energies.²³⁹

6. Knowledge of God as personal participation

Yannaras emphasizes the fact that the Areopagitical writings allow no room for any other kind of attempt to know God apart from the possibility of knowledge delivered through our participation in the divine life. And so to participate is not a process of a mental turning to or understanding of some divine concept about God, but rather a dynamic existential event, a turning of the whole existence that seeks the face of God towards God and into union with Him. For the Areopagitical tradition that Yannaras so sturdily wants to endorse as a substantial response to the debate about God in modern times, this existential move is a totally experiential reality; it is an experience of a powerful realism, sound in the assurance of the knowledge that the experience of a relationship can bring. Yannaras points out the consensus of the ecclesial tradition about the realism of the union with God as the true expression of apophaticism.²⁴⁰ Therefore, for the mind and the practice of the Church tradition, to be apophatic is simply an act consistent with the relational empiricism that the Church consciously holds, since it points to the priority of experiential relatedness as the way to know

²³⁷ Heidegger, p. 94.

²³⁸ Heidegger, p. 93

²³⁹ Heidegger, p. 98 and the section in Heidegger headed 'The apophatic knowledge as personal participation', pp. 103-123.

²⁴⁰ Heidegger, p. 107.

God, rather than the use of objectified terms and definitions.²⁴¹ The theological formulations of the Church, then, are not there to replace the personal relationship; they rather open the way and point to the right belief about God by saving us from an erroneous one (ὀρθοδοξία – κακοδοξία), and they do not eliminate the necessity for the personal step of seeking out God that we need to take. The mystery of God for the Church Fathers, and in particular here for the theology of the Areopagitical texts, is only approached through a personal involvement; it takes a personal engagement to fathom the depths of the mystery of the Godhead. The soul that longs to know God has to stride out on a journey that needs to be made in person.

However, ‘in person’, as we have touched on this before, does not mean in private or in secret, and it does not imply some mystifying or obscure individualistic experience. As we have noted before, Yannaras wants to make quite clear the fact that apophaticism does not relate to some esoteric mysticism. It is true that terms such as ‘mysticism’ or ‘mystical theology’ have been commonly employed to refer to the content of the Christian life and spirituality – notably in the title of Lossky’s famous book. However, all such expressions as ‘mysticism’, ‘mystical theology’ or the ‘mystical life’ of the Church do not refer to something that stays in secret or which is abstract and non-tangible and therefore puzzling. They simply relate to the life and experience of those people who took steps along the way of personally meeting with God. Their experience then is conventionally, as it were, specified as ‘mystical’ – rather to indicate its truly intimate and personal character – but for the tradition of the Church this has never meant that it is a mysterious and a non-communicable experience. The mystical life of the holy people of God and mystical theology is laid out in the open and shared in the community of the Church. Because, however, it remains at the same time an experience obtained on a personal level, it cannot be fully exhausted or grasped through any wordings and notional forms. Hence – it is once again pointed out – the apophaticism, in other words the call to the experience of a personal relationship and participation (μετοχή).

In this way the factor of human readiness to meet with God is also drawn out. God can be known to the extent of human inclination; knowledge of God depends on free human intention and the will to meet with him. Knowledge of God, then, is personal, like direct

²⁴¹ *Heidegger*, pp. 107-9.

knowledge of a human person supersedes all descriptions about them which somebody could give us, and is achieved only in personal contact and relation with them. Relation with God, as we shall see, is likewise erotic; in eros not everything is exhaustively phrased or described, much of it is just lived and felt and known as just a personal experience, possible to be talked about and described, but not possible to be fully shared. No one can fully identify with our personal experience or share our very own knowledge of our erotic participation as if they were us.

Yannaras draws attention to the fact that the Areopagitical writings talk even of a Christological apophaticism. This simply means that even the revelation that took place in Christ bears a strongly apophatic character for the Church: the historicity of the person of Christ can be discussed and verified through the use of an objectively meaningful language; however, it takes the experience of real participation in the life of the Church and of unity with Christ to recognize in him the incarnate Word of God. As Yannaras aptly notes, in this way there is wisely avoided any attempt to turn the revelation of Christ into a matter of ideological character and objective proof and to remove from the event of the Incarnation the dynamism of experiential participation in it.²⁴²

If the distinction between φύση, nature, and ἐνέργειες, energies, of God is the theological presupposition for grounding the affirmation of the possibility of the knowledge of God and for discussing, consequently, the apophaticism of knowledge, Yannaras points out an anthropological presupposition that needs equally not to be neglected. This second premise is the unity and the integrity of the human person. God calls mankind to share in communion with him, and man's response to this call is an act made consciously and in freedom. This means that participation in a personal communion with God is an event that recapitulates all the faculties of the human person; it brings and holds together all the existential possibilities of our nature, uniting and not dividing it.²⁴³ Man responds and relates to God with a complete self-consciousness, and the knowledge of God that he achieves is analogous to the degree to which man manages to overcome his nature, to stand out of his limited existence in a loving

²⁴² *Heidegger*, pp. 118-120.

²⁴³ *Heidegger*, pp. 111, 115.

and self-abandoning movement. Still, the self-exiting on man's side and his self-surrender into a relationship of communion with God incorporates man's full will and freedom, and seeks to reveal the authentic image and the fullness of the human person. This means that all cases of an ecstatic mysticism where the 'I' evaporates within the ambiguity of an indefinite and impersonal 'absolute' are ruled out as far as the Christian experience is concerned. The knowledge of God for the Orthodox theological tradition is achieved within a personal relationship and communion with God, where human nature is not annulled but rather restored to its primal richness and authenticity.

7. Ecstatic nature

Yannaras' thought often delineates this union with God in terms of the overcoming of human nature on man's part, in terms of a personal ec-static movement of the human person that rises above, as it were, its nature to realize its union with God. It is, similarly, a typical attitude of Yannaras to define existence as ex-isting, that is as the being realized in the movement of standing-out of the way of its nature. This can naturally give the impression that human nature in Yannaras is then treated as something rather undesirable that needs to be abandoned in order to achieve a superior mode of being that would not involve human nature, a way of being that would be beyond and rather freed from human nature. This could easily suggest a derogatory view of the nature of humanity. However, a more careful reading of Yannaras allows us to get a clearer view of what is really meant by Yannaras' idioms on ecstatic existence. In Yannaras' mind there is not really any contempt for human nature; indeed, the opposite would be much closer to the truth. Given the strong monism of the exaltation of the spirit alone and the contempt for the corporeal functions of the human body that Yannaras had experienced in his youth through Zoë, what he aspires to do through his turn to the patristic tradition is rather the opposite of laying the grounds for any disrespect for or cancellation of human nature. He instead, as far as I can understand, wishes to bring out the integrity of human nature considered as a unity, which is καλή λίαν, since not just created by God, but made to exist in God's image and likeness. Therefore, when Yannaras discusses true being or union with God as taking place out of or beyond human nature, he does not really

hold some disregard for human nature and its functions as such; he only alludes to the limitedness of nature, to the fact that the being of nature is conditioned and has limits. This at least is the way of being as we know it in the state of affairs we experience, which, in the language of theology, has been described as a fallen state; in other words it is the state into which nature entered after Adam's fall. This is basically a state where nature does not refer itself to God and where life is not realized as union with God. It is the condition where man does not exist in God's way, that is, free from any predeterminations of nature, but rather governed by its limitations. The fallen way, *τρόπος τῆς φύσης*, in which nature exists, is the way of existential autonomy of nature, the breach of the bond with God and the turning away from Him to seek self-sufficiency and self-existence, as if the created nature itself was the source of life. Existence, that is, ceases to be a reality that substantiates communion and true life, since in the way that nature now exists we perceive a separation in man's union with God and in human nature itself, which is now subject to death. As Yannaras notes, Adam's severing of communion with God determined the way of nature's existence in which we all are confined, not legally or morally, but existentially. It simply means that we are all born in and carry the same rebellious nature, which exists in the way of individualism; the nature that wants to be in the mutinous way of self-determination and self-sufficiency, and which can find its way out of this impasse only in the person of Christ.²⁴⁴ In the person of Christ we have exactly the reversal of this process. Christ, whom therefore we name as the 'second Adam', substantiates in his person a new way of existing for human nature, which is not any longer a matter of existential autonomy, but of existential union between God and man, existential communion of life between the divine and the human nature. Again in Yannaras' words, it is now up to the personal freedom of each of us to take up this new *way of existence*, the new *way of nature* which the new, *καινή*, divine-human nature of Christ renders possible. And as Yannaras also notes, Christ's human nature is new, *καινή*, without ceasing to be human. The 'new-ness' of the human nature in Christ, that is, consists in the *way* the nature is, which is the union between man and God as opposed to the separation of the Fall, the communion of divine and human nature and the fact that man now can exist again truly due to his communion with

²⁴⁴ Heidegger, pp. 115-6.

the Godhead.²⁴⁵ Man has the possibility of participation in the divine life, which participation is identified with the possibility of apophatic knowledge.

Consequently, when Yannaras talks of *πρόσ-ωπο* or of existence as the achievement of exiting nature – with respect to human nature - it is the *way* of nature that he means, and in particular the way of nature as we now know it, of what theological language defines as fallen nature. Therefore apophatic knowledge for Yannaras – which is identified in the end with the very relationship and union with God, and for which the self-exiting of the human existence is a requisite – does not involve any abandonment of nature or any cancellation or distortion of the faculty of reason or of the individual's consciousness. For the mystical theology of the Church, in man's union with God all the human attributes are recapitulated and deified.²⁴⁶ Deification, *θέωσις*, in other words to be in the way of God 'without identity of essence', amounts to *σωτηρία*, salvation, where man is *σώος*, whole and safe from any 'deficiencies of corruption, death or unfulfilled desire'.²⁴⁷

Accordingly, apophatic knowledge for Yannaras is achieved to the extent that we open up ourselves to God in a quest to go beyond the limits that are imposed by the self-directed human nature of the fallen state. This is what Yannaras defines as *ἀναφορική ἔκ-σταση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, a standing-out of man from the necessity of self-reliance and the sense of self-sufficiency that characterizes the fallen created matter, in a movement of referring himself to God. Apophatic knowledge, that is, results where the realization of life takes place as communion with God, or in other words, as participation in the divine life, partaking in the *way* of the Godhead which is freedom from the necessity of nature and personal distinctiveness in the loving mutual coinherence, *ἀλληλοπεριχώρηση*, of the divine persons.

²⁴⁵ *Heidegger*, p. 117.

²⁴⁶ Yannaras position on this matter is not isolated, but shared by theologians like Panagiotis Nellas, who also speak of the deification of the whole man, of man's united nature. See Panagiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*, trans. Norman Russel (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

²⁴⁷ *Heidegger*, p. 138.

8. The apophatic knowledge of God as erotic communion

Yannaras, then, takes the last chapter of *Heidegger and the Areopagite* to explore and present the fact that the theology of the Church has often adopted the kind of language that reflects the experience of erotic love in order to refer to and to denote the reality of knowledge of God. The language used to describe the participation in the personal relationship with God, the experience of union with God, is the erotic. Theology, which is ultimately the same thing as the apophatic knowledge of God, or, in other words, the consequence that flows from the state where man is united with God, is an experiential knowledge, as we have noted already, since it takes an immediate involvement on the part of man to be practised and achieved. God is known experientially, and this mystical or apophatic knowledge that we attain through our personal communion with God is often expressed, in the tradition of the Church, with the help of erotic terminology. This is the case for the Areopagitical writings also, where the relationship with God and the knowledge of Him is described as an erotic union, it is seen as an erotic event. Yannaras notes that even the name of love, ἀγάπη, is viewed as having a poorer content, since it is often used for and identified with behaviours and human expressions of a merely social or of “charitable” kind; in other words, it is widely used to refer to attitudes that characterize the human manner in its fallen state of self-centred goodness and of self-sufficiency. Therefore ‘eros’ is treated by the Areopagitical texts as a more divine name to describe the event of union with God, as Yannaras points out.²⁴⁸ In fact, the writer of the Areopagitical texts takes the apophatic knowledge of God to be an erotic naming-of-God, ἐρωτική θεωνυμία;²⁴⁹ in other words apophatic knowledge is identified closely with the potential to attribute certain names to God of which we become aware, or of which we acquire a sense, through an erotic relationship with God. In fact, the practice of identifying the erotic union, the fulfillment that is of a relationship, with knowledge, is not much of a novelty for the Areopagitical source or the Church Fathers more generally, since even in the biblical context we have the connection of erotic love and knowledge.²⁵⁰ Erotic knowledge thus is participation, event, experience, not just knowledge as information.

²⁴⁸ *Heidegger*, p. 125.

²⁴⁹ *Heidegger*, p. 132.

²⁵⁰ *Heidegger*, pp. 111-2, and Yannaras’ references to Gen. 4:1, 4:17, 4:25, Judges 21:12, Mat. 1:25, Luk. 1:34.. Also see Gen. 16:4 (Abraham-Agar), 24:67 (Isaac-Rebecca).

Again, 'eros' and 'erotic' are terms that can commonly at any time – including the time of the Areopagitical writings – be taken as untrustworthy and treated with suspicion. This is normally so, Yannaras again explains, due to the content that 'eros' universally bears, as generally identified with the human experience of the self-centred desire for pleasure, in other words the form that 'eros' takes in the fallen state of the insurgent created nature, where it acts only as an autonomous physical requirement to sustain the individual's existence. For the theological understanding of the Church, however, this form of 'eros' is only a fallen condition from the true eros. For the theology of the Church tradition, the true eros is a mode of being that does not initiate or uphold division and contrast between the different beings united in eros, but true eros unites and keeps the agents of the erotic event together. In our human reality, we commonly experience the sense of failing and frustration to which erotic love generally brings us when it falls short of presenting us with a firm and lasting sense of fulfilled life. The contentment experienced in human eros is most certainly to be combined with or followed by – in one way or another – the ordeal of pain and affliction. Thus we, in our created and fallen state of being, can witness to the experience of erotic relationship²⁵¹ as perhaps the ultimate sense of life fulfilled; even so, we sooner or later realize that our experience of eros is one bound up with imperfection, and therefore not rarely coupled with a feel of insubstantiality.

However, even in such a fallen state of affairs where eros is trapped in the way of being of fallen nature and where it basically serves the divisive autonomy of human individuality, erotic desire or the erotic event is still a representation, even though a faint one, of the true eros. This is because it still indicates or points to a way of existence in terms of communion and unity. It reveals life not as seclusion and self-sufficient isolation but as a movement of reaching out for the other and uniting with it. Therefore, the language that describes the human erotic experience has been taken up by the greatest theologians of the Church to denote also the experience of the divine love, in other words, of the event of communion and unity with God and knowledge of Him.

²⁵¹ 'Erotic relationship' as employed in Yannaras' discourse does not mean just the relationship of two people, but any experience that is characterized by a 'drive' towards the Other, by a sense of self-inadequacy that makes us look out there for finding and uniting with the desired Other.

The event of erotic love is fitting to describe the union with God for another reason too. The knowledge of God, which necessitates personal participation in the divine life, cannot be expressed in objectified definitions and with concepts of a strictly rational character.²⁵² Our knowledge of God is apophatic, and therefore it is conveyed through statements that do not represent it in an exhaustive way, but rather allude to it. Thus the language that signifies man's experience of eros and of erotic longing – which is again a very personal experience – is taken up by the theological tradition as a more appropriate way to communicate and describe the experience of the Christian God.

This, for Yannaras, illustrates the ec-static character of personal existence, an aspect that he likes – enthusiastically and with consistency throughout his works – to bring out. 'Ecstatic' is ultimately identified with 'erotic' since it denotes the stepping out from the self in a referential movement towards the Other. For the Areopagitical writings, Yannaras notes, God is a 'manic lover',²⁵³ an image demonstrative of the powerful motion of yearning for the other, which in the case of God is an act not made by compulsion or some necessity that God's nature imposes, but is rather expressive of the very being of God, which is love in freedom. Thus God's very being and existence is ecstatic, as God is or becomes out of himself (ἐξω εαυτού) not only with regard to the event of the Incarnation, which is the greatest of God's ecstatic, erotic movements towards mankind,²⁵⁴ but more generally as he offers himself to be related to and communicated with. The very way of God, the very being of the Godhead is the opposite of seclusion; God the Father pre-eternally begets the Son and causes the Spirit to proceed, and there was never a time when this was not done. This means that the authentic and primal way of being, life not as existential sufficiency of individuality but as communion and union, the personal way of being, is identified as erotic. In other words, the way that God is for Christian theology is not a way of disconnection in his self-inclusiveness, but what Yannaras highlights as ec-static. God's existence is ecstatic because it is erotic – that is, creative and loving. God is ec-static, since 'God is love'. God is as three Trinitarian persons who exist in an ec-static mutual coinherence, ἐκστατική ἀλληλοπεριχώρηση. Therefore, knowledge of

²⁵² *Heidegger*, p. 138. It is a remark that Yannaras fervently stresses at every chance, that conceptual formulation and objective definitions are inadequate to represent the experiential knowledge of divine truth.

²⁵³ *Heidegger*, p. 134.

²⁵⁴ *Heidegger*, p. 137.

God on man's side, that is participation in the divine life, equates with man's partaking in God's way, which is erotic communion.

Chapter III

Person and Eros

Part I: Exposition

The last century was theologically characterized by an intense interest across the theological world – at an Orthodox and at an inter-confessional level – around questions in relation to the nature of the Church. Many publications and a lot of discussion were oriented and developed on matters like ‘What is [or what makes] the Church?’, ‘What is the reason the Church exists?’, ‘What is the relation between the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and the different local churches?’: all such topics were in the centre of the theologians’ efforts to address and answer them. In fact the theme had been already opened the century before, with the distinctive work of the Russian philosopher and theologian Alexy Khomiakov playing a key part in this. Khomiakov’s unconventional and influential insights about the Church were then carried on creatively into the twentieth century by another great Russian theologian, Nikolai Afanasiev. The latter built on Khomiakov’s ecclesiology, and we could say that his theology of the Church marked a starting point for most of the theological discourse on the same subject that was to follow among the Orthodox in the last century. The discussion of ecclesiology – highlighted by a turn to and emphasis on Eucharistic ecclesiology – acquired extended interest and further dimensions through the whole of the twentieth century with the many other theologians that became involved. It was not by chance that at the same time there was also a rise in renewed efforts from the different Christian confessions to come closer to each other, by establishing new means for communication and dialogue, and by looking into ways of re-assessing their common ground and bridging the gaps that divided them.

On such grounds Bishop Kallistos Ware – in a presentation he delivered in the Spring of 2004 at an Academy of Theological Studies in Greece²⁵⁵ and which was titled ‘Orthodox

²⁵⁵ Published at the same time: Kallistos Ware, ‘Orthodox theology in the new millennium: What is the most important question?’, *Sobornost* 26:2 (2004), pp.7-23. The talk was given to the Academy of Theological Studies of the Metropolis of Demetrias in Volos in April 2004 within a wider agenda of study organized in that year and themed as ‘Orthodoxy and Multiculturalism’. The address also exists in Greek translation.

theology in the twenty-first century' – has described the twentieth century as the century of ecclesiology and of ecclesial ecumenism, a description that other theologians may well accept. Similarly in the twenty-first century, Bishop Kallistos also suggested, Orthodox theology will be dominated by a turn to anthropological questions, namely to the issue about man, and particularly an effort to understand and theologically define aspects of man's nature, of what it means to be human, or what it means to be a person and to participate as such in the body of the Church. It may be too early in time to designate the twenty-first century as solely the century of anthropology. However, Bishop Kallistos' remark feels pertinent, as it is a well-known fact among contemporary theologians that interest and discussions around man's being have seen a remarkable growth over the recent decades and the topic remains open and very relevant. Both at a philosophical and a theological level, from the existentialist philosophers and writers and artists reflecting existentialist ideas to the well-known names of Jürgen Moltmann and John Zizioulas in the theological world, the exposition and analysis of the making of human existence have occupied the core of contemporary interest and speculation. Given that we witness a time of expeditious developments as, for example, in human genetics, or in the shaping of our modern societies with the signs of globalization constantly altering the picture of the communities we live in, the present situation allows a lot of scope for the topic of what constitutes man's being, of what makes a human truly be so, to occupy the centre of our speculation over the years to come.

Even though the theme of man's nature has been touched upon by the Church Fathers, the patristic tradition does not provide us with an extensive or thorough analysis of this matter. I will have the chance to say more on this in the second part of this chapter, where I will also give some examples of the use of the patristic sources made by Yannaras. For the time being, we need to note that the subject of human nature has been addressed in contemporary times in a way that feels distinct in its very analysis of the parameters of the human existence: man's existence, we are told, is personal, and this involves a series of qualities and characteristics attached to personal existence, to what it means to be a person. Thus personalist anthropology – if we can so specify the current discourse on the matter – is distinguished by an emphasis on certain elements that constitute the human person: relationality, freedom and the uniqueness of

personal existence summarize the main characteristics that the notion of the person acquires in the exposition of theological anthropology.

Again, I will have the chance later, in the second part of this chapter, to expand on these characteristics and also to see how they make up an anthropology that has largely drawn on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. However, these aspects of personal existence will also become apparent in the present first part of this chapter, where I will be looking closely at *Person and Eros*, Yannaras's principal exposition of his approach to the personal. Yannaras, therefore, should be seen as part of the wider modern context, where both in philosophy and in theology the matter of Being, God and existence have been discussed largely in personalist terms. The concept of the person has become a fundamental category, a kind of axis around which philosophers and theologians have tried to develop an understanding of, and to interpret the matter of, existence and its meaning. Yannaras is by no means the only one who has put forward a personalist theology; he stands in fact in a wider context of modern philosophers and theologians of the last few decades who, addressing ontological issues, have put forward their views in existentialist and personalist terms. However there are distinctive elements in Yannaras' work about the human person, which I hope I will manage adequately to introduce in this chapter, as there are similarly individual constituents in the course of the personal route that brought Yannaras to see the importance of personalism and which I have tried to illustrate in my first chapter. Yannaras' thought on personal existence was set forth, as we have seen, in his early work *Heidegger and the Areopagite*. His positions on personhood, however, were later more fully developed and laid out in his treatise *Person and Eros*; I will therefore give here an account of Yannaras' exposition by way of a close reading of parts of this work.

1. Introducing *Person and Eros*

Person and Eros is one of Yannaras' principal works and, in fact, the first chronologically among the more extensive pieces of scholarly work that the author produced and which established him in the realm of philosophical as much as theological scholarship. The work is named after what Yannaras regards as the two main categories that stand at the centre of the philosophical Christian tradition in relation to the question of ontology. For

Yannaras, these two terms, ‘person’ and ‘Eros’, sum up the answers that this tradition offers to the question of Being. As we will see later on, Yannaras maintains that the ‘personal’ is for the patristic mind the very starting point from which to approach the event of existence, while ‘Eros’ is the way, the *means* to do so, and to achieve knowledge of the personal. *Person and Eros* originally appeared in a first form in 1970 under the title *The Ontological Content of the Theological Notion of the Person* (Τό ὄντολογικό περιεχόμενο τῆς θεολογικῆς ἐννοίας τοῦ προσώπου) and as such it had formed Yannaras’ doctoral thesis in the faculty of Theology of the University of Thessalonika. It was, in fact, a study that had been carried out by Yannaras during the time of his postgraduate reading with Marguerite Harl in Paris, and a year later, in 1971, it was also submitted at the Sorbonne and successfully examined by Maurice de Gandillac and Jean Gouillard.²⁵⁶ The work was then published as *Person and Eros* (Τό πρόσωπο καί ὁ Ἔρωσ) in 1974 and has since that time seen several reprints. It has also been translated into German and English.

Person and Eros, which has been described as less a theological than a philosophical exposition,²⁵⁷ is the core source for Yannaras’ responses and positions on the matter of existence, as the writer sees it in the light of the patristic tradition and more specifically of the Greek philosophical tradition of the early and the middle Christian years. It is truly a complex work, not only because of the ontological themes that it analyses, but also due to the philosophical language in which the topics are discussed, and also the range of references that it brings in – classical, patristic and contemporary. *Person and Eros* is a study of the truths of the Christian tradition regarding the ontological issue, that is the matter of Being and beings. However, as has been pointed out before,²⁵⁸ the language the author takes up refers the reader more to the modern philosophical context, namely to the terminology of Heidegger and existentialism rather than to the philosophical terms the Fathers had used in order to communicate their thought and doctrines in their time. This can be explained if we think back to Yannaras’ earlier work, *Heidegger and the Areopagite*, in which Yannaras proposes that

²⁵⁶ Καθ’ ἑαυτόν, pp. 111-114.

²⁵⁷ Philip Sherrard, review of *Person and Eros* (published by the author, Athens 1970) by Christos Yannaras in *Eastern Churches Review* 3:3 (1971), pp. 356-7.

²⁵⁸ Sherrard, p. 357. It is a realization upon which critics seem to agree: See also Gerald Bray, review of *Person und Eros. Eine Gegenüberstellung der Ontologie der griechischen Kirchenväter und der Existenzphilosophie des Westens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982) by Christos Yannaras in *Sobornost* 5:2 (1983), pp. 98-9.

Heidegger's metaphysical analysis echoes the theology of apophaticism that the Areopagitical texts put forward some fourteen hundred years before Heidegger. It is evident that in *Person and Eros* its author maintains quite predictably a similar perception when he seems to advocate that some of the theological positions of the Fathers can be expressed in modern existentialist terms. Since Heidegger, to Yannaras, appears to reflect in his discussion of the matter of Being the manner of apophaticism, which is fundamentally present in the tradition of the Church, Yannaras subsequently appears to be accommodating to the terms of the Heideggerean articulation in his attempt to deliver the Fathers' theology on the subject of existence and the concept of the person, since as we will see Being in this tradition is approached only as personal.

In fact, Yannaras' own words in the preface of *Person and Eros* perfectly confirm our very thoughts here. The author shows that he consciously undertakes to express or reiterate the ontological approaches that are found in the philosophical tradition of early and Byzantine Christianity using the language of his contemporary philosophical setting. *Person and Eros*, Yannaras says, is more than a historical study; it is an attempt that he personally makes to explore the possibility of whether the language of the existentialists can express the notions of the philosophical tradition of Christianity. And he makes this endeavour as he finds the inspiration on the basis of what we noted exactly above, and which is what he had disclosed earlier in *Heidegger and the Areopagite*, that he can see a common presupposition or attitude in the two realms of thought, that is in Heidegger's metaphysics and in the patristic mind. The common premise of both of these areas of thought for Yannaras is their apophatic attitude, the fact that they both refrain from defining the essence, Being as such, that they hold back from associating Being with objective definitions, from identifying it with categories of the existent.

I consider that the very title of Yannaras' thesis – *The Ontological Content of the Theological Notion of the Person* – is indicative of a presupposition that the traditional theological positions about personal being can be discussed in terms of philosophical ontology. And if the great Fathers of the Church constructed their theology and expressed it with the aid of their contemporary ontological terminology, from the Hellenic background, it seems an equally imperative need for today creatively to encounter and interact with modern philosophical thought. Yannaras consciously invites one towards such a direction with his

work, which in itself takes some steps down such a path. Whether this is successfully done or not is a question worth asking, but it would be a question to be answered by the Church and her theologians as a whole, in the sense that it touches upon the great and general matter of the formulation of the Church's theology and the articulation of her faith. For the purposes of this thesis I will mainly explore the content of the theological/philosophical element of the personal present in Yannaras' thought.

