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# AD FONTES

A JOURNAL OF PROTESTANT LETTERS

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## **A SYMPOSIUM ON THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE END OF ANCIENT METAPHYSICS**

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**JOSEPH MINICH**

*Philosophical Wonder and the Biography of Christian Theology*

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*Also featuring: poetry by Scott Cairns, Brad Littlejohn on Reformation metaphysics, and more.*

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# About

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AD FONTES IS A QUARTERLY JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE DAVENANT INSTITUTE.

Ad fontes, “to the sources,” was a rallying cry of the Reformation. The Reformers bequeathed to us a heritage, rooted in the Scriptures and their wide-ranging humanistic studies, which sought to address the hard questions of theology, philosophy, and culture in a way that was true to the revelation of God’s word and God’s world. *Ad Fontes* channels this ethos into a modern context, seeking to explore our questions alongside the great cloud of witnesses and the many exemplars who have gone before us.

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# From the Editor's Desk

This issue of *Ad Fontes* takes us to the depths of Christian intellectual history, the heights of metaphysical contemplation, and the breadth of the Christian tradition. It is undeniably fitting, therefore, that this issue was birthed in an ordinary Midwestern house, in a 10x10 first-floor bedroom that once housed my brother-in-law but had been long-since repurposed as a storage unit for childrens' toys—toys whose owners were delightfully producing such pandemonium that I could hardly follow my own arguments to Brad Littlejohn as I tried to sell him on relaunching *Ad Fontes*.

Whatever I said—or whatever Brad heard—worked, and he greenlit the project. *Ad Fontes* relaunched a year ago, and the Summer 2022 issue marks our fourth print issue and second symposium. Our first symposium, in Winter 2022, focused on the work of religion scholar Jason Josephson-Storm, who has recently concerned himself with moving through—not merely beyond—critical theory's epistemological dead-ends. This issue's symposium, centering on Johannes Zachhuber's magnificent new book, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus* (Oxford

University Press, 2020), is similar in form but not in content: instead of treating a contemporary intellectual movement, it focuses our attention squarely in the patristic era; instead of engaging an intellectual movement with roots outside the Church, it is concerned exclusively with Christian philosophy. Indeed, as Zachhuber argues, it is possible to speak of Christian philosophy precisely because of the figures, movements, and patterns of thought his book describes.

The essays from our contributors relate Zachhuber's book to issues of diverse relevance. Readers will learn a great deal about the birth and “biography” of the Church's doctrinal development (Minich), the relation of Zachhuber's book to the last century of patristic scholarship (Peterson), and to issues of contemporary relevance for British and American evangelicals (Laverly).

Likewise, the reviews in this issue share the focus on philosophy and metaphysics, but in different contexts. Matthew Colvin reviews two books investigating the relationship between Scripture and Greek philosophy; Brad Littlejohn reviews a new book on the metaphysics of Peter Martyr Vermigli; and Nicholas C. DiDonato

AD FONTES

reviews a book putting Reformed and Eastern Orthodox doctrines of God into conversation. Our opening poem by Scott Cairns is likewise concerned with the philosophical, and is well complemented by poetry from Cameron Brooks and Pastor Wang Yi (translated by Eastern Pleb) bringing us back down to earth.

The quality of these essays, poems, and symposium contributions exceed anything I could have hoped for those couple years ago when I pitched the magazine relaunch to Brad Littlejohn. It should go without saying that I could have done none of this without the unwavering support of Brad. I am grateful to all of the contributors who have worked with us and made this journal possible. And I am grateful also to my colleagues Michael Riggins, Colin Redemer, and especially Rhys Laverty, who has been doing the lion’s share of the work behind the scenes for months now; it is only fitting, then, that he should succeed me as I step back from my role as Senior Editor to focus on other pursuits. I have every con-

fidence in him (and look forward to still collaborating with him as an Editor-at-Large). Finally, I am grateful to my family—and especially my wife, Elaina—for supporting my endeavors and not begrudging the time that this magazine took from them.

There are, as ever, countless other people to name and thank—too many to name here. I trust you all know who you are. It has been one of the privileges of my career to edit this magazine, and I will miss it—though I am glad that I will now get to join you readers as a part of the community that has formed around it. Thank you for reading.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

**Onsi A. Kamel**

*Outgoing Senior Editor*

July 2022

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# Aporía [Απορία]

BY SCOTT CAIRNS

---

All dressed up, and still  
no place to go. The road  
lies choked with unforeseen  
debris. I have misplaced  
my keys, and, regardless,  
I simply cannot find  
reason to start the car.

I have pored above  
this passage for a week.  
The prose of Palamás  
proves far too thick a soup  
to dish without great care  
even if no amount  
of care appears to matter much.

The paradox persists  
beyond my ken, which proves  
not a single thing, save  
this: our dear Palamás  
knew not to float above  
the text at hand, but knew  
our hope lay ever in descent.

# Philosophical Wonder and the Biography of Christian Theology

JOSEPH MINICH

Faced with the daunting task of responding to a work as significant as *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics*, I must admit up front my own limitations, and play to my strengths. I am not a scholar of Patristic thought, nor is my discipline that of historical or systematic theology. And, while having a decent nose for good versus bad scholarship (and this is very good), I cannot play on the margins of a field's knowledge in the way that most reviews of this sort require in order to generate some "critical" comments. And so, I write as a layman whose fascinations (and teaching) are broad and philosophically synthetic. As such, my comments will tend more to the "abstract" than the "concrete" side of the dialectic so essential (albeit in another context) to the book's own narrative. And so first, the book's argument; and second, some comments.

First, the book's own narrative. In short, Dr. Zachhuber reads Christian theological discourse as a developing

philosophy (and therefore as belonging to the common history of philosophy) in its own right. That is to say, the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of late antiquity were not simply a matter of artificially "fusing" theology and philosophy together. Rather, the negotiation between dogma and the motions of the human mind proved to be a fertile union for the generation of fresh philosophical progeny. Specifically, Zachhuber claims that "it was the Christological controversy...which for the first time truly directed intellectual energies towards the task of conceptualizing the individual as individual" (11). Put in broader context, then, "reflection on the Christian faith in its most peculiar and most idiosyncratic element—the postulation that a historical human person was at the same time God-led to profound changes to the intellectual fabric of Western civilization with far-reaching consequences over the centuries and, arguably, into our own time" (11).

**CAPPADOCIAN THOUGHT WAS ABLE TO SYNTHESIZE THE DOCTRINES OF THE TRINITY, CREATION, THE FALL, ANTHROPOLOGY, SALVATION, AND THE RESURRECTION. BUT APPLICATIONS TO CHRISTOLOGY WERE RARE.**

Some will, of course, immediately hear echoes of the now-discarded thesis of Zizioulas that the origin of a focus on “the individual” can be found in fourth century trinitarian thought.<sup>1</sup> Fully absorbing the critique of such thinkers, and paying very close attention to an enormous number of texts, Zachhuber argues that by the time of John of Damascus (c.675-749), mediated through centuries of fine-grained Christological controversy, we discover “in reality what scholars have sometimes found in the Cappadocians: a philosophical appreciation of individuality that is rather novel in its radicalness” (309).

The narrative arc defies adequate summary and is full of philosophical detail, but the following is more or less the broad contour of the tale: drawing especially on Origen and Athanasius, the oft-called “Cappadocian” Fathers (Basil of Caesarea [330-379], Gregory of Nyssa [c.335-c.395], and Gregory of Nazianzus [329-389]) initiated a philosophical trajectory that was to dominate Christian discourse for the next several centuries. Primarily systematizing the doctrine of the Trinity over against their own contemporary conflicts, the Cappadocians left the Church at least two philosophical trajectories to follow. Quoting our author at length:

The full Cappadocian account of the Trinity is characterized by a duality of perspectives that I have here called abstract and concrete. They could also be named grammatical and physical or logical and metaphysical. The former is focused on properties grouped together into clusters or bundles which, as such, characterize *ousia* and hypostasis. It primarily has a logical, epistemic, and thus subjective focus. This account gives the impression that the two terms are clearly distinct; it is therefore unsurprising that it predominates where the purpose of a text was to argue for the legitimacy and indeed the necessity of employing both *ousia* and hypostasis, each with

its own proper meaning and significance. The latter account is based more on physical or metaphysical, objective reality as it appears in its concrete forms of existence. Existence in this sense is tied to individuals but ontologically grounded in universal being which is identical in all of them. In this perspective, the distinction of *ousia* and hypostasis is less crucial; it is their coherence and continuity that is emphasized. Both sets of properties, after all, appear together in the same individual and indeed in any class of them. (66)

Inheriting this twin-grammar from the Cappadocians, their successors—bedeviled by the Christological controversies—discovered that “the application of Cappadocian philosophy to Christology was far from straightforward. In fact, its particular conceptual strengths turned out to be weaknesses when measured against this new challenge. The outcome, consequently, was a considerable modification of the original Cappadocian philosophy in line with the requirements of the Christological dogma. More precisely, there was no single outcome as there was no single Christological doctrine at the end of late antiquity” (73).

The narrative that follows demonstrates the common authority of the Cappadocian philosophy across what was to be several centuries of debate concerning the person of Christ. There are several ways to account for the widespread influence of their thought, but chief among them was its synthetic power. Cappadocian thought was able to synthesize the doctrines of the Trinity, “creation, the Fall, anthropology, salvation, and the resurrection.” (93) But “applications...to Christology were initially rare.” (93) Particularly controversial was the rise of the “double *homoousion*.” The Chalcedonian creed defines Christ as “consubstantial” with God in his divinity and “consubstantial” with us in our humanity. Yet, in the context of Cappadocian philosophy, this confession raises many questions. Do both natures exist as hypostases in Christ? Are there two hypostases

1. See Derrick Peterson’s response to Zachhuber’s book in this same issue for a fuller exploration of Zachhuber’s work in relation to that of Zizioulas.

and two natures? If so, how is Christ's personal unity maintained? Such questions, Zachhuber argues, led to the clarification of classical terms in ways that, even if sometimes latent in some Cappadocian thought, were nevertheless achievements in their own right.

**I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED  
BY THE NOTION THAT HUMANS  
MIGHT WRITE A REALISTIC HISTORY  
OF UNDERSTANDING GOD.**

The rest of Zachhuber's narrative breaks up into two parts, "The Case Against Chalcedon" and "Chalcedonian Transformations of the Classical Theory." The former section details the gradual interest of the anti-Chalcedonians in the "concrete aspect of the Cappadocian system" (143). Through this interest, the anti-Chalcedonians, as a strand of Patristic philosophy, made a major contribution to the wider history of ideas by "shift[ing] Patristic philosophy from its previous preference for the universal to a stronger emphasis on the particular... Whatever help generic notions of divinity or humanity may offer in understanding the person of Jesus Christ, must therefore be strictly limited by the primary focus on his irreducible individuality" (183). Zachhuber fascinatingly comments on the "conservative design" of miaphysite theology on the whole (182), and one cannot help but contrast it to the way he later writes about how the neo-Chalcedonians "forged a novel path not only for Christology but also for Pastristic philosophy more generally" (214). Neo-Chalcedonian Christology increasingly tended to specify the hypostasis as the locus of existence, and nature as existing only *in* the existence of hypostases. This would enable such theologians as Leontius of Jerusalem to claim that Christ's human nature "was only hypostatized 'in' the Person of the Divine Logos" (263). Part 3 ends with a discussion of Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus, whose writings Zachhuber labels "the climax" of Chalcedonian philosophy. The discussion defies summary except insofar as to claim that in these figures we see the reunion of concrete and abstract accounts in accord with several

post-Chalcedonian trajectories. In short, we arrive at an ontology of "concrete existence" as such, worked out (especially in Maximus) in and alongside a powerfully synthetic account of creation, incarnation, Trinity, salvation, and Christology. Zachhuber concludes with a brief examination of the "posterity" of patristic philosophy, including the fascinating and continued influence of John of Damascus among early modern theologians and their protégés. He concludes, "It is intriguing to reflect that for all its absence from the major accounts of philosophical history, the intellectual tradition of Eastern Christianity never quite ceased to fascinate and influence its readers throughout the centuries" (321).

With this summary in place (and it is a summary much abbreviated, given the level of detail in Zachhuber's work), it falls then to this layman to make two appreciative comments—specifically on how the book chronicles the "development of doctrine" and on the role of wonder in the philosophical enterprise.

First: I have always been fascinated by the notion that humans might write a realistic history of, for lack of a better phrase, "understanding God." What would be entailed, for instance, in really trying to understand what Abraham, David, Paul, Cyril, and Maximus *really* thought of God relative to our own understanding? If Christians worship the God of Abraham, how does one account for the continuity of belief (not to mention of its object) across such vastly different vocabularies? Said differently, can it really be claimed that Abraham, when he thought of God, thought of the same reality as we? Of course, any such genealogy is easily bedeviled by the tendency to write history teleologically. Analogously, living persons sometimes read their grandparents in such a way that *they* and their life are the teleological fulfillment of some ancestor's influence, all the while forgetting that their thousand (and very different) cousins have equal claim to such patronage. As with physical patronage, so with philosophical patronage. Who are the truest inheritors of an originary motion of the mind? One subtle tactic, of course, is to claim that later mature ideas can be shown to be present in "seed form" in what came earlier. Unfortunately, as pressing the analogy might suggest, it could also be said that previous thought was the "seed form" of many possibilities

that were never realized—ideas which were never given birth. Once a great school or thinker has become part of “the canon,” we rarely ask what seeds in their intellectual potting sheds failed to sprout, and why. One might also speak of seeds which sprouted from their thought and were later rejected. Zachhuber writes a sort of “development of doctrine” that remarkably escapes such historical determinism without, however, failing to be fascinated by precisely how what came before can be said to have “led” to what came after (especially what he labels the “abstract” and “concrete” accounts of the Cappadocians and their many applications). And while this is obviously not an entire “history of understanding God,” it is a very intimate account of one particular moment in that history—a “few steps” along the path of understanding which permit imagining what an account of “the whole” might look like if done well.

