

Nicholas Loudovikos

Hell and Heaven, Nature and Person. Chr. Yannaras, D. Stăniloae and Maximus the Confessor

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to examine the ontological meaning of Heaven and Hell through Greek Patristic Theology. One can easily discern a judicial element in both Eastern and Western traditions concerning the Kingdom of God, which tends to become juridical if it is not explained in ontological terms.

This ontological approach presupposes a different understanding of the relationship between person and nature, which contradicts the scheme proposed by some Modern Orthodox Personalists. Yannaras' thought is examined in light of Maximus' dialogue with Origen; there is also an allusion to Staniloae's thought, who, though manifesting an impressive step towards Patristic anthropologi-



Rev. Nicholas Loudovikos is Professor of Dogmatics, Director of Studies at the Department of Theological and Pastoral Studies of the University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki, Greece, Visiting Professor at the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge

cal wholism, nonetheless maintains a sort of dualistic tendency in some parts of his work.

Keywords

Heaven, Hell, Person, Yannaras, Staniloae, Maximus the Confessor

1 Introduction

The film *Avatar* about the search for a lost earthly paradise, which was a box-office success a few years ago, revealed the glowing embers of a Neopaganism widely disseminated in the West today. As Christopher Lasch has shrewdly demonstrated, this is no more than the most recent manifestation of narcissism in Western culture: what it aims at is a return to the womb and its security, as a collective preservation of an unmitigated narcissism, either by the conquest and crude exploitation of the natural world, or else, simultaneously assuaging the guilt feelings that flow from such behaviour, as surrender to this paradise of great mother nature.¹

What is it, however, that has made a genuine Greek-Westerner, who is of course a Christian, feel nausea at the prospect of living in such a paradise? Why, it is the fact that this pagan paradise is only an eternal repetition of sameness, that is, the absence of a true and unexpected creativity with its achievements and dangers and, consequently, the absence of freedom. This paradise lies beyond good and evil, since it is the blind surrender to those hypothetically wise hidden cosmic powers – exactly as the Jedi of Star Wars once did – which permanently and immutably preserve an *invisible harmony* in Heraclitean

¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, (New York: Norton 1978); see the Addendum of 1984.

terms, even if Heraclitus' Logos, which effectively maintains this harmony and affords it a *dialectic* meaning and content, is utterly absent. That is to say, what is absent from *Avatar's* paradise is precisely the likelihood of any gradual and progressive movement towards wholeness, any ground-breaking development or movement towards a higher level of existential perfection on the part of the world's rational beings that live roped together, as it were, in this self-sufficient natural Eden. By theological criteria *Avatar's* paradise, as we shall see, is not so much a paradise as a hell.

2 Justice and Ontology

Consequently, for the Greek-Western Christian there is no paradise without freedom – which includes both the possibility of hell and its transcendence. Hell is the real boundary of the paradise of rational beings, and consequently the full definition of freedom necessarily includes it – and we are speaking here of created beings. Without an understanding of hell, paradise for them would be an asphyxiating repetition of sameness, *Avatar's* neopagan paradise-prison – it would not even exist as such. And this is because unless linked with continuous development, the attainment of wholeness and transformation of nature, paradise (or heaven) is bereft of sense and meaning. Heaven and hell, in this perspective, have to do with ontology and its dangers, that is, with the vicissitudes of a perpetual development of the being of created nature or of its falling away from this being.

Things became complicated early on in Christian theology, for we soon discern the rise of two important ways of understanding the 'last things' – including both heaven/paradise and hell – both in the East and the West: a judicial (or even, at times, juridical) way and an ontological way – without these two ways being always mutually exclusive. In the West, starting with the so-called *Fides Damasi* in the fifth

century, hell was defined as eternal punishment for sins (DS 72).² This teaching is simply repeated in the *Quicumque* (DS 76), also of the fifth century, at the Fourth Lateran Council of the eighth century (DS 852), and at the Councils of Florence in the fifteenth century (DS 1351) and Trent of 1547 (DS 1575). In the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* it is also stated explicitly (N° 1035) that the souls of sinners ‘descend immediately after death to hell, where they suffer the punishment of hell, eternal fire’. Without any further explanation the judicial here can easily be taken as juridical. Some of the greatest Western Mystics tried precisely to give such a further ‘explanation’. To what extent this juridical *infernalisme*, to use J. Delumeau’s expression, as a disastrous filling out of the exclusively juridical understanding of so-called ‘original sin’ (another invention of the West), rendered the Western Christian conscience guilt-ridden and melancholic, creating the presuppositions for an equally juridical understanding of inherited guilt and salvation, and also the stimulus for modern atheism, can only, again according to Delumeau, be estimated in the light of the ontological teaching of the Greek Fathers on these matters.³