It is worth noting that Yannaras' views and his approach to the ontological matter, which is what he basically discusses in *Person and Eros*, are not just found in this particular work, but are very much infused in everything else Yannaras wrote. I would say that with even a little exposure to Yannaras' writing one would easily realize that for Yannaras the existential issue is not just an isolated theme among others with which Yannaras engages. Accordingly, his views on this topic, his standpoint in relation to Being and beings, are not just some of Yannaras' philosophical positions. For Yannaras the matter of existence is *the* topic where all speculation and developments – whether it be theoretical, theological and philosophical or even cultural and scientific – need to start from and where they should meet. Consequently the positions Yannaras takes on the matter of existence form, rather, his whole mindset; Yannaras' approach to the existential is, as I understand it, *the* way Yannaras thinks and is therefore very prominent in his approach to every other topic he may be called to comment on or develop, from civilization and culture or the environmental crisis and the economy to the state of political affairs or matters related to the Christian tradition and the modern life of the Church. This distinctive characteristic of the author is expressive of his very attitude to consider that all aspects of human history and activity and the form they may take spring from the worldview from which they arise. Depending on how man interprets the matter of existence, depending on what meaning he affords to Being, he will accordingly take a stance towards his life and the world and thus organize and run his living; all sides of his activity will then depict his worldview, the way he understands and interprets Being and existence. Yannaras' thought, then, presents in itself an example of this unity in the consistency between man's approach to ontology and the way in which all aspects of life are consequently addressed. However, even though Yannaras' positions about human existence or about what it means to be a person colour very much all of his thought and work, it is in *Person and Eros* that he develops the

question of ontology with a systematic analysis, and it is there that he develops further and presents more profoundly the ideas he introduced, as we have seen, with relation to personal existence, in his preceding work *Heidegger and the Areopagite*.

2. Priority of the particular over the universal

In *Person and Eros* Yannaras embarks on his exposition of the ontological issue, that is, on the question about Being and beings, by accepting a certain viewpoint as specified: that Being – and therefore also human nature – does not exist as something abstract and vague, and that we cannot get to know and approach it, save in certain particular existences. For Yannaras this means that the personal is the only possibility for existence, the only way in which existence takes place and is revealed to us. We may have a concept about a substance as the whole of a sum of certain properties and characteristics, but as regards God's and man's nature it is only known in certain distinct persons.²⁵⁹ The way in which Being *is* is personal, that is, as in particular persons. Personal existence, in other words, is the only possible manifestation of Being, the only way in which we get to know that Being *is*. Before we get to acquire any concept or understanding about Being in a wider sense, we approach it as a reality represented only in the tangible existence of personal beings. Therefore, priority is given to the event of existence and relationship with actual persons. Our exposure to tangible personal beings precedes any conceptual understanding and formulation of their substance as the total of their attributes; it comes before the rationalization and the understanding of objectified substances. God as well as human nature, consequently, is approached only as concrete personal presence, in the existence of certain persons. The personal is the only way of realizing Being and, accordingly, human nature, and the only opportunity for it to be revealed. Nature does not exist, save in persons.

At least this is, Yannaras discerns, the position that the Greek philosophical mind of early and Byzantine Christianity presents, and therefore personal existence is the starting point for this tradition when dealing with the ontological question. In other words, when the patristic

²⁵⁹ *Person and Eros*, p. 34.

mind, mainly as this has been represented for Yannaras in the Greek East, discusses and studies the event of existence or God it begins with the fundamental category of existence, which is the person. This means the particular has priority over the universal. In Yannaras' expression, the *way* of Being, the way Being *is*, which is the person, precedes Being as such. This priority of the person, as I understand it, does not mean for Yannaras that the *way* of Being, in other words persons, prescribes Being, or that the personal operates in a constraining way over Being. The precedence of the person refers rather to the position that we opt to take in dealing with the issue of Being; more specifically it refers to the approach adopted by the Greek East, according to Yannaras, as regards the ontological question, in other words to the manner in which the East chose to look at and speak about Being. And this manner was to start with the specific, by what was revealed as a personal presence and as distinct, namely by the person. In the Eastern Church, Yannaras points out, when one speaks about God it is the specific God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ that is referred to, or even the Trinity of specific persons, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁶⁰

The Cappadocian Fathers, Yannaras explains, in their attempt to talk of the truth of the Trinitarian God and describe the experience that the Church had about God – according to the ways in which God had revealed himself through history – used the terms ‘substance’ (οὐσία) and ‘hypostasis’ (ὑπόστασις), which they borrowed from the language of neoplatonic ontology, and they sought to clarify these terms. ‘Hypostasis’ thus was used to designate the separate, distinct ways in which God had revealed himself, versus the one nature of God, which remained single and united. ‘Hypostasis’ soon – with St Gregory of Nyssa – became a synonym of ‘person’. In this way ‘person’ came to indicate the different, special, non-comparable way in which the one, united and invariable nature would be revealed.²⁶¹ ‘Person’ would mean the unequalled expression of the common attributes of the one nature, the unique way in which the one, indivisible nature could be realized. Since person was understood to be the only possibility of disclosing the event of Being, given that the only way in which anything which *is* can be is the reality of personal existence, the concept of ‘person’ received priority over that of ‘substance’ or ‘nature’, the latter being revealed and approached only through personal existence. This took place, Yannaras remarks, in the thought of the Greek

²⁶⁰ *Person and Eros*, p. 40.

²⁶¹ *Person and Eros*, pp. 31-33.

East, whilst the approach to the ontological question by the Christian West followed a different path, and this dissimilarity of mind did not remain just a matter of theoretical disagreement but was followed by practical consequences.

In the western intellect, Yannaras continues, the starting point for doing ontology turned out to be the notion of Being in general, or in other words the wider concept of 'substance' or 'nature'. In this case however, where we do not begin with the concrete reality of personal existence in order to understand Being or nature – which is materialized in the event of the person – but we set off in the reverse way by trying to approach and describe Being and 'substance' first, as if they were an objective and independent reality, we inevitably end up defining also beings and anything that exists in an objectified way. Thus beings represent to us a kind of prearranged reality; we understand and refer to them as if they were a far-off, remote event disassociated from us. This, however, in other words means that in our attempt to understand the event of life and existence we end up giving priority rather to a conceptual approach to things, and we thus limit or identify our perception and knowledge to our ability to conceptualize and give rational definitions.

In this way, Yannaras argues, our knowledge springs from and is based on objectified definitions and rational formations. In the case of the ontological issue then, the way we built and found our understanding and knowledge about Being is through logical constructions, based mainly on the principle of analogy: Being as such is by all means a far broader concept than our limited existence, but is so approached and understood only in parallel with our reality. The same applies in the way Western theology talked about God: His reality is without any doubt far above ours, but his all-embracing superiority is conceived corresponding to our worldly experience.

To base our thoughts and knowledge about Being on the principle of analogy, when dealing with the ontological question, Yannaras' argument carries on, involves the following triple way in the building of our knowledge: we reach Being first through *negation*, meaning that we refuse to suggest for it attributes that apply to our human experience and existence. Then we acknowledge Being or God being *superior* to all that our earthly experience has to present. And finally Being represents for us the *prima causa*, the ultimate reason and cause of everything that exists. God in this way is primarily recognized as a principle, not as a person. He is the first cause of things and in our perception this corresponds to a conviction rather than

to the familiarity of someone who has been revealed to us. The above triple way of knowledge is what Yannaras calls the ‘analogical knowledge of Being’, as it is essentially based on analogies, on comparisons between Being and our reality.²⁶² Taking this way leads us to what he then names, as we have mentioned in the previous chapter, ‘apophaticism of the substance’ (‘ἀποφατισμός τῆς οὐσίας’) which is basically, as Yannaras likes to emphasize, the method that the Western intellect adopted in the attempt to understand Being.

In the East, however, things developed in a different way, according to Yannaras’ exposition. What prevailed there, as we have seen before in our exposition of *Heidegger and the Areopagite*, was the ‘apophaticism of the person’ (‘ἀποφατισμός τοῦ προσώπου’), which means that knowledge is achieved on the basis, and within the reality, of personal existence, and does not result from speculative definitions and rational reflection. We get to know things through our life as a whole, through our ‘catholic’ personal encounter with others and the world around us, in other words through our ecstatic movement to and relational meeting with all that surrounds our existence. And this personal ecstatic encounter, as we have had the chance to explain in the second chapter, can then be described and spoken of and expounded in words and thoughts and narratives, but in every case it is inexhaustible; it cannot be exhausted and thoroughly shared or expounded in detail. It always remains partly quiet and unrevealed, and this is because every relationship is unique and non-repeatable and thus impossible to be fully represented or covered by any description. This is therefore what we can define as ‘apophaticism of the person’ in our attempt to approach and talk about Being.

Yannaras maintains that the dissimilarity of mind on ontology between the two historical parts of the Christian world did not remain just a matter of theoretical disagreement but was followed by practical consequences. The difference between the two distinct kinds of apophatic thought described above seems to assume huge importance for Yannaras. He sees that this variation reflects on the whole theoretical frame and consequently on the whole culture and style of life formed in the East and the West. In the one case, and that is in the

²⁶² Analogy or comparison does not mean that we necessarily consider Being to be similar to what our limited, human experience can provide us with; to be analogical in our understanding of Being means that even if we agree on it being highly greater in every aspect compared with our partial existence, our starting point is still the ontological categories of this world which we then project in an analogous way on our reflections on Being.

Eastern way of thought where, as we noted, priority is given to the reality of the person, the Truth that we aspire to is identified with a relationship and with an existential experience. Therefore, to be authentic, to achieve the Truth and live in it means to achieve communion, to realize a relational way of being, to exist and grow creating authentic relationships. Truth is lived and experienced within the communicative dynamic of life, and thus life proves worthy and is highly appreciated, as it forms the field where Truth takes place, the latter identified with communion, sharing, participation, being together.

On the contrary, where knowledge about Being derives from a conceptual approach, and this, as we have said, for Yannaras is represented by the situation in the Western intellect and world, then Truth itself is identified with concepts and rational definitions, and in this way it is objectified, it is seen as something outside of us, something objective that exists independently of ourselves and our reality. In this way however, Yannaras will carry on, Truth becomes an object of utility, it is viewed as something to make use of, and this consequently restricts life itself, as everything submits to the expediency of our options and is calculated in terms of practicality and usefulness. This means that man becomes constrained and distorted as his freedom is maltreated and damaged.

3. Personal existence

a. Person as a relational reality

From the very beginning of his analysis of the personal Yannaras sets forth that the person is a relational reality. He sets off from the etymology of the Greek word πρόσωπο, according to which the term means a face or a look that turns towards someone or something, and thus it denotes a movement, a reference-to-somebody or to-something else (πρός + ὤψ, ὠπός).²⁶³ Thus we are immediately introduced to the idea which is very prominent in Yannaras, and present throughout his reflection and argumentation, that the person is fundamentally a relational entity, a being-to-relate. 'Person' thus manifests a communicative contact with the other and it is almost a synonym for the opportunity for relationship; it is

²⁶³ *Person and Eros*, p. 21.

essentially indicative of a movement, of the action of meeting and engaging with other beings. 'Person' stands for the existence that *is* or that realizes its very being by the move to engage and connect with what is found outside it. In other words, the primary concept the word 'person' represents is a link between two things: the subject and what is outside it. In this way, the person assumes a dynamic feature and is straight off juxtaposed with any impression of a static reality. It is not an inert being closed and bound in itself that exists as such. Moreover, it does not signify just a unit, a separated and objectively measured individuality which can be exhaustively described and defined as such. In such a view the person is not merely an independent subdivision of its genus that draws existence autonomously in a way of self-reliance. This all means that it is contrasted with the idea of the individual, where the latter is understood as a being in isolation, a being shut in the limitedness of its individuality and secured in the egocentricity of its self-sufficiency. The person, Yannaras points out, also carries individuality, it is also an individual in the sense of a distinct being, but it is an individual in reference. The person is a referential existence, it exists by referring itself to the Other; it does not fasten upon itself autonomously with a sense of self-support but it looks to connect and share with the Other, with a willingness and inclination to overcome its egocentric restraints.

This inclination of personal existence to move out of itself and get to meet with what surrounds it is basically in Yannaras' presentation identified with eros. As we briefly mentioned before, for the philosophical mind of the Christian tradition that Yannaras looks at, 'eros' is, alongside 'person', a fundamental category. In the analysis of the existent that this tradition presents, that is, if 'person' is an essential notion to refer to the way in which Being is, then 'eros' is an equally central designation of the means or the force through which we get to acquire awareness of the person, through which we advance to our knowledge of the ways of the existent. In Yannaras' reading of the patristic tradition, then, eros comes to have an utterly focal place.

In its earliest use the word 'Eros' referred to the Greek God of love and desire and was consequently employed to signify passionate love, often associated with physical desire and longing. Eros, however, in the classical period was not only given a corporeal meaning. In Plato the term 'Eros' denoted love possibly at first for a person but also for the beauty within

that person.²⁶⁴ In this way it ended up meaning the appreciation for beauty as such, and love for the virtue of beauty, without the allusion to physical attraction. Hence the term 'platonic love' has come to refer to erotic attraction without a sensual content. Thus, for Plato, Eros leads the soul to the knowledge of beauty and to an understanding of spiritual truth. As a result Eros also denoted the longing for wholeness and completeness, and therefore the fulfillment achieved not only in the love between people but also between man and the gods.

When Yannaras maintains that 'Eros' holds a vital place in the patristic mind it is rather with this last sense that the term is used there. The Fathers use 'Eros' primarily to refer to God's strong love for humanity and consequently to God's self-offering and sacrifice for man's salvation. Thus God's erotic love for the creation is not associated with sexuality. Moreover, Eros in human reality is in a similar way not ascribed solely to sexuality; it denotes the living and flowing energy in the human, where the physical/sexual expression of it is only one way of its manifestation. Moreover, wherever Eros is identified in the Christian tradition with love, it clearly means the kind of love that is not self-centred, but which is ascetic and self-denying. In our general reality we sometimes make use of the term 'love', and we say 'we love someone' or 'we love something' to specify in fact our preference or our attraction to the object of our love. Our love in this way refers to the feeling of finding something appealing to us and pleasing. 'Love' can be a feeling of rather desiring something ultimately for self-satisfaction and of looking to appropriate the object of love for one's own self-interest. In theological language, however, 'love' signifies something very different from the content we often attribute to this term in our common human reality. In the Christian understanding of love, it is not the self of love, that is the subject who loves, but the recipient of love that stands in the centre. Love, this means, does not aim at the advantage of the self's own desires, but it seeks to benefit the very object of love. And in fact, in the words of Philip Sherrard, this 'object of love ceases to be an object and becomes an 'other', a particularized being, and it is this 'other' that is the centre of attraction. And love is fulfilled ... not in an act of appropriation... it is fulfilled in a total act of giving'.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ See *Symposium*.

²⁶⁵ Philip Sherrard, *Christianity and Eros: Essays on the Theme of Sexual Love* (London: SPCK, 1976), p. 46.

Consequently, in Yannaras' thought Eros is a notion of decisive significance. Despite some perverse interpretations of Yannaras, Yannaras does not employ this term with just the narrow meaning of a natural erotic-sexual urge. Rather, for Yannaras, Eros is the very force or impulse for life infused in human nature; it is the kind of drive that makes the human being be always in search of the not-as-yet realized, and advance himself to what lies over and above, to the further or to the other. In this way, Eros for Yannaras is the might of the human disposition to move beyond oneself and relate with what lies outside one's own being, with the other, whether this other be the rest of created beings or God. Furthermore, and even more importantly, Eros is qualified for Yannaras also in another sense. Eros is referred to as an inclination of a positive quality only. Therefore, the erotic manner of the being in Yannaras' usage of the term 'Eros' is not a movement towards the other with an intention to appropriate, with a disposition for getting hold of or for reaching out for something in the interest and for the benefit of one's own self. Erotic conduct signifies in Yannaras' understanding the mood of self-offering, it is the manner of a being characterized by generosity and self-sacrifice. The erotic subject moves towards the desired other not as an act of self-indulgence but as only a free turning of self-abandonment. The centre of the erotic feeling and attitude is not the self, but the other. And for the self thus to be erotic it needs to step out of its own being, to exit from its own limitations of self-assurance and egoism, in order to be able to tune into the needs or the terms and the circumstances of the loved one. That is why Yannaras associates the erotic, as we have seen, with the ecstatic, and thus identifies Eros with ecstasy. Besides, this move of self-denying is not treated in Yannaras' thought as something naturally given or easily done in the present state of human nature, but it is an accomplishment of continual training in the domain of the spirit.²⁶⁶ Eros is thus an achievement of existence; it is attained through asceticism. And as such it is equivalent to the fulfillment of being, to the way of being as authentic and complete. Since in Yannaras to truly Be means to connect and to relate, and since Eros represents the perfect state of relating, this means that Eros and true being are one

²⁶⁶ Spirit, 'πνεῦμα', is not understood as a part of being as opposed to matter, but it denotes the whole mode of being, the state of turning towards and uniting with God. The opposite is indicated by 'σάρκα', which is used to refer to the condition of the separation from God. This distinction is described better in Christos Yannaras, *Ἡ Μεταφυσική τοῦ σώματος: Σπουδὴ στον Ἰωάννη τῆς Κλίμακος* [*Metaphysics of the Body: Study on John Climacus*] (Athens: Dodoni, 1971). See pp. 36-9.

and the same thing. As far as I understand, to be erotic for Yannaras is another way to signify the authenticity and the fullness of existence. Eros is the way b/Being is fulfilled.

We have seen that the person in Yannaras' mind is fundamentally a relational reality, a being-in-relationship. Since Eros then is identified with the very move or the flowing energy for relating, it means that for Yannaras the person is intrinsically erotic. Once again let us clarify that 'erotic' in Yannaras' intellect is not connected merely with the sexuality of the body. 'Erotic' represents a much broader meaning and understanding, and it is significant of the nature that is inclined not to detach itself and to stay in isolation but to realize its very existence in the act of connecting lovingly, to realize existence as a relationship. In this sense Eros represents for Yannaras the very Life, the true life, *την ὄντως ζωή*. Thus in Yannaras' mind personal being, Eros and Life are ultimately identified. In Yannaras' language Eros is therefore a category full of ontological content and not a restrictive term that relates only to the experience of human or sexual love. In the experience of human love rather, which is truly one expression of the event of Eros, Yannaras finds the images and the paradigm to describe the experience and the sense of the ontological, erotic fulfillment of life. The sense of fulfilled life, that is, comes about in the event of the relationship with the other. The possibility for life to be truly so, the achievement of Life takes place only in the event of communion, in the sharing of life with the Other. Life fulfilled is life realized as communion, as erotic love, where all the resistances of the nature to preserve its autonomy and defend its self-interest are overcome or abolished and the lover surrenders to the terms of the loved one.

Yannaras' thoughts in relation to the erotic are also presented, apart from *Person and Eros*, in a later piece: *Commentary on the Songs of Songs*. There we can clearly see that for Yannaras to live is essentially to love. To love, that is, is not something to do while we live, but it is *the* way to be, *the* way to live. Life and love in this way are also seen as one and the same thing. In order to Be, one needs to love. Anything less than this constitutes death, where death is not meant in terms of the physical, but it also carries ontological significance. Thus death as the absence of love would not be incompatible with biological life, which, in this case and in line with Yannaras' philosophical look on the matter, would amount to no more than survival. True life instead is the erotic life, the life of the nature that moves forcefully beyond

its own restraints into meeting with the Other and being in a relationship of loving communion with it.

b. The ecstatic character of personal existence

We have seen so far that Yannaras' discussion about existence unfolds closely bound to the notion of the person, since for the philosophical expression of the Christian tradition in which Yannaras is interested the way in which existence takes place is the personal. The person is the only available way of getting to know the existent, for getting a grasp on Being, since the person is the way in which nature is realized; the way of nature is the personal, the personal being is the unique and distinct way to actualize nature, to let anything that *is* be. We have also seen that the personal being is in Yannaras' exposition innately relational, and consequently it is also erotic, or at least called or created to be erotic. The more the human being attains to being truly a person, the further it moves from being an individual, that is, and the closer it gets to realizing being as a relationship, as loving communion with what lies beyond itself by overcoming the restraints of its own individuality, the more it reaches its erotic quality.

If the patristic mind – as Yannaras himself detects – specifies the living and flowing energy in the subject and even more the abstinence of the subject from its self-sufficiency and the realization of a relationship with what lies out of the subject as Eros, this in Yannaras' language is also described as ecstasy (ἐκστατικότητα). The word comes from the Greek verb ἐξίσταμαι, which means 'to be surprised' or 'amazed at'. In its older form ἐξίστημι also meant 'to change one's position' or 'to be taken out of oneself' and also 'to cease from' or 'to abandon'. It is then with the import of this older usage that the noun ἔκστασις and the adjective ἐκστατικός are used in Yannaras' phraseology. Therefore, ἔκστασις in Yannaras' language indicates mainly the dynamic of a 'standing-out' movement, the dynamic of the advance from a given state or condition to another or to what is not as yet accomplished, and all this activity that is referred to as ecstatic heads to or realizes a relationship. In other words, the very event of the personal relationship, which as we have seen is fundamental for the

reality of the person, is existentially ecstatic; the personal relationship is seen as an existential ecstasy. And when he says 'personal relationship', we need to keep in mind that Yannaras refers not only to the bond or the affair between two agents but rather more broadly to an existential state or movement, to the energy of transcending oneself and of engaging directly with the other, with what is beyond the subject. 'Relationship', σχέση, and consequently 'ecstasy', stand broadly in Yannaras' thought for the dynamic of personal engagement, personal exposure; they ultimately denote the vigor of personal experience, which is an existential effect. This analysis is largely drawn from Heidegger, who derives it by analyzing the word *Existenz*, *existential*, in terms of *ex-sistere*. The Greek word for existence, ὑπαρξη, does not offer this etymological analysis, so Yannaras transfers Heidegger's analysis to ἔκσταση, as explained above.

I would say that to pin down or to delineate a clear-cut content for the terms 'ecstasy' and 'ecstatic' in Yannaras' presentation, at least as this unfolds in *Person and Eros*, is not really a straightforward task. This is because the author employs the terms in his text broadly and in connection not just with a single concept but fused with rather a series of ideas, of which I will give some examples.

First, 'ecstasy' is identified by Yannaras as the otherness of personal being, the distinctiveness in which the common attributes or features of nature are found and realized in each distinct person.²⁶⁷ Ecstasy is the realization of personal uniqueness, the unparalleled way in which the objectively given nature is personally actualized in each person. Therefore it refers to the complete distinction of the person as regards other beings. The move of the person from the naturally given life to the unequalled embodiment or instantiation of existence realized in each personal being signifies ecstasy.

This involves, Yannaras also notes, the overcoming or the self-transcendence (ἀνθυπέρβαση) of nature, in the sense that personal existence ascends from the predeterminations of nature to its own matchless way in which it exemplifies its nature. The person instantiates within its natural individuality the universal qualities of its nature; however, it is not a settled, prearranged reality on the basis of the objectified features of its

²⁶⁷ *Person and Eros*, p. 37.

kind, that is, of its nature. In fact, the person actually determines its nature within its very own existential ecstatic reference, in other words within its complete difference. Therefore, personal existence is ecstatic not only as regards other objective beings and other persons but also and primarily in relation to its own natural individuality, which it transcends in order to reach its ecstatic otherness.²⁶⁸ On the whole Yannaras speaks of the ecstatic character of personal existence.

The term 'ecstasy', however, is also employed in Yannaras' expression in relation to nature itself. Thus nature is ecstatic too, the nature ἵσταται-ἐκτός-ἐαυτής, stands out of itself, in the sense that it is approached and known only as the content of the person. The nature is not made known as a notion, but through persons in their uniqueness and matchlessness. Ecstasy is here, following Yannaras' wording, the way in which the nature is disclosed and becomes familiar within the reality of personal otherness; ecstasy is the *energy* of the nature, and it is not the same as nature nor its effect. Yannaras explains this further through the example of the natural will. The will, he says, is a characteristic or energy of the nature. We get to know of this energy of the nature only through its personal carrier who is the person that wills. This means that we get to know and speak about the energy of the will only through the very individual way in which it is realized and expressed. So the *how* of the will lets us speak of the feature of willing which belongs to the nature. The energy of willing, however, is identified neither with the nature that has the possibility to will, nor with the person who wills in a distinct and unequalled way.²⁶⁹ Overall, I would say that here again it is the kind of dynamic course or activity of the nature to be realized in unparalleled personal existences that is referred to by Yannaras as the ecstasy of the nature.

So far I have tried to describe how the notion of the ecstatic/ecstasy is associated in Yannaras' discourse both with the person as well as with the nature. The personal being is ecstatic as it substantiates the nature in a totally distinctive way; it differentiates itself both as regards the way in which it exemplifies the energies of the nature which are common in all the beings, and in relation to its own natural individuality, by making a move further from the

²⁶⁸ 'ἡ ἔκ-στασις σημαίνει τή δυναμική αὐθυπέρβασι τῆς φυσικῆς ἀτομικότητος, τήν ἐλευθερία τῆς ἀπό τούς ἴδιους τούς φυσικούς προκαθορισμούς τῆς': *Person and Eros*, p. 46.

²⁶⁹ *Person and Eros*, p. 87.

conventionalities of the nature which are inherited, as it were, within the person's natural individuality, and also by standing out of its own self to engage with the other. 'Referential ecstasy of the human existence' (ἀναφορική ἐκστατικότητα τῆς ὑπαρξης), is Yannaras' common phrase to refer to this act of the human being to step out of itself and refer existentially to and relate with the reality around it. The nature, then, is ecstatic as it is ecstacized²⁷⁰ in distinct personal existences. Furthermore, ecstasy is also applied in relation to the Godhead. Thus the divine Eros is described as ecstatic and the loving response and relationship between God and man is again pronounced as ecstasy.²⁷¹ Ecstasy, that is, takes place not only in relation to personal otherness, in other words as regards the different beings, but also in relation to different natures or substances. God thus is ecstatically self-offered, he gets revealed in his erotic ecstatic self-offering (ἐρωτική ἐκστατική αὐτοπροσφορά). In such a verbalization Yannaras decides to express what theological language has specified as Grace, Χάρη, the fact that God gives Himself away to the creation, χαρίζεται.²⁷²

As I suggested earlier the idea of ecstasy or the ecstatic is not presented in Yannaras' work in a very straightforward way. However, I would say that as far as I understand it, wherever the terms 'ecstasy' (ἐκ-σταση, ἐκστατικότητα) and 'ecstatic' (ἐκστατικός /-ή) are employed, they are used to put across the dynamics of a moving activity towards what is to be existentially accomplished or the force of the inclination towards the realization of a relationship, of a personal engagement. To my understanding Yannaras applies the notion of ecstasy and the ecstatic wherever he wants to express some kind of dynamism, the dynamics or drive of the person's existential reference to things or the vigour of personal engagement, the potentiality of a relationship, whether this relationship be a unifying one that connects two separate realities – as in the case of the human person with other beings or with God – or a relationship of transcendence and liberation from something, for example, from individuality. Generally, that is, ecstasy represents and is identified in Yannaras' thought with the opposite of stagnation and motionlessness. And it also signifies a different approach to Being than

²⁷⁰ In fact the term 'ecstacized' does not appear much in Yannaras' articulation, but it has been used before to express a similar idea in Vladimir Lossky: 'The theological notion of the human person', *In the Image and Likeness of God*, p. 120.

²⁷¹ *Person and Eros*, p. 100.