**PHILOSOPHY BEGINS IN WONDER.  
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In this, the book reminds me of Julian Marias’s attempt to write a “biography” of philosophy. Marias is famous for his *History of Philosophy*, but it is not well-known that he likewise wrote a *Biography of Philosophy*, treating the Mediterranean philosophical enterprise as having a sort of (analogical) life unto itself as a discourse that migrates across time. To stare at the development of human speech and thought in this manner is not to be bogged down with all of the obvious material and semantic contradictions that are common and inevitable in any real comparison of that sort. What stands out from this vantage point is the fertility of originary motions of the mind to re-assert themselves stubbornly despite the apparent problems that they cause us. Marias’s drama concerns the search for metaphysical unity, the manner in which the pre-Socratic attempt to grasp the whole of things at its most basic level. Such an enterprise, argues Marias, continues to animate the human mind and has proved a fertile discourse for 2500 years.

Zachhuber, on the other hand, paints Cappadocian philosophy as just as fecund and resilient as that of the pre-Socratics and Socratics, whose gestures of the mind led to unexpected places on the frontier of human wonder and knowing—and he is a master of detecting the family resemblance in the difference. This is particularly impressive because it would be easy to imagine such an account that failed to trace the migration of insight from (classically considered) heterodox communities to orthodox ones. But patterns of thought take on a “life of their own”—not in that they ever incubate outside the hypostasis of particular individuals, but that their influence is often aggregate and irreducible to the particular shades of meaning found in one individual or definition. One might speak of a sort of philosophical “hivemind” not over and above individual minds, but precisely as their aggregate in a singular discourse. As philosopher Stephen R.L. Clark has written, “Words convey more than they say, and never say all that there is.”<sup>2</sup> What emerges from an account like Zachhuber’s is that all Christological settlements in Late Antiquity required saying fundamentally new philosophical things, even though all sides saw themselves as simply expounding what the Church had always believed, proclaimed in worship, and articulated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. What demonstrates the fruitfulness of the Christological debates is that these new things were able to be synthesized and productive of greater insight in later centuries in the likes of Maximus the Confessor or John of Damascus. And their syntheses in turn shape us still today.

My second comment, and one with which I wish to conclude my response is this: philosophy begins in wonder. This is often a throwaway line in undergraduate philosophy courses, but it remains profoundly true. Philosophical wonder is not navel-gazing (even though the souls of Philistines might project such upon it). Rather, wonder is that fertile existential place from which we experience intellectual and moral movement. Inasmuch as this is a book about a distinctly Christian *philosophy*, and a productive philosophy at that, it brings us into contact with exemplars in wonder. One of the

2. Stephen R. L. Clark, *The Mysteries of Religion: An Introduction to Philosophy Through Religion* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 49.

fascinating observations of Zachhuber’s account, on this score, is the role that “theological conservatism” played in the view that ultimately fell afoul of Chalcedon. Now, to speak in such a manner is somewhat anachronistic, and it should certainly not imply that Chalcedonians were (by contrast) “the liberals” of their time. However, broadly speaking, within Zachhuber’s exploration of the Chalcedonian Christological controversies, we can detect two approaches to how the theologian and philosopher defers to the answers that have come before when he finds himself at a seemingly new frontier of human knowing. And interestingly, it would seem that the anti-Chalcedonians had stricter standards about not “moving beyond” previous syntheses and tended toward less bold intellectual innovation. The neo-Chalcedonians, while certainly deferential to their tradition and inspired by the syntheses already achieved by their intellectual ancestors, were nevertheless apparently more willing to make giant leaps of the mind to achieve a greater philosophical vantage point, with the result that they might unexpectedly be said to have discovered new frontiers of wonder.

Of course, the actual details are not so neat, as the language of conservation and progress break down the closer you get to the ground. Even those “conservatives” who treat previous arrangements as an “arrival” that must be defended, for instance, nevertheless find themselves making fascinating intellectual moves to avoid the problems that are pointed out with their systems. And these can in turn, as noted above, play surrogate to greater syntheses when integrated into other frameworks. Such is the history of ideas, ever driven on by wonder. And, at least for this reader, I cannot help but feel the synthetic power of a discourse that remains with us because it has proven faithful over against the many philosophical fads that have come and gone throughout the centuries. To read the Church Fathers, much like reading the Bible to which they stood in closer historical proximity, is both to discover something profoundly *foreign* and yet strangely evocative to the wondering modern soul. This is (in part) because these texts still shove us into the frontiers of knowing, and the attempt to understand metaphysics in light of this shoving has yielded much fruit. That questions remain is the price (and adventure) of finitude, and this is no innate argu-

ment against the explanatory power of a particular idea or ideas *per se*. Moreover, a book like Zachhuber’s persuades me that we do well to suspect that these Patristic theologians might be good guides even as we face *contemporary* frontiers. The account Zachhuber has written involves ordinary motions in some of the Cappadocian fathers—intellectual “starts”—that were sometimes not appreciated until generations later. Arguably, the same remains true today. Contemporary studies of Thomas and Maximus, for instance, demonstrate them to be full of insight that has not yet been excavated clearly. The cry of “*ad fontes!*” is not the interest of an antiquarian, but, at its best, the cry of a contemporary man who trusts that old masters, whilst they did not fully know, have still not yet been fully known. This is because “words convey more than they say, and never say all that there is.” It is left to the living intellect to mediate, see alongside, and perhaps on occasion, see beyond them.

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## SYMPOSIUM

# Beyond *Being as Communion*

**DERRICK PETERSON**

In *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics* (hereafter *RoCT*), Johannes Zachhuber has written a book that should easily be considered one of the most important in the field of Patristic theology since Lewis Ayres' *Nicaea and Its Legacy* was published in 2004.<sup>1</sup> Like Ayres, Zachhuber is hardly satisfied to stay within the realm of detailed historical work, branching out with some particularly suggestive things to say about the Western tradition at large. The work embodies a sophisticated level of detail, and continues themes in recent decades of Patristic thought that have deployed such granularity to deconstruct and correct many “big picture” ideas in historical and systematic theology which seek validation through Patristic pedigree. It will doubtless come as something of a surprise to many therefore that Zachhuber's latest book can be seen as a purification of, and legitimate heir to, the work of Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, whose broader theological claims have been so often harrowed by that same meticulous Patristic scholarship of the last quarter century or so. Specifically, there are two

major ways in which *RoCT* corrects and expands upon some of the themes that catapulted Zizioulas to the forefront of the theological world several decades ago. First, he corrects Zizioulas' reliance upon an artificial unity among the Cappadocians, instead identifying an ontological revolution arising from the plurality caused by the Christological legacy of internal Cappadocian tensions. Second, Zachhuber disembeds many key Patristic insights from a simplistic Eastern and Western theological schema that so often hampers Zizioulas and those who follow him. In doing so, Zachhuber ultimately provides an excellent example of how granular historical work can still interact with the excitement of bold genealogical ideas. My humble goal here is to provide a bit of broader context to some of what I consider to be Zachhuber's major achievements.

## **CAPPADOCIANS NOW!**

It is now difficult to remember a time when “the Cappadocians” were yet to become a ubiquitous theological shorthand for everything ranging from praise for those who dislike Augustine to an Eastern panacea for Western theological woes. Werner Jaeger, for example,

1. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

argued that the Cappadocians had created *the* synthesis of classical philosophy and Christian theology, reconciling Athens and Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of such praise, no doubt a major force for solidifying the eastern trio of Basil of Caesarea (330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389) was rather the work of John Zizioulas. In 1985 with the English publication of Zizioulas' *Being as Communion*, the Anglophone theological world was treated to an explosive event that can now be isolated as a formative moment in twentieth century theology.<sup>3</sup> It was all the more remarkable as one of the first instances in which Eastern Christian theological resources of the so-called neo-Patristic movement began to be seriously considered as viable dialogue partners and supplements for Western theology.<sup>4</sup>

Focusing the efforts of many predecessors, Zizioulas argued that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan trinitarian debate of the fourth century was not an event cloistered within the walls of Christianity. Rather, it was of such epochal significance that it fundamentally transformed philosophical thought by eschewing the previous Greek metaphysical focus on impersonal substances and causes.<sup>5</sup> “The Greek fathers’ main success,” argued Zizioulas, “rests in the identification of truth [and God] with communion.”<sup>6</sup> The Cappadocian fathers, in the light of Nicaea, differentiated hypostasis and *ousia* (previously synonyms for “being”) in such a way that, respectively, individuality and universality become distinct but related. The trinitarian debates over person and nature came to emphasize, so Zizioulas would argue, that the notion of personhood and communion—not nature and

substance—were primal in God.<sup>7</sup> This “being as communion” thesis in both its metaphysical and historical components together created a unique insight—again as Zizioulas argued—which if it had been properly followed in the West would have incited a philosophical revolution pruning away many problems like secularism, atheism, and impersonal theology before they had time to grow. Beyond the historical and genealogical analysis, “being as communion” was also a metaphysical or ontological element in Zizioulas’ constructive proposals for theology, and so given priority as an interpretive category to understand the Church, society, creation, and other theological *loci*. The effect of Zizioulas’ book was immediate and dramatic, coinciding with a ground swell of appreciation for the Cappadocians during the 1980s, as well as general aplomb for the broad umbrella of “social trinitarianism” and thinking (arguably mistakenly) of Zizioulas as an ally in that endeavor. One could not throw a rock for the next two decades without hitting a theology professor incorporating Zizioulas’ historical or systematic insights at some level.<sup>8</sup>

As we have mentioned, however, Zizioulas’ reception within Patristic scholarship differs markedly from that which he warmly received in systematic theology,<sup>9</sup> and *Being as Communion* hardly emerged unscathed from the Patristic research that began to appear after his initial and subsequent publications. On the one hand, many, like Lucien Turcescu, argued that the specifics of Zizioulas’ notion of personhood, communion, and substance did not reflect the reality of the debates sur-

2. Werner Jaeger, *Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1961).

3. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

4. This is not to suggest Zizioulas was representative of all neo-Patristic scholars, far from it. Cf. Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2006) which outlines major differences and similarities between Zizioulas and Lossky.

5. The best introduction to this aspect of Zizioulas is a recently released monography by Jesmond Micallef, *Trinitarian Ontology: The Concept of the Person for John D. Zizioulas* (Brussels: Domuni, 2020). Helpful as well is the discussion in Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 73–126.

6. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 101; Cf. the expansion of his thesis in *Communion & Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

7. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* 87–88: “Now, however, [with the Cappadocians] the term *hypostasis* was disassociated from that of *ousia* and became identified with that of *prosopon*. But this latter term is *relational*, and was so when adopted in trinitarian theology. This meant that from now on a relational term entered into ontology, and, conversely, that an ontological category such as *hypostasis* entered the relation categories of existence. To be and to be in relation [become identical].”

8. An excellent and extremely helpful look into discussions surrounding Zizioulas, personhood, and the Trinity and its broader place in twentieth-century theology is Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 262–307.

9. Perhaps the most famous example summarizing many of the broader shifts in Patristic thought generally, and their journey of coming into the awareness of systematic theologians is the aforementioned work of Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*. Though limited to Gregory of Nyssa as its prime example, perhaps the best read introducing major shifts in Patristic historiography in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Though dated, a good summary of broader shifts in regards to the Arian controversy in scholarship since 1987 can still be found in Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 247–268.

rounding Nicaea and beyond.<sup>10</sup> In fact, methodological doubts about contemporary twentieth century handling of ancient sources, went beyond this<sup>11</sup> and questioned why Zizioulas seemed to produce highly reductive accounts of the Cappadocians presented as the essence of their theology.<sup>12</sup> Even the formula “one substance, three persons,” attributed as the so-called “Cappadocian settlement,” surprisingly did not even occur in their work, but was most likely a summary formula by Didymus the Blind.<sup>13</sup>

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Zachhuber’s book embodies many of these concerns regarding how to characterize Patristic theology without losing granularity in the vein of Zizioulas. Zachhuber, like Zizioulas, focuses (initially) on the Cappadocians, but argues that each had a distinct approach, and that these, along with unresolved tensions in what Zachhuber terms the “abstract” and “concrete” levels of analysis occurring amid internal Cappadocian dialogue, were elements that contributed to the directions of later Christological controversies. In fact, ironically, in complete opposition to Zizioulas, Zachhuber remarks that the focus of the Cappadocians was *not* the individual but that “Cappadocian philosophy as a whole is geared toward the universal” (69). Yet “the fact that the

‘ontological revolution’ in Patristic philosophy of which Zizioulas spoke, cannot be identified with the Cappadocians, does not mean that it never happened” (70). Rather, Zachhuber boldly contends that it was within the fires of the fifth and sixth century Christological debates, which arose from the very plurality of the Cappadocians, that the role of the individual began to be forged with its current ontological density.

**EAST AND WEST**

Another feature of Zizioulas’ work is the fact that many of his assertions gain their sharpness, and even some of their structure and content, from a larger dualism between the Christian East and West that, for him, stand as representatives of two quite different ways of doing theology.<sup>14</sup> This presupposition—reinforced by Zizioulas’ argument that the ontological revolution of the Cappadocians was a sorely needed corrective for supposed deficiencies of Western theism stemming from Augustine and Aquinas, to name but two of those identified as delinquents—deeply embedded itself into many subsequent works of Trinitarian thought published in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>15</sup> This was no accident, but a load bearing architectural feature of Zizioulas’ constructive thought—one inherited from trends begun in earnest when many theologians who would become staples of the neo-Patristic movement, were exiled from their home in Russia during the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>16</sup> These thinkers found themselves trying to reassert and cultivate an Eastern identity via their Patristic scholarship while adjusting to life in a Paris controlled largely by Catholic neo-Thomists and *nouvelle* theologians (though the latter were often seen by George Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky as somewhat uneasy allies).<sup>17</sup>

10. Lucian Turcescu, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Concept of Divine Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

11. E.g. the (in)famous final chapter of Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*; cf. Michel Rene Barnes, “Ebion at the Barricades: Moral Narrative and Post-Christian Catholic Theology,” *Modern Theology* 26:4 (2010): 511-548.

12. Richard Fermer, “The Limits of Trinitarian Theology as Methodological Paradigm,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 41 (1999): 158-186.

13. Joseph T. Lienhard, SJ, “*Ousia* and *Hypostasis*: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of the One Hypostasis,” in Stephen T. Davis et al. *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: 1999), 99-122; cf. as well Johannes Zachhuber, “Basil and the Three-Hypostasis Tradition: Reconsidering the Origins of Cappadocian Theology,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* vol.5 (2001): 65-85.