All the above does not mean that there does not exist an inherent judicial element in Christian eschatology, starting already with the Gospels. However, it is not without meaning that some of the greatest Fathers of the Church tried not simply to combine this element with an ontological understanding of the Kingdom of God, in order for the judicial not to become juridical, but, on the contrary, to somehow transform the judicial into an existential/ontological reality. Indeed, as we shall see below, a judicial understanding of the ‘last things’ was

² H. Denzinger, A. Schonmetzer (eds.), *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, (Fribourg: Herder, 1976).

³ Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: the Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture*, (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990), pp. 244-265.

not lacking in the East either, though in this case an ontological understanding was developed parallel to it, from Irenaeus of Lyons to Maximus the Confessor. This judicial element often became even juridical, but this ontological understanding, has yet to fully supplant, as we shall see, not only the juridical but also the Origenistic understanding of the 'last things', which, although not clearly juridical, nevertheless inhibits any plausible filling out of an authentically ontological understanding of them. Before we turn our attention to the East, we must not neglect to emphasize that the high points of the Western judicial understanding of the last judgement lie without any doubt in the work, on the one hand, of Augustine (*De Civitate Dei* XXI, 72) and, on the other, of Thomas Aquinas (*ST* Ia q. 20-25; Ia IIae, q. 87; *De Malo*, q. 5), both of whom clearly regard the judgement as a work of *justice* and thus render God essentially a judge who inflicts the precise punishment due for each sin – it was Fr Sergius Bulgakov who liked to remind us how ironically Augustine used to mock those who were opposed to this merciless legalism, calling them 'the merciful ones' (*misericordes*).⁴

It is clear that within such a perspective, on the one hand, hell must remain eternal torment as punishment for sinners and the great joy of the elect⁵, while on the other, both condemnation and justification lie under the absolute authority of God – the appalling teaching on absolute predestination. In his important work: *Freedom and Necessity. St Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom*⁶. Gerald Bonner notes that Augustine, in a rather contradictory fashion, despite his respect

⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1988), p. 185.

⁵ John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 272.

⁶ Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

for humanity's innate desire for God, cannot help regarding God as utterly transcendent, unaffected by humanity's desire and, consequently, utterly independent of it through his predetermination of each person's eternally good or eternally bad destiny (pp. 34-35).

Understood in this way, absolute predestination creates the relentless legal arsenal on behalf of the eternity of hell that has marked a significant part of Western theology up to our own day – with the full reception of the above theses taken as a given, not only against Pelagius but even against John Cassian, by almost the whole of the West, Protestant theology with Calvin at its head included. Only recently have theologians appeared, both Roman Catholics, such as von Balthasar⁷, and Protestants, such as Jenson⁸, who, along with Orthodox writers such as Evdokimov⁹ have attempted timorously to recover the Origenistic line of *universalism*, the theory of the restoration of all things, in spite of all the problems that accompany it.

The dominant trend today among Christian theologians of all denominations is to reject the eternity of hell, although the problem is that usually the theological argumentation is lacking that would offer sound criteria for adopting one or the other position. Perhaps it is possible for this trend to be regarded as a desperate attempt to overcome the legalism innate in our understanding of the 'last things', an argument that also attracts Orthodox theologians precisely because the ontological understanding of the 'last things' already mentioned has not yet, as we shall see, been sufficiently appreciated.

I have said that the judicial, or even, at times, juridical perception of judgement and hell was not lacking even in the

⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kleiner Diskurs über die Hölle*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 2007).

⁸ Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 359-368.

⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *Orthodoxie*, (Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1959); Greek trans. (Thessaloniki: Rigopoulos, 1972), pp. 445-447.