²⁷² *Person and Eros*, p. 101.

having an objectified understanding or concept of it. Being, this means, is actualised as an extraordinary realization (πραγμάτωση) and it bears in this sense an ecstatic character; it does not exist as a settled or solidified objectively determined reality.

c. The 'catholic' character of the person

Since the reality of the person is the only possibility, as we saw, of revealing and knowing nature, or, in other words, since nature is not an abstract concept but it can be approached only in the reality of certain existing persons, it means that the person is of a *catholic* – universal or perhaps holistic – character. Yannaras justifies this attribute by explaining that the person is not just a part or fraction of the nature, which would be in this way understood as a far more inclusive and wider notion than that of the person; the person, rather than being a division of nature, is *the* way in which nature is made known, it is a revelation of the whole nature. The person embraces the whole nature, therefore it is of a catholic character. The whole, the catholic nature is disclosed in each personal existence. The full nature is enclosed in each individual being, and each human person is a dynamic disclosure of the entire, catholic human nature.²⁷³

Besides, given that nature is the only possible way in which *Being* as such comes to be made known, it can be consequently understood that it is then only through the distinct persons, which are, say, vessels of the nature, that access to the knowledge and the understanding of *Being* can be gained.²⁷⁴ Therefore the person remains of a *catholic* character additionally for the reason that the catholic *Being* finds the unique possibility to be manifested in the reality of distinct persons; the person embodies for us the only and single way to come up to *Being*, it is a catholic disclosure of *Being* itself.

d. The unity of the person

Furthermore the person for Yannaras is the substantiation of *unity*. Unity is another key quality of the person that Yannaras points out. The dual nature of man, that is of matter and spirit, Yannaras claims, does not introduce any division in human existence. Body and soul, in

²⁷³ *Person and Eros*, p. 47.

²⁷⁴ *Person and Eros*, p. 60.

the thought and theology of the Church Fathers to whom Yannaras likes to refer, are seen in complete and firm unity. It was only in the Christian West and within scholasticism, Yannaras remarks, that matter and spirit came to be seen as two separate elements of human nature. Western thought, carried away in its attitude to identify the truth with objectified definitions and well-reasoned statements, and because of the ontological priority it gave to the substance and not to the person, came to distinguish between the body and the soul as two different and often contrary parts of human existence; thus it initiated a dualism with regard to the view of man and his life.

On the contrary, the Fathers in the Greek East, Yannaras argues, have wisely avoided giving any absolute and exhaustive definition of the dual nature of man and designating exactly to what each of his components, body and soul, refer. It is true, Yannaras notes, that both terms, ‘body’ and ‘soul’, appear in the writings of the Fathers, with reference to human existence. However they do not introduce any division into the human person, neither do they establish any contrast between the two components that they name. Moreover, ‘ψυχή’, that is ‘soul’, represents also the senses,²⁷⁵ and in the language of the Fathers denotes not just the psychological part of man, but the separate, the distinct character of human existence or the particular and unique personality – what Yannaras names as ‘πρόσωπο’- versus ‘σῶμα’, that is ‘body’, which stands for the broader reality of human nature as a whole, or for the physical possibility of evidence and expression of each united again and distinct human person.²⁷⁶ Therefore ‘soul’ and ‘body’ as discussed in the theology of the Fathers, Yannaras explains, are only conventional ways to state the one united human activity (φυσική ἐνέργεια) which stems from or is the result and expression of the one and sole but composite human nature. It is the same in modern psychology, Yannaras points out, where no precise and definite distinction is made between bodily and psychological expressions of behaviour, as man is regarded as a solid whole that it is not possible to separate into purely bodily or purely psychological functions.

Similarly to the above reluctance of theological language to define in an exhaustive way the reality of the body and the soul, the Eastern patristic mind has also avoided limiting in any exclusive interpretation the biblical teaching about man’s creation ‘in the image and

²⁷⁵ *Person and Eros*, p. 67.

²⁷⁶ *Person and Eros*, pp. 68-9, 82.

likeness' of God. Again the attitude of the Eastern Christian tradition has been to ascribe the 'image and likeness' to the entirety of man's existence, body and soul together, and to refer it to the *way* of being of the whole man, rather than to link 'the image and likeness' with the human soul only, as the case has been, according to Yannaras' exposition, in Western scholastic theology.²⁷⁷

4. The distinction between the 'nature' and the 'energies' of the person

All the above aspire to display that the perspective of the Christian mind – at least in its Eastern Greek version which Yannaras takes as the authentic interpretation of the biblical tradition – towards man and his life has been to regard man as an inseparable and integral totality, as an existential reality characterized by strong unity in its various expressions of life, and foreign to any idea of dualistic understanding and division.

The only distinction that the theological mind has introduced and on which it has insisted with reference to the ontological categories regarding the person, Yannaras explains, is that between the nature – in this case the human nature – and its energies. To describe the distinction I will simply use an example that Yannaras himself often quotes: that of a painter (Van Gogh is the name that Yannaras brings up most of the time) and his paintings. The 'energy' in this case is the ability or the action of painting, which results in certain artistic results, the created pieces of art that we know as the works of Van Gogh. This energy belongs to or stems from human nature, which bears the ability to paint or draw, and the specific paintings of Van Gogh bear evidence of Van Gogh's special and unique way in which he realizes the one human nature in his person. In other words, Van Gogh's works bear evidence of the person of Van Gogh, so that the public which are already familiar with Van Gogh's individual style and technique, before a new painting of the same artist they would easily identify the painter behind it and say: 'this is Van Gogh'.

Through such an example what Yannaras wishes to demonstrate is that although the nature and the energies are closely linked together and the latter cannot exist without the

²⁷⁷ *Person and Eros*, pp. 75-8.

former, they still remain distinct: human works can give witness to human nature, which is able to create, and they can also ‘speak’ of the person whose particular manner of creating they bear. However, they are neither the nature nor the person itself; they remain only indications of both of them, since, even though they ‘speak’ of them (the nature of their creator and the particular person of some creator) they still do not say all there is to say about them, they do not expose them completely or make them known to us thoroughly. Therefore both the person and its energies are only *the ways* in which the nature exists, and only ways in which the nature gets disclosed, and despite their undivided unity with the nature they are not identified with the nature itself.

From the above it follows that the distinction between the ‘energies’ and the ‘person’ – the former being the course through which the nature is revealed and the latter the unique way that this disclosure takes place in each individual – does not eventually initiate any division in the nature. The ‘person’ and the ‘energies’ are not parts, components of the nature; to distinguish between them does not mean that we break up, that we split the nature itself. The latter remains one and undivided and it is as such ‘contained’ in each different person. This fact constitutes the catholic character of the person to which we referred above, meaning that the person is the conveyor of the *whole* nature. Therefore the unlikeness with which the energies of the nature are realized in each individual existence – that is, for example, the variety of the forms of art produced by different people – is only indicative of the *way* in which the nature *is*, and this way is the personal singularity and uniqueness.²⁷⁸

The distinction between the nature and the energies that Yannaras brings out, and which has proved fundamental in the Eastern Christian theological tradition, also confirms the person as united. Because we get to know or approach the nature through its energies, and because the variety of the energies or of the ways in which they are expressed do not reflect a divided nature, but they rather sum up the whole nature, as we saw, it means that a person is united and inseparable as body and soul in all its expressions, in all those unique ways in which it embodies and realizes the energies of his twofold nature. Man remains one and

²⁷⁸ *Person and Eros*, p. 94. As it has been indicated before, Yannaras’ exposition on ‘nature’, ‘person’, and ‘energies’ has attained a synthesis of the ‘nature-person’ schema of Chalcedon and the Palamite distinction of ‘essence-energies’. Yannaras has shown successfully how all three, even though distinguished, interlock unbreakably with each other. See R. D. Williams, ‘The Theology of Personhood: A Study of the Thought of Christos Yannaras’, *Sobornost* 6:6 (1972), p. 421.

inseparable in all his actions and manners, and we would be misled into dualistic discords in our understanding of him if we were to separate human existence into purely bodily and psychological sides of it.

Therefore, as it has been again pointed out earlier, the body, say, is not to be considered as a part of man's being, but as only the most immediate communication of the embodiment of the whole nature in the reality of a single person; and also as the most immediate communication of the unequalled way in which the same nature is realized in the case of each different person. Besides, due to the oneness of the person we get to know somebody as an entirety of body and soul together, as a wholeness which is expressed in the personal, ecstatic otherness of one's existence.

Finally, to accept or not the differentiations discussed above, and especially the distinction between the nature and the energies, for Yannaras would not only stay a matter of theoretical disagreement, but it would rather constitute a difference in the whole attitude to life, and would consequently lead to different practices and even to diverse styles and cultures. In fact this has been the case in the course of Christian history for the Eastern and the Western Christian world, which, as Yannaras likes to remark, ended up developing diverse civilizations as a consequence of following distinct theological and philosophical ways. This being the case, the importance of theoretical differentiations like the ones expounded above and of possible disagreement in theological understandings would then go unquestioned.

5. World, Space and Time

The importance of being a person is for Yannaras brought out again in his discussion about the world (cosmos), space and time, where the personal way of being appears to determine all aspects of human experience and make a difference in all the ways that man relates with the surrounding world. Thus, because of the relational nature of the person, or within the relational way of being, space and time acquire a different dimension than the one we conventionally understand. All is experienced and understood and known and approached then differently. The personal aspect of the world, space and time as described by Yannaras

bring out the importance of the relational attribute of the person, and emphasise the fact that knowledge and experience of things is acquired within a relational frame; the personal way of being and the immediate relationship with things is what changes things to be experienced differently. We will look therefore below at what Yannaras says in particular about the personal aspect of the world, space and time.

a. The personal character of the world

The high importance that Yannaras places upon the event of a personal relationship and upon the knowledge attained within a personal encounter with what surrounds us, and which becomes apparent in Yannaras' discussion about the person in the first chapter of his book *Person and Eros*, keeps steadily coming out in the following chapter as well, as the discussion continues on the personal aspect or character of the world.

The word 'κόσμος' itself, standing for world, Yannaras notes, is indicative of a relationship. This is because 'κόσμος', deriving from the Greek verb 'κοσμῶ' and meaning originally ornament, is not just an accidental word that has been randomly chosen to describe the creation that surrounds us, but it is a term indicative of some evaluation that has taken place in the attempt to define the all-surrounding existence. And because the term 'κόσμος' indicates an evaluation, it consequently bears evidence of a relationship, as any assessment presupposes a kind of encounter or personal engagement, within which we get to know something and determine its value. Thus, to acknowledge the surrounding world as an ornament, that is to acknowledge the beauty, harmony and order found in it, implies a personal relationship with this surrounding reality, an experiential meeting and familiarity with it and not just an abstract or rationalizing approach to the world.²⁷⁹

The word 'κόσμος', as follows from the above and as Yannaras notes, does not simply designate the *what* of the world, does not simply, that is, give us a dry definition of *what* the world is, but it rather points to the *way* of physical reality, it refers to the *way* in which the surrounding reality, what we call 'cosmos', exists. It describes the fact that the world, as noted above, exists in beauty, order and harmony; it therefore exists, according to Yannaras, in a way of personal character, for the reasons that I will try to describe below.

²⁷⁹ *Person and Eros*, p. 107.

It is not only due to the fact that the world is the one part of a personal relationship, within which we get to know and describe it as κόσμος -κόσμημα, that makes the world have a personal character. The world is of a personal character, following Yannaras' thought, also in the sense that it is revealing of Being, in other words of the way in which all that exist *are*, and this way is the way of personal uniqueness and singularity. Not least because all creation consists of a revelation or a materialization of the divine will and energy, which comes from a personal God, can this personal character be ascribed to the world.

To take things in turn, Yannaras makes the point that even contemporary science comes to verify that the reality of the world and the knowledge we can have of it is not exhaustive and can never be limited within objectified definitions and certainties. Modern science itself, through theories such as the theory of relativity, for example, or Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principle',²⁸⁰ comes to reinforce a picture of the world other than that of a reality defined by cause-and-effect, bound together in an orderly way and mechanistically predictable; modern physics has come up with an image of the world which is a harmonious whole of infinite and indefinable differentiations, a harmonious plenitude of indefinite variety, and thus testifies to what one might well call the personal character of the world, depicted in the uniqueness and unparalleledness that the world represents.

The *way* of Being, as discussed in the first part of Yannaras's book, is personal uniqueness and singularity; Being is revealed only in persons, in unique and unequalled individuals, which can be known and identified only within a relationship, within a direct personal encounter with them. Here Yannaras adds that this distinctiveness, which is the key feature of all beings, or rather the *way* in which all beings can *be*, consists also in the beauty of each creature and of the whole creation. The exceptionality of all that exist, the indefinable diversity of the world, still within a harmonious combination and coexistence, is what renders the physical reality to be 'κόσμος', that is 'κόσμημα', meaning 'beautiful' or 'an ornament'. And as in the case of a piece of art, where the artistic creation gives witness to the singularity of an individual artist, similarly in the case of the world, the beauty of it testifies to a personal logos, in other words to a Person, to the logos of a Person, that is to the person of the Logos, Yannaras says.

²⁸⁰ *Person and Eros*, pp. 114-5.

Within his discussion of the personal character of the world, Yannaras makes some more points with reference to the beauty (κάλλος) of the world and to what the stance of the Christian mind towards the cosmos is; he touches, that is, on Christian cosmology.

The beauty of the world, Yannaras says, calls us to a fulfilling relationship and communion. This in simple words means that the beauty of the world, in all its possible forms, is attractive to man, who on impulse responds to the call of the things that attract him, as a result of his deeply existential need to form links of communion, basically in search of relationship with the things around him and of happiness. However, due to the fallen state of things and the self-centredness of the fallen nature of man, the relationship and communion with the world, to which man is called, fails. Man remains trapped in the urge of his fallen nature to use the world according to his own selfish desire and satisfaction, and fails to meet with the true logos of the things that surround him and to unite himself with them in a bond of true communion. Thus, the beauty of the world results in being a deadlocked tragedy for man, who always remains pulled towards it, but ultimately fails to realize a fulfilling connection with it, as he only relates with the world egocentrically.

The Christian answer to this painful frustration, in which the experience of the world's attractiveness ends, Yannaras goes on, has been the practice of self-exertion and purification. Only when man resigns, within this Christian practice, from the urges of his fallen nature and individuality, is he able again to meet with the true logos of the things that surround him, to become conscious of their actual meaning and thus restore his failed relationship with the world. Our senses, although an important source of information and knowledge, because of sinfulness, show us things distorted, so that all we can see is only a shadow of the truth. To see things clearly, to approach the real meaning and nature of things, involves therefore a moral effort and achievement. It means that our senses need to be purified and restored to their initial, pre-fallen state and thus become ways of true knowledge and appreciation of the world. Only if man frees his senses from the compulsion to satisfy them can he cease from submitting the beauty of the physical reality to his selfish wishes and desires, and thus establish a relationship of genuine communion with the surrounding world, where the world will then be seen and respected as such, independently of man's needs and urges. This is, in other words, the meaning of the Christian cross, and this is how the spiritual exercise (*ascesis*) in the life of

the Church receives its meaning: through the sacrifice of our self-interested desires and through the self-denial attained through Christian practice and purification, the way opens again for man's potential towards a loving communion with the world and seeing the beauty of the world in itself.²⁸¹

As it follows from the above, Christian cosmology then is not simply another theory or set of ideas about the world, but it represents a stance of life, a certain way of living and relating to the world. It involves the ability of man to respect, to look into and to bring out the true logos of things. Man in this case is able to discern the truth of the world to the extent that he has cleared his own senses and faculties and freed them from the physical laws of necessity. In this way he may then recognize the presence of God as the personal will and energy depicted in all that has been created, and which forms a constant and active calling towards man for an immediate relationship with the personal God-Logos, through the logos of the visible, all living things.

Yannaras' next point of discussion, then, is the fact that depending on what one's cosmology and relationship with the natural world is, the expression of this relationship, that is cultural development and civilization, will be formed accordingly. That is why in Yannaras' understanding and analysis, significant differences can be noted in the cultural expressions of the East and the West; this is not accidental, but is the result of the dissimilar outlooks on the natural world developed in each of these historical areas. For Yannaras, the deviation of Western Christianity from the authentic tradition of the one Church and the development of rationalism and scholastic thought has led to a different view and interpretation of the physical world, which then resulted in what we know today as the modern world and civilization. The unrestrained expansion of technology and its rough dominance over man and his life are the immediate result of an unorthodox cosmology, where the world has turned out to be seen only in a utilitarian way and become just a profitable object for man. For Yannaras even the variant artistic expressions of the two worlds, the East and the West, for example in architecture (the gothic architectural style on the one hand and the Byzantine on the other), depict a different frame of mind towards the material world and are expressions of the different frame of thought and attitude developed in each of these worlds. The contemporary environmental

²⁸¹ *Person and Eros*, pp. 119-21.

catastrophes and threats, Yannaras concludes, are evidence that something has gone wrong in man's view of the world and they mirror his disturbed relationship with it.²⁸²

b. The personal aspect of space

Following the above, Yannaras discusses the idea of space: once he has pointed to the way in which we commonly experience and understand space, he goes further to demonstrate another, commonly ignored or hidden aspect of it, which is brought out in relation to somebody's absence, and that is the personal aspect of space for Yannaras, which in other words can be specified as the non-dimensional space realized within a personal relationship or experienced in the event of a person's proximity, even or mainly when this person is actually absent.

Space or distance, Yannaras will note, is regularly understood in relation to the visible things that surround us, and is basically conceived as a totality of dimensions and measurements. We comprehend space in relation to the dimensional limits of the material objects, as one comes after the other, and even emptiness is understood as room lacking an item and movement as the succession of the room that an object occupies. This is a neutral and rational perception of space, which involves the idea of the physical-dimensional proximity of things, as we experience it in the physical reality around us. The main point Yannaras wants to make in this context though is that there is another reality where space is non-dimensional and where it cannot be defined objectively in such physical and uninvolved categories: that is the *space* of personal relationships, of that existential reality where one relates in a personal way with the world around him, that is in an ecstatic reference to the surrounding things, where he meets with and gets to know them and become involved with them in a unique, non-repeatable way which cannot be fully represented.

In this line of argument, Yannaras uses the example given by Sartre, where somebody visits the café where he normally meets with his friend Pierre. This time however, Pierre is not there, which makes the café – for Pierre's friend, that is – to be full of Pierre's absence. The *reality* of Pierre's absence, however, which is easily recognized by looking around at all the tables and not seeing Pierre anywhere, works as a confirmation of Pierre's existence, Pierre's being. This is what Sartre wished to demonstrate using such an example, to specify existence.

²⁸² *Person and Eros*, pp. 142-6.

the experience or certainty that something *is* through reference to its absence or to nothingness. Yannaras, however, will take the example further, by stressing the fact that the absence of other people, who, say, Pierre's friend may have heard of but has not actually met, does not bear the same weight and does not have the same meaning for this person as *Pierre's* absence does.²⁸³

For Yannaras, Pierre's absence from the café where he commonly meets with his friend provides the opportunity – in this case for Pierre's friend, but in fact for any of us who would walk to the café to find out that our friend that we regularly meet with at that place is not there – to realize the non-dimensional proximity of our personal reference to this person that happens to be absent. In other words this would mean that in the absence of our friend we are able to feel and confirm the reality and perhaps the familiarity that characterize our personal reference to him. This is independent of the fact of his physical absence or distance at the time, therefore Yannaras calls it “non-dimensional nearness”, meaning that it is free and out of the conventional notion in which we commonly understand or specify that somebody is present or not. We commonly do so through the categories of physical presence and physically measurable proximity within – what we objectively specify as – space.

Nevertheless, what is it, Yannaras goes on to ask, that makes us realize the nearness of the person-other, recognized in his absence and within our personal reference to him? Why does the absence of people other than Pierre, whom we probably do not relate personally with, not generate the same consciousness of relational proximity? What is the condition necessary for such a consciousness? Why does the absence of others not provide us with the same sense of confidence about their existential imminence as the absence of our friend does?

According to Yannaras' approach, the confident awareness of somebody's existence and nearness, realized mainly in the event of their physical absence, derives from the event of relating personally with them. The experience of the personal relationship that we have had with someone, up until their physical absence occurs, is the presupposition required, so as to sense in their bodily nonappearance the certainty of their existence and their nearness to us, experienced in our personal reference to them. It takes therefore a personal relationship, that unique and unrepeated event that is of ecstatic personal reference or connection with someone,

²⁸³ *Person and Eros*, pp. 150-2.

within which we get to know the unequalled singularity of a person and connect and relate with it in a unique and impossible to be objectively represented way.

Having expounded how our reference to and relationship with a person stands out of the physical dimensional space, or, in other words, having shown the non-dimensional or non-limited 'space' of a relationship, where someone as an unparalleled being meets ecstatically with the distinctiveness of the other, Yannaras then turns to point out how the energies of a person, or more accurately what results from them, are the non-measurable 'space' where the person is revealed and approached.

Again he gives examples, such as listening to Mozart, say, or studying one of Van Gogh's paintings, where despite these peoples' actual absence we relate with them within a 'space' that is beyond measurements and actual distance. This is the encounter with and the experience of their personal uniqueness and dissimilarity, depicted in their varying and matchless pieces of their work and talent. Their personal works, that is the visible outcomes of their personal energies, are the 'space' where the person – that is the unique, individual way in which they *are* – of these people is revealed and met and known.²⁸⁴

Similarly, the 'space' of God, the 'place' where we can meet and relate with him, is his energies. This 'place' can be otherwise defined as God's love and grace, or even further as the created world itself, which is the visible revelation of God's personal energy. The cosmos, therefore, as the disclosure of God's creative and providential power, becomes the arena where we can meet and relate with God, the substantiation of God's personal will, and within it we then experience God's personal proximity and presence. It goes without saying that this proximity is not of God's nature, since, Yannaras notes in accord with the patristic mind, the reality of God is far beyond and other than the worldly one. Therefore their closeness is not natural, as creation stands far-off from God in terms of nature, of what it actually is, but only positional, as we might say, which means personal, that is exclusively a matter of a relationship.

²⁸⁴ *Person and Eros*, pp. 158-60.

c. The personal aspect of time

Moving on to the notion of time Yannaras discusses two different approaches to the issue of time and again brings out the importance of the person, of the personal way of being, with regard to the experience and evaluation of what we know as time and duration or even eternity, which in other words is a non-dimensional present or one beyond time, as he calls it.

The common experience and understanding of time is closely related to the idea of a succession of moments signified by events. Time is therefore appreciated as a succession of events, in other words it is realized as a change that takes place between what was before and what is now. This movement from 'before' to 'now' seems therefore capable of being objectively defined and constitutes the way in which time can be realized. In this way however time becomes a necessary condition for things to exist; anything that exists, exists in time and there is nothing that can exist regardless or outside of it. This is at least the ordinary way we understand beings and the existence of the whole world, and this has been, as Yannaras quotes, the main way of conceiving time since Plato and Aristotle, the latter defining time as the combination of the worldly movement and a subjective, psychological response.

The above approach, where time is conceived as a sequence of objectively defined proceedings following one after the other, where everything that exists or happens takes place only within time and is 'counted' by it, involves also the consciousness of decay and death. Everything that exists is experienced as being-to-death, since everything that exists, exists in time, that is in a sequence of change, which is equivalent to decline and attrition and brings beings closer to an inevitable end. In other words the notion of time is closely bound to that of decay (φθορά), and time is not only the existential condition for something to *be*, but also becomes the measure of reviewing beings and their life- span.²⁸⁵

To this objectified understanding of time, where time seems a principle or measure which is, as such, independent of beings, and where the latter undergo time and are determined by it, Yannaras suggests another approach, related to the reality of the person, where time is not the measure of determining beings, but rather proceeds from the existence of the latter, to the extent that beings are revealed within the 'horizon of the person', as Yannaras says, that is in relation to the person's ecstatic-relational meeting with them.

²⁸⁵ *Person and Eros*, pp. 184-5.

To put it in different terms, and following from what Yannaras has expounded in earlier chapters about truth and the personal way of being, things *are* or *are true* (ἀληθεύουν) only as they come out of λήθη, oblivion, only as they reveal themselves, that is, with reference to the person. Things get to be known, this means, not as distant and objectively, but within the ecstatic, relational connection of the person with the world around it. This represents the personal way of being, where things are known and experienced in their uniqueness within the frame of an again unique and unequalled personal relationship. This revelation of things with reference to the person, this movement from the oblivion of things to the consciousness of them, constitutes a change, a movement from an earlier to a later state, which is again experienced as time.

However, time here only indicates this shift, it does not cause or determine it. The ‘measure’ for the change, for the disclosure of things within the ‘horizon’ of the person, is the disclosure itself. Time is no longer the standard for beings to exist, it is not their existential condition as in the first approach to time, but stands only as a pointer, as it were, to their existence, which is realized only because of beings’ exposure to the person and not because of time; this uncovering within the frame of a personal relationship, as Yannaras would note, is ultimately a choice and not an objective necessity.

In this sequence of thought Yannaras brings forward the event of erotic love (ἔρωζ) as an example or as a main case of personal ecstatic reference to the other, where the ecstatic relationship is experienced in its own sake and independent of time; the ecstatic self-denial and meeting with the personal other is a dynamic event not determined by time, but which instead determines time, and this is shown in the different impression that our consciousness may have of time when it comes to waiting a delayed train or completing a boring task,²⁸⁶ if we wish to stay with Yannaras’ examples, and to realizing a meeting with the beloved one instead. The objective duration of all the above may be the same, however time does not feel the same in all cases. This is how time, for Yannaras, can be a sign that only signifies the personal way of being and is not then decisive for existence.

Another example that Yannaras gives to show how personal existence and not time has the leading role with regard to the ontological issue, that he is basically concerned with, is that of personal energy. Personal energy, as we saw in earlier paragraphs, is the disclosure, the

²⁸⁶ *Person and Eros*, p. 192.

chance we have to become aware of the fact that a nature exists and realizes itself in unique persons. This personal energy, Yannaras now notes, or rather the results of it, remain and last beyond time, and thus bring us before the reality of the personal presence that surpasses time rather than being determined by it. The example he brings forward here is, yet again, that of the works of an artist (Van Gogh), which for us represent the personal uniqueness of Van Gogh, and allow us to ‘meet’ with this person, more or even better than any description of him or objective information about his life would let us do.

Finally, Yannaras takes the chance once again to explain how the practice of the Church, as delivered through the patristic mind and tradition, points to this personal way of existence; the fallen and fractured man, the individual, is called to overcome the existential split represented by his individuality, and achieve personal existence, become a person, which means free of the necessities that his fallen nature dictates, and in relation to what we expound here, free of the limits and bonds of time. That is what the liturgical time of the Church then denotes, the overcoming of worldly time: in the Eucharist for example not only we, the ones actually present at it, are there, but the living and the dead, all saints and sinners, those who are close and those who are far away, the first and the last ones, all are present there and then, before the person of Christ, in a direct personal relationship with Him. The Eucharist, that is, the coming together of the Church community and the partaking of the bread and the wine as the flesh of Logos, is not just a memorial, imitation or symbol of the Last Supper, but the always present possibility of partaking in the always present communion, in the always present event of the union, of man and God. In this way eternity does not refer us to an after-death reality, but to the immediate, personal *presence*, the reality of the everlasting and corporeal presence of Christ beyond time and the union with Him.

6. Logos and Image

a. Logos: the disclosure of the personal

The central role and the priority of ‘personal existence’, that is the way of being where man has overcome his individualized, fractured nature in a self-denying encounter with his surrounding world, is brought out as Yannaras goes on to talk about the *logos* of things. The

latter is only the first in a series of ways that he analyses as signs or possibilities of denoting personal existence. And this is because the reality of a person, as Yannaras has already pointed out several times, can be experienced and known within a relationship and a direct encounter, but not fully depicted or exhausted in words or any other means of expression – only described and suggested.