14. See Bruce D. Marshall, “*Ex Occident Lux?* Aquinas and Eastern Orthodox Theology,” *Modern Theology* vol.20 no.1 (2004): 23-50.

15. For more on this point, see Derrick Peterson, “A Sacred Monster: On the Secret Fears of Some Recent Trinitarianism,” *The Lord is One: Reclaiming Divine Simplicity* (Landrum: Davenant Press, 2019), 174-213

16. For a helpful and detailed retelling, see: Ivana Noble, “The Neo Patristic Synthesis,” in Ivana Noble et. al. *Wrestling with the Mind of the Fathers* (New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2015), 25-78; Paul L. Gavriluk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42-59, 132-158, 172-189, 232-258.

17. A helpful summary can be found in Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 193-219.

What has become evident since *Being and Communion's* publication is that despite (often legitimate) complaints of historical and historiographical mishandling by its Western confreres, many aspects of the duality of East and West as it is present in twentieth century work arose in part from the East's own superficial engagement with—indeed construction of—“the West.”<sup>18</sup> While some scholars continue to emphasize the deep historical-structural nature of the East-West split in theology,<sup>19</sup> the emerging consensus as of late appears to emphasize how much of the divide is in fact not perennial, not essential, and not readily attributable to structural differences in actual theology (though certainly some differences do persist without being candidates for structural or essential divides). Rather, many of the most iconic distinctions supposedly characterizing the East-West bifurcation in fact came about by way of conflicts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—divisions which were then projected back onto the tradition by way of new and often polemically skewed categories used to understand and classify the theological tradition in terms somewhat alien to the past but useful for the proprietary conflicts of the present.<sup>20</sup> As but one example, it has recently been demonstrated rather convincingly that some of the historical pictures of the Cappadocians and their Western counterparts drawn by Zizoulas arose as materials useful for prosecuting contemporary historiographical and theological disagreements with T.F. Torrance (another extremely influential figure in the twentieth century) over the nature and significance of both Patristic and systematic

theology.<sup>21</sup> As Aristotle Papanikolaou puts it, many neo-Patristic theologians like Zizioulas or Vladimir Lossky, to demonstrate Eastern thought, also “illustrate [their points]. . . by construct[ing] a history of eastern and western patristic thought.”<sup>22</sup>

Now, Zachhuber does not tackle these aspects of the division between Eastern and Western theology directly. However, as the reader internalizes the masterful way in which Zachhuber describes the divisions, distinctions, and reconciliations in the fifth century Christological debates as a byproduct of latent ambiguities within the Cappadocian notions of hypostasis and *ousia*, one is reminded of another figure also navigating these same ambiguities: Augustine. Infamously, the East and West division has been (by Zizioulas and others) reinforced in part by remarking upon Augustine's apparent inability to understand the fine nuances of Eastern (often Cappadocian) theology. Augustine's perplexity at the meaning and difference of *ousia* and hypostasis, is not really a matter of Augustine's “deficient” trinitarianism trading on notions of substance or psychological analogies, or his poor Greek (which most likely surpassed today's most gifted seminarians, whatever it was lacking). Rather, as Richard Cross has adeptly shown, Augustine is particularly confused because hypostasis, defined as distinct from *ousia* since it is that by which the persons are *different* from each other, is nonetheless something *equally shared* among the three—thereby making it also fit the new definition of *ousia* as that which is common.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Augustine is concerned with finding the appropriate “species” term for “person” that does not result in allowing the equation of “three people = three gods” or “one essence = one person.” Curiously, the language Cross uses to unpack Augustine's careful exploration of what exactly it is about the language that perplexes him bears a striking resemblance

18. Cf. George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

19. Apart from the increasingly anti-Western work of Christos Yannaris that, while poignant, remains largely without English translation until recently, the most intellectually powerful examples of grounding an essential divide as a byproduct of branching theological history is no doubt David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004); Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), is another sophisticated example of how the divide is still usable. Nonetheless, recently Richard Cross, “Divine Simplicity and the Doctrine of the Trinity: Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine,” in David Bradshaw, ed., *Philosophical Theology and the Christian Tradition: Russian and Western Perspectives – Christian Philosophical Studies* vol.3 (2012): 53-65, critiqued Radde-Gallwitz in a way that relativized his distinction between eastern (Cappadocian) and Western ways of conceptualizing divine simplicity and, surprisingly, Radde-Gallwitz later, in an article entitled “Gregory of Nyssa and Divine Simplicity,” *Modern Theology* 35 no.3 (2019): 452-466, indicated he agreed with Cross' argument. Regardless of the final position, the debate remains an incredibly contested one.

20. For example, see Mark McInroy, “How Deification Became Eastern: German Idealism, Liberal Protestantism, and the Modern Misconstruction of Doctrine,” *Modern Theology* vol.37 no.4 (2021): 934-958.

21. Jason Radcliff, “T.F. Torrance in Light of Stephen Holmes' Critique of Trinitarian Thought,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 86 no.1 (2014): 32; cf. Nikolaus Asprolos, “T.F. Torrance and John Zizioulas On the Divine Monarchy: the Cappadocian Background and the neo-Cappadocian Solution,” *Participatio* 4 (2014): 162-189; Ralph Del Colle, “Persons' and 'Being' in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology: Conversation With Thomas Torrance and Thomas Aquinas,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54:1 (2001): 70-86.

22. Papanikolaou, *Being With God*, 10-11.

23. Richard Cross, “*Quid Tres?* On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in *de Trinitate* 5 and 7,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100 no.2 (2007): 215-232.

to that which Zachhuber uses to set up the latent tensions within Cappadocian theology which caused the branching paths between the contending fifth century Christological positions.

Inevitably, the partial reception of the Cappadocian system caused conceptual complications on both sides. The miaphysites cogently insisted that according to Cappadocian logic something that was said of universal nature had to apply to all individual members of the class. If, then, as their opponents claimed, the two natures of the Chalcedonian formula were universal divinity and humanity, the Incarnation would have to be said of the whole Trinity, and its object would be humanity in its entirety (312).

These are, remarkably, ideas that show up in Books 5 and 7 of Augustine's *De Trinitate* in which he parses out why exactly he is not entirely certain of the content of the Eastern (Cappadocian) distinction between *ousia* and hypostasis. More importantly, they show up as broader points of consideration as Augustine discusses Christ's incarnation in ways often reminiscent of later Eastern discussions. Parallels between Augustine and Maximus have been suggested, for example. Augustine may even have been a source of inspiration for Maximus.<sup>24</sup> Recently, Brian F. Daley in his own monograph revisiting Patristic Christology, wrote "To those who have been looking for a bridge between the Eastern and Western churches, I would suggest that it exists here, in the Christology of the . . . Greek and Latin fathers, rather than in an attempted rapprochement among their respective Trinitarian doctrine."<sup>25</sup> Though Zachhuber does not explicitly mention this conclusion, it is reasonable to infer from his work overall that something similar to Daley's advice can be followed, at least in mitigating the typical example of Augustinian "perplexity." For, if we follow Zachhuber's presentation, Augustine's perplexity gains broader historical context and should not be read as "Western" or Latin ignorance of Greek subtlety. At one level, Augustine is simply stating facts, for nowhere do the Greek writers truly define "hy-

24. Brian E. Daley, SJ, "Making a Human Will Divine: Augustine and Maximus on Christ and Human Salvation," in Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Democopoulos, eds., *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 101-126.

25. Brian E. Daley, SJ, *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 311.

postasis." Far from some misunderstanding unique to the West, or a language deficiency, what Zachhuber's work describes are Eastern debates trying to navigate the Cappadocian Trinitarian legacy and its implications for Christology whose terms, concepts, and questions are remarkably similar to those with which Augustine eloquently struggles, albeit in the idiom of Latin Africa.<sup>26</sup> Though hardly a statement of identity (and one surely still must account for local differences where they occur), Zachhuber's work nonetheless gives what appears to be an opportunity to reconsider this misunderstood aspect of Augustine's thought, adding itself as a resource to the growing number of works describing parallels and intersections between East and West.

## CONCLUSION

Zachhuber has found a way to combine the rigor of recent Patristic scholarship with the excitement that came about from bold claims like that of Zizioulas. Rather than a forced unity of thought, it is precisely in honoring the granularity of differing Christological parties emerging out of the richness of Cappadocian thought that Zachhuber's thesis of the emergence of the individual person as a valuable philosophical notion enters into the light of day. Valuable as well is the manner in which Zachhuber's work dovetails with the recent "turn to religion" in many sectors of academia.<sup>27</sup> For many, one of the most compelling factors of Zizioulas' work was the fact that it provided a theological genealogy for realities like persons and relations that today are usually associated with philosophy, rarely, if ever, with theology. Since at least Pierre Hadot (1922–2010), a number of recent works have begun quite rightly to question the hard binary that many have placed between "the-

26. It remains an open question who among the Greeks Augustine read. An older study by Irénée Chevalier, *Saint Augustin et la pensée grecque. Les relations trinitaires* (Collectanea Friburgensia 24: Librairie de l'Université, 1940), 98, argued that Augustine has read relevant discussions in Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Epiphanius of Salamis, and Didymus the Blind. Richard Cross ("*Quid Tres*," 229) argues that given the parallels it seems clear as well that Augustine was familiar with relevant portions of Gregory of Nyssa.

27. Though a broad movement, my reference to it is meant to indicate recent works that emphasize reevaluating the historical and genealogical contributions of religion to various aspects of life, and/or the continuing power of theological discourse as a conversation partner with other disciplines (often by also revealing the hidden and over theological and religious premises of these disciplines as points of contact). Perhaps the most infamous work here would be John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* 2nd ed. (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

ology” and “philosophy”—at the very least in Patristic settings.<sup>28</sup> It remains to be seen whether this view has made Christians more or less competitive toward other ancient philosophies than Tertullian’s “what hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?” stance; however, what can be seen is that an increasing amount of academic work has bolstered the opinion that the activities and contributions of Christians in these controversies cannot be neatly categorized as “religious” if by that what is meant are activities separated from broader human considerations and activities. Rather than a selection of “religious” propositions to be believed and to which one’s faith assents, the debates on the Trinity and Christology surrounding the early creeds were intended to be part of larger considerations impacting an entire way of life and view of reality.<sup>29</sup> Zachhuber’s immensely detailed and granular work in a seemingly obscure and arcane section of debate as such has major genealogical ramifications for today:

[The conclusions of *RoCT*] are more than a historical footnote. Those who hoped to find a turn to the individual in the Cappadocians themselves, expected this to result in a philosophical vision of individuals harmonically united to form a larger whole. The turn to the individual that actually took place in the context of the Christological controversy, by contrast, shows the disruptive consequences inevitably accompanying such a paradigm shift. The relationship between the individual and its class become as questionable as the constitution of being as a whole, the ontological role of existence, and many others. (315)

It would obviously be anachronistic to credit the *miaphysite* opponents of Chalcedon with a project of ‘demythologization’ or think of John of Damascus as the originator of modern historical consciousness. And yet it is arguable that the

28. For example, Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2004); Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995). Important as well are the debates over “Christian philosophy” taking place in the 1930’s in France, which is especially relevant in the overall context of the rising opinion of an East and West split arising in Paris at the same time. Cf. Gregory B. Sadler, ed., *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930’s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

29. Cf. George E. Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Darius Karłowicz, *Socrates and Other Saints: Early Christian Understandings of Reason and Philosophy* trans. Artur Rosman (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017); Dru Johnson, *Biblical Philosophy: A Hebraic Approach to the Old and New Testaments* (Cambridge: CUP, 2021).

insistent and increasingly subtle doctrinal enquiries into the nature of the Incarnation and the metaphysical constitution of the person of Jesus Christ that followed the impasse of the Council of Chalcedon changed the intellectual matrix of Western thought in such a way that would ultimately make these modern questions feasible and intelligible” (317)

If we are to take Charles Taylor’s aphorism that “On the way from Plato to Descartes, stands Augustine,”<sup>30</sup> Zachhuber would have us say also (or perhaps instead) that “on the way from Plato to Descartes stand the Christological debates of the fifth to seventh centuries.” As Zizioulas argued, so now also does Zachhuber, who opines, “The study of Patristic philosophy has long suffered from attempts to refer to older philosophical ideas as determinative forces in its formation” (319). The transformation that occurred thus also points backward, aiding our historiography. Just as the Christian transformation of ideas still impacts ideas and practices today, so too, we must not confuse Christian practice as the simple continuity of natural philosophies on offer. This leads to what may be Zachhuber’s broader goal in this excellent work, as well as his corpus at large: to seek out and continue to investigate the nature of Christian theology and its relationship to our vision of the world and that which populates the world. In so doing, he has provided us—among many things—an excellent example of the fact that detailed historical work that emphasizes granularity need not be a wet blanket on those seeking grand narratives and theories of everything. Appropriately, in Christ, who fills all things, these things do, in fact, come together.

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30. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992), 126.

## SYMPOSIUM

# A Theory of Everything? Christology as a Hope for Evangelical Metaphysical Revival

RHYS LAVERTY

## INTRODUCTION

Starting in the early twentieth century, many Protestant theologians developed an allergy to metaphysics—that is, to the study of being *as* being. The allergy is, on many levels, understandable. For one thing, the conversionist and activist streaks within evangelicalism make metaphysics seem a dangerous distraction—we want to know how many souls we can fit in the lifeboat, not how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. For another, the old liberal Protestant tradition often made poor use of metaphysics—or at least, used metaphysics in a manner that was bad for the faith—so it made sense when evangelicals attempted a return to the pure Word of God over against metaphysical speculation. This metaphysical malaise has, however, left us marooned

when faced with many of today's thorny theological questions—questions on, say, the doctrine of God or ethics. The responses tend to be either capitulation to our prevailing culture's metaphysical disinterest and rapidly shifting ethical mores (e.g. mainline churches) or circling the wagons to protect an ever-more incoherent biblicism which finds itself unable to address pressing questions for which it cannot find chapter-and-verse (e.g. evangelicalism, of which I am a part and on which this essay will focus). Of course, whatever happens, the Church in its *esse* will survive. But is there anything that can be done in the arena of metaphysics for its *bene esse*, and specifically in its evangelical quarters? Johannes Zachhuber's magnificent new book *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics*, in my reading, suggests so. It must be said at the outset that these

**DID ANY DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN “THEORY OF EVERYTHING” REMAIN BY THE END OF LATE ANTIQUITY? IN TIME, TENTATIVELY, WE MIGHT SAY YES.**

concerns are not ones which Professor Zachhuber at all approaches in the work, but they are ones which it cannot help but illuminate. What, then, does he illuminate?