East. For reasons that are usually pedagogical the 'eternal fire', the 'deep pit, the inescapable blackness, the lightless flame in the darkness that nevertheless has the power to burn, and the privation of light', the 'worm of poisonous and flesh-eating kind that eats voraciously and is never satisfied, inflicting unbearable pain as it devours' of Basil the Great accompanies the descriptions of the eternity and horror of hell fire, 'which burns those it has seized hold of forever and never ceases, and that is why it is called unquenchable,' as John Chrysostom says.¹⁰ Similarly, teaching on the eternity of hell is common from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and the *Epistle of Diognetus* right up to the preachers of the Ottoman period. Alongside this line of thought, however, there is also that of Irenaeus, Maximus and John Damascene.

It is truly refreshing, after what has been set out in the previous paragraph to encounter theses such as those of John Damascene: 'and you should also know this, that God does not punish anybody in the world to come, but each person makes himself capable of participation in God. Participation in God is joy; non-participation in him is hell.'¹¹ That is, according to John Damascene hell is a creation of created beings and especially of the devil. In the familiar description of hell in the Gospel as 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41), the dative (rendered in English as 'for the devil') should rather be read as a dative of causal agency ('by the devil')!

Even if the patristic tradition in its kerygmatic form usually regarded this expression as indicating a form of punishment for

¹⁰ Basil the Great, *On Psalm 33*, 8, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XXIX, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1857), p. 372; John Chrysostom, *On the Epistle to the Romans*, hom. 5, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XLVII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1863), pp. 288-289.

¹¹ John Damascene, *Against the Manichaeans*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCIV, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1864), 1545D-1548A.

the devil, it is clear that, in keeping with the deeper criteria of Orthodox theology, the devil is the one who envies God's love and opposes it. Hell thus becomes the self-maltreatment of the creature in terms of a refusal to participate in the Godhead on account of achieving its own satisfaction by turning itself into an idol, leading to the expression of creaturely freedom in terms of a narcissistic enclosure within the self. Texts such as the above perhaps have their original stimulus in the theology of Irenaeus of Lyons. The very important and noteworthy feature of the teaching of this great Father on the present topic is that on the one hand it connects judgement with the ontological renewal of creation, and on the other, more importantly, it regards this renewal as a consequence of humanity's spiritual renewal and attainment of bodily incorruption. Thus when this happens and humankind advances 'towards incorruption, so that it can no longer deteriorate, there will be a new heaven and a new earth'.¹² This means that heaven and hell occur through a *synergistic co-operation* between God and Man, not through one-sided moral and juridical provision on the part of God.

What we have here are processes of *dialogical reciprocity*, profound encounters of the freedom of God with the deiform freedom of rational creatures. The above theses signify above all that hell and heaven can also be related absolutely to ontology, that is, to the full restoration of the created nature of beings and the never-ending evolution of that nature, or, alternatively, to its never-ending ontological fixity or nullification, after the general resurrection. Thus the judicial element is translated into ontological terms, and avoids its alteration into juridical. God's justice is understood as identical to His love, and the adventures of the reception of this love on the part of man.

¹² Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* V, 36, 1, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus VII, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1857), pp. 1221-1222.

3 Person as Heaven and Nature as Hell? Maximus correcting Yannaras

And of course the author who has demonstrated the ontological nature of heaven and hell in an unparalleled manner is St Maximus the Confessor. The most important discovery of this great theologian in the present context is not simply the distinction between the *gnomic* and the *natural* will, but chiefly their deep connection: in order for the *gnomic* or *personal* will to 'advance directly', it must express the uncreated *logos*, or principle, of nature, which is not simply a *logos*-invitation of God, but an answering *dia-logos*, or dialogue, expressed, on the part of the creature, as a *natural will*, which is nothing other than the response of the creature to the invitatory attraction that God exerts upon it through his *logos*/will. This response, in turn, has as its content the request for 'its own natural and full onticity'.¹³ That is to say, the gnomic will does not seek deliverance from nature as created by God, but on the contrary needs to 'bow to the *logos* of nature', with the intention of being led towards the 'good use' (*euchrēstia*) rather than the 'non-use' (*achrēstia*) of the *logoi* of with nature, in such a manner that finally with regard to every rational creature 'either the *logos* that is in accordance with nature comes to subsist in it through being used well, or the mode that is against nature exists co-ordinately with it through not being used; the one is in

¹³ Maximus the Confessor, To Marinus, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), 12 CD. All my arguments relating to Maximus that follow have been discussed at length in my *Eucharistic Ontology*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), ch. 2; *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self* [in Greek], (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 1999), pp. 189-204; *Terrors of the Person and the Ordeals of Love* [in Greek], (Athens: Armos, 2009), pp. 19-31.