The Greek word ‘λόγος’, which could be variously translated as ‘word’, ‘truth’, ‘reality’, or ‘reason’, is here used by Yannaras to refer to the very nature of things, to the essence of what something is. Yannaras starts off from the earliest uses of the word, where it would be employed to indicate a ‘collection’ or ‘gathering together’²⁸⁷. Through such a use it ended up standing for the word or the language used to name something, because the names of things are ultimately collective of – they ‘contain’, as it were – all those elements that characterize and make up the identity of a being.

As referring to the very nature of things, *logos* is indicative of the unity and the unequalled singularity of beings. Following on from Yannaras we can say that the *logos* of something is equal to the definition of that thing, in the sense that it delineates and refers to the attributes that distinguish one being from the other, excluding all the rest of qualities that do not belong to the nature of a being. As such, however, it presupposes that we have an experience of what we come to define; therefore once again *logos* reveals a personal relationship, reveals the personal encounter with whatever we get to know before we define or name it.

In fact to arrive at the *logos* of something means to put together all the separate and particular experiences of that thing that each of us may have. That is how *logos* is in the end a signal or a ‘symbol’ of a being (σύμβολο in Greek deriving from the verb συμ-βάλλω, which means bring or put together).

But before *logos* ends up being identified with or reduced to a word or the language that we use to communicate and refer to the reality of our experience, it primarily reveals and denotes the unique and unequalled relationship and meeting of man with the surrounding beings that he encounters and which he later comes to name and define. For this reason, *logos*

²⁸⁷ *Person and Eros*, p. 207, where he quotes uses of the word as early as in Homer and later in Philo of Alexandria.

is first of all and foremost a disclosure of the person himself and of his unparalleled encounter with the world around him, in other words of a personal relationship. As such, it means that it is not just the result of a reasoning and rational approach to things, but of a wholly experiential encounter or involvement with them. It follows then from the above, and Yannaras will here quote from Aristotle as well as from Maximus the Confessor to support this position,²⁸⁸ that knowledge is not only the quality of what we restrictedly refer to as reason, but of the senses too, which are part of man as a whole and which contribute to the gathering of information and the construction of our knowledge.

Logos, then, referring to the nature of what something is, is indicative of an order, for *logos* does not only speak of the elements that make up the nature of something, but furthermore denotes the *way* those parts exist to compose the one essence. In this way *logos* conveys an order, an organized, ordered or ‘logical’ state of being (‘logical’ here, referring not to what we normally mean by ‘ratio’, ‘logic’ or ‘reason’, but to what is consistent with *logos*, with the structural principles of a being, *κατά λόγον*).

In previous chapters Yannaras discussed how the energies of nature are the ‘channel’, the way through which nature is revealed and known, always within the framework and reality of personal beings. Here he adds that the energies of nature reveal, in other words, the *logos* of nature, or more accurately, the *logos* of each person, that unique, distinct and unequalled realization of the one nature. Following from here he will then make the point how the cosmic *logos*, the *logos* of the cosmos, is basically the disclosure or the exposé of a personal creative energy: that of the personal divine Logos.

b. The image as signifying the non-conventional logos

Having described how *logos* is not just an utterance of words, not just a conventional description of objectified realities but in fact a category bearing some ontological significance within the personalistic approach of ontology, Yannaras will go on to discuss of the role and the importance of the image, as a carrier of the same ontology, the ontology of the person.

Yannaras starts off by evaluating how the phenomenological approach to the ontological problem, that is the approach according to which one understands beings as

²⁸⁸ *Person and Eros*, pp. 214-215.

phenomena, as what they appear to be mainly within the horizon of time, inevitably leads to conventional knowledge and to conventional language, which is employed to communicate the phenomenological knowledge. He sees this approach as one that rather restrains the human potential for knowledge. This is because, according to his analysis, if we start with phenomenology, knowledge and truth are ultimately identified with the objectified meanings of the words employed to communicate that knowledge. Given the restricted, stereotyped character of human language, alongside the fact of an awareness present from the onset of the phenomenological viewpoint that the *οὐσία*, the substance of things, remains hidden beyond what we can see, beyond the phenomena, it follows that one can realize, Yannaras maintains, how confined and relative phenomenological knowledge can be. Since we are limited to what we see, to what things appear to be, to the phenomena, our knowledge of things is only an allusion, an indication of what things *are*, let alone when this relative knowledge is identified with the very definitions of meaning that the use of a language imposes, with the very terms, which, constrictive in their meaning by nature, have been standardized in a conformist way to communicate knowledge, understandings, ideas, in short what we can make of the surrounding world and of our experiences. This is what in other words could be described as a linguistic positivism, where the possibility of knowing things is identified with – is one and the same as – the possibility of communicating this knowledge. This is how life, Yannaras will conclude, ends up not being served by language, but rather serving it, since it is acknowledged and realized only in what can be defined, linguistically spoken and expressed.²⁸⁹

For Yannaras the answer to such a state of affairs lies again in the ontology of the person, in the personalistic approach to the ontological question, to the ontological issue. We could say that the whole philosophical and theological thought of Yannaras is personalistic, woven around a personalistic ontology; by this I mean an ontology, a discourse on the matter of beings and Being, centrally based upon the category of the person, the reality of personal existence. (Whether or not such ontology can be traced in and defended by the theological heritage of the Church Fathers is a separate and challenging question). For Yannaras the person is a fundamental category present in all strands of thought and theological or philosophical discussion.

²⁸⁹ *Person and Eros*, pp. 223-6.

The person therefore is again the starting point for the issue of knowledge that Yannaras has been discussing here, in the second chapter of the third part of *Person and Eros*. The horizon within which we get to know things for Yannaras is not time, as in phenomenology, but the reality of personal existence. The event of personal relationship is for Yannaras a dynamic circumstance within which the process of knowledge unfolds as a moral achievement, as a potent undertaking towards a progressively more thorough realization of being as a person. Knowledge is not just a function of acquainting oneself with beings by becoming familiar with a stereotyped linguistic semiology employed to refer to and to describe all that exists; this would mean, as we saw above, a limitation of the true possibilities of knowledge and render Being, the substance of all that *is*, οὐσία, a complete mystery, a totally obscure and unexplored ground (what Yannaras calls mysticism of the substance, μυστικισμός της οὐσίας). Knowledge, within the frame of personal ontology, where beings reveal themselves, ἀ-ληθ-εύουν not within the horizon, for example, of time but of the person, depends on and is ultimately equal to the moral exercise of becoming more and more what it is to be a person, that is relational, self-denying, ecstatic, and in short all that is opposed to the fragmented state of individuality; in this way one gets more and more authentically involved with things and consequently achieves true knowledge. Thus knowledge is an ongoing becoming, is something dynamic and not limited, is an always open possibility for further progress in the *view* of things, in self-engaging with the reality, with the beings, in a loving self-offering and self-denial and overcoming of individualized existence.

Now this knowledge which derives from the event of personal relationship or, to be more faithful to how Yannaras puts it, is rather identified with the personal relationship itself, can still be and is communicated through the human language of words. However in this case language serves life, is subject to the event of personal involvement with things and is taken closely in relation to whoever uses it. The terms employed to convey the meanings we wish to share are not rigidly objectified or just technically used. Therefore the language that is put to use, Yannaras will explain, is not to be understood as isolated from the person that applies it. The words one may use to express something are not everything, are not the fullness of the event, experience, thought, speculation, and so on, one intends to describe. Yannaras, drawing

here from the realm of literature and poetry, speaks of ‘the word within a word’²⁹⁰, that is of what remains unspoken beyond what one speaks, of what lies beyond the terms used to refer to things. Language in this way preserves a dynamic and itself forms a calling to communion and personal involvement. Language communicates personal experience by alluding to it rather than in an exhaustive way; in this way it is rather an invitation to a personal engagement to approach and understand that experience.

We are in part three of *Person and Eros* where Yannaras basically speaks of ways that signify personal existence, of channels, so to speak, which convey or denote the disclosure of the person. If *logos* –the nature of which was explored in the first chapter of the third part of *Person and Eros* – is one of these channels, the next one Yannaras will expound here is the image. Again he sets off by briefly exploring the etymology of the Greek word εἰκόνα as well as the way images have been used in the Greek world since classical times. Starting from the use of the image as analogy, humanity moved on to employ image in order to allude to things, rather than represent them in a realistic, natural way. Images, either in the form of paintings or sculptures, were initially used to represent reality as closely and faithfully as possible to their models. Their function was to depict their topic in an analogous way to reality, that is, as accurately as possible in relation to real life. Yannaras brings out the importance that vision, the ability to see and perceive things through the sense of sight, had possessed since ancient times and how θεωρία, the act of viewing, has been closely related to, if not identified with, the very act of knowing as early as Plato. To see things means to participate in them; the ability to have sight of things is the first step towards μέθεξις, which is a state of communion with things, participation in what we can see, and thus knowledge of it. Μέθεξις equals a personal involvement, is the realization of a personal relationship with reality. Yannaras will analyse how this relationship is preserved and conveyed by the image, especially when the latter does not seek to represent strictly the objectified forms of reality, but when it invites the viewer to participate through the depiction of a theme in the inner logos of it. A painting or a piece of art does not illustrate everything, nor can it portray everything that it wishes to communicate, in an absolute, naturalistic way. It rather opens the way towards true

²⁹⁰ *Person and Eros*, p. 230: ‘The word within a word, unable to speak a word... T.S. Eliot, *Gerontion*’.

knowledge, towards the truth of things, which lies beyond what can be depicted and which can be endlessly explored within and through a personal relationship with the pictured subject. Thus the image preserves again the dynamics of personal existence, it is an invitation to a personal way of existing and it requires a personal involvement to understand what one can see in it. The image has a dual function of disclosing and at the same time concealing its objects, in a way that leaves open possibilities of a more genuine approach to true knowledge. This has been the function of Byzantine icons, as Yannaras explains, which have not sought to exhaust the event or the persons they represent in the illustration of the icon itself. The truth, Yannaras will point out, cannot be objectified, and icons as used in the Christian tradition have been an example of the consciousness of this fact. Another example of such awareness has been the theological language employed to speak about God and knowledge of him. Yannaras describes this language as *εἰκονολογική*, illustrative, since through the use of opposite terms (*ὑπερούσιος οὐσία, νοῦς ἀνόητος, ἀνώνυμον ὄνομα, ὑπέρθεος θεότης*, etc.) it seeks to preserve some meaning beyond the meaning of either of the terms used in each case. In other words it seeks to save the truth from becoming something objective and thus limited and not the truth.

In the last part of *Person and Eros* headed as ‘The Fall and Nothingness’ Yannaras discusses aspects that have been essentially treated already in *Heidegger and the Areopagite* or themes that also occur in his discussion on the ethical dimensions of the personal way of being in *Freedom and Morality*, which we will be looking at in the following chapter. Here I will, therefore, turn to examine shortly the premises from the tradition that are appealed to in discussing theological personalism as well as the way in which Yannaras puts his patristic sources to use.

Part II: Some issues further discussed

If we turn to look at the tradition of the Fathers on the subject of the human person, as it has been pointed out,²⁹¹ some aspects of the human nature have been touched upon by the patristic tradition, particularly when the Fathers try to interpret and present the meaning of man's creation 'in the image and likeness of God'. However, the Church, through the voice of the great theologians and the Church Fathers, had rather, through the centuries, mainly to resolve other matters, such as the Trinitarian existence of God and the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, with all the relevant problems and controversies that would revolve around these themes at each time. Therefore, even though the Fathers invoked notions and terms related to the existence of the person when tackling the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology, they did not however expand separately on their anthropological presuppositions and they did not provide us with an elaborate, independent theology about the human being. This is a remark acknowledged quite widely by today's theologians, that the Fathers of the Church do not provide us with a distinct doctrine of the human person. It is not a recent observation. Over half a century ago Vladimir Lossky had made the same comment, and had been critical towards the attitude of attributing complex concepts of the human person from modern philosophical traditions to the Fathers. He did not, however, deny that at the same time we can, from the side, as it were, find some Christian anthropology in the Fathers,²⁹² which in fact Lossky calls 'unquestionably personalist'. This means that the anthropological insights we find from the Fathers are in most cases raised in a not directly anthropological context. Even where we have treatises about man as such – as, say, in Gregory of Nyssa's 'On the Making of man' – the aspects that are analyzed in relation to man's being are approached in a different way and in a quite limited spectrum compared with the anthropological analysis and the ideas that we would come across in a modern setting. Thus the patristic texts talk, for example, of man's creation by God, of man's composite nature of body and soul, of man as a microcosm, of man's fall and of the human passions, but they do not go into these areas with the same kind of analysis with which contemporary theologians would approach the same matters. The patristic mind is set well apart from the problematic of contemporary thought and the ways in which the latter approaches and tries to interpret aspects of man's existence. We

²⁹¹ See Ware, 'Orthodox theology in the new millennium'.

²⁹² See his 'The theological notion of the human person', pp. 111-2.

need to keep in mind that the material presented by the Fathers often refers us to the biblical environment and the biblical language that it actually wants to interpret and that it does not address the issues or share the insights and the presuppositions that press on the modern mind in relation to the human being.

In the modern times, on the other hand, theologians have turned to analysing the parameters of human existence with quite a different approach from that of the patristic material. Contemporary theologizing has gone down the path of looking into and discussing what man's existence involves primarily in terms of the relational and the communal character of being. So in addition to what the theological tradition would so far have to say about man, we have now some particular aspects of man's existence being stressed. The characteristic that is mainly stressed in relation to human personhood is the quality of relationality (the human person discussed in the light of the Trinity, the personhood of God, and therefore approached primarily as relational): man has been created to exist not in self-sufficiency but in relation with what is out there for him. Man is meant to experience Being by meeting and sharing in union with the Other, whether this other be God, other people or the natural creation. Man has been created, so the modern voice continues, to be a person, *πρόσ-ωπον*, to exist by facing or encountering and relating with what is before him. Only by doing so does man fulfill his true being. Or, to put it another way, it is by attaining to personal existence that man exists *κατά λόγον*, in accordance with his inherent *logos*. It is prominent in the mind of many modern theologians, that man fulfills the principle of his existence by opening himself up to the other and maintaining a relationship with it. It is seen as an integral aspect of what it is to be human that man overcomes the limits of his own existence and exists in communion with everything else beyond him. Now, we could say that for one to live in communion with every other living entity in the world feels at least technically unrealistic. We need to note therefore that the sort of the communion we refer to here and to which man is called is not quite the same thing as the communal co-existence of, say, living in the same city or belonging to the group of society. The communion theologians put forward as the very substance of the human existence is rather a deeper notion of an ontological nature. Thus people may live very close to each other – as in fact is the case in our modern world – but still fail to realize a genuine communal being. The communal character of man's nature that the theologians want to

emphasize is something well beyond a physical co-existence and signifies a spiritual quality that man has. It is the exercise of this spiritual quality to overcome the boundaries of his own limited existence, of his narrow individuality, that would allow man to relate to and even unite with the things that are not in physical proximity to him. Theologians see this aspect of relatedness of man's being as the very objective of man's existence. In this way to be a person is a mode of being juxtaposed to that of just being an individual. The contemporary theological personalism thus works with a contrast between 'person' and 'individual'. 'Person' is understood as the authentic way in which man was created to be, an existence opened up and sharing lovingly and in union with the fellow-people, with God and the world; while the 'individual' is what the fall of man has left him with, basically man entangled in the limitedness of his human constraints and passions.

1. The Trinity as the basis for discussing human personhood

The understanding of persons as existing in, and constituted by, communion is not an idea peculiar to Yannaras in modern Orthodox theology, though he does not dwell at all on the implications of this way of thinking for the doctrine of the Trinity itself. It might, however, be useful to explore a little how the notion of the Trinity itself – understood as what has sometimes been called a 'social Trinity' – can be developed to provide a model for our understanding of human personhood.

To discuss human existence in the light of the faith that the Church holds about the being of the revealed God has certainly been associated in the modern years and in the Orthodox world with the names of particular theologians. Furthermore, this attitude does not represent only the position of certain persons in the Orthodox theological world, but is rather a way of thinking, a general approach, infused in the thought and the work of the Orthodox theologians of our days more widely (I have in mind for example Vassilios Thermos, and others who are not primarily involved in discussing the Trinity and personhood, but who in

discussing personhood in a psycho-therapeutic context, take an existential approach to human person, sin, etc.)

Modern theological personalism appears to draw to a great extent on the established Tradition of the Church by making an appeal to Trinitarian theology and even to Ecclesiology when expounding its understanding of the human person. It would be helpful at this point to explain a bit further this association and see how contemporary Orthodox theological thought connects anthropology with the theology of the Trinity and also with its teaching about the Church. The doctrine of the Trinity is a pronouncement in the Christian faith which is by and large a mystery even to the believer. Why is God three persons or how he can be three and strictly one at the same time remains a wonder and even though it is not an arbitrary theological formulation but one that clearly reflects the experience of the Church, yet it cannot be logically explained and understood. Belief in a Trinitarian God is, therefore, something that often appears, to a non-Christian especially, as something bizarre, and for the faithful it can feel to some extent an awkward aspect of the faith to try to explain or justify. Even so, the dogma of the Trinity, as well as the rest of the doctrinal teaching of the Church, is not a random dictum that is there just to be blindly endorsed. Dogmatic theology reflects, and results from, the experience of the Church and it has significance for man's salvation, hence the great concern in the course of the Church history to safeguard and clarify the dogmas against heretical deviations. The beginning of Christian life, at least for an Orthodox Christian, is to believe rightly, to accede to the true faith (ὁρθή δόξα), since the authentic content of the faith serves as a signpost, as it were, for the way to a true life. Therefore the theological dogmas, instead of being seen totally as enigmas, need to be approached as articles of the faith that have relevance to our practice as Christians and to how we conduct our lives. On such grounds, some of the theologians who initiate the contemporary discussion about personhood start from or draw their insights from the established theology of the Trinity, which in the course of the Church history was formulated far more clearly and articulated in more definite terms than other theological subjects. They appeal, that is, to the patristic tradition and to the way the Fathers understood God as Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is thus put forward as having great significance for and relevance to the actual life of the Christians. The fact that we believe in a God of three distinct persons perfectly united in one, it is suggested, has practical consequences for our understanding of human personhood and also for the sort of the society

to which we aspire. The way we organize our life and all the aspects of our social activity need to reflect our belief in God the Trinity.²⁹³

More specifically, the Fathers' doctrinal theology about the Trinity instructs us about a God seen as communion (κοινωνία) of distinct *hypostaseis* or persons. This means that rather than seeing the Triune God as a single whole owing to God's one common substance, the Triadic unity is understood mainly in terms of interpersonal relationships among the three divine *hypostaseis*.²⁹⁴ Thus the unity of the Trinity is not an accord imposed, as it were, by God's nature or essence, but is seen rather as a union that results from the harmonious interaction between the three persons of God the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Besides, all the three distinct persons of the Trinity exist in an undivided correlation with one another and cannot be conceived as isolated *hypostaseis*; the Father cannot be thought of without the Son, nor the Son be seen as separate from the Spirit. God's being is thus understood and presented in terms of the relationships between the divine persons. It is relational being and it is not possible to speak about it while cutting it off from the concept of communion.²⁹⁵ Thus the Christian God is also talked about in the contemporary context mainly as interpersonal community; the Trinity is a communion of persons in indivisible mutual dialogue, it is a 'social' Trinity. The link from here with modern propositions about human personhood is quite evident, but I will return to this later on.

The present-day theological appeal to the patristic tradition for the analysis of what it means to be human makes use also of the Fathers' presentation of God – not unrelated to the one of interpersonal community – as a Trinity of love.²⁹⁶ The connection among the divine *hypostaseis* is a bond of mutual and eternal love. God is not, as we saw, a single entity, but a union of persons that are related in between them not due to some necessity but in an exchange of reciprocal love. This leads to an understanding of God's *hypostaseis* as self-

²⁹³ Kallistos Ware, 'The Holy Trinity: Paradigm of the Human Person', in Melville Stewart, ed., *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue* (Netherlands: Kluwer, 2003). In this article Bishop Kallistos draws basically on the theology of the Cappadocians, on Augustine and on Richard of St Victor.

²⁹⁴ This is at least the way the Cappadocians talk of the Trinity, and yet not St Athanasius, who emphasises rather the *homousios*, the 'consubstantial', 'The Holy Trinity', pp. 229-30.

²⁹⁵ This is for example a central position of the principal exponent of personalist theology in the recent decades, Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas. See Zizioulas, John, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993).

²⁹⁶ See Ware drawing on Augustine and Richard of St Victor, 'The Holy Trinity', pp. 230-31.

giving and responsive towards one another, since true love is not turned inwards. It means that God exists in complementary sharing, in an exchange that requires both a 'you' and an 'I'. God is thus discussed as a fellowship, where completeness and perfectness rest in the love for another and where nothing is withheld from being shared among the loving partners. Moreover, the fullness of the Trinitarian love is realized and expressed in the fact that it is love not only between two partners but love shared among three. This is because the existence of a third party guarantees, as it were, the completeness of love, which is not confined in a closed track between just two persons but opens up to be jointly shared and also mutually received back by a third. In the words of Richard of St Victor whom Bishop Kallistos quotes in his discussion of how the holy Trinity can be an example for the human personhood: 'The sharing of love cannot exist among any less than three persons... Shared love is properly said to exist when a third person is loved by two persons harmoniously and in community, and when the affection of the two persons is in this way fused into one affection by the flame of love for a third'.²⁹⁷ So the Holy Trinity is understood as a perfect unity of mutual love among God the Father, the Son and the Spirit, where all three persons are joined together in an internally structured oneness and where each of them remains fully distinct. Their complete unity, that is, does not invalidate or harm the absolute uniqueness of each Triadic person; each of them continues to exemplify the common essence of the divinity in their totally individual way and to have their own distinctive attributes (ιδιώματα).

Such views about the Holy Trinity are found in the theology of the Fathers. On the basis of this Trinitarian theology then and on the ground that man has been created in the image of God the contemporary theological approach moves on to discuss what it means to be human. The analysis and the understanding of the human personhood, that is, is presented as a consequence of the way we believe about God, of the view and the understanding we have of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, since the existence of the divinity is comprehended in the ways we described above, human personhood is interpreted similarly; attributes of the existence of the divinity are in such a context transferred to the being of man. Man, it is consequently proposed, cannot be a true person, πρόσωπο, unless he faces the Other, unless he exists in fellowship with others. If God's being is a relational being then the same must apply to the

²⁹⁷ 'The Holy Trinity', p. 231.

human existence. Just as it is impossible to separate the concept of communion from our understanding of the being of God, so we cannot achieve a true understanding of what it means to be human without involving the idea of communion, *κοινωνία*. Man is truly a person, according to this contemporary presentation, when he relates with the Other, he is truly an image of the Trinitarian being only when he exists in communion with and in an outward movement of love towards the Other. This understanding of being authentically a person involves the concept of self-offering, of mutuality and of making the Other the centre of one's own existence. Personal being, similarly to God's being, is seen as constituted only in a relationship, in a loving exchange of an I and a You. The human person cannot be egocentric but only exocentric. It is also seen in terms of *perichoresis*, coinherence, and as constitutive of a perfect solidarity of love, where, however, the unbroken unity does not cancel the complete distinctiveness of each personal existence. Human existence, this means, is discussed in terms of communion and unity with one another, in a similar way the divine persons remain one even though absolutely distinct from one another at the same time. The argument is that since human beings take after their Creator's image, they need to attain to a personal way of existence, in which they will preserve their complete uniqueness while at the same time sharing in each other and deferring to each other, as God the Father, the Son and the Spirit do: they stay united but not confused, distinct but not divided. Only when man's existence is relational, social, interpersonal, reciprocal, can it be a true image of the Trinitarian God. Thus the approach and the interpretation of the so-called Social Trinity is drawn in and projected, we could say, on to the being of humans. It is used as the starting point for the construction of a theological anthropology and for discussing how the faith in the Holy Trinity needs to be reflected in us humans and furthermore in our societies.

Such positions about the significance of Trinitarian theology for the understanding of the human personhood can easily and legitimately enough raise some objections: in our attempt to inform our understanding of the human personhood drawing on what we know about the Trinity, do we run the risk of projecting on to the latter our modern perception of the 'person' as basically an agent of subjectivity? Can we see the persons of the Trinity as distinct in the way we accordingly understand human persons, each as a different and separate centre of self-consciousness, willing and feeling? And can we, consequently, refer to the divine

Triune unity in similar ways to those in which we conceive the union of three human beings? Beyond the danger of misrepresenting the Patristic tradition, objections of this kind seem to forewarn us of the loss of the element of apophaticism, which is in general a fundamental constituent for the Orthodox theology. Therefore, as it has been noted by Bishop Kallistos – who is one of the exponents of the modern approach to the human personhood on the basis of our faith in the Holy Trinity – we need to remember that the depths of the divine darkness remain always beyond comprehension and that the analogies we use when we refer to the Godhead never cease to reflect our created reality and to employ, inevitably, our material language, charged as this must be by our human experience. Yet, the analogies we employ from our human experience are often the only way we have of making some sense of and of referring to God's reality. The term 'person', for example, is our only way of understanding relations; however, we need to make use of the concept while retaining at the same time an apophatic stance and keeping in mind that the divine reality always remains transcendent and beyond all our human notions of inter-personal relationships. Thus God is not personal in our created sense of being personal; the divine uncreated *hypostaseis* are not persons in the same way as we are. As Bishop Kallistos remarks, when the Church Fathers employed the term 'person' they did not use it with the sense of what 'person' represents to us today in terms of subjectivity, self-consciousness etc., as this would mean that in the Trinity we would have three separate centres of consciousness. Instead, 'person' in the patristic tradition signifies the distinctive existence in terms of objectivity rather than subjectivity, how the person, that is, is manifest to an exterior witness.²⁹⁸ Besides, the union of the three divine *hypostaseis* cannot be equated to any kind of human bond, it is 'incomparably closer and stronger than any human association can ever be'.²⁹⁹ It is important, therefore, to remember that when we discuss personalism employing the Trinitarian theology we actually take on two different levels of being and for this reason we need to set off with an apophatic mind. There is a fine balance to be observed: we would not, on the one hand, really mean to leave our faith in the Trinity aside as something absurd and irrelevant to our lives and, as Bishop Kallistos suggests, we need be confident that we do not fall short if we understand God in terms of sharing, solidarity and mutual love. On the other hand, we need bear in mind that the life of the Trinity exceeds all

²⁹⁸ 'The Holy Trinity', p. 233.

²⁹⁹ 'The Holy Trinity', p. 233.

our created sense of relatedness and ‘we should not employ the analogy of mutual love to the exclusion of all other images and models [even though] ...this paradigm enables us to ‘make sense’ of the Trinity in a way that no other paradigm can do’.³⁰⁰

Such an exhortation on behalf of bishop Kallistos safeguards his propositions from being misunderstood, as at some point he takes the view that both our understanding of the Trinity can help us understand the human person and our understanding of the latter can also illumine us better about the Trinity, which can lead us to the kind of objections we pointed to above. He also makes the suggestion, taking the stimulus from Augustine’s ‘Trinities of the Mind’, that insights from the theology of the Trinity could lead us to other interpretations of the person, for example on a unipersonal level, allowing thus the space for someone to realize the relative character of the interpersonal approach.³⁰¹

2. ‘Person’ versus ‘individual’

Since the idea of the ‘individual’ is in this modern context juxtaposed to the notion of the ‘person’, which is, as we have said, particularly understood in terms of relatedness, the core of the content for the term ‘individual’ would seem to be the opposite of relationality: dissociation, disunion and estrangement. This means that being an individual is to be apart, to exist separately from one another, to be divided or detached. The existence of the human being then is not defined and understood in terms of relationality and communal life but is independent of those aspects that would be considered as constitutional for the making of the person. The community is not an integral part of the identity of the individual as it is in the case of the person. Thus an individual is seen as just a unit of a public alongside other units but not essentially in relation with them. This view of human beings as individuals has been reflected greatly on the social level in the modern times, and was widely inflicted by the social changes caused at the time of the industrialization. It still is very much a part of the picture of today’s world as well. The citizens in our modern societies are generally seen as impersonal

³⁰⁰ ‘The Holy Trinity’, p. 235.