Zachhuber’s core contention is that, rather than merely rehashing pagan Greek thought, the post-Nicene Cappadocian Fathers Basil the Great (330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.395), and Gregory Nazianzen (329–389) forged a distinctly Christian philosophy from the crucible of the Trinitarian controversies following the first Council of Nicaea. Among other things, Zachhuber demonstrates that this Cappadocian philosophy, with its distinctive account of *ousia* and hypostasis, was, especially in the hands of Gregory of Nyssa, not just suited for questions of trinitarian theology, but for basically all areas of theology: “Gregory of Nyssa applied the same conceptual language [of *ousia* and hypostasis] to a range of other doctrinal topics including creation, salvation, and the eschatological resurrection and restoration of humankind. In this way Cappadocian philosophy permitted for the first time the systematic integration of many doctrinal topics into one systematic whole” (6). As such, Cappadocian philosophy became the Church’s theological *lingua franca* in the years after their deaths, such that Zachhuber can justly term it “the classical theory.” This classical theory has been seen as, in effect, a “theory of everything.” However, the philosophy was never applied to Christology, given that it was not a bone of theological contention while the classical theory was in development —“a fact that was to have grave consequences” (6). The question arises then: does a distinctly Christian “theory of everything” remain by the time Zachhuber’s narrative concludes?

We must follow the account to find out. By the time of the Christological debates of the fifth century (and following), the major shortcoming of the classical theory became evident: “[it] lacked a cogent explanation of the individuation of the universal. It was the application of the classical theory to Christology that made this flaw painfully obvious” (216). Although the Cappadocians

had seen off the difficult puzzles of how three hypostases could fit with one *ousia*, their system was not ready to answer how one hypostasis could fit with two *ousiai*.

But so ensconced was the classical theory that both Chalcedonian diophysites and non-Chalcedonian miaphysites worked tirelessly to adapt it to underwrite their competing Christologies, but in diametrically opposed ways:

The miaphysites gestured towards a theory of particular nature. . . which recognized that the individual could also be called, and was, a *physis*. This served to underwrite their own claim that the Incarnate must have existed as one nature. The Chalcedonians, by contrast, tended towards a solution which distinguished an abstract placeholder of the nature *in* the individual from its carrier, the hypostatically existing individual (217).

We do well to assume that all sides of the Christological debates recognized that, at some point, the mystery of the hypostatic union is precisely that—a mystery. Ultimately, we cannot answer the question “how can one hypostasis exist with two *ousia*?” (although some of the later thinkers Zachhuber engages do speculate on this to some degree). However, we *can* answer attendant questions—most significantly, “how does a single hypostasis exist with just *one ousia*?” The Cappadocians, it seems, lacked a cogent answer to this question.

So we must ask: after the rough examination to which the Christological debates subjected the classical theory, did any distinctly Christian “theory of everything” remain by the end of Late Antiquity? In time, tentatively, we might say yes. The bulk of Zachhuber’s book is taken up with a detailed study of the theological wrangling by thinkers both famed and obscure involved in reaching this point, but his narrative concludes with studies of Maximus the Confessor (c.580–662) and John of Damascus (c.675–749) as “the climax of Chal-

cedonian philosophy.” Although each theologian developed different answers to the question of how *ousia* and hypostasis relate, both denied that they exist in a zero-sum game, overturning an ancient philosophical settlement which always prioritized the one over the many. Maximus did so by making his primary metaphysical framework one of whole and parts (relating respectively to hypostasis and *ousia*) rather than universal and particular; John of Damascus did so by making hypostases rather than *ousiai* the carriers of being in which all else inheres, but which never themselves inhere (the Trinity excepted) (292), conceiving of hypostases in their individuality as instances of “historical non-repeatability” (301). Both theologians brought hypostasis, at last, out of the metaphysical shadows to share in the limelight with *ousia*.

#### METAPHYSICAL HOPE FOR EVANGELICALISM

What promise, then, does Zachhuber’s work have for the anemic metaphysics of evangelicalism? It may be this: if we comprehend that our Chalcedonian Christology arose from applying and adjusting the earlier classical “theory of everything” and, therefore, is not solely related to narrow theological questions, we can find within it an adjusted “theory of everything” and unlock metaphysical resources with which to address other areas of philosophy and theology.<sup>1</sup> Baked into the Chalcedonian Christology which evangelicals still profess are wider philosophical commitments that can be put to use in other areas—philosophical commitments of which we need not be wary since we have already made them in our professions regarding the incarnation. Chalcedonian Christology, in other words, can be viewed as a Noah’s ark for the metaphysical wrangling which Zachhuber chronicles—and it is time for the passengers to disembark.

If there is anywhere that modern Reformed and evangelical churches retain some vestige of real metaphysical interest, it is regarding Trinity and Christology.

1. For a lengthier consideration of the way Zachhuber’s book illuminates the relationship between retaining orthodoxy and answer novel questions, see my colleague Joseph Minich’s essay in this symposium, “Philosophical Wonder and the Biography of Christian Theology”

Contemporary evangelical ordinands or Bible college graduates may not, by and large, be conversant in Platonic dialogues or Aristotle’s categories in the way that humanistically trained ministers were in the heyday of Reformed scholasticism. Yet they can almost certainly tell you that there’s a big difference between *homoousios* and *homoiousios* and that the miracle of the incarnation can be called a hypostatic union. Even if they are just shibboleths, shibboleths at least acknowledge that, like it or not, you’ve got to cross the Jordan somehow.

**CHALCEDONIAN CHRISTOLOGY CAN BE VIEWED AS A NOAH’S ARK FOR METAPHYSICAL WRANGLING—AND IT IS TIME FOR THE PASSENGERS TO DISEMBARK.**

If Zachhuber’s point stands that the Cappadocian philosophy necessarily developed something like a metaphysical “theory of everything” in its (albeit incomplete) explication of *ousia* and hypostasis as it addressed the trinitarian controversies (a theory which was then successfully adapted throughout the course of the Christological controversies), then it stands to reason that, within their ongoing adherence to Chalcedonian statements regarding *ousia* and hypostasis, modern evangelicals have, necessarily, the tools they need to rebuild a broader metaphysics which will enable them to address (if not entirely answer) the most challenging questions before them about God and humanity. To put it another way: one can’t talk about the *ousiai* and hypostasis of Christ without ending up with things to say about *ousia* and hypostasis *as such*.

#### RETRIEVING ETERNAL GENERATION: AN EXAMPLE

We perhaps have reason to be optimistic that Chalcedonian Christology can be of use in this way within evangelicalism because Nicene trinitarianism has already done likewise by bringing about a recent retrieval of the doctrine of eternal generation. In the twentieth-century, evangelicalism largely jettisoned the key

**THE METAPHYSICAL CONTENT OF THE *HOMOOUSIOS* FORMULA IS SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH THAT, WHEN ITS IMPLICATIONS ARE ABANDONED, IT CAN FUNCTION AS ITS OWN CORRECTIVE.**

Athanasian doctrine of eternal generation. Scott Swain has noted that it would be hard to find a pre-eighteenth century theologian—Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—who would not affirm eternal generation; however, “a scan of recent evangelical systematic theologies and biblical commentaries reveals that evangelicals have not warmly embraced the aforementioned ecumenical consensus.”<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, whose 1994 *Systematic Theology* has been the go-to textbook on doctrine for at least two generations of evangelical pastors, has become a popular example of this cool reception of the doctrine. Grudem has described the doctrine as “having never been defined very clearly,” eschewing the term.<sup>3</sup> James Dolezal describes Grudem’s position as a rejection of “the classical view that relations of origin (better, begotten, spirated) are sufficient to account for the real distinctions among the divine persons.”<sup>4</sup> Such approaches to eternal generation and related doctrines (e.g. divine simplicity) are increasingly tied to a wider neglect of the “classical” Christian doctrine of God developed by Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and others, which has now generated a wave of retrieval theology seeking (although, some would argue with varying degrees of success) to reclaim what has been lost.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this neglect of eternal generation however, evangelicals continued to confess the Nicene *homoousion* formula—a formula which is so effective that, in time, it has acted as a corrective, illuminating that it

cannot actually be maintained without an accompanying confession of eternal generation. Following significant pushback during the so-called 2016 Trinity Debate (an intra-evangelical debate which I imagine, blessedly, Professor Zachhuber has avoided),<sup>6</sup> the recent second edition of Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* presents a revised position affirming eternal generation and, in Fred Sanders’s reckoning, has “given his students the orientation they need to take their trinitarian theology further into the satisfying resources of the great tradition.”<sup>7</sup> The metaphysical content of the *homoousios* formula is significant enough that, when its implications are abandoned, it can function as its own corrective. The metaphysical truth has emerged safely from Noah’s ark, and has now gone forth to multiply.

#### CHALCEDONIAN ETHICS?

So much for the doctrine of God. But what about the other sphere in which evangelicalism has been caught so metaphysically flat-footed: human ethics? This question is perhaps more directly relevant to Professor Zachhuber’s core thesis: that the Christological debates of the fifth century and following precipitated an ontological and philosophical turn to the individual, in contrast to pre-Christian philosophy’s emphasis on the universal. Zachhuber is clear that it would be anachronistic to, for example, credit John of Damascus with birthing modern historical consciousness—yet it is highly arguable that his enquiries and those of other post-Chalcedonian thinkers rendered such questions feasible and intelligible (317). We must then ask: what ethical demands are placed upon us by a distinctly Christian understanding of human *ousia* and hypostasis?

This is, perhaps, the most metaphysically pressing eth-

2. Scott R. Swain, “The Radiance of the Father’s Glory: Eternal Generation, the Divine Names, and Biblical Interpretation” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 29.

3. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology 1st ed.* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 245

4. James Dolezal, *All That is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 133

5. For some notable examples of such recent critiques, see Dolezal’s *All That is in God, God of our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church* (ed. Bradford Littlejohn; Moscow, ID: The Davenant Press, 2018), *The Lord is One: Reclaiming Divine Simplicity* (ed. Joseph Minich and Onsi A. Kamel; Moscow, ID: The Davenant Press, 2019), *Simply God: Recovering the Classical Trinity* by Peter Sanlon (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), and *Interpreting Scripture With The Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* by Craig A. Carter (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018)

6. For a comprehensive chronology of this debate, see “The 2016 Trinity Debate: A Bibliography”, n.p. [cited June 15 2022]. Online: <https://www.books-ataglance.com/blog/thirteenth-edition-trinity-debate-bibliography/>

7. Fred Sanders, “Adding Eternal Generation”, n.p. [cited June 15 2022]. Online: <https://scriptoriumdaily.com/adding-eternal-generation/>

ical question of the moment in the West. I say “metaphysically” and “in the West” intentionally. Practically speaking, global issues which cost millions of lives such as the famine caused by war in Ukraine or the genocide of the Uighurs, are, in reality, the most pressing ethical issues of our time. Yet, typically, these are not regarded as posing unique *metaphysical* questions to us. Their evil is as apparent as solutions to them are apparently impossible. But the relationship between the self and human nature (if there is such a thing) is of the utmost relevance on the current frontiers of human ethics in an era of attempts to “transcend” human nature—whether in transhumanism or transgenderism.

### MODERN MAN IS ALL HYPOSTASIS AND NO OUSIA.

The extremes of the “turn to the individual” have been outlined well by Carl Trueman in his recent book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*.<sup>8</sup> Although he concedes he could easily have started earlier with, say, Descartes or Locke, Trueman starts his intellectual genealogy with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778).<sup>9</sup> Trueman, in fact, narrates something posterior to the turn to the individual: the *inward* turn, specifically the way in which “with Rousseau and then the Romantics, this inward turn plays out in a profoundly ethical manner and is used as the basis for a critique of the way society . . . forced individuals to conform to its conventions, to be untrue to their inner impulses, and therefore to be untrue to themselves and inauthentic.”<sup>10</sup> This turn is accompanied by a turn “from mimesis to poiesis. If society/culture is merely a construct, and if nature possesses no intrinsic meaning or purpose, then what meaning there is must be created by human beings themselves. . . . The social imaginary emerging in the nineteenth century was one that intuitively placed human beings as

8. Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

9. Trueman, *Rise and Triumph*, 193.

10. Trueman, *Rise and Triumph*, 194.

the sovereigns at the center of a universe to which they could give shape and significance.”<sup>11</sup>

In other words, modern man is all hypostasis and no *ousia*. With the metaphysical category of human nature abolished, there remains no framework by which to deny the wholesale alteration and augmentation of the human body, and so we find ourselves in an age in which an individual hypostasis can on no grounds be opposed if it wishes to dramatically alter itself. Of course, Reformed evangelicals feel intuitively ill at ease with such innovations, but how are they to respond? Citing Genesis 1:27 is an excellent place to start, but evangelicals must be prepared to give an account for what underpins such a verse, and how we resolve the apparent tension in this very verse between the individual as made in God’s image and humanity as a whole.

We should also note that while we undoubtedly live in the age of the triumph of the modern self, there are also moments in modern Western life when we become blind to the unique wonder of a human hypostasis. The expressive individualism of postmodernism is regnant, but it can willingly muster mass dehumanization to its purpose when required, rhetorically reducing the vast swathes of deplorables to T.S. Eliot’s anonymous hollow men—“shape without form, shade without colour.” There are, strangely, moments when culturally conservative evangelicals feel called upon to defend the seemingly trite idea of human beings as preciously unique. These moments too require a metaphysical account.