accordance with nature, the other becomes the messenger of the free choice that is contrary to nature'.¹⁴

This very significant text links free choice (which is always personal) in an absolute way with the nature of being – that is to say, personal freedom lies in the hearing and implementation of the uncreated creative summons that constitutes nature's only ontological identity, precisely because created nature is defined solely and exclusively as participation in God. It is in any case precisely for this reason that on the one hand 'nothing belonging to the natural world ever conflicts with its cause, just as nature as a whole never conflicts with its cause'¹⁵, and on the other, 'the natural things that belong to the intellect are not subject to necessity'¹⁶ – nature at its core is not necessity but freedom of loving offering on the part of God and a giving back in thanksgiving on the part of Man.

Do we need any special emphasis on an ecstasy out of nature here? In a perspective such as that of Maximus, 'the balance between the will of each will be the *logos* of nature according to the judgement that is the movement directing the will towards what is unfavourable or favourable in relation to nature, in accordance with which what results is either participation or non-participation in the divine life.'¹⁷

This means that at the Last Judgement what will 'weigh' the truth or the falsehood of the personal choice of each of us is the personal or freely chosen preservation of the truth of our nature as participation in God (naturally in Christ), rather than

¹⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), 28D-29A.

¹⁵ *Idem*, 80A.

¹⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), 293BCD.

¹⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Various Chapters* 4, 54, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), 1329B.

a fearful denial of it. Consequently, paradise is here the freely chosen continuation of the natural dialogical development of created nature by participation (effected in Christ), whereas hell is precisely the freely chosen refusal to allow nature to follow the path to its completion by participation, that is, the understanding of nature not as participation but 'as a given, implacable necessity (as urges, instincts, inexorable tendencies, irrepressible reflexes),' that must be 'restrained, confined, controlled and nullified by our gnostic will'¹⁸, as Yannaras defines nature – while Maximus the Confessor wants the gnostic will to cover, include and express this divinely-created nature, which, as a gift of God connotes in its essence as we have seen, dialogical freedom rather than necessity.

In his latest book Christos Yannaras attempts, among other things, to respond to the criticism I have been making about his personalism in the recent past. Unfortunately, he does no more than repeat his arguments that begin with his formulations set out in the paragraph above.¹⁹ As this debate is directly relevant to my theme in the present article, I shall take it up again. It is clear, then, that Christos Yannaras usually gives the impression that he tends to identify nature ontologically with the fall. However, this was first explicitly done by Origen.²⁰

¹⁸ Christos Yannaras, *Six Philosophical Sketches* [in Greek], (Athens: Ikaros, 2011), p. 128.

¹⁹ I find it difficult to comprehend Yannaras's uneasiness with my criticism. Anyone who has read pp. 107-111 of my book *Terrors of the Person...* will gain the impression, rather, that I hold Yannaras in high respect, and for very serious reasons. This does not prevent me from having some disagreements with him on his ontology of personhood, while in other books or essays of mine I have praised, for example, his ecclesiology or his understanding of modern science and politics.

²⁰ It is extremely indicative that even the greatest modern defenders of Origen think that he was the first to identify the nature of beings with the evil of a fundamental fall. Thus H. Crouzel, *Origen*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), p. 215, writes: 'if the Devil is called (in Origen) the First

The problem with Origenism in so far as eschatology is concerned – a problem that St Maximus alone resolved – is not that the spatio-temporal character of eternal life is not accepted, (even if Yannaras does not clearly accept the ‘material’ spatio-temporal character of eternity). The problem is that the final Kingdom of God is a transcendence of this spatio-temporal eternity: for Origen the world is by nature ontologically outside God; spirituality means ultimately the transcendence of the nature of beings within God; heaven is the final abrogation of the nature of beings, of their spatio-temporal character, despite the restoration of all things in the meantime through their relationship with God.²¹ Yannaras regards the instincts as the main content of nature (the instincts of self-preservation, domination and pleasure), which exist in a state of ‘functional independence from the reason and will of the human subject, an independence that is experienced empirically by us as more or less a state of existential schizophrenia: a splitting of our reason and will from the biological demands of our nature. The description of the Apostle Paul remains classic in our literature: “I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind”.’²²

In the face of this nature-monster all that is available to us as human beings is ‘resistance to, control of and suspension of the necessities that the mode of nature imposes on us,’ and this is precisely, in the author’s view, ‘the possibility of *ek-stasis* from

Terrestrial, that is, because he was the source of the fall which caused the creation of the perceptible world...’. P. Tzamalikos, in his *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 354, writes: “The “Fall”, on the one hand, coincides with the actual creation and marks the “beginning” of space-time’. It is curious that Yannaras regards my attribution to him of unconscious Origenian presuppositions with regard to his understanding of created nature as excessive.