³⁰¹ ‘The Holy Trinity’, p. 229.

members of the gigantic social whole, as just separate and neutral constituents of the big picture of the social order. They are individuals – holders of rights to be protected and served and bearers of needs to be provided for. In this way they are primarily seen as customers and potential buyers of services and goods. Partly as a result of this, individualized societies go hand in hand with consumerism while the latter incorporates as a fact man's destructive interference with the natural environment. All in all, in such modern expressions of individualized forms of life as these there is initiated a sense of division and fragmentation, whether the rupture refers to the relationship among men who are estranged from one another, or to the dissociation of individuals from the wider social group which basically represents to them an impersonal public, or to the hostile attitude that man develops towards his natural habitat or the natural world – not to mention the fact that there can even be a sense of split within man's own identity, too, arising from the experience of being uprooted, from the fact that modern humans less and less belong organically to a particular place or a specific community, as they can often move and adjust to different geographic locations and social settings. Furthermore, and as a consequence of this, people today often bear a sense of discontinuity and lack the consciousness of carrying a particular heritage, either in terms of the milieu of a certain locality or in terms of a long family background that would give them a sense of where they come from and who they are.

All these are aspects of what contemporary theologians – at least those who invoke the distinction of 'person' versus 'individual' – would refer to as individualism; they are all examples of forms of life and behaviour that belong to what the modern theologizing would specify as individualized rather than as personal. However, when contemporary Orthodox theologians like Yannaras put forward the idea of the person and place it opposite that of the individual they do not allude just to the sociological, as it were, expressions or consequences of the loss of a personal way of being. The modern theological distinction between 'person' and the 'individual' is made, to my understanding, primarily on a more profound and rather ontological level. In Yannaras' language, more specifically, an individual is the human being that fails to realize life as a relationship. All the expressions of individualism that we pointed to above would then, in the thought of Yannaras and of some other contemporary Orthodox theologians, come about as the results of the tragedy where life is not realized as relationship. When man does not achieve personal being, when he fails to be a person, that is to relate

ecstatically with the Other and share life lovingly, then he ends up experiencing a disturbed relationship with the creation around him, whether the result is the formation of big and inhospitable, monster-like cities and the estrangement which they involve for people's lives or the devastating use of the natural environment. So what underlies such consequences is the ontological distinction between 'person' and 'individual'. The difference is thus in the mode of being: the person realizes its nature by leading it to its fulfillment, which is the sharing of life in a loving communion and unity with the Other, while the individual comprises a deformation of its nature, it is simply a misrepresentation of what would otherwise be true being. There is, therefore, a differentiation of a rather spiritual kind between 'person' and 'individual'. These two vary, first and foremost, in their ontological quality: the person exists by making a loving turn out of itself and towards the Other while the individual is condemned to its very egocentricity; it is a self-absorbed existence that either isolates itself from the Other or turns towards it only to make use of it. Therefore, when contemporary theological thought seeks to defend personal being versus the individual, it does so not so much on a societal basis and spectrum, but mainly from a theological understanding.

Present-day theologians, as mentioned already, like to present such contemporary insights as part of the patristic tradition of the Church. They appear to put forward their perceptions not as innovative ideas but as positions that one can well find and draw from the theology of the Fathers. Truly enough, the fact that man is created to exist as a being related to the Other is not anything alien to what the Fathers would have to say about man. The patristic mind would well be in accord with the idea that man was created by God to exist and rejoice in a loving relationship with Him as well as in sharing and relating with the other men and with all the creation. Hence man was not made as a solitary entity but as Adam and Eve. The biblical text is explicit about God's will in the creation of man: 'it is not good for man to be alone'. Man was created to be loved and to love, primarily to share in God's beatitude and maintain his being through a relationship of trust and love for God. Hence the Fall for the patristic mind is nothing other than the breaking of the bond with God, the ceasing of trust in God and of referring one's existence to Him. All these are positions that the Church Fathers and writers would very comfortably go along with and in fact it is a substantial part of their teaching. In the Fathers' teaching the revealed God of the Christians is a personal God who

out of the abundance of His love became man to meet again the fallen Adam and who continuously calls his creature back into a recovery of his broken bond with God. The God whom the Fathers proclaim is truly a God-lover calling man, and through man the whole of the creation, into a relationship with Him.

Accordingly, the distinction between 'person' and 'individual' is not something unsuited to the mind of the patristic tradition. Certainly, this differentiation does not appear as such anywhere in the patristic texts and it is unquestionably a modern articulation. However, even though the terms and the distinction as such between 'person' and 'individual' are not explicitly there in the work of the Fathers in the way they are voiced today, the concepts/meanings and the qualities to which the terms allude are very much present in the Fathers' thought and theology.

When the Fathers speak of fallen man, when they refer to the effects of the fall and the new state of the 'garments of skin', they refer to a state of being for the humans and for the world or creation in general where also fissure and dispersion prevail, where the harmonious unity and the loving communion of paradise have been lost and the authentic image of man has been damaged. They speak of a condition of being dominated by the passions, where the power of the soul, the *νοῦς*, has been darkened and consequently all the operations of the human nature assume a wicked and compelling disposition and cease to reflect the nature's true logos; they now lack their transparency and authenticity, they have become passionate functions. The fallen state of being is a condition where life does not derive from the relationship with God anymore; it is not realized in sharing and in the communion of a self-abandoning love as it was in the delight of paradise. Life now is found in self-reliance and in self-preservation. Adam's hiding from God's call and his self-defence in justifying himself for his drifting away from God is an image of the breach, the dispersal and the isolation into which man now enters and to which through him the whole of the creation is also dragged. After the fall, the centre of reference is not the Other, but one's own self; man's existing does not derive from the love for the Other but from securing the self's own gain, by turning the Other to one's use and advantage. In the Fathers' exposition man's being after the Fall equates to what the contemporary theological language would delineate as 'being an individual'. It is a state where man lacks his inner freedom, his freedom, that is, from the passions and the vanity of his fallen nature, and thus he does not connect lovingly with the things outside him. In this

sense then the patristic mind – discussing the restoration of the primordial order – connects the absence of passions (ἀπάθεια) with love (ἀγάπη). All such ideas illustrating or interpreting man's fall are there in the Fathers, even though the latter's language does not involve the term 'individual' to refer to the fallen man. Equally, they do not make use of the term 'person' with the content that the word holds in its contemporary usage, in the modern context of discussing personalism, – alluding to authenticity and to the fullness of being, or to what the religious language would refer to as holiness.

On the grounds that I have tried to describe so far, I understand that when modern theologians discuss human nature in terms of communal being and relatedness they actually do so by drawing on a tradition that is already there. Also when they make the distinction between what they specify as the authentic mode of human being, namely the person, and what they see as the alienation of the former, that is the individual, it is primarily on a spiritual level that they identify or detect the difference. Thus by 'individual' they mean nothing less than what the patristic material would refer to as the damaged image of man or as the fallen nature. Subsequently to this the 'individual' today is then also identified with the modern expressions of man's failure to connect lovingly with God and with the world around him, examples of which we have given above: estrangement, the impersonalisation of human beings and man's becoming only a unit or a number, nature turning to selfishness, all in all man no longer being the minister and guardian of the creation, but a destructive consumer and an exploiter. Such contemporary theological insights are therefore not at variance with the patristic mind. What probably differentiates the contemporary theological presentations from the patristic tradition is the way in which certain aspects of man's being – such as relatedness or communal existence – are emphasized and put forward in such a way that they stand out as *the* characteristics of the human nature. Furthermore, theologians of today vary from the theological tradition established in the past in the way that they seem to associate their positions about the human nature and existence with the doctrine about the Trinity for example, a connection that cannot be found in the same explicit way in the Fathers.

3. Comment on Yannaras' use of Patristic citations

Having made a description of Yannaras' main positions as these are expounded in *Person and Eros*, it is interesting to turn to and look into the patristic sources that Yannaras quotes in defence of his expositions. For on the one hand Yannaras found himself led to this understanding of human relationships by his reading of the Fathers, and yet, as his critics have pointed out, what he finds in the Fathers seems to go beyond any ideas they might have had themselves. It is worth then looking in some detail at a selection of these citations to determine whether Yannaras can be regarded as faithful to his patristic sources, or perhaps better, what kind of faithfulness is implied in his creative use of these patristic sources. The thoughts Yannaras proposes in his book seem to rest on the patristic mind. *Person and Eros* abounds with references to patristic works. The use Yannaras makes of the patristic material is very extensive. In preparing what follows I looked closely at ten cases of patristic quotations used in *Person and Eros*, and I will give the description of four such references here. The examples I use come from St Gregory of Nyssa and from St Maximus the Confessor. Based on the limited sample of Yannaras' references to patristic sources at which I have looked, I will try to make a few points exploring how Yannaras founds his personalistic expositions on the Fathers and whether he draws them from the particular Church authors accurately and justly. I hope that the closer description of the specific references that will follow will justify and demonstrate the truth of the general evaluation of Yannaras' use of these references.

A first general response on juxtaposing the two bodies of material looked at, that of Yannaras and of the Fathers, is the realization that certain patristic texts from which Yannaras draws are not on the same subject as the one Yannaras himself is involved in. As can be shown in the analysis of specific quotations further on, the theme that St Gregory of Nyssa and St Maximus deal with each time is not the same that Yannaras discusses and in defence of which he quotes from the patristic texts. Yannaras, as we have seen, is mainly involved in discussing the ontological issue, the question about beings and Being, and he proposes the notion of personal existence as a fundamental category within this discussion. Throughout Yannaras' *Person and Eros* the idea of the person, with all the attributes and the existential consequences that the latter brings about, is a core idea, central to all the aspects of arguments

that Yannaras makes. Yannaras' topic basically is personalist existentialism. However, none of the patristic texts I am looking at below gets into such a conversation. It is pretty clear that the themes the Church Fathers were addressing had a noticeably different interest and a different objective. The latter are trying to clarify the content and consequently to secure the correct use of terms like 'substance' and 'hypostasis', or are discussing the function of νοῦς in man and treating the views of their time with relation to the mind and its connections to the human body. They further talk about the event of the Church and describe its symbolism, as St Maximus does in the *Mystagogia*. But by no means do the Fathers seem to discuss existence the way Yannaras does; indeed, they appear quite unaware of the whole context of thought that Yannaras is concerned with. As can be shown in the examples below, Yannaras draws phrases from the Fathers used in a certain context of discussion and uses them as a foundation to his own thought, which is concerned with a different topic from that of the Fathers. In this way we would say that certain concepts are projected on to the Fathers since they are absent from the patristic text; an example of this based on the references I have examined is the priority of hypostasis or personal existence – Yannaras introduces and widely uses 'existence' as alternative or equivalent to 'hypostasis' – that Yannaras proposes versus nature, a notion absent from the particular texts of St Gregory of Nyssa to which Yannaras refers us. The variance of the theme between Yannaras' text and that of the Fathers, especially in certain cases, is striking.

A second general comment on Yannaras' use of the patristic references, which follows from what was just stated above, is that Yannaras isolates patristic expressions which he most of the time successfully blends into his own writing, however these phrases appear to be suspended in terms of the context in which they are used. Yannaras does not truly refer his arguments to a patristic text that treats a similar topic of discussion as his; what he rather does is to pick up phrases or even single words from the Fathers and integrate them into his own discourse, in a way that rather creates the illusion that Yannaras' positions reflect the patristic mind. Such a realization is confirmed when we realize that the reference to the patristic sources made by Yannaras is often very fragmentary if not inaccurate. The patristic quotes used are often dislocated from their true context, and stretched by Yannaras to express something else than what the Fathers wished to say when they were using them.

Furthermore, it is useful to examine the quotations that are used really closely, no matter how scrutinizing such an attitude may seem to be; by doing so we come to discover that sometimes certain references are not accurately quoted. I have come across references where the patristic quotations have been altered, either by the addition of some words or by replacing a single word with another, close in meaning. Now, it may be argued that the alterations are insignificant. However, we could not leave unmentioned the fact that we even notice some misquotations. The analysis of certain quotations that follows can hopefully bring evidence for the above remarks.

Speaking about the personal way of being in the first part of *Person and Eros* Yannaras quotes repeatedly from St Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Creation of Man*. In particular I shall look at a passage from chapter VI of St Gregory's work which Yannaras quotes twice: «Μία γάρ τις ἐστι δύναμις, αὐτός ὁ ἐγκείμενος νοῦς, ὁ δι' ἐκάστου τῶν αἰσθητηρίων διεξιὼν, καὶ τῶν ὄντων ἐπιδρασσόμενος. Οὗτος θεωρεῖ διὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τό φαινόμενον, οὗτος συνιᾷ διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς τό λεγόμενον, ἀγαπᾷ τε τό κατενθύμιον, καὶ τό μή καθ' ἡδονήν ἀποστρέφεται, καὶ τῇ χειρί χρηται πρὸς ὅ,τι βούλεται». [For there is one faculty, the implanted mind itself, which passes through each of the organs of sense and grasps the things that exist. This it is that, by means of the eyes, beholds what is seen; this it is that, by means of hearing, understands what is said; that loves what we set our hearts on, and turns from what is unpleasant; that uses the hand for whatever it wills.]

The passage comes from the sixth chapter of *On the Creation of Man*,³⁰² the content of which however – in order to discern what is the principle or the basis of the thought of Gregory of Nyssa in it – would need to be looked at not in isolation, disconnected that is from what immediately precedes it, but in continuity with what has been said earlier in the patristic work, that is in chapters four and five. There, St Gregory was speaking of the authority granted to man over the rest of the creation, showing how the character of man's creation demonstrates

³⁰² PG 44. 140.

that man was made to have a ruling position in the world. This is so because man was made in the likeness of God, therefore taking after the divine kingship, and exactly in paragraph five St Gregory exposes a series of qualities granted to man, due to which the latter is found to resemble God. However, the variety of these qualities or energies should not cause us think that the simplicity or the oneness of God's nature is abandoned (or destroyed) because of them; therefore St Gregory goes on in paragraph six, which is headed 'Examination of the connection of the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ to nature, in which also the doctrine of the Anomoeans is incidentally questioned', to speak about this oneness that is the feature of God's nature. In this line of thought he brings out the function of $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, taken as an example from the human reality, where despite the range of our senses, with which we connect to all that is out there, the perceiving power behind all of them is one only, and that is man's intellect or power of knowledge, the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, which is the one and same operating through all the human senses and the bodily expressions.

The patristic lines in discussion are quoted by Yannaras twice, at two different points in *Person and Eros*, specifically in paragraphs 15 and 21 of the book, both within the first part of it, where the personal way of existence is discussed. More particularly, in the first case³⁰³ Gregory of Nyssa's text is employed alongside a couple of other quotations, from Gregory Palamas and Macarius of Egypt, as a supporting reference to the idea that the soul is not to be simply considered as one part of man's existence, identified with the spiritual element in man, say, and seen as contrasted to the material part of him, but that it rather represents the especial or the distinctive character of man's being, as this results from God's particular creative energy, when he breathed life into man. Right at the same point Yannaras in further words identifies the soul, $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$, with the whole of man as a united personal existence, with what he has defined as a person, the unique and distinctive personal being in its unparalleled expression. (And the body consequently, he will go on to say, again is not just a part of man's being, but rather the material expression of the whole of the man again). Now, no matter how appealing this idea may be, trying to parallel it with what the patristic source says turns out to be rather a puzzling task, as the two texts (Yannaras' and Gregory of Nyssa's) do not appear to be talking about exactly the same thing. Yes, a notion of unity with respect to man's being is

³⁰³ *Person and Eros*, p. 68.

present in both authors, however Gregory's reference quoted above does not talk about the single personal hypostasis in relation to the compound nature of man. In that particular quotation under discussion, St Gregory does not even touch, as far as I can understand it, on the issue of the composite human nature and does not give any definition of the component parts. He only talks about qualities of God that were passed on to man in the creation of the latter, and he also tries to secure the one nature of God and its simplicity, despite all the different energies through which God is revealed. If there is an idea of singleness that St Gregory is preoccupied with, that is the singleness of nature despite its expression through various energies, and not the singleness of existence despite the compound character of nature. The picture of this distinction between the two texts may seem to blur as one tries to look at it, but I think the two texts do not talk exactly about the same thing.

The second time the same lines of St Gregory of Nyssa are quoted³⁰⁴ is within the same part of *Person and Eros* describing the personal way of existence, where Yannaras talks about the unity of the person and in particular about the energies through which the nature or substance can be revealed or approached in each personal existence. He distinguishes the energies of the nature in "homogenous" and "heterogenous" energies, with respect to the nature that lies behind and generates them. To make this more explicit, if we are, quite arbitrarily Yannaras notes, to consider speech as a substance itself, then the voice is a "homogenous" energy of it, while we could take written language or music or any art as "heterogenous" energies of this substance. In the case of God's substance, God's grace is energy akin to God's nature, whereas all created things are rather "heterogenous" energies, ways of expression, that is, of the divine nature. And in the case of man the energy "homogenous" to his nature is man's power of love and self-offering, while all creations, 'ποιήματα', resulting from human action or effort are more subtle ways, so to speak, of revealing human nature. In this line of discussion Yannaras wants to stress the unique and unequal way in which the energies of the nature are realized in each person, the distinct way in which each personal existence embodies one and the same nature. This uniqueness of the realization of the nature in each person is represented also by the human body, which is a primary expression of the matchless way in which human nature is manifested. Yannaras wants to stress the exclusiveness of the person, the unparalleled character of the personal

³⁰⁴ *Person and Eros*, p. 93.

existence, which is most immediately noticed over the individuality of the human body, and this is where he quotes St Gregory. However, from what has been expounded above in relation to the content of the patristic text quoted here, the inconsistency of the idea discussed by the two authors is again, one can say, striking.

For Yannaras the idea of the person is a fundamental ontological category, personal existence is *the* way to be, and a central point he makes within this discussion is that the person is by definition something integral, united and unique in the way it represents or incarnates human nature. One way to put forward this unity of the person is by focusing on the union of the spiritual and bodily elements in man. Yannaras' main focus in the relevant discussion is to put emphasis on the idea that human existence is single and one despite its compound nature. The unity of the person is not damaged or diminished because of the twofold character of man's being, material, that is, and non-material. Personal existence remains a mystery of synthesis and unity and no antithesis should be envisaged between its composite parts.³⁰⁵ However, in the use of the above quotation that I have examined, there is a discrepancy of objectives between Yannaras' use of the patristic lines and the context in which these were initially uttered.

The other three of Yannaras' references to the patristic mind that we will look at here come from *Mystagogia* by St Maximus the Confessor. In the first chapters of this work St Maximus discusses some symbolic references of the Church, as how the Church can be interpreted as a symbol or an image of God, of the cosmos, of man or even of the soul. Thus in chapter one he sets off describing how the Church can be understood as an image of God. He basically draws a parallel between the two, God and the Church, on the ground of the feature of unity that both of them bring about. God brings and holds everything together, all the parts of the creation, both visible and invisible reality, as being the cause, the beginning and the end of all. In a similar way the Church holds all its members together by granting the same spiritual renewal to all and by letting all people be called after the name of Christ, despite their miscellaneous origin, manner of life and circumstances, gender or age, customs and habits, knowledge or the offices they may hold. All those differences are overshadowed by the fact

³⁰⁵ *Person and Eros*, p. 67.

that every single one participates equally in the body of the Church and shares likewise in the grace and faith and the relationship with the whole community. In exactly the same way the different nature of each of the parts of the creation is put in the shade before the fact that all refer to the same origin and cause which is the one Creator and God. All are viewed in a totality, where their individual differences are not terminated or invalidated, but rather outshone by the luminous fact that they all share in their one common cause; in St Maximus words, ‘καθ’ ἣν ἡ τε ὁλότης αὐτή, καί τὰ τῆς ὁλότητος μέρη φαίνεσθαί τε καί εἶναι πέφυκεν ὡς ὅλην ἔχοντα τὴν αἰτίαν ἑαυτῶν ὑπερλάμπουσαν’.³⁰⁶ [According to which the wholeness itself and the parts of the wholeness are accustomed both to appear and to be as having the whole of their cause radiating from beyond.]

The above quotation is taken up by Yannaras early in the third part of *Person and Eros*.³⁰⁷ There, Yannaras explores – further to the *energies* of the person that he discussed in earlier parts of his book – ways in which the reality of the person – as an ecstatic, relational existence – is revealed. Thus he looks at *logos* as one of these ways, taking *logos* to mean both the inner structural principle of the nature of things and, following from this, the conventional words or verbal expression, in which in fact the constituent attributes of things, as he explains, are actually depicted. *Logos* ultimately for Yannaras is the exposure of a personal relationship, of a direct encounter with whatever *is*, that lets us know things and get a grasp of or approach to their *logos*. In this line of argument he brings up the *cosmic logos*, as a revelation or evidence of the energies of God, and therefore as an indication or support of a personal creator. I think Yannaras smoothly integrates the patristic quotation into his own text, however it feels as if he stretches the patristic lines further than what St Maximus meant them to denote; that is further from the fact that all the created parts have or refer to a common cause, ἀρχή, which was at least what Maximus’ lines were talking about. Yannaras takes this further into another context, where he wishes to show that all having the same cause, are an evidence of the same *personal* logos of God, and this again is a part of his whole discussion of the personal existence as an ecstatic, relational one.

³⁰⁶ St Maximus, *Mystagogia* PG 91. 665.

³⁰⁷ *Person and Eros*, p. 221.

In the fifth chapter of *Mystagogia* St Maximus gives an exposition of the human soul, so as to demonstrate how the latter can be viewed again as a representation of the Church. Inside the range of such a discussion St Maximus gives an account of the different elements of the human soul, starting basically with the distinction between the νοερόν or contemplative part of it and the πρακτικόν, the active element, so to speak. He then exposes how these two respectively relate to the truth, ἀλήθεια, and to the good or the virtuous, ἀγαθόν. The description of the soul goes in short like this: the theoretical (i.e. contemplative) part is what we can call mind, νοῦς, which is successively connected to wisdom, to contemplation, θεωρία, to knowledge, and to knowledge enduring or immortal, the end and the fulfillment of which is the truth. The practical (i.e. the active) element of the soul, λόγος, in a similar manner evolves through prudence, φρόνησις, to action, πράξις, then to virtue or excellence, ἀρετή, and to faith, πίστις, and the end of all of which is the good, ἀγαθόν. Further on St Maximus will go on to couple the above aspects of the human soul, that is, the mind with reason, λόγον, wisdom with prudence, seeing with works or action, knowledge with virtue and immortal knowledge with faith, all of the latter being caused or following on from the former respectively.

From chapter V of *Mystagogia* Yannaras quotes twice, both quotations brought up in the third part of *Person and Eros* where the author discusses ways, as it were, that are evidence of, or which signify, the reality of the person, that is of personal existence. In particular, St Maximus' lines of which Yannaras makes use here are the following: 'ἐνέργεια γάρ ἐστι καί φανέρωσις τοῦ νοῦ ὁ λόγος'³⁰⁸ [The reason <logos> is the activity and manifestation of the intellect <nous>] and 'Τῆς ψυχῆς, τό μέν θεωρητικόν... τό δέ πρακτικόν καί τό μέν θεωρητικόν ἐκάλει νοῦν τό δέ πρακτικόν, λόγον.'³⁰⁹ [Of the soul there is the contemplative... and the practical <aspect>, the contemplative is called intellect <nous>, and the practical reason <logos>]

³⁰⁸ PG 91.680B.

³⁰⁹ PG 91.673C.

In the first instance³¹⁰ Yannaras discusses the function of the language, as basically a means through which a personal encounter with things is indicated. The words we use to speak about things and describe things are not random or just rambling sounds, the meaning of which we just conventionally agree upon to enable communication. Yannaras wants to defend the idea that human speech, the words we use to refer to things and communicate, is based on something more than a conventional agreement as to their meaning. They are rather vehicles of one's knowledge of things deriving from personal experience; a personal encounter with things, relational or personal experience of, or relationship with, all the different aspects of the world and of life is imprinted, as it were, in the various words we use to describe this experience of the reality that surrounds us. Thus, before language turns to conventional symbolism or names or meanings for the sake of interpersonal contact, it is initially a conveyor of the knowledge of the person about other beings or persons, as this knowledge is acquired through a direct engagement with things. In this way language, Yannaras will go on to assert, is the possibility the person has to denote and express his/her unique and unequalled, ecstatic, catholic, relational connexion with the other beings and the other persons. In support of this analysis Yannaras uses the first of the quotations we examine here coupled with another passage from Maximus, from the *Chapters on Various Texts*: 'ἡ γλῶσσα τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν γνωστικῆς ἐνεργείας ἐστὶ σύμβολον'³¹¹ – 'ἐνέργεια γάρ ἐστι καὶ φανέρωσις τοῦ νοῦ ὁ λόγος'. At first glance, one might well easily admit that the patristic lines smoothly integrate into Yannaras' thought. However, the second passage, as our translation indicates, is not primarily about language; neither is the first passage, where γλῶσσα seems to mean tongue, rather than language. The variance of topic between the patristic work and Yannaras again cannot pass unnoticed. If Yannaras' reference to chapter V of Maximus' *Mystagogia* aspires to offer a patristic testimony to or justification for his own discussion, then the effort could be easily defeated, and the case is no better with the quotation from the *Chapters on Various Texts*. By no means is St Maximus involved in a discussion on the function of language, even less on ways of signifying personal existence.

³¹⁰ *Person and Eros*, p. 215.

³¹¹ *Kephalaia Theologika* II (*sic*) (PG 90. 1253C), 'the tongue <or language, as Yaanaras takes it> is a symbol of the knowing activity of the soul', quoted in *Person and Eros*, p. 215.

With relation to the second quotation from St Maximus' *Mystagogia* (chapter V) highlighted earlier and used by Yannaras, it is again taken up into a not very different discussion than the one of Yannaras described above. This time Yannaras discusses the function of the image and of visual forms as means initiating us to the view of the truth, θέαση τῆς ἀλήθειας, and to knowledge.³¹² The forms the images take is another way that points to the event that we know things personally, through personal, relational involvement, in a way that is unique and unequalled for each of us and only depicted in images, that cannot be exhausted but only experienced, within the event of one's personal ecstatic being. The images, as Yannaras explains, disclose and at the same time conceal what they mean to illustrate, as what they reveal are the forms, the appearances, and not the substance of the things they depict. The truth of things is thus concealed, and it is the purpose of a personal struggle and asceticism to approach it and come to view and know it. The importance of personal involvement, ecstatic-relational engagement with things and personal experience and knowledge is once again here highlighted. Also underlined, I hope, is the fact that the three levels of knowledge that Yannaras discusses in this context, that is the possibility to know things on the basis of the senses (αἴσθησις), of the reason (λόγος) and of the mind (νοῦς), forms a different topic of discussion altogether from the one with which St Maximus in *Mystagogia*, which is being quoted here, is occupied.