If we turn to the ark of our professed Chalcedonian Christology, we may find that we have categories at hand to begin addressing such questions. This is precisely what Zachhuber’s account illuminates in such detail. The Church neither achieved nor maintained the Chalcedonian definition of Christ’s hypostasis and *ousiai* without an immense amount of intellectual legwork concerning hypostases and *ousiai* considered by themselves. And so, in the essential act of confessing our savior—human in every respect as we are—to be a single hypostasis, we can by good and necessary consequence affirm the unique and significant hypostatic status of

11. Trueman, *Rise and Triumph*, 195–196.

any individual and ask what ethical demands this hypostasis places upon us. Yet we also confess that Christ exists in two *ousiai*, divine and human, and that he is, according to the Chalcedonian definition, “co-essential with the Father according to the Godhead, the Self-same co-essential with us according to the Manhood.” If he is co-essential with us, there must be a universal “essence” or “*ousia*” in which both he and we share—and so we must ask what ethical demands this shared *ousia* places upon us. Most crucially of all, we must ask how we act ethically without making the misstep, which Zachhuber chronicles time and time again, of giving one perennial *carte blanche* over the other. To briefly consider an example: belief in a shared, universal human *ousia* should strongly push us towards a rejection of the idea that basic elements of our embodied existence, such as sex or lifespan, should be cast aside or overridden by technological and medical intervention in the service of the desires of a particular hypostasis. And yet, this *ousia* is only ever encountered in these unique, individual hypostases which demand our recognition as such, and so, when we find one of these hypostases chafing against the reality of their own *ousia*, they demand of us a high level of attentiveness to the distinct circumstances which have led them to such a metaphysical conflict, so that we might act in such a way as to fully honor their metaphysical reality.

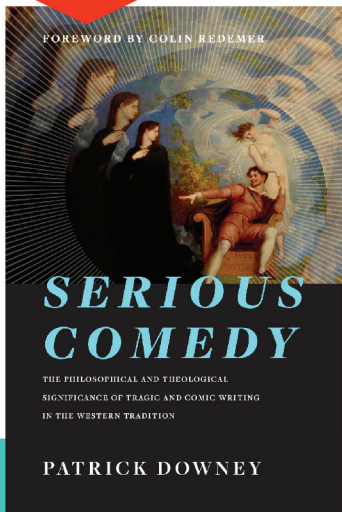
## CONCLUSION

In tracing the development of the classical theory from the Cappadocians up to Maximus and the Damascene, Professor Zachhuber has demonstrated in the finest of detail that Christian theologians have already been wrestling for a long time with the apparent Mexican standoff between *ousia* and hypostasis and that it is not the case that one must always be marginalized at the expense of the other. In an age of deep ethical confusion, in which even those outside of the Church are casting about for ways of accounting for realities they intuit but cannot articulate, there seem few more worthy endeavors than the kind of metaphysical reflection made possible by this book. As it demonstrates, Christian theology has already seen off the metaphysics of the ancients. Perhaps it will soon do the same with that of the moderns.

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## SYMPOSIUM

# Finding Christian Philosophy: A Response To My Readers

JOHANNES ZACHHUBER

I am delighted and honoured by the fascinating and wide-ranging responses to my book, and grateful for the welcome challenge of responding. As a scholarly book, mine was written in the first instance for a specialist readership, focusing on detail rather than the big picture. In reconstructing four centuries of ancient Christian philosophical reflection in late antiquity, I examined many, often obscure, Greek and Syriac sources, contextualising them within their own world—an emergent Christian Mediterranean which, over the period I studied, underwent fundamental mutations and profound crises. Yet I am excited to see my interlocutors explore the wider significance of the book’s narrative in their different ways. Derrick Peterson reads it against the backdrop of John Zizioulas’ classic *Being as Communion*;<sup>1</sup> Joseph Minich raises the question of *how* to write a “biography” of theology, asking what *method*

should be used in such an undertaking; and Rhys Laverly explores how a theological philosophy, a “theory of everything”, is relevant for today’s Church. I will seek to briefly address all these broad questions as far as is possible. Rather than following them one by one, however, I shall begin by using Laverly’s point about a Christian metaphysic as a point of departure to set out my own understanding of Christian philosophy. From there, I move on to consider how we can best approximate the historical development of this kind of idea. Then, I discuss the controversies engendered by the notion of a Christian philosophy, before finally inscribing my book into debates about genealogy and the Christian contribution to discussions of modernity.

## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY?

Theology, we say, is faith seeking understanding. But the application of reason to the Christian faith is not a simple exercise. We can identify at least three layers in it.

1. John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

**COMBATANTS ARGUED FROM REASON—OR WE MIGHT SAY, PHILOSOPHICALLY. THEY WOULD POINT OUT THAT A GIVEN DOCTRINAL CLAIM, IF UNIVERSALLY APPLIED, WOULD RESULT IN NONSENSICAL OR OUTRIGHT HERETICAL CONCLUSIONS.**

The first layer is faith as articulated in Scripture. Some think of it as pure faith, but its New Testament presentation centers on basic theological concepts regarding Jesus of Nazareth who is recognized as the Christ. Jesus' teaching, death, and resurrection are of unique importance insofar as they reconcile humanity with the God of Israel, creator of heaven and earth. The New Testament authors never doubt that faith in this sense is needed for salvation. It is, furthermore, arguable that Christians throughout history have been in nearly complete agreement on the existence and necessity of faith as understood along these lines. Most have also, however, held that this scriptural faith needs further elaboration and elucidation in order to avoid misunderstanding and error.

This has led to the emergence of a second layer in reason's application to faith: the doctrines of the Church. These doctrines clarify, for example, that Christian belief in God is belief in the Trinity; that Christ is fully divine and human; that the world was created from nothing; that the resurrection is a bodily one. While there has been broad consensus on the need for doctrines, none of them was adopted without controversy, and disagreement on them has led to schism throughout church history. Part of the intensity of these conflicts was due to the general view that these doctrines, in defining the *correct* faith, were also necessary for salvation.

A casual student of theology might conclude that these two layers are all there is to Christian teaching. But, historically at least, a third layer is also evident: theoretical assumptions adopted to interpret and make intelligible the doctrines of the Church. As much as the second layer (doctrinal teaching) is based upon Scripture, as much is this third layer developed in aid of the officially recognised Church doctrine. Or perhaps more correctly: of the churches. As I mentioned, doctrines were not accepted unanimously by all Christians of all times.

Rather, a plurality of Christian communities who define their differences partly in doctrinal terms has long persisted. Total unanimity was never or hardly ever accomplished, and so doctrines were nearly always debated.

These disagreements led to doctrinal controversies whose literary products make up much Patristic theological writing. Their importance has not always been clearly perceived. While some only see the heroic effort of orthodox Fathers in their struggle against heresy, others bemoan their polemical treatises. Yet, polemics aside, the participants in these debates advanced genuine arguments. Such arguments took different forms including appeals to Scripture, authoritative Patristic sources, and doctrines considered settled. Frequently, however, these methods proved inconclusive, and consequently the combatants also argued from reason—or, we might say, philosophically. They would point out that a given doctrinal claim, if universally applied, would result in nonsensical or outright heretical conclusions. In response, the other side would seek to show how their doctrines could be justified based on a philosophical foundation of their own making.

Such philosophical arguments were often applied *ad hoc*, especially in the early centuries of doctrinal development. As Christian orthodoxy took shape, however, they became more systematic, and attempts were made to connect them so that a single theory could be adduced to explain and rationalise the whole doctrinal edifice of the Christian faith.

My primary intention in writing *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics* was to narrate the history of this process from the fourth to the eighth century. I show how such a “theory of everything”, as Rhys Laverly calls it, was first developed by the so-called Cappadocian fathers with a special interest in defending Nicene trinitarianism. Their subtle

theory was so successful in tying together a variety of doctrines, from creation and fall to salvation and restoration, that it soon enjoyed quasi-universal acceptance across the Greek-speaking Church. I therefore call it the “classical theory.” Problems within that theory, however, began to appear once Christology moved to the fore of doctrinal debates, especially in the centuries following the Council of Chalcedon (451). This synod opened deep and seemingly irreconcilable divisions in Eastern Christendom. In the ensuing debates, numerous attempts were made to adapt the classical theory in line with the evolving needs of doctrinal clarification.

This third layer is what I call Christian philosophy. It has existed since early Christian history and it was inseparable from the Church’s adoption of doctrine. I call this aspect of Christian thought a *philosophy* because it is rational in nature, dependent on intellectual justification, and open to critical debate. Unlike Scripture or doctrine however, this philosophy does *not* require faithful acceptance, nor was it considered necessary for salvation. This philosophy, moreover, is “Christian” insofar as it grew alongside the emergence of doctrine and from the outset served the justification and defence of doctrinal orthodoxy.

#### METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Before considering some problems inherent in the conception of this Christian philosophy, let me discuss my historical approach. Joseph Minich raises the intriguing question of how to “write a realistic history of, for lack of a better phrase, “understanding God””. He suggests we might understand the history of theology as a kind of biography, analogous to the narration of a human life. I like this analogy, in particular if we manage to avoid the use of overly teleological categories. The point is not to show how all developments led to an apex in our own understanding, but rather to appreciate how each period can be “immediate” unto God’, to borrow a famous phrase coined by Leopold von Ranke.

How do we go about researching and writing such a history though? I would once again extol the neglected potential of polemical writings. From the way certain

theological ideas were opposed and defended, we can often gain a particularly vivid sense of how ideas were understood. My guiding assumption is that all truly big ideas are to a point controversial, because they express an insight that is new, unusual, or even paradoxical. This is true whether we think of “God” as per Minich’s question, or more specifically of the way the Church’s teaching about God was expressed in the language of the Trinity or the Incarnation. In one sense, the controversial or provocative nature of these ideas has not changed throughout history, but the objections raised to them have. Past believers may have found something unobjectionable that strikes us as implausible, while balking at something we take for granted. It is therefore invaluable to pay close attention to the process in which doctrinal debates play out in their time. This admittedly involves a methodological imperative too rarely heeded. We cannot simply cheer every argument advanced by an orthodox Father and pooh-pooh every counter argument made by their opponents. We must step back and adjudicate these claims on their own merits—not to advocate doctrinal relativism, but to understand what was intuitively theologically plausible and implausible at the time.

We can, moreover, observe these theologians “at work” refining their conceptual apparatus and ultimately providing solutions that gained broad acceptance. We can then perceive how problems besetting generations of thinkers can also be left behind as they appear satisfactorily solved. The most impressive such case in the Eastern Church, arguably, was the Cappadocians’ “settlement” of the trinitarian controversy. This accomplishment more than anything else earned them their unique place in later theology. Given the significance of their specific philosophy in this, it is hardly surprising that its use in doctrinal disputes was taken for granted by the Eastern church in subsequent centuries.

#### CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY AS CONTROVERSIAL

This does not mean that the latter point was settled for good. As Lavery rightly observes, the need for a Christian form of philosophy has often been denied. It is not difficult to see why. Even the brief characterization given above indicates some fundamental tensions at the

heart of such an enterprise. One key question is how Christian such a Christian *philosophy* can be. Is it not inevitable that the adoption of a philosophical discourse within Christianity eventually leads to modifications or even critique of doctrine? It seems a difficult balancing act to ensure that such a Christian philosophy is neither Christian at the expense of being philosophical nor philosophical at the expense of being Christian.

But this is not all. I have above referred to Christian philosophy as the “third layer” of Christian theology, which would seem to suggest an existence on the margins of theology—a mere tool adopted in aid of doctrinal clarification. But the third layer can often present itself as if it were the truly first one. Once philosophical argument moved from *ad hoc* illustrations into the kind of coherent system found in Gregory of Nyssa, the temptation arose to consider it the true center of theology, a kind of control room in which the detailed meaning of doctrine is determined. Once this possibility is taken seriously, why not focus all theological work on this field in the assumption that, once these questions have been satisfactorily settled, the rest will follow quite easily?

These are not abstract speculations. Rather, the history of theology shows how often and how easily this shift occurs. We can think here of late medieval Scholasticism, or strands of modern theology in the wake of German idealism. This tendency then produces the opposite extreme: rejection of any philosophical reflection in Christian theology, such as in Martin Luther’s early work, or to an extent in Karl Barth.

Part of the problem is that the use of philosophy in theology is often not seen, as I suggest here, as a germane development within Christianity but as an import or an adoption of existing philosophies, for example that of Platonism in the early church, that of Aristotle in the Middle Ages or, that of Kant, Hegel or Heidegger in modernity. In fact, the protest against Christian philosophy has often taken the form of a rejection of the alleged *infiltration* of Christianity with unsuitable, foreign influences. The idea that Platonic philosophy exerted an undue influence on Christian thought goes back to the Patristic period from which it was adapted by historical theologians in early modernity.

There are several reasons why, in my view, this theory is wrong. First of all, the emergence of Christian philosophy historically *follows* the evolution of doctrine. Philosophical ideas were adopted in order to defend and justify doctrinal decisions, not to establish them. Second, my own research suggests that much of the development of Christian philosophy, at least in the Patristic period, can be explained from within the Church. This does not mean that Christian theologians of the period did not somehow share in ideas that were more generally *en vogue*. But the motivation for innovations in Christian philosophy were, by and large, provided by the need to clarify existing doctrines, not by an attempt to make Christianity palatable to pagans; it was doctrinal, not primarily apologetic.

**PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS WERE  
ADOPTED IN ORDER TO DEFEND AND  
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This development of Christian philosophy from within the Church also makes me critical of any view which affirms Christian philosophy as the real nerve center of theology, and which ascribes erroneous theological views (and other problems) to the adoption of the wrong type of philosophy. Most influentially, John Milbank has argued that Duns Scotus’s critique of the theological use of analogy is the most fundamental heresy of Western Christianity, one shared by both Reformation theologians and Tridentine Catholicism. Milbank’s own version of “orthodoxy” (which he calls Radical Orthodoxy) is, consequently, principally *philosophical*, a view of the world supposedly held universally prior to the late thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

As little, however, as there was a version of Platonism that illegitimately underwrote the emergence of doctrines in the early Church, as little was there an underlying

2. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Catherine Pickstock, ‘Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance’, in *Modern Theology* 21/4 (2005), 543-74.

ing philosophical orthodoxy. The increasingly elaborate forms of Christian philosophy developed by Christian thinkers were developed in service of the explication of doctrines the Church had already adopted. In many ways, Radical Orthodoxy offers something like the mirror image of the Hellenization thesis: both wrongly consider philosophy the root of Christian doctrine.

Moreover, as I pointed out above, there is little evidence that the Church ever moved to make the adoption of a certain philosophy mandatory in the way faith in certain doctrines was required of the believer. Such a decision was taken, perhaps for the first time, by Leo XIII in *Aeterni patris* (1879), which prescribed a form of Thomism as normative for Roman Catholic theology. No such attempt was made in the Patristic age. The fact that the classical theory, which came with the authority of the Cappadocians, was adapted and changed when this proved necessary in the context of the Christological debates shows quite distinctly that the adoption of philosophical theories was not *as such* a matter of orthodoxy. This is further confirmed by the observation that these later adaptations of the classical theory did not lead to the establishment of a single form of Christian philosophy by the end of the Patristic era.

#### CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE GENEALOGY OF MODERNITY

My disagreement with Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy, however, goes further, and here I must touch on Derrick Peterson's essay. He reminds us of the work of John Zizioulas, who argued that the Cappadocians developed, along with their clarification of trinitarian doctrine, an ontological revolution bringing the notion of the person into the center of philosophical reflection on being. Peterson rightly sees my own work as an attempt to develop this insight, while trying to avoid some of its problematic aspects. I agree with Zizioulas in his observation that Patristic thought in its philosophical connotations cannot simply be understood as continuing an earlier metaphysical tradition. Rather, it represents a rupture. The universally shared assumption was that being is primarily general and universal; Christian philosophy, however, emphasised the ontological dignity of the individual.

In opposition to Zizioulas, however, I do not consider fourth century trinitarian theology the origin of this. The "ontological revolution" in Patristic thought, therefore, was not the work of the Cappadocian fathers. Rather, it arose from the need to give a precise account of the Incarnation, the belief that God became fully human in one, *historical* person, Jesus of Nazareth. Peterson intriguingly suggests that my restatement of Zizioulas' position may also help correct another controversial aspect of his thought, namely, his insistence that Western theology lost its way with Augustine, whereas the Eastern tradition (by continuing along the path of the Cappadocians) preserved a more helpful philosophical and theological perspective. This suggestion was eagerly picked up by a number of prominent Western theologians such as Colin Gunton, but it has, more recently, been sharply and rightly criticized. Peterson now suggests that my insight that the Cappadocian classical theory needed corrections in light of the Christological controversy could also build a bridge to Augustine and the Eastern tradition. I am sympathetic to this idea, but cannot currently take a decisive stand on its validity. One well-known historical fact, however, *may* serve to confirm Peterson's theory: the Western reception of John of Damascus's *De fide orthodoxa*, an important eighth century work codifying many earlier Eastern developments. Upon translation into Latin by Burgundio of Pisa in the twelfth century, the Damascene's Christology became the gold standard of further medieval and early modern Western theology. Considering how influential Augustine was on all these thinkers, it seems intuitively plausible that they recognised in the Damascene something not at all incompatible with the kind of theology they had traditionally studied.

Both Zizioulas and Milbank share a genealogical interest in seeking to demonstrate how Christianity is related to modernity. In fact, genealogical accounts are another context in which the problem of Christian philosophy has recently gained significance. The question here is less how Christian philosophy is related to Christian doctrine or the Christian faith, but rather how philosophy embedded in the Christian tradition (or its rejection) can explain non-theological developments during the modern period. Rhys Laverly has, rightly, pointed

out the connections between my work and genealogical narratives, referencing the work of Carl Trueman.<sup>3</sup>

One way we can (roughly) divide these narratives is between those who see fundamental continuity between pre-Christian and Christian philosophy with a philosophical “rupture” occurring later to pave the way for modernity, and those that see the rupture as being between Christianity and everything before it. Milbank and Trueman belong to the former group, locating the rupture in the thirteenth century and Enlightenment respectively. Zizioulas, however, belongs in the latter group, alongside rather different thinkers such as Jean-Luc Marion and René Girard. The research I did for *The Rise of Christian Theology* tends to support the latter of the two views. Admittedly, my work did not touch on medieval and modern thinkers, but the evidence of the Patristic debate I surveyed makes it undeniable that Christian philosophy, in a sense, led to the end of ancient metaphysics. In particular, the idea that Christ could be fully human without being a human individual distinct from the *Logos*, adopted to explain how Christ’s human nature didn’t require a second (human) hypostasis, directly contradicted the standard Greek assumption that possessing all human properties and *being* a human person amounted to the same thing. Essence and existence could be seen as separable from each other; the world in which we live became less stable and could, over time, be considered one of several possible ones. These, to be sure, were mere seeds in the Patristic period, but they must be taken seriously. The notion of Christianity as simply continuing an age-old intellectual consensus, cannot be squared with the evidence we have for the rise of Christian philosophy in the Patristic period.

This, finally, brings me to the question of how the history I narrate in my book can aid with the Church’s challenges today. I can answer this question by way of summarizing my main points so far. First, Christian faith as found in Scripture and expounded in the Church’s doctrines tends to develop out of itself philosophical reflection. There is good reason to think that

such reflection is as much needed today as it was fifteen hundred years ago.

Second, while such a Christian philosophy is needed, it should not be turned into the center of the faith. It is only a tool, albeit a necessary one, to elucidate, clarify, and deepen the faith of the Church. It is the third layer, not the first, and so rightly subject to debate, disagreement, and critique. This seems especially pertinent when current fault lines within the Church seem principally cultural and ethical rather than doctrinal, as their evaluation inevitably depends on philosophical reflection. The Church is well advised to encourage dialogue and debate rather than apodictic judgments and condemnations.

Third, as much as Christian philosophy in late antiquity pushed against what was permissible within the constraints of traditional metaphysics, as much should the same task be undertaken today by boldly following the insights of the Christian faith. The example of the early church shows, however, that this is not the same as adopting a conservative attitude. References to a universal cultural consensus and a supposedly natural law at that time were regularly made by the opponents of Christianity. Today’s Christian philosophy, then, ought to be prepared to be innovative and open-ended as much as it was in the fourth, sixth, or eighth centuries.

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3. Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

# Early Morning Embers

BY CAMERON BROOKS

---

Your cigarette glowed like the last dying star  
of some frigid galaxy as you stood exhaling fog  
and smoke before dawn. When summer came

you would sit on your step and smoke and yell  
on the phone with your mother in your Long Island  
accent. That was when we shared a backyard.

At first I planted three magnolias—hoping you  
wouldn't read between the lines. Magnolias are  
patient bushes, though, and you needed nicotine.

So I tried a wooden panel fence, asking for your  
permission this time: Sure, a little privacy can't  
hurt. In the morning, I found all three magnolias

flattened under the fence, which had blown over  
in the night. I put it up again. More deliberately.  
And once I was reading while you were smoking

on the step. Somehow you saw me—you saw me  
and tossed a bag of fresh baked cookies over  
the fence, as if to heap burning coals on my head,

as if you knew. We had to stand ten feet apart so  
you could see my face when I thanked you, ashamed.  
It was winter again by the time I realized you were

gone. No more early morning embers, no coughing  
or yelling or baked goods. Just a useless fence and  
three lopsided magnolias shivering in the snow.

# *Hidden & Revealed: The Doctrine of God in the Reformed & Eastern Orthodox Traditions*

BY DMYTRO BINTSAROVSKYI

REVIEWED BY NICHOLAS C. DIDONATO

“What we’ve got here is failure to communicate.” The most famous line from *Cool Hand Luke* is directed at a recaptured prisoner by the warden, and then repeated by that same prisoner after another (failed) escape attempt. While the relationship between the Reformed and Orthodox traditions certainly is not as strained as that between warden and prisoner, there has nevertheless been failure to communicate—failure which Dmytro Bintsarovskiyi aims to correct.

And rightly so: the Reformed tend either not to know key differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, or, when they know a “distinctly” Orthodox doctrine (such as the Essence-Energies distinction), the depth of understanding is shallow. Conversely, the Orthodox are often unable to distinguish the various strands of Protestantism, or, worse still, lump them all with Ca-

tholicism in one monolithic tradition that could be called “Western.”

Bintsarovskiyi, a Reformed theologian whose ancestral homeland is Ukraine (a majority Orthodox country), is well-positioned to charitably compare Reformed and Orthodox theology on the doctrine of God in his recent work *Hidden and Revealed: The Doctrine of God in the Reformed & Eastern Orthodox Traditions*.<sup>1</sup> Since “Reformed theology,” “Orthodox theology,” and “doctrine of God” are *each* unmanageably large topics, Bintsarovskiyi wisely narrows his comparative work to Herman Bavinck and John Meyendorff. He focuses specif-

1. *Hidden & Revealed: The Doctrine of God in the Reformed & Eastern Orthodox Traditions* by Dmytro Bintsarovskiyi. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic Press, 2021, \$29.99, 376 pp.

ically on the ways in which both theologians speak of God as both hidden and revealed—or, as the author puts it, “what God is in himself and what he is for us” (3n6). Specifically, Bintsarovskiy assesses God’s hiddenness and revelation in the theologies of Bavinck and Meyendorff by three criteria: how well each preserves “God’s incomprehensibility,” “the reality of union with God,” and “the oneness of God” (32).

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Bintsarovskiy comprehensively covers first Bavinck’s and then Meyendorff’s theology in these areas, justifying why these thinkers were chosen to represent their respective traditions by systematically working through what each wrote on God’s hiddenness and revelation, before concluding with compelling interpretations of their articulations. In the final chapter, he also notes how each directly interacted with the other’s tradition. In short, Bintsarovskiy finds in Bavinck a sophisticated treatment of analogical reasoning about God (which Bintsarovskiy himself favors) that genuinely reveals God while simultaneously preserving his transcendence (due to the creaturely limits of any analogy). Bintsarovskiy finds in Meyendorff a rich exposition of the Essence-Energies distinction: the Divine Essence secures God’s hiddenness by being utterly transcendent, and the Divine Energies (for those unfamiliar with the Greek term *energia*, when it appears in the New Testament, it is typically translated as “operation” or “activity”; importantly, it is *not* the same as the English word “energy”) reveal God by being God’s activities or operations (be they, as Bintsarovskiy distinguishes, internal or external to God).

As an Orthodox Christian, I especially appreciate three pitfalls in reading Meyendorff that Bintsarovskiy skill-

fully avoids that many (including the Orthodox) do not. First, he flags, without casting judgment, simplistic caricatures of Western and Eastern theology. An example from the West would be Théodore de Régnon’s thesis that Western trinitarian theology goes from nature to person whereas Eastern goes from person to nature; or, from the East, Vladimir Lossky’s generalization that Western theology is “rational” whereas Eastern theology is “mystical.” Bintsarovskiy simply notes the influence of such theses on Meyendorff without assuming they are true when it comes to his own conclusions.

Second, Bintsarovskiy does not read his own definitions into Meyendorff. This typically happens when someone who knows Scholastic terminology reads that Meyendorff says both that the Essence-Energies distinction in God is a real distinction and that God is simple. Obviously, by Scholastic definitions, this is a contradiction, and whereas lesser scholars would (and have) stopped there, assuming incoherence in Meyendorff’s thought, Bintsarovskiy digs deeper to argue to his Reformed audience that actually what Meyendorff means by “real distinction” is not what a Reformed thinker would mean, and, in fact, Meyendorff’s account of divine simplicity is coherent.

Third, Bintsarovskiy never assumes that Meyendorff, or any single Orthodox writer, represents the entirety of the Orthodox tradition. He carefully notes how Meyendorff’s articulation of the Essence-Energies distinction differs from other Orthodox theologians, and is even controversial among some. Likewise, he is rightly critical of Meyendorff’s reading of Pseudo-Dionysius, noting how poorly Meyendorff interprets the Neoplatonic tradition as a whole.

Throughout the Meyendorff chapter, Bintsarovskiy consistently represents him fairly, and even later lavishly praises his Essence-Energies distinction as providing “greater precision” in distinguishing between the hiddenness and revelation of God (285). Without being unfairly sidetracked into tangential issue, my greatest quibble with the Meyendorff chapter is that Bintsarovskiy sides against those who read the Essence-Energies distinction as being historically rooted in the Cappadocians (209n302), but then notes about twenty

pages later that, for Basil the Great, we don't have access to the essence of anything, only to energies (228). According to Bintsarovskiy's own research, Basil affirms the Essence-Energies distinction, at most the corrective being that he applied it to *all* things and not only to God—but then, applying Bintsarovskiy's own analogical reasoning about God, it would seem fair to say that the way in which the Essence-Energies distinction applies to God would not be exactly the same as found in creatures.

**BINTSAROVSKIY AVOIDS THE USUAL  
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While the greatest strengths of the book are Bintsarovskiy's outstanding research and in-depth understanding of Bavinck and Meyendorff, the greatest weakness is the lack of a comparative methodology. In the final chapter, no theological comparative methodology is argued for or even mentioned. Instead, the measure for comparison appears to be Bintsarovskiy's own theological commitments. The same level of research and argument poured into choosing and articulating the theologies of Bavinck and Meyendorff needed to be poured into constructing a comparative methodology: listing topics or criteria is not a method for comparing different systems.

Unfortunately, this lack of clear comparative methodology opens Bintsarovskiy up to critique. What begins as a controlled and narrow topic broadens exponentially as the reader begins to wonder why Bintsarovskiy (as opposed to Bavinck or Meyendorff) holds this theological position rather than that. Suddenly, Bintsarovskiy himself is on the hook for a much fuller treatment of these issues than can possibly be done by researching two thinkers, however important they are for their respective traditions.

For instance, Bintsarovskiy claims, “the very need to become ‘uncreated’ for real communion with God to occur cannot be properly substantiated from Scripture”, which reads like a thesis for an entirely different book (312). Perhaps it's true, but there is no engagement with Orthodox readings of Scripture (which, for the curious, on this topic would begin in Genesis). Likewise, with no argument, he asserts, “The distinction should be drawn not between God's unknowable essence on the one hand and his knowable acts on the other, but between his inexhaustible essence and inexhaustible acts on the one hand, and our limited capacity to understand them on the other” (305). Established comparative methodology would have allowed statements like this to be made unproblematically, but if the measure is Bintsarovskiy himself, he would need to argue against the traditional Platonic arguments for why God's transcendence is not merely epistemological (if only God created us with greater minds) but ontological (God transcends even being). As with the scriptural claim, such an argument would likely have to be a separate book.

Even accounting for the lack of an established method for comparing different theologies, Bintsarovskiy succeeds in bringing scholarly rigor to a comparison between Bavinck and Meyendorff over how God is hidden and revealed. His knowledge of both figures is unquestionable, and he avoids the usual pitfalls that have trapped lesser scholars who are outsiders to Orthodox theology. Through his charity, fairness, and scholarship, Bintsarovskiy helps the Reformed and Orthodox break free from the prison of miscommunication.