²¹ Restoration is thus connected with a return to pre-creational conditions. See Tzamalikos, *Origen*, pp. 156, 273-274, 293.

²² Christos Yannaras, *Six Philosophical Sketches*, p. 90.

nature: a possibility that a rational (personal) hypostasis should exist *ex-istamenē* (“standing out” in existential “apartness”) from the necessities given in nature (urges – instincts – reflexes) that determine the common mode of homogeneity.’²³ And to remove any doubt, the author offers the following clarification: ‘*ek-stasis* from nature is a linguistic expression that permits the ontological content of the word *freedom* to be signified and communicated.’²⁴ That is to say, it is clear that the primary ontological process which provides the foundation for the person is a distancing of the person from its own nature. The personal freedom of deliberate choice not only fails to summarize nature’s demand for participation in the uncreated that is its foundation, that transforms it and sacrifices it, but on the contrary is consumed in a hard moralistic struggle ‘of resistance to, control of or even suspension of’ the mode of nature.

However, the quintessence of the Greek Patristic tradition, as expressed by Maximus the Confessor, is that the original creation of human nature has nothing to do with its post-lapsarian distortion resulting in uncontrolled urges and reflexes. Interpreting, then, the relevant saying of Saint Gregory the Theologian in his *Ambigua*²⁵, and referring to man’s prelapsarian creation, Maximus writes that ‘at that time (i.e. before the Fall), since man was not torn asunder by qualities of the body’s constitution that were contrary to each other and corruptive of each other, but enjoyed them in a state of equilibrium without ebb and flow, and was free from constant change with regard to each of these according to which of the qualities happened to be dominant, he was not without a share by grace in immortality and was not subject to the corruption

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, in: J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Tomus XCI, Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1865), 1353 AB.

that now scourges him with its torments, but had a different constitution of the body that befitted him and was maintained by qualities that were simple and not in conflict with each other.’

All this means that nature was created to be deiform and not at all inexorable and monstrously inimical to the person, who is supposedly free by definition (and the fall happened not because of the existence of nature, but precisely on account of Man’s self-serving *personal* choices – it is telling that because Yannaras identifies nature and the fall, he rejects the latter as an ontological event). Our personal-gnomic *ek-stasis* should aim at the restoration of nature and at its divinization, and not, according to Maximus, at its ek-static ‘truncation’ through the renunciation (as supposedly non-personal – i.e. non-subsistent?) of either the instincts, or the unconscious, or the body, for the sake of a pseudo-ascetical ek-static ‘apostasis’, or ‘separation of oneself’ from it, a truncation that is regarded by Maximus unhesitatingly as ‘Manichaeism’.²⁶ Despite the fall, then, nature remains as a gift of God, naturally, without the ‘censurable’ sinful fall of the free will, which, according to Maximus, also provoked the ‘non-censurable’ fall of nature – it is the person, as I have said, that rendered nature the way Yannaras regards it, not the other way round.²⁷ The following text from the *Ambigua* merits close study by us all:

“For the Word, Who is beyond being, truly assumed our being for our sake and joined together the transcendent negation with the affirmation of nature and what is natural to it, and became man, having linked together the way of being that is beyond nature, that he might confirm the [human] nature in its new modes of being without there being any change in its *logos*, and make known the power

²⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 1340BC.

²⁷ Idem., *To Thalassius*, PG 90, 405BC.

that transcends infinity, recognized as such in the coming to be of opposites”²⁸.

There is no existential ‘*apo-stasis*’ or ‘*ek-stasis*’ or ‘freedom’ from nature, but its affirmation and its opening up to a mode that is beyond nature, not simply the mode the ‘person’, but the mode of uncreated enhypostatic nature. This anthropology of a psychosomatic sanctification and participation in God, which flows from the Christology discussed above, was a constant throughout Eastern theology, from Macarius and Maximus through to Gregory Palamas.