As the examples given above illustrate in some detail, Yannaras' use of the Fathers is a matter of some complexity. There is no question that Yannaras was in fact inspired by his reading of the Fathers and as far as the general thrust of his work is concerned he should be regarded faithful to the Fathers' general message. Furthermore, it is perhaps useful to draw a distinction between the general perspective on anthropology that Yannaras draws from his reading of the Fathers, especially Maximus and Gregory of Nyssa, and the use to which he puts particular citations from their works. In the case of these particular citations, it seems that Yannaras' enthusiasm often leads him to read into the Fathers ideas they did not have or to read their passages against a background that they would not have shared.

³¹² *Person and Eros*, p. 254.

Chapter IV

The Freedom of Morality

Yannaras' philosophical discussion about personal existence is not just a theoretical engagement with an intellectual matter. His positions on the issue of being and on human existence are not generated and put forward by him as some merely conceptual advances that match the need to pursue speculative objectives or that meet with the requirements for conducting academic work. His insights do not assume their meaning and do not aspire to make a point on just an abstract, notional level. Before it takes the form of a theoretical pursuit, Yannaras' quest to explore and approach the constituents of personal existence and to set forth a perspective with respect to human personhood, is first and foremost a search of a practical character, an enquiry with a very pragmatic concern: What is the truth about human existence and how does that truth delineate the way man should live? Even more specifically, how does the truth about human existence relate to the existence and life of the Church? Basically, what does participation in the life of the Church involve, what are the parameters of an authentic Christian life?

Yannaras' theoretical exploration of what it means to be a person connects, therefore, though not always very obviously in all of his works, with the theology of the Church and the tradition of Church life. This is explicitly the case in *The Freedom of Morality* with which I will engage in this chapter. Yannaras sees the existence of the person in absolute connection with the nature and the being of the Church, because what he delineates as 'personal existence' or 'hypostatic being' is to him attainable only within the life of the Church. This is so for, in Yannaras' perception, the Church represents not just a religious institution or a certain group of people sharing the same ideas, but a state of being, the mode of communal being, where an individual has the opportunity to turn into a person. An individual existence becomes a personal hypostasis, in Yannaras' wording, only to the extent that it is restored to the true Life that the Church represents and sets forth. The state of being that we ordinarily

know as humans is a fallen state, a condition of life incomplete and subject to pain, corruption and death. It is a condition from which human nature alone cannot rise above unless it partakes in the life of immortality which was brought about by the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ and which is transmitted through his body, the Church. The hypostatic union of the human and the divine natures in the single person of Christ represents the model and the possibility for man to be a hypostatic existence, a personal existence, unparalleled in the way he realizes being and free from the necessities of the nature. Man achieves his true being, which in Yannaras' formulation is existence as personal distinctiveness and freedom in a communion of love, only as he is grafted into the fullness of life and the immortality of human nature that Christ's incarnation and resurrection inaugurated. And this is realized through the life of the Church.

Therefore, all Yannaras's account of human personhood and personal existence, as we went through it in the third chapter of this work, though very philosophical in appearance, links intrinsically with the true content of the nature of the Church and life within it. If the Church is the body of Christ, the re-establishment of life and being in their archetypal mode, then the human possibility of returning to the original mode of being, which is personal existence, is essentially bound up with man's participation and his engraftment into the true life realized in the person of the incarnated Logos, in the person of Christ, and prolonged in history through His body which is the Church. Partaking in the life of the Church provides the opportunity man has to transcend the present state of his nature, that is the corruption and the mortality of nature, and the present condition of his existence, which is his fragmentary biological individuality, self-centred and limited in space and time. Only through the life of the Church, the life that flows from the empty tomb of the resurrected Christ, can fallen humanity emerge reborn in the true, original way of being, into life immortal and life realized as personal distinctiveness and loving communion. Yannaras' thought is mostly expressed through philosophical language, but despite the philosophical clothing his reflections actually convey theological convictions.³¹³ Therefore, in Yannaras' thought, man's present state of being suffers entrapment in the aftermath of the Fall, it reflects the consequences of the abolition of authentic life which was life as loving communion and union with God. By

³¹³ For a theological exposition on the topic of the nature and truth of the Church by Yannaras see Christos Yannaras, *Αλήθεια και ενότητα της Εκκλησίας* [*Truth and Unity of the Church*] (Athens: Grigoris Publications, 1997).

Adam's free rejection of communion of love and trust in God, by his drifting away from God and his ceasing to realize being as a relationship with reference to the Other, God's image in him was damaged and the possibilities of his nature suffered distortion. This means that the way man was created to be, that is as personal distinctiveness and communion of love, was abandoned, and instead of realizing the possibilities of his nature for personal existence, he rendered human nature fragmented into individual entities; the possibility of nature being realized as a life of love and communion is now turned into the absolute need for individual survival and into the individual's illusion of self-existence in its egocentric self-sufficiency. Man himself, as created nature, cannot overturn the state of being implemented by the Fall, he cannot conquer corruption and death. He can do so only by uniting himself again with the source of everlasting life that is God, only by engrafting himself into the body of the incarnated Logos of God who in the experience of the Church is Jesus Christ and who took up in his person fallen human nature and renewed it by restoring it in its original splendour.

In this way Yannaras' philosophical positions about the personal existence have from this perspective a highly practical significance. There is a direct link between the existential truth about man and man's practical life; the viewpoint we take in relation to man's being has immediate consequences for the understanding we will subsequently form with regard to what human life involves, how should man's existence be organised and expressed in every level, social, political, economical or other. That is how Yannaras evaluates the diverse historical interpretations of and stances towards the ontological question – namely, in the scope of the author's discussion, the Western Christian tradition and the tradition of the Christian East – that have resulted in different historical formulations and cultural expressions. And since Yannaras' philosophical speculation reflects his theological framework, the practical significance of his views relates to the content of the Christian life, to what membership of and life in the Church involves. Yannaras' existential approach to man's being – the idea, for instance, that man's true existence is personal, which is existence as complete distinctiveness which cannot be delimited or predetermined by nature, that man, in other words, transcends nature – is all reflected in his understanding of the nature of the Church and the kind of life into which the Church invites us and which she sets forth for her members.

We would certainly not err if we said that Yannaras' work and the interests he took on followed naturally from the experiences in his youth in the religious environment of Zoë, as we have shown in the first chapter, and also from the incentives that the young man's life and study abroad later gave him. In this way his pursuits reflect, or are an expression of, those early experiences and years of his life. Yannaras, as we have seen him confessing through some parts of his autobiographical material, was left, after his experiences in the strictly moralistic environment of Zoë, with the strong need and an eagerness to know and to clarify what the true content of Christian life was. This meant that he would have to identify authentic understanding about the being of the Church and what life in the Church was about. In other words, as we have mentioned before, he was left with a 'Hunger and Thirst'³¹⁴ to find out and to throw light on the orthodox criteria for the Christian life, for Christian spirituality, for the life and nature of the Church. His academic work then, we could say, has been a sequence of advances where gradually and bit by bit Yannaras achieved some theoretical answers in matters that certainly reflected his own personal existential quest. This means that to resolve the troubling or even painful questions that he was left with after he abandoned Zoë was not a matter of theoretical importance only; to come up with answers was rather a pressing requirement for him personally, it was a hugely significant task that he owed first and foremost to himself.

In the pages that follow I will try to describe how Yannaras' philosophical stance in relation to the question of ontology and existence has consequences for the way he views and puts forward the content of the Christian life for man as a member of the Church. The existential repercussions of his positions on personal being are more apparent when he discusses Christian ethos and morality, an area of his presentation that has attracted the most criticism and that created an upheaval in Greek theological circles in the past. Yannaras engaged with these topics in *The Freedom of Morality*, a work that the western audience received rather genially,³¹⁵ but which brought down on the author severe criticisms and attacks

³¹⁴ As we saw in the first chapter, this was the title of one of Yannaras' juvenilia, a compilation of short literary essays that he composed while still a probationer in Zoë; the title he gave to the collection is without doubt a witness to the state of his intellect at the time.

³¹⁵ In his review of *The Freedom of Morality* Norman Russell greeted the book as 'a stimulating meditation on the nature of man, ...full of valuable insights', seeing in it a 'guide to the thinking of the Greek Fathers on the nature of man': Norman Russell, review of *I Eleftheria tou Ithous* (Athens: Ekdoseis Grigori, 1979) by Christos

on the Greek side when it was published in 1970. We are so informed in *Τά καθ' ἐαυτόν*, where through Yannaras' own exposition we are also acquainted with the feelings of sorrow and bitterness that he experienced in those days at the way in which his work and himself were treated. The positions expressed in his book, in Yannaras' view, were not criticised in a constructive way; the faultfinders did not engage productively with the content of the book, they did not disprove his ideas by building constructive arguments against them. They did not appear interested in listening to him, in indicating errors or winning him over. Instead, rather shocked by the positions and the language of his book – which for that time must have been novel and therefore provocative – they sought just to condemn and blame him. The assaults came from all sides, even from people considered to be close friends, while many of the attackers, Yannaras points out, were just alarmed and driven by the general censure; they had not even read the book themselves. Even those who agreed with the positions in *The Freedom of Morality* still accused him of 'exaggerations' and 'scathing language' that they felt to be unacceptable. There was also, although as an exception, an enthusiastic response to the book by some Greek poets: Nikos Karouzos, Nikos Triandafylopoulos, and Panos Laliatsis. The majority, however, hurled charges at the author, that he was a heretic, a betrayer of the faith, a blasphemer and an agent of the imperialist powers.³¹⁶

Yannaras comments that today the positions of the book would seem commonplace: morality is derived either from a social consensus or from the unquestionable submission to supreme authorities or it results from ontology. In this last case, when regulative principles result from the answer we give to the ontological question, then morality amounts to man's struggle for existential authenticity, it is his very adventure of exercising freedom, poised on the borders between authentic life, *κατ' ἀλήθειαν ζωή*, and the alienation or falsification of life. In this way morality is freed from the legalistic formalism, even though this autonomy is a painful one for the human consciousness, since formalism offers protection, a sense of psychological security and egocentric armour, wholly required by the human psyche.³¹⁷

Yannaras in *Sobornost* 5:2 (1983), pp. 96-8. In all fairness, the work met with some sharp criticisms too, however reviewers agreed on its creative and perceptive element.

³¹⁶ *Καθ' ἐαυτόν*, pp. 95-6.

³¹⁷ *Καθ' ἐαυτόν*, p. 97.

1. The basis for discussing morality

The starting point for a Christian to talk about truth and existence and consequently about the meaning and the content of the true life, is the content of the Christian Revelation, in other words the experience of the Church, extending from as early as the time when the Israelites were designated the people of God, an event that is seen to have prefigured the establishment of the Church as the body of Christ in the times of the New Testament. And the Christian Revelation for the Church is none other than God's presence made known in a very personal way. He is God the Father, who commits Himself and bestows upon His people a covenant, God the Son who entered history by taking up human flesh, the Logos of God incarnate in the historical person of Jesus Christ, and God the Spirit bequeathed to the Church as her Paraclete by whom the Church is built up and nourished. God is revealed as a Trinity, a communion of inseparably distinct and non-confusedly united persons. We made a more extensive reference to this association between the truth about God and the truth about the human being in the part of the previous chapter, where we saw how such an approach is exemplified in the recent years in the discourse developed on human personhood as an extension of the Trinitarian theology into anthropology.

Yannaras' material does not present us with any very thorough review of this kind. We do not find in his work an examination of the Trinitarian interpersonal relations and of the ramifications these have for human personhood in exactly the same way as we find it in other authors. Still, Yannaras' exposition and his perspective are by no means devoid of the same attitude of discussing man's being in the light of God's being.³¹⁸ Yannaras sets off from the fact that the truth that the Church holds about God is not related to an abstract God. God in the faith of the Christians is not known or understood as an objective ultimate power, neither is he identified with a vague energy that stands at the beginning of the world, the neutral primal cause or 'prime mover'.³¹⁹ Nor does the Christian faith see God merely as a guarantor of value, an authority required for validating ethics. Yannaras is keen on emphasising that God in the Christian tradition is known as a particular hypostasis, as He who *is* (Ex 3:14), as a personal God. He is revealed to mankind on specific occasions and is known to people by his

³¹⁸ See 'The ethos of Trinitarian communion' in *The Freedom of Morality*, pp. 16-8.

³¹⁹ *Freedom of Morality*, p. 16.

relating to them in a personal way, being thus the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He assumes human flesh and becomes a theme of specific reference (σημεῖο συγκεκριμένης ἀναφοράς): ‘we speak that which we have known and testify that which we have seen’ (John 3:11); and he also stays with the people and edifies them in the truth (John 14:16, 14:26). All of God’s personal manifestations are one and the same God, an undivided communion of hypostaseis, being inseparably together in a loving coinherence. This delineates for Yannaras the way we are to understand and speak about Being and existence. We cannot talk, this means, about Being as such in an abstract way, we cannot approach Being save in particular existences. In the case of God we can talk of His being only as this is known to us in God’s personal revelation, and God reveals Himself, Yannaras emphasizes, as personal distinctiveness and as love. In the faith of the Christian tradition God’s being instantiates in every instance a quite unique expression of being and of relating; God is made known as a completely distinct presence and He also amounts to a presence of utter and unfailing love. God is love, as the biblical tradition affirms; He is the true Eros, as the patristic mind has also set down. This leads Yannaras to the understanding, as we have seen in the previous chapter, that the only possibility for God’s Being – and subsequently for the human being – to be is the personal: personal existence is the comprehensive and exhaustive expression of God’s being.³²⁰ God’s personal existence reveals to us the truth about Being, and this truth is that true Being is realized as distinctiveness and love in freedom, as a life of loving communion of distinct persons. God the Father ‘*constitutes* His essence or being, making it into “hypostases”’: freely and from love He begets the Son and causes the Holy Spirit to proceed. Consequently, being stems not from the essence, which would make it an ontological necessity, but from the person and the freedom of its love which “hypostasizes” being into a personal and Trinitarian communion. God the Father’s *mode of being* constitutes existence and life as a fact of love and personal communion’.³²¹

If our knowledge of the true God, the truth of the Trinitarian God, reveals to us the truth about Being, then, Yannaras’ argument goes on, we can draw from our experience of God as Trinity to understand and speak of the existence of man. This is not an arbitrary

³²⁰ *Freedom*, p. 17

³²¹ *Freedom*, pp. 17-8.

connection Yannaras makes, but as with others, it follows naturally since, according to the biblical instruction, man was made in the ‘image of God’. The truth about God’s being has great significance for understanding the truth about man’s being. For Yannaras this means that since God *is* as personal distinctiveness and love man was made to exist also as personal distinctiveness and loving co-existence. Man made in ‘the image of God’ for Yannaras means that man was made with the potentiality to realize his own nature in the same *mode of existence* as God. The ‘image of God’ in man, God’s imprint in man, has, in the course of the Church history, under the influence of Western rationalism, been erroneously associated, Yannaras notes, with the nature of man as such, and even further with only just one part of man’s nature, the ‘spiritual’ part, and with certain properties of man’s ‘spiritual’ nature.³²² However, this is something that contradicts patristic references of which Yannaras makes use³²³ and which see man’s soul and body as united in an existential totality, and understand the ‘image of God’ in reference to both, to the whole of man’s nature. Yannaras, therefore, strongly proclaims that the image of God in man relates to the possibility that man has to use the potentialities of his nature – such as rationality, free will, and dominion – in order to realize existence in the same way as God is, as personal distinctiveness from the nature and as communion of love, embracing in his being the totality of nature. Man is not created by God to exist in isolation; he is made to realise life as communion and to delight in the sharing of it, and when he resists this opportunity he loses something of what it means to be human. This is what Yannaras refers to as the fragmentation of nature inflicted after man’s repudiation of the possibility of realizing his being in unity with God and life as love. The Fall occurs when man defies the ‘image of God’ in himself, rendering himself an individual, that is, not an existence in communion, not an existence that draws being from the Other and realizes life as love and therefore distinctiveness from nature, but as individuality, as an entity closed in on itself and succumbing to the laws of nature, and thus fragmented. The recovery from the loss of the true mode of being can then take place, as we shall explore in later paragraphs, only in the Church, which is the depository, as it were, of Life, since it is the body of Christ, who, in his theanthropic hypostasis, restores humanity to the Trinitarian mode of existence, that is to true life. Hence the description of the Church as ‘κιβωτός’, ‘ark’, which – like the ark that in the

³²² *Freedom*, p. 24.

³²³ *Freedom*, p. 25.

days of Noah saved all the living forms of the Creation from the flood – becomes the repository of true being, of Life. The Church therefore is clearly not an ideological association, nor a society devoted to conceptual ideas or some particular philosophy; it is primarily the restoration of the damaged human nature back to its true mode of being, which is personal being, distinctive from nature, participation in the life of the Father and the Son and the Spirit. In this sense the Church inaugurates spiritual life, which applies to man's whole mode of being, and not just to some 'spiritual' part of his nature.

2. The being of the Church and the liturgical ethos

It follows, therefore, that the restoration of the human nature to the true way of being is offered as a possibility for man within the Church. Thus Yannaras is particularly keen on bringing out the true character of the being of the Church, marking it off from all alienations that it has from time to time suffered in the course of time and human history. This means that the Church to him is not at all a conventional kind of institution that exists in order to safeguard morality for society and the common good. Neither is it some sort of an ideology that exists alongside other ideological systems, to provide humans with ethical or social ideals to pursue, and thus give meaning to an otherwise insignificant or futile course of human life. Yannaras wants to emphasise that the Church does not represent a system of morality – of usually a rather conservative trend – nor does it stand for a religious structure, which provides a code of beliefs to fulfil or satisfy man's religious needs, as it were. Yannaras is clearly keen on putting forward quite a different understanding of the Church and talks about the Church in far more dynamic and existential terms. Thus the Church in Yannaras' mind is the restoration of existence to authentic life, to the true mode of being. The being of the Church involves first and foremost a presence, a very specific and tangible one, that of Christ who is in the midst 'of two or three gathered together in [His] name',³²⁴ and offered to all each time they gather to celebrate 'in remembrance of [Him]'.³²⁵ The Church is Christ, reaching through time and space to invite humanity anew to share in Him, to share in the true life, in the authentic mode of being. This means the Church is the possibility of recovery for fallen man, and the

³²⁴ Mat. 18:20.

³²⁵ Luke 22:19.

restoration of man's nature and through him of the whole of the creation to its original splendour – the re-establishment of the world to the archetypal order of existence created by God, and which was damaged by man's free act of apostasy.

Quite commonly the term 'Church' refers our mind to a certain assembly of people, say the clergy and those who practise the Christian faith; thus in our thought the word 'Church' is ordinarily associated with some sort of group or establishment, with certain customs perhaps of some particular character, such as other associations would also have. But when dealing with Yannaras' thought and vision, it becomes clear that we need to abandon completely such an understanding of the Church. For Yannaras the Church is clearly not an institution. It is the 'ecclesial event', as he often refers to it and by which description he alludes to the experience of gathering together and of being and remaining united with one another. This experience is what actually makes the Church and what at the same time manifests the reality of the Church. Yannaras employs the phrase 'ecclesial event' conscious of the meaning the term 'ecclesia' – ἐκκλησία – had originally in its Hellenic use.³²⁶ There, it denoted the assembly of the people of the city, the Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Δήμου. It referred, that is, to the function of the community that demonstrated and confirmed the very existence of the city and also made this existence possible, by being the medium through which the city operated and governed its affairs. In its Christian usage then the 'ecclesial event', the event of the Church, refers to the gathering of the people in the name of Christ to celebrate and partake in the Supper, an act that expressed and verified their common faith and at the same time realized their new faith and way of being, which was about being together 'with one accord in one place'.³²⁷ Therefore the Church – ἐκκλησία – represents for Yannaras the state of existence where life is realized as a communion of persons, as the reality of being together, of sharing being and of staying united. It signifies a way of being, a way of relating, which – as in the classical πόλις – aimed at bringing out and realizing true being, the κατ' ἀλήθειαν βίος. The ecclesial event is thus the invalidation of life realized as self-sufficiency and separation; it is the annulment of life as the survival of individual entities, which basically

³²⁶ Christos Yannaras, *Ενάντια στη Θρησκεία* [Against religion] (Athens: Ikaros, 2007), pp. 43-44.

³²⁷ Acts 2:2.

equates to existence suffering fragmentation and faced with death. This reversal in the mode of being, which means the defeat of corruption and death and the possession of the advantage of eternal life, cannot be accomplished by created nature on its own. The truly existent is identified with God alone and therefore only in communion with Him can created being – and therefore human nature – rejoice in true and eternal being. Even more after the Fall it is not within the reach of the capacities of damaged human nature to overturn the consequences of sin save through Him who defeated death, the incarnate and risen Christ. Accordingly, Yannaras sees the possibility of true being only in connection with the life of the Church. And it is in this way in Yannaras' thought that the being of the Church is associated with morality. The question about ethics, about how man ought to live, links directly in Yannaras' outlook with the life of the Church, as it is only in the reality of the 'ecclesial event' that true being can be realized. Morality, as it will become apparent also in the following paragraphs of this chapter, is not identified for Yannaras with the conventionality of adhering to some ethical code – most likely a system of a human origin and nature. Morality relates to the striving to achieve existential authenticity of nature, of realizing the possibilities of nature for true life, that is life as distinct from nature and thus as everlasting life. In other words, then, morality is about complying with God's will, which intended that man be in God's 'image and likeness', that is, sharing in God's way of being, in God's life, which is life eternal. Since this is not attainable, as we have said, for man alone but only when man is united with God, it means that in our worldly condition after the Fall it is attainable only in view of Christ's resurrection; it becomes possible through the life of the Church, which is the restoration to the authentic mode of being, the defeat of corruption and death in the person of the incarnate and risen Christ. It therefore becomes apparent how for Yannaras morality relates to the existence of the Church.

In fact Yannaras' attitude to the matter of the Church as the 'ecclesial event' simply brings out the Eucharistic character of the Church as the fundamental aspect that actually makes the Church. This is not an innovation on Yannaras' part, as others well before him have drawn out and have highlighted the Eucharistic origin of the Church. However, it is clearly an appeal that Yannaras makes to what he also sees as constituent of the true being of the Church in order to draw from this and specify what the ethos of the Church then is and what is the kind of morality, if at all, that the Church presents. In Yannaras' thought, as we have already

noted, the Church is clearly a reality of co-existence, the gathering together of the scattered people of God to carry out the 'work of the people', the liturgy, λειτουργία.³²⁸ Yannaras aptly comments that all the descriptions used in the biblical and the liturgical texts with reference to the Church, such as 'the people of God', 'the heavenly city', 'the body of Christ', 'the new creation', 'the new Israel', 'the Kingdom of God' and so forth, all of them allude to the reality of the Church not as an ideology nor as a religious system of belief, but as an event of shared being, as a reality of unification and joint existence. The Church in Yannaras' mind represents the reality of renewed being, of new life as this is offered through the resurrection of Christ, the only one who 'trampled on death', as this is presented every time we celebrate the Eucharist: being as distinctiveness and freedom and as loving communion. In Yannaras' actual words '[the Church] is the historical manifestation of God's new relationship with mankind as a whole "in flesh and blood". She is the fact of God's incarnation and the deification of man, the Eucharistic supper of the Kingdom'.³²⁹

For Yannaras, to identify the true being of the Church opens the way to a valid discussion about the ethos of the Church and the character of Christian morality. We can talk of the ethos of the Church only in relation to the true nature of the Church, to what makes the Church, and since the liturgy is 'the core and the sum of [the Church's] life and truth',³³⁰ then the ethos of the Church is nothing else but a *liturgical* ethos. This means that the heart of the Christian life is the liturgy and our participation in it, and therefore the whole content of a Christian's life is directed only and simply by it, that is by the readiness to remain organically part of the body of Christ, to exist as a member in a unity and communion, to realize life as a relationship rather than as individual sufficiency and self-centredness. Beyond the liturgical ethos, that is the Eucharistic reference of the world's being and life and the transformation of it as a gift of God's grace, the Church knows no other directive.

Consequently, following Yannaras' thought, to be a Christian does not mean adjustment to a certain protocol or the adaptation of a set of ideas and beliefs or of tenets for a certain moral conduct, but a personal, existential involvement to meet and unite with the personal God residing and presiding in His Church. To be a member of the Church is an

³²⁸ *Freedom*, pp. 82-3.

³²⁹ *Freedom*, p. 84.

³³⁰ *Freedom*, p. 85.

invitation to the Eucharistic Supper, which substantiates the new life inaugurated by the incarnate and resurrected Christ. It is, in other words, an invitation to Life, to life restored to its fullness and to its authenticity; it is restoration to the original mode of existence, to life realised as communion of distinct and free persons united freely in love. The Church is not a human organisation nor is it a merely pious or spiritual type of establishment. It is a unity of God's presence and man's free collaboration and participation; it is a workshop, as it were, for man's return to God, for man's free choice and movement to siding with (συντασσόμενοιο) the true mode of being realized in the person of Christ, and for renouncing death, as is mentioned in the initiatory rite of baptism, as this is celebrated at least in the Orthodox Church.

For the Church, therefore, morality, Yannaras' emphasis goes on, is first and foremost the adventure of man's freedom, about how man deals with his freedom, the venture of using one's free will granted by God either to consent to the true life of loving freely and being in unity with God, thus fulfilling the true mode of existence, or to reject life and its Creator. The greatness of God's conferring of freedom to man, Yannaras points out, lies in the fact that God grants man the possibility of using his human will to give up even on God. Morality thus is not seen as adjustment to some external moral law but is understood primarily as the disposition and the activity of the human heart. Moral integrity is not simply substantiated in ethical deeds; virtue is not the demonstration of a certain conduct, but it is primarily the condition of the heart. Not to say that what Christian morality is concerned with in the first place is not virtue but truth, something that will become clearer by what is explained further on. According to Yannaras – who in fact draws at this point on the ascetic material of the Church tradition such as the Macarian homilies and homilies of St Isaac the Syrian in order to bring out and describe the ethos of the Church – morality takes place mainly 'within'. It is identified with an internal change of man to reflect the image of God and thus to promulgate the Kingdom of God, a change that can still be expressed through good works and translated into good acts of a social nature, the latter in this way being only the outcome and not the precondition of moral change and man's moral condition. In Yannaras' words the Church does not deny social ethics, the ethos of the Church does not disregard social participation of Christians living the world in duties and moral obligations of a social nature, however 'in no way does [the Church]

confine her own truth and morality within the limits of social behaviour and the conventional obligations which govern it'.³³¹ What is found in the centre of Christian life is not the adherence to some objectively ordered ethical norms, but the internal contrition of the heart, man's interior movement of repentance and re-turn towards God with the realization of human inadequacy. The state of the heart thus is, as it were, the criterion for morality and all the external attitudes are valued and measured against one's inner inclination and condition, not against some objective code of ethics. For example charity, to follow an example of Christian merit that Yannaras himself picks up,³³² is not, as the world would generally see it, an act of altruism that sets the individual conscience at rest with a sense of self-praise. By the Church's criteria such individual virtue could be 'equivalent to injustice and theft and the other sins',³³³ to the extent that it distinguishes the individual as separate from the others and it favours the self-regarding conscience through conferring private justification and self-appraisal, and in this way actually only perpetuates the original sin of self-deification and of deviation from God. For the Church's true ethos, instead, charity takes place primarily 'inside'; it is an inner act of fellowship, identified with the 'burning' of the human heart for all the creation. It is the state of the merciful, remorseful and prayerful heart that contemplates every entity of God's creation with compassion and sums up thus in its 'microcosm' the whole world. Charity thus seen, therefore, is a sign of the 'good alteration' that takes place in man and encompasses the realization in man of his Trinitarian prototype.³³⁴ Such is the approach to righteousness that the Church has, which leads to an understanding of morality as something very profound and deeply existential, not conventional or subject to the relativity of a human-centred ethical evaluation. This means that 'moral', Yannaras highlights, by the Church criteria is that which reveals the truth, that which brings out the true identity of man and not something that just ameliorates his external behaviour or improves the human character. For that reason, in Yannaras' outlook morality has to do with man's search for his true self and is thus rather an existential category which relates to the personal identity of man beyond all 'masks imposed upon him by the egocentric need for external and formal compliance with the demands of

³³¹ *Freedom*, pp. 78-9.