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## BOOKS AND ARTS

# Scripture, Hellenism, and Hebraism: *Biblical Philosophy and Paul and the Giants of Philosophy*

REVIEWED BY MATTHEW COLVIN

The Greek philosophical tradition looms large for two reasons: first, it has shaped the history of Western thought, famously summarized by A.N. Whitehead as “a series of footnotes to Plato.” Second, it has shaped Christianity, with Greek substance metaphysics, faculty psychology, and virtue ethics becoming parts of traditional Christian theology. Yet this influence has not passed without objection. The biblical faith originated before Greek philosophy; the Hebrew Bible is innocent of Greek philosophical concepts; and Christian thinkers ever since Paul in Colossians 2:8 have warned their readers not to be “taken captive by deceptive philosophy” that “depends on the basic principles of this world.” From Tertullian’s “*what hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?*” to Harnack’s “Hellenization thesis,” philosophical theologians have long had to fend off charges of syncretism.<sup>1</sup> Can we speak of a biblical philosophy that is (1)

truly philosophical and (2) not already Greek? And if so, what is its relation to Greek philosophy? These are the questions addressed by two recent books, Dru Johnson’s *Biblical Philosophy: A Hebraic Approach to the Old and New Testaments* and a collection of essays edited by Joseph Dodson and David Briones, *Paul and the Giants of Philosophy*.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1960s, Thorlief Boman’s *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* attempted, by means of a Sapir-Whorf method (i.e. hypothesizing that language affects percep-

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Hellenism in Judea are adduced as proof that all Jews were already “Hellenized” in the period of the New Testament—as though that meant that all philosophical concepts were fair game. See *M. Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1975).

2. *Biblical Philosophy: A Hebraic Approach to the Old and New Testaments* by Dru Johnson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, \$34.99, pp. 340. *Paul and the Giants of Philosophy; Reading the Apostle in Greco-Roman Context*, edited by Joseph R. Dodson and David E. Briones, Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, \$28, pp. 172.

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1. Fred Sanders is unduly optimistic that the battle is over at the academic level. Some have appealed to the work of Martin Hengel, whose works on

**THE HEBREW BIBLE IS “NETWORKED” AND “PIXELATED”, MEANING IT DOES NOT OFFER PRE-CISE DEFINITIONS OF TERMS BUT PICTURES AND EPISODES REITERATED ACROSS NARRATIVE, LAW, AND POETRY.**

tion rather than vice versa), to characterize its two titular systems at a conceptual level. Thus, Hebrew thought is dynamic and full of motion, while Greek thought is static and rational; Hebrew prioritizes the sense of hearing, Greek the sense of sight and so on.<sup>3</sup> Boman was savaged by the liberal Oxford scholar James Barr, such that his work is now unfairly ignored, and the attempt to contrast Hebrew and Greek thought has been jettisoned along with the fallacious linguistic arguments that Boman used to do so.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, we do not find Dru Johnson appealing to linguistics to establish “Biblical philosophy” as distinct from Greek. Nor does he mainly contrast the specific concepts of Greek and Hebrew thought—their different eschatologies, cosmologies, or anthropologies, for instance. Instead, his project characterizes the Hebrew Bible and the Greek tradition as distinct “philosophical styles.”

Johnson characterizes the Hebrew Bible’s mode of argument as “networked” and “pixelated,” by which he means that the Bible does not ordinarily offer precise definitions of terms, but that the biblical authors “define the contours of a second-order abstraction” through “pictures and episodes... through iterations and reiterations across narrative, law, and poetry” (84). By “pixelated,” Johnson does not mean that the resulting terms are fuzzy, like low-resolution JPGs or censored videos, but that the larger picture emerges from particular elements (“pixels”) that must be viewed together, as in a pointillist painting. By “networked,” Johnson means that the mode of argumentation is intertextual and distributed over an entire corpus of literature, not laid out comprehensively in a single locus. Johnson proposes four other distinctives of Hebraic philosophical style: it is mysterionist (i.e. denies the possibility of comprehensive knowledge for humans, contrary to logical positivism and similarly

reductionist philosophies), creationist (i.e. the Hebrew Bible pervasively assumes a metaphysical structure derived from Genesis 1-3); transdemographic (i.e. the Bible aims to create a “discerning social body with diverse but mutually enriching perspectives on reality,” in contrast to the Hellenic ideal of a mature or elderly male philosopher, Socrates or a Stoic sage, standing defiant against *hoi polloi*); and ritualist (i.e. the Bible assumes embodied knowing via rituals practiced by the community, as Johnson has argued in other works) (96).<sup>5</sup>

These six criteria of Hebraic thought are heuristic devices, reminiscent of John M.G. Barclay’s six “perfections of grace” in his much-lauded *Paul and the Gift*<sup>6</sup>, and they exhibit some of the same methodological problems: they are etic, somewhat Procrustean, and defined in deliberate contrast to six characteristics of the Greek philosophical style: “linear, autonomist, domesticationist, abstractionist, classist, and mentalist.” That there are certain characteristic traits of Greek philosophical thought seems uncontroversial, and I can readily agree with most of these descriptions. Greek philosophers do tend to reason by abstraction, and in a linear manner (e.g. the logical train of dialectic in one of Plato’s dialogues, or the definitional investigations of Aristotle—both in stark contrast to the scattered intertextuality of the Bible that Johnson so convincingly demonstrates); philosophy was indeed exclusively the preserve of men of leisure, not of slaves or women. And it is indeed “mentalist,” by which Johnson means an activity done by the mind rather than by ritual or embodied knowing. Even Johnson’s hedging concession that Parmenides is an exception to his characterization of Greek thought as “domesticationist” rather than “mysterionist” because of his claim to have been led by a goddess seems too

3. Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (Library of History and Doctrine 1: London: SCM, 1960).

4. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

5. For examples of Johnson’s arguments in other works, see *Knowledge By Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomenon to Sacramental Theology* (Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplements 13; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016) and *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013).

6. John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

cautious. The goddess herself exhorts Parmenides to “Judge by reason the much-contesting refutation [*elenchus*] spoken by me” (DK 28B7). Indeed, Parmenides, more than perhaps any other Greek philosopher, is responsible for the idea that philosophical thought is legislative for what can be, and that nothing is beyond human thought (“domesticationist”).

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HEBREW BIBLE ITSELF.**

But if we examined “non-philosophical” Greek literature—Homer, Aeschylus, etc. rather than Plato, Aristotle, etc.—who is to say that we would not be able to come up with “networked,” “pixelated,” and “ritualist” second-order thinking? There is rich intertextuality between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Greek tragedy and lyric. Moreover, one could well derive second-order conclusions from inspection of scattered (“pixelated”) passages in these authors. The role of “mysterionist” revelation and rituals in Greek life (the oracle of Delphi, the omens, the Panathenaea, the city Dionysia, etc.) might not be that different from biblical revelation and rituals like the Passover or Shavuot or the Day of Atonement. I suspect that if we examined non-philosophical Greek thought, we might find that it hit nearly as many of the traits of the “Hebraic philosophical style” as the Hebrew Bible itself. As Johnson recognizes, he is dealing here with entire societies and with ways of thinking that are used by all members of these two societies. We must therefore recognize the greatly preponderant place of pre- or non-philosophical thinking.<sup>7</sup> Johnson’s criteria of “philosophical style” often appear to be a way to make

7. Owen Barfield’s discussion of figuration, alpha-thinking, and beta-thinking in the opening chapters of *Saving the Appearances* might be helpful here. See O. Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1988).

philosophy out of non-philosophical Hebrew texts, and he does not apply them equally to both cultures.

It is part of Johnson’s argument that he must distinguish biblical philosophy from Greek, while at the same time vindicating it as genuinely philosophical, that is, containing “prescriptive second-order thinking regarding the usual field of suspects: political thought, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics” (37). This contrasts with the thought of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, which he characterizes as “speculative, but not necessarily philosophical,” since it engages in some second-order thinking, but not enough and not about the right topics. Some of Johnson’s arguments for this latter point are not convincing. One of his proofs of the Hebrew Bible’s pixelated and networked style of philosophizing is precisely the method of parallelism that characterizes all Hebrew poetry. But the techniques of Hebrew poetry originated in earlier Semitic languages, so that scholars like Wilfred Watson and Scott Noegel adduce numerous examples from Akkadian poetry in their discussions of Hebrew literature.<sup>8</sup> I suspect that if we approached Akkadian literature with Johnson’s generous criteria of philosophical argument (“pixelated and networked”), we might well come away more impressed.

Similarly, Johnson presents Babylonian fortune-telling as though it were simply a matter of knowing the formulas with which to interpret the “textualized” and pre-encoded world of omens, in contrast to Hebrew prophecy and divination, which is dependent upon God as the source of knowledge. This strikes me as a selective caricature; Johnson does not seem to be aware of Matthijs de Jong’s *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*,<sup>9</sup> nor does he reckon with, e.g. Enkidu’s apotropaic reinterpretations of dreams in Tablet IV of the Epic of Gilgamesh (reminiscent of Eteocles’ reinterpretation of the symbols on the shields in Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*). This is creative interpretation, not mere reading-off of textualized meaning from lists of

8. Wilfred G. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984) and Scott B. Noegel, *Wordplay in Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2021) and *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Potomac, MD: CDL Press, 2018).

9. Matthijs de Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007).

omens. I suspect that members of the Assyriology guild would push back against Johnson's ranking of Mesopotamian literature as sub-philosophical. Johnson does interact with Marc Van De Mieroop's *Philosophy Before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia*,<sup>10</sup> but Martin West's *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* does not appear to have been consulted.<sup>11</sup>

Despite my doubts about Johnson's central contention about the Bible being truly philosophical, there is much of value here, especially the examples with which Johnson illustrates the Bible's deployment of this philosophical style. The interpretations of these biblical texts are, hands down, the best aspect of the book. Readers of Scripture will come away with new understandings of many passages. For instance, Johnson points out that the phrase "marrying and giving in marriage" in Jesus' answer to the Sadducees (Luke 20:35), far from being a point about marriage in the resurrection, is elsewhere always used of the activities of "those who are blind to the coming judgment," as in Sodom and Gomorrah or in the days of Noah (Luke 17:27). Jesus is thus using networked argumentation to turn the Sadducees' question against them: they want to debate the resurrection, but are unaware of the judgment bearing down upon them. There are many such examples, and Johnson is to be commended for them.

Particularly interesting is Johnson's extended argument in the later chapters of the book that the New Testament's philosophical style is basically a continuation of the Hebrew Bible, and not a Hellenized style such as is seen in intertestamental literature. This seems to me precisely right; Johnson's book should give pause to anyone claiming that Christianity "needed" Greek philosophy in order to complete or explain the teaching of Scripture.

On the whole, Johnson's *Biblical Philosophy* is a needed catalyst for a staggeringly interdisciplinary conversation. Even if we might not agree that the Bible is a philosophical text, we can certainly grant that it has

powerfully shaped the philosophical thought of Jewish and Christian thinkers, and philosophers would do well to take seriously the second-order thinking that arises from a people formed by Scripture.

**WE CANNOT SEIZE UPON GREEK WORDS AND ASSUME THAT THEY CARRY ENTIRE CONCEPTS FROM GREEK PHILOSOPHY, AS SOME DO WITH LOGOS IN JOHN, OR HYPOSTASIS IN HEBREWS.**

*Paul and the Giants of Philosophy* approaches the question of philosophy and Scripture from a different starting point. Without asking what counts as philosophy, the authors of the book's fourteen essays are united in taking the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition as a given. Each of the essays takes up a comparison between a Greco-Roman philosopher and the Apostle on a particular topic: so, "Attitudes on Slavery in Paul and Seneca" (Brian Tabb), "Paul and Philodemus on Therapy for the Weak" (Justin Reid Allison), "Paul and Aristotle on Friendship" (David Briones), "Paul and Plutarch on Faith" (Jeanette Hagen Pifer), and so on.

The theme of the essays is this: "superficial similarities... will reveal the substantive differences" (87) between Paul and the philosophers. Again and again, shared diction or genre or imagery, when pressed, reveals a "great gulf fixed" between Paul and the Greco-Roman authors to whom he is compared. Thus, in Allison's essay, though Philodemus and Paul both speak of "the weak," their solutions are poles apart, with Philodemus using "frank criticism" to push the weak toward self-sufficiency, while Paul urges the strong to support the weak and promotes dependence upon others and upon God as the mark of mature faith (33). Or again, in his discussion of gift-giving, Briones concludes that "for all their points of agreement, Paul and Seneca still clash... for Seneca, god is an inseparable component of one's being, but for Paul, God is a separable being who radically reconfigures human relationships" (119-120).

10. Marc Van De Mieroop, *Philosophy Before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

11. M.L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

The essays are judicious and well-balanced, avoiding “parallelomania” and clearly distinguishing Paul’s concepts from those of the philosophers who deal with the same topics (slavery, faith, community, friendship, suffering, the good life). Nijay Gupta is typical of the entire collection in the careful distinction he draws between mere familiarity with the main ideas of philosophers which Paul would have had as a cultured person, and the stronger claims that are sometimes made by other scholars: “That is not to say Paul himself intentionally studied the works of philosophers to imitate their styles of discourse. After all, he never mentions any philosophers by name in his writings, nor does he appear to quote them explicitly” (96).

The best essay in the volume is the concluding one by Christopher Redmon, which presents and defends Kevin Rowe’s “incommensurability” thesis from his *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (Rowe’s work is also commended in Dru Johnson’s book). Redmon urges that “we can’t get at Paul’s view of death without summoning his whole narrative world along with it” (167). Because knowledge is bound up with one’s way of life, “in the end, what Christian-Stoic influence amounts to in Rowe’s view is not a clean translation of ideas—as if concepts could be isolated

and moved from a Stoic life into a Christian one—but a transformation of words” (170). This means that we cannot seize upon Greek words and assume that they carry with them entire concepts from Greek philosophy, as some do with *logos* in the Johannine prologue, or *hypostasis* in Hebrews 1:3. Rather, the authors of these essays give us a detailed understanding of Greek philosophical concepts in their own context, contrasted with Paul’s ideas in their own context within his own highly narrative Jewish worldview. What emerges is a greater clarity about what Paul had to do to present the truth of the gospel in a culture in which philosophical concepts were “in the air”—and thus, also, a pattern for us to follow as we seek to distinguish the claims of Christ from those of our own culture and its philosophies.