³³² *Freedom*, p. 80.

³³³ *Freedom*, p. 78.

³³⁴ *Freedom*, p. 80.

social recognition and respectability'.³³⁵ It is in this sense that the Church does not look for virtue, as we mentioned earlier, but for the truth, where 'virtue' stands for a private ethical attainment or an agreement with standards of goodness conventionally understood, whilst 'truth' signifies the innermost purpose and function of beings, what theological language would refer to as the 'logos' of beings. So if logos, as in Maximos, relates to the will of God, the intention pre-existing in God's will for the role or purpose of beings, then morality looks to connect man to his logos, to his true reason for being, that is to God's will, indeed to God, since complying to God's will indicates union with God.

3. Ethics in the Scriptures and the phenomenon of Pietism

Virtue seen on an individual basis, that is, as a private attainment of righteous behaviour generating individual valuation, can be said, as we have already mentioned, actually to be a sin. This is because sin is what cuts us off from God, and virtue understood as an individual accomplishment is none other than what drove the first man, Adam, away from God. Self-deification, the attitude where man sets off from himself and his own resources and not from God even when having the best of intentions, even to resemble God, constitutes the original and the fundamental content of sin and apostasy. Righteousness then, when serving man's self-justification, is nothing but a repetition of the original deception, which ultimately not only fails to save man from his fallen state, from entrapment in his individuality and fragmented being, but in fact reinforces this condition. Man's ethical conformity does not fundamentally restore him to a new mode of being, which is life realized as communion and loving co-existence, rather than life as individual survival. Man's own efforts at moral obedience may at most result in an improvement in human conduct and the amelioration of one's character, but cannot inaugurate for man a new life, they cannot initiate the 'new creation' of God which is the life of unity brought in by the Church. Thus the morality of the Church is not the improvement of morals but regeneration to the true life, to the Trinitarian mode of being, of which the Church is the realization and manifestation. The Church's morality is summarized, as we saw, in the *liturgical* ethos of the Church, the ethos that looks

³³⁵ *Freedom*, p. 77.

to engraft all in the unity of the life-giving body of Christ. This is a practice that involves the abandonment of one's own way, departure from the way of individuality, which is self-reliance, even when this self-reliance is camouflaged behind the ultimate acts of altruism, in an effort to reach out to moral ideals. Quitting one's own interests thus marks the beginning of turning to the Church's ethos – participation in her body, coming together and being together, as this is realized and manifested in the Eucharist, the definition and the essence of the Church. And this is consequently how, as Yannaras insists, 'the Church's ethic is diametrically opposite to any philosophical, social or religious ethic...'.³³⁶ It is not individual belief or virtue that makes the Christian, but participation in the body of the Church, in other words restoration to the fullness of his existential possibilities as a person.

In fact individual virtue and the sense of merit that spring from compliance with objective law, Yannaras maintains, oppose the true ethos of the Church. He firmly holds that the ethics of the Gospels does not signify at all some morality of individual justification or merit on the basis of religious principles and objectified regulation. Even the observance of the Law in the Old Testament, Yannaras explains, was not a means for personal justification, but the way for the people of God to manifest their Truth, which was their participation in God's covenant with His people.³³⁷ The observance of the law was not an act of a juridical nature, an act for securing individual merit, but an expression of faithfulness to God's call and a demonstration of belonging to His chosen people to whom God had given the promise of salvation. It is not without significance, Yannaras points out, that God's deliverance of the law in the book of Exodus coincides with the disclosure to Moses of God's name. The reception of the given law, this means, was not just the acceptance of some juridical constitution, but amounted to participation in a relationship with God and the possibility of knowing Him. The law therefore represented God's call, a gift of grace, and did not aim at just providing the Israelites with legal commandments useful for social administration and order and for religious correctness.

³³⁶ *Freedom*, p. 82.

³³⁷ *Freedom*, pp. 53-6.

Similarly, the ethics of the New Testament relate to an existential regeneration of man and not to the formation of a religious type of person whose righteousness could be measured against objective norms of conduct. Rather the latter is fiercely criticized and rejected by Christ himself on many occasions. The Gospel, Yannaras emphasizes, rejects individual ethics, in the sense that individual justification of man by reference to the objectively formulated religious law and its moral norms merely reinforces man's sense of self-adequacy and self-validation, and basically shuts the way to repentance and encounter with God. The starting point for repentance is instead man's realization of his human insufficiency and failure; this, for Yannaras, needs to be sharply distinguished from feelings of guilt, which are just another expression of human egotism. Guilt, as a consequence of ethical transgression, is associated with the understanding of morality in terms of individual achievement. Morality however for the Church ethos, as this is put forward in the earliest expression of the consciousness of the Church found in the Gospel, is not man's achievement, but the result of man's rebirth,³³⁸ which is initiated by the abandonment of human individuality³³⁹ and man's incorporation into the new way of life, life as communion and relationship, participation in the Trinitarian mode of existence, which Christ's hypostatic being reveals and to which it points.³⁴⁰

The conventionality of secularizing the message of the Gospel by identifying the radical character of repentance with adjustment to a formalized code of values and thus seeking religious reassurance found expression, according to Yannaras, in the phenomenon of pietism. The term refers to the religious trend in the history of the Church where practical-active piety has been over-emphasised, at the expense of dogmatic theology. Pietism thus developed as a zeal for Christian activity, featuring a strong emphasis on the significance of good works and an intense individual focus on the practice of the virtues and morality.³⁴¹ In such a context man's salvation is approached as an individual event; it is understood as the result of individual moral endeavour, an individual attainment. Salvation is therefore a moral achievement, whereas the body of the Church signifies, as we have seen, a mode of existence,

³³⁸ John 3:7.

³³⁹ Mat. 16:25.

³⁴⁰ See *Freedom*, pp. 49-64.

³⁴¹ For Yannaras' presentation on pietism see *Freedom*, pp. 119-36.

the Trinitarian mode of being, and participation in which restores man in his existential authenticity despite his individual unworthiness and human sin.³⁴² For pietism the Christian life is understood as a series of duties, leading to an individual imitation of Christ, something that, as Yannaras notes, may allow for the improvement of morals or one's character but 'which cannot possibly transfigure our mode of existence and change corruption to incorruption, and death into life and resurrection'.³⁴³ It follows therefore that pietism amounts to the abandonment of the liturgical and the Eucharistic character of the Church, since it acts as alienation of the Church's criteria and a trend of moralistic considerations. It brings about a shift from an ecclesial to an individual ethos, since man's justification does not result from participation in the life of the Church which effects for man the transformation of his mortal individuality into the hypostasis of eternal life;³⁴⁴ the Church is instead treated as the gathering of the morally 'reborn' and the pure, with reference to objective moral criteria. On such grounds Yannaras does not therefore hesitate to characterise the pietistic movement as heretical, since in its expressions the Church becomes a religious form of man's fall,³⁴⁵ a kind of religious institution through which man certifies his moral self-reliance, his individual self-sufficiency based on moral achievement.

4. Liturgical realism

The unorthodoxy of pietism finds its opposite in the strong liturgical realism that distinguishes the ethos of the Church and on which Yannaras ardently insists. Christian ethics is specified by a pragmatic and forthright acknowledgement of human sinfulness, spoken out without fear or reticence and at the same time without any pessimistic attitude. This is because the Church's pragmatism about human failure finds its counterbalance and answer in the reality of the Incarnation and in the Eucharistic event. The Church's message of salvation is not a theoretical exhortation and does not impel man to some abstract or absurd set of tenets and duties. The Church's life is signified by the realism of initiating a change in man's mode of existence, a realism which derives from the fact that the Logos appeared in the flesh and

³⁴² *Freedom*, p. 121.

³⁴³ *Freedom*, p. 122.

³⁴⁴ *Freedom*, p. 127.

³⁴⁵ *Freedom*, p. 123.

consequently proceeds from the substantiality of the Eucharist. With the incarnation of Christ the renovation of the world becomes a tangible possibility and is effected in the liturgical assembly, which is the actual realization and manifestation of the Church and in which man's participation changes his mode of existence from individuality to community and communion. In the act of Eucharistic celebration man's fallen state of being is transformed. As Yannaras puts it, 'the Eucharist is man's assent to the assumption of his nature by Christ',³⁴⁶ in other words it is man's assent to his existential change and to the salvation of life from corruption and death. This transformation of being becomes an experienced reality in the ecclesial event of Eucharistic unity and communion. Yannaras firmly insists on this Eucharistic realism by emphasizing the fact of physical participation in the body of Christ through the act of eating and drinking the Eucharistic offering.³⁴⁷ Moreover he points to the reality of the union and communion of 'all in all' within the liturgical context, where both the militant and the triumphant Church are present and take part, as 'the saints are indivisibly joined in heavenly and holy union with [Christ]',³⁴⁸ and also where the life and the inner principle of the whole world is summed up in man's assent and thanksgiving to God.

Yannaras' repeated emphasis on Eucharistic realism, in other words on the fact that the Eucharist is an existential fact of unity and communion, a tangible reality of life being transformed and not just some theoretical view or interpretation of the biblical Last Supper, nor an intellectual acceptance of moral principles and axioms, fundamentally seeks to underwrite the realism of man's salvation. The life of the Church which emanates from the resurrection of Christ and which is realized in the liturgical event is the existent possibility for man to experience a reversal of the consequences of the Fall, it is the opportunity for the world to overcome death and corruption, something that man alone, despite all human endeavours after moral improvement, cannot bring about. Humans' own moral efforts may effect some improvement in their life, but cannot defeat death. Human morality cannot make the flesh immortal.³⁴⁹ It cannot overcome the existential self-sufficiency of nature bound up with individuality. This, however, is for the Church a tangible reality, set forth in the Eucharistic

³⁴⁶ *Freedom*, p. 86.

³⁴⁷ *Freedom*, p. 81.

³⁴⁸ *Freedom*, p. 82.

³⁴⁹ *Freedom*, p. 81.

gathering. Besides, Yannaras' emphasis on the true character of the Eucharistic event maintains the make-up of the ethos of the Church which is, as we have said, a *liturgical* ethos, in other words an ethos of participation; it means that life in the Church is about a personal involvement in the experience handed down by the Fathers; it is about faith and trust, experiential knowledge and personal engagement with and verification of the truth. It is the ethos of dealing with life and death. Christian ethics look for an existential change in man, ultimately for the salvation of life from corruption and death.³⁵⁰

5. The cosmological dimension of the Church ethos

The fact that in the Eucharistic celebration the whole of the creation is taken up and referred to God points to the cosmological dimension of the Eucharist and therefore to the cosmological dimension of the liturgical ethos of the Church. Speaking of the cosmological dimension of the Eucharist and of the Church ethos as articulated in Yannaras' work, the first thing that we need to note is that Yannaras completely rejects any kind of dualistic view of the world and thus discountenances divisions such as those between spiritual and corporeal, sacred and secular, material or worldly and holy. If we detect such differentiations in his material, they are not made with reference to the corporeality of the world as such in opposition to ecclesiastical faith and the mind of the Church, but they are made in regard to how created reality as a whole stands in relation to God. This simply means that the material world is not seen as bad or as opposed to the spirit; sin is not identified with the body alone and the latter is not viewed as the enemy of the soul. The world as a whole, as both matter and spirit, was created by God and was made *καλός λίαν*. To the extent that the world turns towards God, and stays in relationship and union with God, it fulfils its inner principle, it brings out the logos assigned to it through God's creative action. In this sense it remains holy, a spiritual world, a world that bears and conveys the hallmark of God's Spirit. On the other hand, the world's breaking away from God is what introduces sin and initiates evil, and thus brings the world to a darkened state, where created reality instead of substantiating the glory of God now embodies damage and vice. In the celebration of the Eucharistic event we have

³⁵⁰ *Freedom*, p. 87.

the overturning of this failing condition since in the elements of the Eucharist the world is taken up and referred back to God in an offering of thanksgiving, and thus is brought back to its natural end, which is the manifestation and glorification of God. The Eucharist thus is the ultimate evidence on the part of the Church that she accedes to the material world and it is also a demonstration of her belief in the godliness of the materiality of the world. The Church does not repudiate matter, but, as verified in the celebration of the liturgy, she takes matter on board and it is essentially through and with it that she works, λειτουργεί, God's presence and that she communicates Life to the participants. Christ is fundamentally present by assuming matter. The very elements needed to sustain physical life are changed in the Eucharistic offering into the means of immortality and eternal life without ceasing to be material.

In the event of the Eucharist then we have the supreme manifestation of the unity which the Church sees between uncreated and created reality, but also of the integral unity between man and the world. For this reason, the cosmological dimension of the ecclesial ethos is simply a natural and inseparable aspect of the morality of the Church. This means, in line with Yannaras' exposition, that someone cannot be a member of the Church and partake in Life and yet despise the material world, or remain indifferent to it and consider the use of it as irrelevant to human salvation.³⁵¹ As has by now been established, life in the Church for Yannaras involves an existential change for man. For the Church, repentance, as Yannaras himself notes, is not to be identified with an intellectual or emotional change, but is deep down an existential event. This means that what changes in man is eventually his way of existence, including thus a change in the way man connects with the world and in the way he uses the world, since human existence is organically connected with the life of the world and our use of it. In the new way of being, which in Yannaras' language is the personal way of being, man's rectified νοῦς, his mind or power of the soul, comes to see the world not possessively, that is as an object for use merely to sustain his individual sufficiency, but man comes to see the world and recognize in it the loving act of God. He comes to discern the true principle of things, the logos of the things of the world and relate with them in ways that substantiate the personal way of being, that see them as realities of relationship and communion.³⁵² If this way of relating to the world is supremely represented, as we described above, in the Eucharist, then

³⁵¹ *Freedom*, p. 86.

³⁵² *Freedom*, p. 87.

man's moral efforts involve a personal extension of the Eucharistic ethos into all aspects of human life. To quote Yannaras' actual words: 'Work, economic life, the family, art, technology, politics and cultural life all become part of man's eucharistic relationship with God'.³⁵³ This means that the liturgical ethos of the Church, which comprises Christian morality, is to be lived out in the relationship of Christians not only one with another, but also with the material world and it is to be reflected in all the aspects of human life, whether it be the economic, social, or political side of human activity or any other.³⁵⁴

Nevertheless, although the Church ethos is to reflect in all the aspects of human activity, there is another equally significant point Yannaras makes. He takes the position that the ethos developed in the Church with regard to the relationship of Christians with the world cannot be codified and organised into an economic system or into a political ideology.³⁵⁵ The change in man's relationship with the world comes out in the extent to which change takes place first within man, in his very way of being. Man's relationship with the things that surround him is a reflection of his inner disposition, and therefore the way he relates to the world can be modified to the extent that his inner inclination changes. As the *way* of being shifts from individualism and self-centredness and reaches closer to what Yannaras refers to as the personal mode of existence, where being is realised as personal distinctiveness and communion, so man comes to see clearly and recognise the truth of things, thus being able to see the other beings in the world as they truly are in themselves. This cleansing of man's darkened *voũς* is something that can be worked on and take place on a personal basis only. Therefore the Christian ethos cannot be externally imposed on people, for if it were, it would not be a truly Christian ethos. That is simply because the core of Christian morality, as we have seen, is how man deals with his own freedom, how he chooses to use it in relation to the possibility he has for attaining to the truth, to the authenticity of his being, into the personal way of being and thus in relation to God. Christian ethos, consequently, is not like a juridical law that could be outwardly applied, but is the *way* man chooses to be, it is the stance he opts to take towards himself, the world and God, and it is something that occurs in one's heart, and can thus only spring from the inside out. The particular ethos that the Church holds on how to

³⁵³ *Freedom*, p. 94.

³⁵⁴ *Freedom*, pp. 86-8, 94 and also 'The Historical and Social Dimensions of the Church's Ethos' in *Freedom*, pp. 195-229.

³⁵⁵ *Freedom*, p. 87.

relate with the world can be realized only on a personal level and is revealed in as much as man's being evolves from individual sufficiency to relational and communal existence. For this reason, Yannaras adds, the way Christians live out their relationship with the world and the way they use the world cannot be separated from the life of the Church to be put forward autonomously in any social or political or economic programme. At the same time he observes that naturally the ethos of the Church creates a culture, and can thus bring about a general attitude as to how Christians should live in the world and in relation to certain aspects of human life, such as the economic or the political aspect. Still, despite the general tone that the faithful mind may bear, this is to find expression, Yannaras insists, only on a personal level, it is to be embodied in persons and not schematised in objectively imposed solutions.³⁵⁶

6. Does the absence of predetermined ethics amount to immorality?

We have seen so far how Yannaras' approach to the matter of morality does not accommodate concepts of a juridical kind. His thoughts on the Christian life and ethos do not involve a legalistic understanding. Yannaras does not identify morality with a personal achievement of adherence to some law, and consequently the failure to be moral, or – in theological language – the condition of sinfulness is not thought of as the transgression of ethical norms, thus engendering feelings of guilt. In Yannaras' outlook morality is the achievement of attaining to the true way of being, which is realized in and through the practice of the Church. Truly, the authentic way of being, which Yannaras specifies as personal existence, should then find expression in all aspects of human activity and would need to be interpreted in all the very particular circumstances and demands of our life. This brings us to acknowledge that there cannot be preset answers to determine what in specific circumstances would be good or bad, what would be the right or the wrong thing to do in individual situations. In other words, Yannaras leaves us with the understanding that for the ethos of the Church there are no predetermined directives to be followed in some rigid and absolute way, as if they were disconnected from the truth of life and the reality of man's existence. If the life and the existence of each person is something that develops organically in ways that cannot be

³⁵⁶ *Freedom*, p. 88.

predicted or predefined, then the truth about the life of each one of us is to be experientially discerned and discovered. Consequently what someone ought to do at a particular moment determined by one's own very personal and specific circumstances cannot be pre-decided and thoroughly circumscribed. If this were the case, it would mean that the moral law would function as an absolute principle above and beyond the truth of life and also that personal freedom would have to be strangled to fit into the expectations of moral rules and regulations. But this might well amount to lack of respect for the person, failure to appreciate his personal circumstances, in other words failure to honour the uniqueness of each personal existence. It is then pretty obvious how this would in fact contradict the very ethos of the Church, which as we have seen is concerned with discovering and following logos in the world, with bringing out the distinctiveness of the world and the uniqueness of each human person and thus with acknowledging and glorifying God's creation.

In this way, to take Yannaras' thought a little further, but in accord with the spirit that his own ideas convey, we could say that in the Church we are not presented with some rigidly predetermined ethical rules to follow, thus fulfilling the role of being good Christians. The only aspiration the faithful have as members of the Church is to meet with the revealed God, to be able to see God, to discern God's love and presence and let this love operate in their lives. We could also say that if there is a tenet for the Christian life this is to resemble God, to realize the 'image and likeness' assigned to humans, to be the embodiment of God's grace and love. This would involve in practice the development of qualities such as the ones we would recognize in God, for example humility, forbearance and forgiveness. However, these for the Church ethos are χαρίσματα, gifts of grace that man can be endowed with through the life and practice of the Church, rather than something that human ability and skill can achieve by simply abiding by some code of moral conduct. Besides, the way such qualities will be translated and realized in practice, in the reality of life, is for the mind of the Church bound up with the uniqueness of the person. Love, humility and all other virtues, can only find expression on a personal level and therefore in a quite distinctive way. Therefore, the Church does not really provide her members with prescriptions about how to act morally in the manner of instructions to be followed step by step. This would simply create moral robots; it would prompt people to adjust and fit into identical patterns of action and thus would annul personal distinctiveness and freedom. The Church in that way would be turned into a system,

she would be similar to any ideological structure, where followers need to demonstrate discipline and strictly adhere to and follow the principles and norms of it. And an ideology is exactly what Yannaras passionately wants to exclude from the reality of the Church. He holds very firmly to the conviction that the Church is *not* an ideology, is not a system of beliefs, rather it is the ‘ecclesial event’ as he often refers to it, which represents a totally different reality; it is the ceaseless quest of engaging with the enigma of life and death. The line Yannaras draws at this point is steadfast. In this sense he speaks about the ‘freedom of morality’, referring to the fact that for the ecclesial ethos – unlike the case of ideological systems – freedom is intrinsically connected with morality, the former is rather the precondition of the latter and at the same time evidence of the presence of the latter. One cannot take steps towards a moral life save by a free and voluntary choice. If morality is identified with true being and authenticity of existence, as we have seen in earlier paragraphs of this chapter, this means that it is the fruit only of a genuine quest; it cannot result from imposition, it cannot be the product of a mandatory regime. In an analogous way if we are to attain authentic being, which in Yannaras’ language is specified as personal being, then it means we have achieved freedom, in the ways in which personal being substantiates the latter.³⁵⁷ Therefore, morality cannot exist without freedom and the latter would not be true freedom save as freedom in morality.

This brings us to the point where we need to make an important distinction and also an equally significant clarification. The distinction relates to the forms of freedom and subsequently the clarification is about what the freedom of the Church experience, in other words the freedom of personal being, does *not* involve. We are bound to ask, if the freedom fostered in the context of personal existence is true freedom, then what is not true freedom? Also, if Church life does not involve, as we said, a predetermined law for action does that mean that we open the way to a wild type of freedom, a lack of restraints, a state where everyone just does as they feel or fancy to the loss and damage of any order or cohesion?

³⁵⁷ The association of freedom with the existential category of the person (as opposed to individual) is not found exclusively in Yannaras; the same occurs for example in Zizioulas. See Metropolitan of Pergamon Ioannis, ‘Νόσος καί θεραπεία στήν Ὁρθόδοξη Θεολογία’ [‘Disease and Treatment in Orthodox Theology’] in *Ὁρθοδοξία καί Σύγχρονος Κόσμος* [Orthodoxy and Contemporary World] (Leukosia, Cyprus: Κέντρο Μελετῶν Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Κύκκου [Kentro Meletōn Hieras Monis Kukou], 2006); also: *Being as Communion*, pp. 39-49.

Furthermore one could not help but wonder about the existence of elements of the Church tradition and life such as the canons and asceticism, which are in common thought identified with the understanding of a very restrictive and strict way of life.

We ordinarily understand freedom, evenmore so in our modern times, generally as the autonomy for people to act as they will. Thus our mind commonly identifies freedom as a concept more or less with the absence of control or restraints, with the possibility that one does what one likes to do. However, we would all without disagreement consent to the fact that in human societies the freedom of the individuals needs to be regulated, in order for the public body to hold together, in order for the social group to exist as such, to remain united and to retain its coherence. In this way we come to accept that there are boundaries to our freedom, that we are free within the limits of the civic law, which regulates human relationships and confines human activity by certain restrictions. We are accordingly used to thinking and saying that ‘the freedom of the one ends where the freedom of the other begins’ suggesting in this way the operation of some conventional agreement that legalizes our human activity and safeguards the order of our social co-existence. We understand then that the freedom we experience in our everyday human reality is conventional and in that way not a form of complete freedom.

So what would be a form of perfect freedom? Would simply the absence of rules and regulations allow us to experience a more genuine freedom? Does it perhaps mean that the legal code alienates us from our true humanity, from our natural liberty and what it means to be human and that if we were allowed to express our wants and longings totally freely, we would then attain to true freedom? As we have mentioned just a little way above, for the mind of the Church, which Yannaras wants to bring out, true freedom is only the freedom achieved in morality. From what we have described already in this chapter we should be able by now to think of morality in connection with the authenticity of being, with the realization of the potentialities of existence to be *κατά λόγον*, with the personal hypostatization of the nature, in other words with personal existence. Therefore true freedom, Yannaras would insist, is the freedom of the Trinity, the freedom manifest in the Trinitarian relationships, the freedom of being realized as distinctiveness and love. There freedom does not annul unity and does not threaten cohesion, while at the same time it allows for personal difference and uniqueness

without destroying the balance of the relationships, without allowing any overpowering of one person by another. It is the freedom realized in a communion of persons, where no imposition of uniformity is necessary to hold the persons together as they are organically united in love. None of the Trinitarian persons exists on its own or for its own sake, but they hypostasize being only in relation to the others, and this signifies, as Yannaras at every opportunity highlights, the way of the truly existent, the way of true being. The unity we find in this type of the Trinitarian communion is not a unity imposed by some charter; it is unity fostered in freedom and therefore freedom – characterised by love – is integral to personal existence, it is essential to what it means to hypostasize being as a person. Besides, despite the absolute freedom that characterises the Trinitarian relationships, in the Trinity we do not have anarchy. There is structure and order, induced by the very distinctiveness of each person, by the unique place that each Triune person occupies always in relation to the others. In other words we could say that because the Trinitarian persons substantiate absolute freedom it does not mean that they exist and act arbitrarily, as they individually please, as it were, neither does their love for each other operates restrictively on their freedom. Love in the Trinity is not a principle that is introduced in order to counterbalance freedom. It is simply integral to the divine hypostasis, it is simply the other fundamental constituent, alongside freedom, of what it means to hypostasize being personally. Therefore, the Trinitarian persons substantiate absolute, that is true, freedom and love as they are and act *κατά λόγον*, in accord to the logos of personal existence, in line with the way of personal being, which means hypostasizing nature in a matchless way going beyond nature and overcoming any necessities or predeterminations nature would entail.

Having described the model of true freedom as it is put forward in the faith of the Church and turning back to our opening question about whether the absence of external law would mean the presence of a more complete freedom, we should now be able to envisage that the abolition, as it were, of our human constitutions would not necessarily result in genuine freedom. To be perfectly free is not just a state of being loose, of having no law and of acting exclusively on the drive of the self's own wants and likings. Perfect freedom, the freedom revealed in the case of the Trinity, is for our human state of being something to be achieved, not something we already possess. And what stands in the way of our attaining it is our

rebellious human nature, not the existence of external legal restrictions. True freedom is the achievement of existing *κατά λόγον*, that is according to the logos, the principle or the truth that permeates our nature; in other words the achievement of realizing the fullness of the potentialities of our created human nature, which, in the language of the theological teaching of the Church, was made in God's 'image and likeness': to exist in relationship and union with God. However, human nature sought to achieve on its own what it could fulfil only in unity and communion with God. 'In the day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall be as gods'.³⁵⁸ That first revolt of humanity is repeated every time man seeks to attain to true life by himself, to realize existence as self-sufficiency, ignoring the fact that he was created 'in the image and likeness' of God, meaning he was created and called to exist in the way of the truly existent, that is, not as a monad but as a communion of persons, a communion of personal distinctiveness and love. Thus we understand that the liberty to act as we subjectively choose as individuals – in the ordinary concept of freedom that we have in our present state of being – not only does not suggest true freedom but it can well be a state of captivity for man in his existentially autonomous and alienated nature. In other words, the freedom of nature when the latter turns to an existential absolute is not true freedom, as it is bound up with the necessities and the urges of a rebellious and thus fallen nature. Yannaras – by referring to the work and the language of Maximus the Confessor – specifies the existentially autonomous human nature as 'beast-like' and relates it 'not to the body alone, nor to the spirit alone, but to the common reality of the nature manifested and expressed by both'.³⁵⁹ For Yannaras this clarification is of huge significance, and it reflects the immensely important distinction of nature and energies. This means that both the body and the soul represent the energies of nature, they are both expressions and manifestations of the one united human nature.³⁶⁰ Therefore the Fall and the present sinful condition of the human nature is not to be identified with just the body. The Fall affected the human nature as a whole, not just the material part of it. If we fail to adhere to this elucidation, Yannaras insists, we end up with dualism, with an a priori scorn for matter and the body, and consequently with an 'external, schematic understanding of ethical life – ultimately, the juridical moralism of the Roman

³⁵⁸ Gen. 3:5.

³⁵⁹ *Freedom*, p. 112

³⁶⁰ The matter of integral unity between the body and the soul is central in Yannaras' interests from the very start of his scholarly career, a theme first explored by him in *Η Μεταφυσική του σώματος*.

Catholic Church, and the pietism and Puritanism of the Protestants'.³⁶¹ It means then that when Yannaras speaks of existence as subjugated to the necessities of the nature, he does not associate the existential failure of a being with its materiality, he does not link the 'necessities' or the passions or compulsions of nature with the body alone. The existential failure of man refers to the way he realizes his nature, that is, to the way of self-sufficiency and self-centredness, to the fact that nature becomes an end in itself, a condition that then finds expression in soul and body together. Therefore it is not our corporeality that is regarded as sinful and governed by the passions, but fallen human nature in its totality. The physical manifestation of the passions may be more apparent and easy to identify, but in no case does the body represent human wickedness as such. Subsequently, freedom is not a requisite with reference to the body and the functions of the latter. The morality of the Church, as we have already highlighted, does not seek to fight the body, or free the spirit, as it were, from the body, it does not turn against the body, neither does it treat matter with contempt. We shall consider this further shortly, when we look at the nature of asceticism.

By what we have said so far we should find ourselves in a position also to deal with the question of whether the fact that – as Yannaras suggests and as we have earlier explained – the Church does not receive its members by handing out to them a predetermined prescription for ethical action, does not mean that this allows for loose and unchaste conduct. The answer should now be obvious, because if true freedom is freedom realized *κατά λόγον*, the freedom of personal existence as we identify it in the model of the Trinity, then living in accordance with the urges and needs of our rebellious nature is not at all what Church life involves and what she invites people to. The freedom of the Church ethos that we referred to in earlier paragraphs does not mean a total liberalism where man is dragged along by the passions of his nature. It is exactly the overcoming of the necessities of nature, as we have said, that Church life looks to. And when Yannaras suggests that for the Church ethos there is no predetermined ethics and also when he speaks about the freedom of morality, he alludes to the kind of true freedom that we have earlier tried to describe, the freedom of true being, of

³⁶¹ *Freedom*, p. 112.

personal existence, which does not need the law, since according to the Scripture: ‘you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free’.³⁶²

7. The nature of asceticism and the Canons

As much as Yannaras highlights the idea of freedom in the sense that we have explained, and as much as he passes judgment on legalistic interpretations and practices of morality and ethical life, he at the same time holds in high regard the practice of asceticism in the life of the Church. It therefore seems necessary to throw some light on what may appear as a variance of approach. This may easily feel so as we commonly tend to associate asceticism, and similarly the canon law, with strict discipline and conventionality, with obedience and restriction and with the sense of a rigid and miserable attitude to life, all very different from the impression and the tone that Yannaras’ style and manner in discussing the theme of morality convey. The unravelling of this ostensible inconsistency lies in Yannaras’ actual exposition; the answer can be found in the illumination that he himself offers with regard to asceticism and also to the Church canons. Thus from the very outset of his account of asceticism Yannaras clarifies the fact that for the mind of the Church asceticism is not an individual but an ecclesial matter.³⁶³ This means that the Church does not put forward the ascetic life as a means of achieving individual virtue. Asceticism is not seen as a way for man to exercise individual merit and to become, as it were, a better person. It does not seek to improve people’s behaviour, to get them to achieve steadiness of character and compliance with some objectified code of righteousness. All these in Yannaras’ thought are rather objectives that an external and legalistic interpretation of ethics would offer. The ascetic practice of the Church, therefore, is intended not just to improve human character, but to regenerate human existence, to transfigure our mode of being, to change ‘our nature’s individual mode of existence into a personal communion and relationship, [to offer man] a dynamic entry into the community of the life and body of the Church’.³⁶⁴ We have referred in earlier paragraphs to what Yannaras describes as the engraftment of man in the body of Christ,

³⁶² John 8:32.

³⁶³ *Freedom*, p. 109

³⁶⁴ *Freedom*, p. 109.

and how this is closely linked to the nature and life of the Church. It is in accordance with this same outlook that Yannaras sees the practice of asceticism. Asceticism is the practice of turning the mode of self-sufficiency and self-centredness of our fallen nature into relationship and communion; it is the way to overcome our fragmented individuality by submitting it to the common practice and life of the Church. Take fasting for example: it is a practice that signifies the submission of the individual's need for food to the common practice of the Church.³⁶⁵ Eating, instead of serving an autonomous need, turns into an act of participation in the life of the Church, thus preventing nature from becoming an end in itself and preserving a focus on the sole end in creation, which is the participation in the life of God, the Trinitarian communion. This means that asceticism is not in conflict with the body, but with the alienated way of our nature's being, and it aims not at fighting our materiality but the rebellious human nature, which by dissociating itself from God became existentially absolute and an end in itself. The mind of the Church, as we have noted before and as Yannaras constantly emphasizes, is against the dualism of seeing the body as unclean and the soul as pure. Both matter and spirit are products of God's creative action and love, and therefore highly regarded in the faith of the Church. Consequently, the ascetic practice of the Church, Yannaras notes, seeks to reverse the movement of self-deification, not to tame the body as such under the superior soul, as it were. Asceticism in all its forms – fasting, sexual abstinence, prayer, acts of charity – seeks to reverse the motion of nature that exists independently and as an end in itself, and to get nature to realize existence as personal hypostasis, as freedom from any necessities, as distinctiveness and love, in other words as participation in the life of the Trinitarian communion. Asceticism is thus a form of resistance to the egocentric individuality, which is expressed equally in the totality of the human nature, both bodily and spiritual reality. Yannaras also brings out the fact that in the tradition of the Church the life of asceticism is identified as *philokalia*, that is as the love for beauty, 'love for the beauty of that "uncompleted perfection" which is personal fulfilment, the restoration of God's darkened image in man to its original beauty'.³⁶⁶ This is how – only to shed further light to what we mentioned in an earlier paragraph – Christian ethics and accordingly here asceticism have an

³⁶⁵ *Freedom*, p. 110.

³⁶⁶ *Freedom*, p. 111.

interest in truth and not in virtue; they intend to bring out and to restore the lost archetype of human nature and not just to adorn, as it were, nature with moral attributes.

Christian ethics is about drawing out and restoring the parameters of the true life and therefore is characterised by a strong realism of acknowledging and of sympathizing with human failing and with the condition where human life falls short of these standards. This involves honesty and courage in the way in which the human weakness is addressed and it means that Church ethics does not foster pretences and does not seek just to conceal the human sinfulness, by suppressing it and dressing it up in ‘virtuous’ ways. The only way for the Church mentality to eliminate sin is to transform it through repentance into genuine love for God and thus into conscious inclination towards the One who is the only Good and the truly existent. It means, that is, that the emphasis for Christian ethics is not on appearances but primarily on what truly lies beneath in the human heart. Christian ethics and asceticism is the recovery of the genuineness and the integrity of being.

It is the exploration of this kind of human genuineness and integrity that prevails for example in the work of people such as Dostoyevsky and the Greek short story writer Alexandros Papadiamandis, both of whom Yannaras holds in high regard.³⁶⁷ In the narratives of these writers one can identify a representation of the ecclesial ethos expressed in the existential adventure of their characters, who often disclose bravely their human failure and fight their way through their lapses with sincerity, towards an existential conversion of their defeats (for example Alyosha in *Brothers Karamazov* and Barba Giannos in Papadiamandis’ short story *Love in the Snow*). Dostoyevsky and Papadiamandis, that is, portray the human search for God beyond pretences of moral propriety and without masking human inadequacy. They illustrate man’s existential struggle to establish a relationship with God, and by displaying the risk that the search for God involves – as the realism of every living relationship does – they preserve the true ecclesial ethos and criteria, according to which man’s communion with God is truly *a relationship*, an exercise of freedom, a venture devoid of the self-assuring objectification of a moralistic scheme based on the logic of effort and result.

³⁶⁷ See *Orthodoxy and the West*, pp. 408-14.

In line with the love of original beauty, then, the ascetic texts talk of the Eros of God. One need not be surprised that the ascetic material often employs a very erotic language to talk about the experience of the spiritual life and the knowledge of God. The ultimate objective for the heart of the ascetics is to find and unite with God and this is how asceticism becomes *philokalia*, the quest for and the attraction to the source and the cause of beauty, which is God. In searching God the ascetics seek for the perfection and the beauty of the original order. Therefore, what may feel as a kind of incongruity, namely how asceticism can fit with notions and expressions of fervent love, is only a genuine expression of the very spirit and ethos of the Church tradition and practice.

Yannaras takes the elucidation of the nature of asceticism even further: given that the salvation of man, the victory over the death that has befallen nature, is not accomplished by human efforts but is a gift of God's grace, in Christian asceticism man hopes for nothing from his human powers, '[the] human ascetic endeavour does not even aspire to crushing the rebellion of man's nature. It simply seeks to affirm the personal response of man's love to the work of his salvation by Christ...'³⁶⁸ This is a remark in harmony with the distinction that Yannaras is keen on making between Christian asceticism and individual virtue, and it refers to the bankruptcy, as Yannaras also likes to specify it, of all anthropocentric morality. It means that all human efforts to overcome the fallen state of the nature are condemned to failure as they only enforce the same movement of autonomy and self-sufficiency, which was responsible in the first place for the distortion of the way in which nature realizes its being. So what we have been used to seeing broadly as the nucleus of morality and to evaluating as the definitive expression of power of the human will within the practice of a Christian life, namely asceticism, Yannaras goes as far as to call just a 'response' on man's side. Such an interpretation and understanding of asceticism wipes out any sense of it as a stern and conventional aspect of Christian practice.

Similar is Yannaras' approach to the Canon law of the Church. The canons, Yannaras maintains, are there to serve the true ethos and character of the Church, which is of an ontological nature since it seeks to restore existence to its authentic mode of being, that is, to the transcendence of individuality and participation in the life of God, in life as communion.

³⁶⁸ *Freedom*, p. 114.

Consequently, it is a mistake to understand the canons in juridical and moralistic terms: their character is ‘healing and therapeutic’³⁶⁹ since their function is not to pass judgement but to indicate ways that do not constitute an expression of true life according to the Church ethos, to signify what is falsification or alienation of the authentic mode of being, in other words to point out what forms failure or sin. Thus they operate only as a precondition and possibility for existential and not for moralistic justification, for realizing life as freedom and personal distinctiveness. It means then that the canons are of an ascetic nature; they seek to enable the subjection of individuality – understood as the falsification of true life which is communion – to participation in the common life of the Church. The canons thus ‘guide man to the fulfilment of his possibilities for life’.³⁷⁰ To understand the canons as a corpus of moral legislation, Yannaras highlights, does not do justice to their soteriological character and ultimately contradicts and alienates the truth of the Church, its being and ethos. That is why from the very beginning the Church did not give precedence to law over her life; she resisted replacing salvation by submission to ethics and thus changing her ontological nature into a religious one.³⁷¹ Furthermore, the right interpretation of the nature of the canons allows us understand the frequently applied principle of economy in the implementation of the canon law, as well as the absence of a codified corpus of the canons in the Orthodox Church.³⁷²

Yannaras describes the ‘miracle of [the canons’] antinomy’,³⁷³ exemplified in the fact that although they are regulations that point out sin, initiate order in the Church life and prescribe penances, still they do not turn into legislation, they do not substitute the eucharistic nature of the Church for an institutional one, nor do they strain personal particularity and freedom. Yannaras’ approach to the matter of the canons is not eccentric or aberrant. Especially this concept of the ‘miracle of antinomy’ found in the canons calls to mind the ascription of a mystical quality to the nature of the canon law, expressed well before Yannaras’ *Freedom of Morality*. The canonical decrees – Orthodox theology has told us before – participate in a dual nature, temporal and spiritual, corresponding to the dual divine-human nature of the Church, as this derives in its turn from the dual nature of her head, the

³⁶⁹ *Freedom*, p. 180.

³⁷⁰ *Freedom*, p. 181.

³⁷¹ *Freedom*, p. 177. Yannaras appeals to St Paul’s stance towards the Judaizers’ insistence on the Law, and the position of the apostolic council on the same matter: *Freedom*, pp. 174-7.

³⁷² *Freedom*, pp. 181-2 and 189-92.

³⁷³ *Freedom*, pp. 191-2.

nature of Christ.³⁷⁴ This annuls any understanding of the canons as absolute, objectified formulations or legal norms, and allows us see the law of the Church as a living 'apparatus' that serves her very nature and her spiritual life. It therefore serves and provides for the personal distinctiveness that life involves; it does not precede it nor does it predetermine it. It allows, on the contrary, to the Church adaptation and creativity – indeed, it calls for it –, for if the Church does not show 'a creative attitude toward [modern life] ...a passive acceptance of it is inevitable'.³⁷⁵

The Freedom of Morality is an essay of a crosswise pattern: it talks about the Freedom signified in the condition of the truly existent, the freedom of Life shared indivisibly in the mutual *perichoresis* of persons, yet totally distinct in their way of hypostasizing their shared nature: the freedom of the Trinitarian God, the only model of morality. And also about the Morality achieved only through and in the presence of true Freedom as archetypally found in the life of the Trinitarian being; morality realized in the distinctiveness of personal existence, devoid of any necessity and predetermination yet submissive to the love of/for the Other. Moral law marks the distance that separates the world from God. Freedom from the law means that the interval is crossed over, that we have reached the end of the law, Christ alone.³⁷⁶ *The Freedom of Morality* closes on a poetic note, drawing all its points together through a selection from St Isaac the Syrian. It feels almost like a prelude to Yannaras' *Comment on the Song of Songs*, which, more than any other of the author's early works, epitomizes by its very structure the Christian way to God, with its allusion to music and musical terms. We start by studying and playing given patterns; we simply repeat what is given to us. In this way, however, we take steps towards making perhaps one day our own music, towards discovering our own personal gift. The more we advance on the templates, the closer we may get to our personal distinctiveness. We head for finding and bringing out our unique and unrepeatable personal expression, the matchless, unequalled and yet inexhaustible *personal existence* disclosed in the musical notes; free as it may be, non predetermined, over and above patterns and instructions and only resembling its archetype in *being itself a creator*.

³⁷⁴ See Nicholas N. Afanasiev, 'The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable?', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 11:2 (1967), pp. 54-68.

³⁷⁵ Afanasiev, p. 65.

³⁷⁶ Rom. 10:4.

Epilogue

For the great mystics of the Church, to know God is to ‘suffer’ God.³⁷⁷ The knowledge of God is not the knowledge of the sciences; it is knowledge that asks for much more than our reason. It takes an engagement; it calls for participation in a relationship. It justifies, like every relationship, a thorough involvement: man as a whole, mind, soul and body equally, receiving the Bridegroom who is encountered in the flesh.

What could be a better representation of this involvement than the bond of husband and wife,³⁷⁸ in which the Church from its earliest stages has seen an image of the love of God for Israel, of Christ for the Church: a genuine relationship, deep intimacy and all-embracing participation – all essential qualities of the bond of love and knowledge between man and God. The life of the Church does not address the human spirit alone, as if this existed disembodied. The spirituality of the Church does not renounce matter; it rather embraces the material. Therefore, it does not hesitate to use the images of physical love. What the Church is wary of is not nature but the *way* of nature, when this becomes selfish appropriation of life, cleaving to the self, leading, therefore, to fragmentation, death.

The context of the erotic affair presents the most pertinent setting to exemplify both *ways* of the nature: life as self-dispossession, which signifies the joyful experience of love, where we meet the unique other, utterly and yet inexhaustibly disclosed to us. If not, the affair sooner or later becomes imposition, self-defence, unbearable strain, isolation; the pain intense as none other; the injection of mortal poison between man and man, as self-absorption gains its way; being conquered by death.

To know God is to ‘suffer’ God. We know God through the loneliness of his absence. His arrival is prepared for in the wilderness. And even when he appears, it takes ‘our eyes to

³⁷⁷ This is the language used for example by Denys the Areopagite, who, speaking of his spiritual father, presents him as someone who did not so much learn about the divine things as suffered them. In the mystical tradition suffering is seen as inscribing knowledge, as deepening the soul and making what the latter learns part of its being: Louth, ‘The influence of Denys the Areopagite’, pp. 198-9.

³⁷⁸ Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2:2, Ezekiel 16, Ephesians 5:25, 31-32.

open' to recognize him; as soon as we do, he vanishes again.³⁷⁹ He remains for us the eternal object of our quest – unless, that is, we turn him into an objectification; a distant certainty, a conviction – unless we replace God by religion or ideology.

But God is no-*thing*. He is not a being; he is rather a *presence*. Like our loved one, the desired partner, he may give himself to us, but he is not our possession. He is self-determining and free – and even more longed-for when he is 'out of [our] sight'. In the 'suffering' of his absence we verify his existence. Helpless, we look out for him with trust in his mercy; we hold on in uncertainty with the groundless hope that only the lover who is driven out of his senses may bear.

The fulfillment of the expectation signifies the extra-ordinary. The 'nonsensical' longing lets the way open for the unique Incomer, the one beyond compare. It is a meaningful disclosure, an arrival that gives rise to a purpose, a revelation that takes far more than pure reason to make sense of. It presents us with a taste of the 'not yet', the transcendental, as this is explored and reached from the inside: '...the kingdom of God is within you'.³⁸⁰ The *presence* of the Other casts plenty of light: up to our inmost imprint, the 'image' of an injured and helpless lover, who astounded at the revelation of Personal distinctiveness cries out the song of love: 'Your kingdom come ...Amen, Come Lord!', '...cause me to hear [your voice]... make haste, my beloved...'.³⁸¹

The *Comment on the Song of Songs* (Σχόλιο στό Ἄσμα Ἀσμάτων),³⁸¹ is a book that came out of 'the experience of colours', as the author himself puts it; the experience of human love, which naturally brightens up the otherwise pale or achromatic everyday reality.³⁸² An experience of 'colours' caused by a short-lived occasion, such as falling in love with another person, which, however, opens up the way to the possibility or the prospect of fulfilled life, of True Life, τῆς ὄντως ζωῆς. In the powerful sense of fulfilment and perfected life that derives from the happiness of man's relational being and exchange – possibly the most

³⁷⁹ Luke 24:31.

³⁸⁰ Luke 17:21.

³⁸¹ Christos Yannaras, *Σχόλιο στό Ἄσμα Ἀσμάτων* [*Comment on the Song of Songs*] (Athens: Domos, 2003).

³⁸² *Τά καθ' ἐαυτόν*, pp. 77-80.

intimate of which is that which takes place within an erotic encounter – Yannaras sees not just a symbol, but rather a revelation of the creating and loving-erotic call of God to mankind. However, owing to the worldly and imperfect state of our nature, the human experience of happiness is the experience of the ephemeral: short and passing. The reasons that cause our happiness and brighten up our reality turn soon, very often, to sources of pain, as they reveal their finite character subject to limitations. It is almost intrinsic to human experience of fascination for it to turn, sooner or later, to disappointment and unfulfilment. Therefore *Σχόλιο στό Άσμα Άσμάτων*, Yannaras clarifies, is a book of ascetics, which has dared, however, to present the occurrence and the knowledge of ‘colours’ in the language of non-celibates. Despite the difference in the expression, the asceticism for monks and non-monks remains the same: to master the pain caused by the realization of the ephemeral character of the reasons that open our eyes to the True Life; to discern between the real and the imaginary; to distinguish life from the illusions of life, to tell the difference between the grey and the colourful.³⁸³ It is only the short means of fulfilling happiness that we are offered. However, ‘owing to these means we are born to the aspiration for true life, [owing to them] we realize our metaphysical being’.³⁸⁴

The *Comment on the Song of Songs* is a lyrical review of the theme of love and existence by way of a commentary on the ‘Song of Solomon’. It is a work that Yannaras has composed rather than written; it consists of nineteen melodious parts that guide us through the variations of the existential tune ‘played’ through the course of human experience, along the *way of being*. This runs from the acknowledgement that the fulfilment of the fathomless thirst for life lies in love (*Ouverture*), through the life-giving call of a Presence to the dynamic achievement of a relationship (*Intervallum*), to the realization that ‘death’ is all we have and all we can possibly contribute (*Imitation*), and leading up to glorification (*Te Deum*). It is a chant of humility before the ‘non-existing’ God that we are unable to recognize; a tune of apologetics that eliminates the ‘terrible’ God through the recognition that the armaments of our reason and religion, of law and merit are not repellent of punishment, but only of mercy. But let us just attend.

³⁸³ *Τά καθ’ ἑαυτόν*, p. 80.

³⁸⁴ *Τά καθ’ ἑαυτόν*, p. 103.

Ouverture *Our nature knows that love holds the fulfilment of life. You get recruited in the navy of death, though, in order to sail along the coasts of life; then you realize that life is not to exist a n d love, but you exist only because you love and to the extent that you love.*

Modulatio *Mutual love is the sense of Adam and Eve on the first day of the creation. Ready for everything, even for death, for the lover's sake.*

Appoggiatura *The 'damage' interrupts the miracle; it creeps unnoticed into life, like the snake in the foliage of paradise. The Other now confirms my loneliness.*

Notes de Passage *To compromise is only lack of hope. The next Other will accept me without calculation, will love me without limits. We cease from life in illusion; we persistently shut our eyes before reality.*

Intervallum *The lover's beauty: invitation to life, the ultimate stimulation. And behind the attraction: nature – a mocking grimace of death. Necessity of nature: to subdue life to the objective of her own survival and perpetuation. Death entraps life.*

Divertimento *If love is the w a y of life, marriage is the way of nature. The distinction is laid bare in the model of the way of life, Christ, the kenotic self-offering: If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26).*

Proménade de parmi les tons voisins *Our innermost self or our 'soul', our true person, rises free from death, when in the Other we recognize the p e r s o n a l call that makes us what we are: The Person of the Lover, the Father.*

Scherzo *Earth of the people: the multiform/polymorphic drama. The only crevice in the freezing wall of facts is loving confidence in the Father.*

Stretto *Where the law does not spread out his deadly tentacles, chastity is an erotic expression. Final end: the source and fulness of eros, the Person of God.*

Exposition au relatif There, in the relationship, rises ...the distinctiveness of the innermost nucleus of our existence, our *p e r s o n a l* hypostasis; freedom from the natural, from the commonly given. For nature to become relationship, there is needed the intervention of Grace, of love naturally free from mortality. Only the 'always alive' Lover can utter, 'Lazarus, come forth'.

Comma The harlot does not offer repentance to receive justification; she does not aim at a deal. She only offers what she has and what she is. Ὁ ἔσχεν αὕτη ἐποίησε (Mark 14:8); for she loved much. Love is born when 'suddenly' there becomes apparent the vanity of the unchaste deal, ...of our virtue, or good name: treasures unable to overturn death. Love is born when 'suddenly', as the only hope of life, there shines the one 'who raises the dead'.

Cantus Firmus Erotic nudity is ...the language of 'kenosis'. 'Kenosis' means that the formless takes on form, the ineffable becomes language. Form and language is the flesh of the finite, the ephemeral; the flesh of the mortal. The Other is always beyond the 'sign' of my desire, undefined by language, accessible only in the intimacy of the erotic relationship.

Ricercare The Enlightenment made war with the weapons of the opponent. Where illumination rises, knowledge is not exhausted in the meaning of the definitions; it is the experience of a relationship. Relationship: participation in the 'energies' of nature. Energies: accessible in the imminence of the experience.

Reprise Every 'dogma' and 'confession' create their own type of man, 'devoted' to God ...He is in love with his 'devotion', his idolized egotistic chastity, not with God. You undress yourself of the armour of concepts and dive annihilated into the void, into the nil. We call 'ascesis'...the everyday pace in self-denial and self-submission.

Imitation Exhilaration of the spring that drives creatures crazy at the calyxes of flowers. How can nature be 'very good' when it contains the possibility of death? 'I have said, you are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But you shall die like men'. Yes, we ignore what we are; we only know the making of our natural decay and death. I only have death...and that I offer in t h a n k s g i v i n g.

Interlude Ἐξέλθατε καὶ ἴδετε (Solomon's Song, 3:11): the departure/exodus, first condition for the viewing. The kingship and the crown, the mother, the day of gladness and the nuptial chamber³⁸⁵ remain imaginary sketches of the feeling, if the nerve for the exodus/flight to the relationship with the real runs short. In the culture of timidity there abides insurance: the voracity of self-sufficiency. The exodus to the view of the real: the Church calls it *m y s t e r y*. We speak of the mystery by excess, walking on tiptoe on the edge of nature and relationship, of mortal and grace.

Dissonantia Clever nature...plays the game of selfishness even through the way of virtue. The opposite of desire: self-adequacy. The opposite of love: self-adoration. The torture of hell will be the failure to recognize Christ in the Person of the Bridegroom and Lover of our souls. He cannot be the one who embraces the unchaste – the publican, the harlot, the prodigal, the thief. We wait for him who will not come...unable to recognize the Bridegroom, present and most close, in his erotic self-submission.

Conclusion sur pédale de dominante The true life (ὄντως ζωή) consists in the way of existence, not in 'nature'. Each Person hypostasizes the whole 'nature' in the way of kenosis from every 'natural' autonomy and self-existence: the way of love. The immortality of the [Trinitarian] Persons is not given by 'nature' and it is not compulsory; true life is not an oppressive natural predetermination. Personal freedom hypostasizes nature as erotic self-transcendence. Christ Jesus...the person of the Virgin hypostasizes life not in the way of nature, but in the way of love. In the freedom of submission to the manic love of God for humanity.

Te Deum Crowds swarming always across London Bridge, in the dens of the underground in Paris, along the avenues of Tokyo, in the sportsfields of Los Angeles, the factories of Osaka, Cologne, Toronto. Each person: a matchless look, a unique smile. They drink in the present with the carefreeness of the eternal. Unrelated to the death that will mow them down, unrelated to the treachery of the flesh that withers every day and some day will rot in the ground. We have known the composition of the nucleus of the atoms, the structure of DNA, the nature of light, the constituent elements of the farthest galaxies. And we do not know how to

³⁸⁵ Yannaras draws on the Song of Solomon, 3:11.

define the beginning and the end of the human subject, of our very self. We dig into the mystery of our existence, the mystery of life and death, like earthworms in the mud after the rain.

There may be ‘another’ knowledge where the positive knowledge ends. There may arise more confident knowledge when all becomes dust, ashes and shadow.

‘I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you,

Which shall be the darkness of God’.

The darkness of the questions is the n a t u r a l distance that separates man from God. To alter the n a t u r a l distance into p e r s o n a l relationship is an exercise of self-resignation from nature, it is love. The gift of thanksgiving takes the place of the unanswered questions.

Υπέρ πάντων, ὧν ἴσμεν καί ὧν οὐκ ἴσμεν.

‘So the darkness shall be light, and the stillness the dancing’.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ The section in italics is a collection of verses, chapter by chapter, from the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* by Christos Yannaras, a celebratory presentation-summary by the author of the themes that he generally explores in his works. The excerpts have been chosen in a way to reflect the gist of each part.

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