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# Memories (One—)

BY PASTOR WANG YI

TRANSLATED BY EASTERN PLEB

When I was young, I thought  
Love was something I would die for.  
After I married I learnt  
That it was something I must pathetically live for.

回忆 (其一)<sup>1</sup>

年少的时候以为  
为了爱情可以去死  
结婚后才知道  
为了爱情需要卑微地活

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1. Wang Yi's works are available on [www.wangyilibrary.org](http://www.wangyilibrary.org), where this poem is the first of a series of his memories rendered into poetic form. This poem was translated and used with permission. Translation was done by a pseudonymous contributor out of fear of reprisal by the People's Republic of China (PRC) which still holds Wang Yi in prison for practicing his faith. While most Americans assume the PRC is contained to China or Asia most businesses working internationally must beware possible reprisal by their government.

## BOOKS AND ARTS

# *Metaphysics in the Reformation: The Case of Peter Martyr Vermigli*

BY SILVIANNE ASPRAY

REVIEWED BY BRADFORD LITTLEJOHN

Time was when Protestants and Catholics could argue their differences on the familiar terrain of doctrinal *loci*—justification, Scripture, the eucharist—trusting that beneath these specific (albeit significant) differences lay a broadly shared foundation of metaphysics, epistemology, and theology proper. No longer. Sometime in the 1990s, a handful of Cambridge dons had too much time on their hands and cooked up an intellectual curiosity dubbed “Radical Orthodoxy,” which claimed, among other things, to have discovered a fundamental rift within Western intellectual history that had formerly gone largely unnoticed: Duns Scotus and his “univocity of being” (c. 1300 AD). Although Radical Orthodoxy’s fifteen minutes of fame have come and gone, it has left an enduring impact, in part through works like Brad Gregory’s *The Unintended Reformation* (2012). Now, Protestants eager to cling to their heritage must defend the Reformers against the charge of helping to popularize the new Scotist metaphysic, which

supposedly pitted God against creation and paved the way for the rise of a functionally atheistic approach to the natural sciences.

Silvianne Aspray’s new study *Metaphysics in the Reformation: The Case of Peter Martyr Vermigli* represents an important contribution to this ongoing debate.<sup>1</sup> In it, she considers the thought of one of the deepest philosophical thinkers among the leading early Reformers, the Florentine Reformed scholastic Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), and uses it to test the validity of Gregory’s thesis (shared with John Milbank and others) that the Reformation rejected a “metaphysics of participation.” Aspray deserves credit for saying “not so fast” to their sweeping claims that the Reformers simply exchanged the rich birthright of classical neo-Platonic or Thomistic metaphysics for a mess of nominalist pottage,

1. *Metaphysics in the Reformation: The Case of Peter Martyr Vermigli* by Silvianne Aspray. Oxford: The British Academy, 2021, £60, pp. 164.

**THIS BOOK FAILS TO FULLY ESCAPE THE ORBIT OF BRAD GREGORY'S FRANKLY ABSURD PARADIGM, AND DESPITE FLASHES OF BRILLIANCE ENDS UP MIRED, AS OFTEN AS NOT, IN INCOHERENCE**

and also for helping to raise the profile of Vermigli, a true giant among the Reformers who has been widely ignored until recently. That said, her book fails to fully escape the orbit of Brad Gregory's frankly absurd paradigm, and, despite flashes of brilliance ends up mired, as often as not, in incoherence.

Aspray begins promisingly enough, offering a lucid and readable account of the centrality of metaphysics in anti-Reformation polemics over the past century, along with a very helpful summary of the issues at stake. She defines the conflict as one between an "ontologically participatory" model of reality and a "univocal" model. In the former, "the ontological dependence of finite causes on the infinite means that God works intimately in and through all secondary causes because he is the innermost cause of their being" (15). In other words, divine being and divine action are of such a different order than creaturely being and action that the two are not in competition: of any creaturely action, we can say *both* that the creature acts fully and properly (in its mode as a dependent being), *and* that God acts fully and properly (as the first cause of all being, upon which all creatures depend at every moment). There is to be no parsing out of "God does X, but creatures do Y," whether in analyzing the laws of nature or free human action.

In the latter, however, "instead of God's gift of being, it is God's power which comes into view," such that "God's causal agency may exclude human agency, or be in competition with it." In this latter system, supposed to have begun with Scotus, "God's influence and agency does not primarily work itself out through the being of the secondary cause (so that God works *in* them), but rather as a concurring with them, in such a way that divine (primary) and human (secondary) agency both work *alongside* each other, contributing different but seamless elements to the same effect" (15). There is no question that this second model, taken to its logical conclusion, is potentially disastrous for theology and

philosophy. With regard to salvation, for instance, it seems to lead us either toward a Pelagianism, in which God and man "team up," as it were, to accomplish something that neither can achieve entirely on their own, or to a hyper-Calvinism, in which God's almighty power is seen as entirely overwhelming or excluding any creaturely agency such that man is reduced to the status of passive automaton. Moreover, the second model could certainly lend itself to an exclusion of the Church and the sacraments as instruments of God's gracious work, as authors like Milbank and Gregory have charged the Reformers with doing.

That said, we might wonder if something as profound as metaphysics can be captured in terms of such a neat dichotomy, and particularly, whether every *locus* of theology can be subjected to this kind of analysis. For instance, while seeing the ordinary relation of God and world as participatory, such that God works in and through natural causes, the Thomistic tradition has of course granted the possibility of miracles—God can and does sometimes deploy his power to act *in place of* or *alongside* natural causes. When God causes a tree to grow, both divine and creaturely being are fully active in one and the same act, but when God raises the dead to life, creaturely being really is wholly passive. And since "raising the dead to life" is a common way in which the Scriptures speak of our salvation, we might suspect that there is some place for a more "univocal" framework in describing aspects of soteriology. In other words, one could be committed to a participatory ontology on the whole and yet find univocal language better suited to discussing certain questions. Thus, we should beware of any approach that seeks to read an overarching metaphysical framework out of the way in which a theologian treats an individual theological *locus*.

Unfortunately, this is exactly the methodology that Aspray adopts, proposing to discover Vermigli's "implicit metaphysics" by zeroing in on his discussions of par-

ticular issues in ethics, justification, the eucharist, and political theology as they appear scattered throughout his occasional treatises and biblical commentaries. The result, unsurprisingly, is a constant, “on the one hand, on the other hand,” that purports to show Vermigli at one moment committed to a thoroughgoing participatory metaphysics robust enough to warm the heart of the most devout acolyte of Radical Orthodoxy, and at the next moment, mired in a disjunctive metaphysics of univocity in which divine and human agency are in conflict. To be sure, in her conclusion, Aspray attempts to rescue Vermigli from the charge of inconsistency—which she herself has effectively foisted on him—by describing his approach as comprising a “complex metaphysics.” Such a metaphysics, “by sustaining an unresolved tension between a participatory and a univocal metaphysical model,” she suggests, might transcend the either/or framework she has set up, suggesting that perhaps neither model is fully adequate to do justice to the human condition (145). Perhaps, she hints, the apparent contradictions in Vermigli’s thought point toward the possibility of some higher Hegelian synthesis of finite and infinite.

This conclusion, however, is more of a promissory note than a payoff, and it is hard to see what currency it is drawn upon. From the rest of the book, it is difficult to resist the impression that “complex metaphysics” is indeed simply a euphemism for “self-contradictory metaphysics,” with Aspray making little or no effort within each chapter to make sense of the apparent conflicts she discovers. Indeed, despite her insistence in the introduction that Vermigli was a thinker of uncommon profundity, he comes across as little more than a dunce in several key portions of the book. For instance, in a pervasively confused account of Vermigli’s political theology in Chapter 4, Aspray finds herself over and over again expressing astonishment that Vermigli could have believed that Scripture was transparently self-interpreting, given that he himself spent his whole career as a careful and patient interpreter of the text. Perhaps, one wonders, Vermigli did *not*, in fact, mean to claim that Scripture was self-interpreting, and Aspray has simply not been a careful and patient interpreter of Vermigli’s texts in this regard?

This is not to say that Vermigli was never inconsistent. Some of the inconsistencies (or “complexities”) Aspray analyzes might give us pause and invite today’s Reformed theologians to search for better and clearer ways to express their doctrine. In some cases, though, while the tensions she uncovers seem real enough, plausible reconciliations readily suggest themselves. In other cases, however, the tension itself turns out to be the result of superficial misreading or poor theological reasoning. In what remains, I will give one example of each of these interpretive failures: one relating to justification, and one to the eucharist.

**ASPRAV MAKES LITTLE OR NO EFFORT WITHIN EACH CHAPTER TO MAKE SENSE OF THE APPARENT CONFLICT SHE DISCOVERS.**

An example of the first appears in Chapter 2, in Aspray’s discussion of justification. The question revolves around the idea of imputed righteousness—clearly a central question for any Protestant theology. On the one hand, the author wants to credit Vermigli with a deeply participatory understanding of salvation as union with Christ, a framework in which God is savingly at work *in* and *through* all the faculties of the believer such that “the more God inspires faith in human beings, the more fully they become themselves in communion with Christ” (79). On the other hand, she wonders why he also seems at times to fall back on a thoroughly “extrinsic” understanding of grace as a pure divine gift of imputed righteousness, such that “only once this pure first gift is given, will human beings themselves be transformed” (80). Is salvation a both/and activity of God and man or is it an either/or? To be sure, these are deep waters, but might we not say, in keeping with the above point about God raising the dead, that there must be a moment in any fully Protestant account of salvation in which God is wholly active and man is wholly passive? Not because, as a general metaphysical rule, creatures should be understood as inert instruments or as inherently in competition with divine agency, but for the quite specific

reason that fallen man is *spiritually dead*: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,” declares Paul (Eph. 2:1). Only after being revived by a word that is entirely *from the outside* can man’s creaturely being again participate actively in God’s work *within* him.

Aspray’s apparent unwillingness to consider this possibility also colors her discussion elsewhere. For instance in Chapter 3, she claims to find a tension in Vermigli’s account of the role of faith in the eucharist. For believers, faith sustains a life-giving union in which the life of Christ overflows into those who receive the sacraments. This, she says, “seems to imply an ontological connection between the two [i.e. between Christ and the believer], along the lines of the older model of causality described in the Introduction: the faithful and their actions depend in their very being on their connection to the transcendent” (98). But this does not seem to be the case for unbelievers, for whom “the Eucharist has no mediatory function” and God and man seem to stand over against one another. Thus, Aspray asks, “How come they [unbelievers] have any life at all, if they are entirely cut off from the life-giving source of being? If they do have being, their being seems to be ontologically dependent on the infinite” (99). Presumably, Vermigli would answer (along with Aquinas, Augustine, and almost the entire Christian tradition for that matter) that it is entirely possible for a human being to be entirely dependent upon God at all moments for his physical and psychical life and, yet, because of indwelling sin, alienated from the spiritual union that enables a participation in eternal life. Finitude may pose no obstacle to participation, yet fallenness still may; there is no real tension here, much less a contradiction.

However, perhaps the greatest lapse in reasoning for Aspray (as for Brad Gregory, on whom she seems too dependent here) comes elsewhere in Chapter 3. To her credit, Aspray vigorously dissents from the characterization of Vermigli’s Reformed eucharistic theology as mere Zwinglian memorialism; no, Vermigli’s sacramentology is a fully participatory one, in which the creaturely instruments of bread and wine become true instruments of a life-giving union between Christ and the believer. Indeed, she rightly notes that Vermigli critiques his Catholic opponents’ transubstantiation doc-

trine on precisely the grounds that it falls into the ditch of a univocal metaphysics in which creaturely being must be shouldered aside to make way for divine action. However, she then goes on to argue that Vermigli collapses into this same error by “his tendency to conceive of the distance between God and the world in spatial terms” (104). Vermigli, she says, “seems trapped in the terms of a debate which conceives of a spatial gulf between God and the world which can only be overcome by either a kind of spatial rapprochement, or through spiritually bridging the distance” (104). In other words, she charges Vermigli with falling prey to the crassest physicalism in his conception of God, such that God must be physically present in either one place or another; if God is present in a place, no creature can be present in the same place, and if a creature is present in a place, God must be somewhere else, present only by spiritual influence.

**FINITUDE MAY POSE NO OBSTACLE TO PARTICIPATION, YET FALLENNESS STILL MAY; THERE IS NO REAL TENSION HERE, MUCH LESS A CONTRADICTION.**

If true, this would be a damning charge, indeed. Vermigli would be guilty not merely of Scotism but of a conception of deity on par with the lowest forms of pagan mythology. Nonetheless, this is exactly the charge Brad Gregory lodges against all of Reformed sacramentology in his *Unintended Reformation*, and Aspray seems ready to agree. What is the basis for the charge? Vermigli’s insistence “that in his human nature, Christ sits at the right hand of the Father” (102). Aspray, like Gregory, seems unable to distinguish between claims about Christ’s human nature and his divine nature, a distinction that was absolutely fundamental to sixteenth-century eucharistic debates, as indeed to all of post-Nicene Christian theology. It is, one supposes, possible that deep down, Vermigli heretically believed that the divine nature itself was spatially limited, but his conviction that Christ’s *human* nature was spatially limited can hardly be alleged as evidence for this remarkable claim. In sum, then, Aspray’s foray into Vermigli’s theological

metaphysics represents an important but largely unsuccessful effort to grapple with some of the most important questions facing Protestant theology today. To her credit, she refuses Milbank and Gregory’s simplistic dismissal of Protestant theology as hopelessly detached from the earlier tradition of Thomistic metaphysics and classical theism, marshaling considerable evidence that Vermigli effectively deployed this participatory understanding at key points in his theology. However, by forcing upon Vermigli’s theology a simplistic dichotomy between two all-encompassing metaphysical models, she misses clear opportunities to discern a coherent underlying theological vision that might make sense of many of his divergent emphases. While holding open the possibility that the “tensions” she discerns might be reconciled as part of a “complex metaphysics,” Aspray makes little effort at such reconciliation within this

book, leaving the reader with a picture of Vermigli’s thought (and of classical Protestantism generally) as a chaotic jumble. *Metaphysics in the Reformation*, in the end, highlights the urgent need for scholars well-versed in philosophy, theology, and history to articulate the coherence of Reformation thought anew in a theologically illiterate age.

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