Having a different view, Yannaras in the end identifies nature with evil, objectifying it in an evil being that is independent and reliant on its own powers and that exercises its infernal authority on a good being, which is the person. Yannaras writes: ‘Man is created, and his given *mode* of existence (his nature or essence) is by necessity that of individual onticity, of the instinctive urges of self-preservation, domination, perpetuation. It is that of self-completeness at the opposite pole to the *good*; that is, it is *evil*’, an evil “which destroys a *personal* human being with the same even-handed indifference with which it destroys any animate existence”²⁹. Finally the author

²⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 1053BC, trans. A. Louth.

²⁹ Christos Yannaras, *The Enigma of Evil*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012), pp. 35, 37. It is surprising how much the concept and reality of Divine Providence is weakened before the evil of nature: the ‘scandal of evil’ appears to be independent even of God (ibid., p. 117). It is curious that Yannaras accuses me of regarding ‘essence/nature as a thing’, as ‘an (in itself) autonomous existential factor’ (*Six Philosophical Sketches*), p. 126), because I use expressions such as ‘the substantial person’ (*to enousion prosōpon*) (on the model of Gregory the Theologian’s ‘substantial Father’ (*enousios Patēr*) – and he does so in spite of many pages that I have devoted in the books listed in note 13, especially my *Terrors of the Person...*, pp. 19-31, toward demonstrating precisely the opposite: how nature is personal and only constituted relationally (p. 27). On the contrary, it is Yannaras who on the one hand makes nature perfectly autonomous by

asserts that eternal life in God means nothing other than that 'human beings [should] exist, after the death of their physical being, by hypostasizing existence as grace, without the mediation of created nature.'³⁰

Nature has no future in eternity, remains soteriologically unaffected, simply checked and controlled, like an infection, and in the end is totally abrogated, in an ecstatic delirium wherein without nature the created being hypostasizes the natural energies of God – the creature is flooded by the divinity. I find it difficult to understand what the purpose of the Incarnation precisely is (as a coming together and *synergy* of two natures, two natural wills and two natural energies, divine and human, in the one hypostasis of the Word) in this perspective – unless it concerns a 'Christology of escape', as I have called it recently, in discussing the similar theology of Metropolitan John Zizioulas,³¹ where Christ is regarded as a model of a double hypostatic escape from his two natures. At any rate, in a case in which the person, as Yannaras claims, is really freedom, expressed as control, domination and resistance, etc., with regard to nature, it is evident, it seems to me, that hell is nothing other than surrender to the innate irrationality, badness, self-interest, etc.

identifying it with necessity or evil, and, on the other, makes the person in a similar fashion perfectly autonomous by identifying it with the freedom of an ek-static standing-out from nature.

³⁰ Christos Yannaras, *The Enigma of Evil*, p. 136. See also his *To Rhēto kai to Arrhēto*, (Athens: Ikaros, 1999), p. 209: 'The created hypostasis of every human being also exists after death by no longer hypostasizing its created nature but the uncreated vivifying energy of divine love' since human beings after death are changed into an empty, non-substantial hypostatic shell, 'an existential mould' according to Yannaras (p. 214). It is doubtful whether such views allow us to suppose even the survival of the soul after death. The problem then, at least according to Gregory of Nyssa, is how in that case is the resurrection of the dead possible, without the natural mould of each of us which is our soul, so that the Resurrection would be the resurrection of the people themselves and not some new creation.

³¹ Nicholas Loudovikos, *Terrors of the Person*, p. 58.

of nature, whereas heaven/paradise is the kingdom of fully realized self-control and self-transcendence, i.e. a flight from nature through an 'ek-static' relation. All this, however, signifies that the Kingdom of God is entirely bereft of natural creatures – and it was precisely this that was the essence of the Origenism that Maximus saved us from.³²

³² Yannaras's error naturally lies not in his view of the Kingdom of God as an ontology of relations, but in the 'existential standing-out' of these axiomatically free 'personal' relations from this axiomatically and originally fallen nature, which is identified with a burden of blind necessity. I have spoken elsewhere of the roots of this ontology in Augustine, Origen, German Idealism, Berdyaev's Existentialism and Kantianism (and finally, in the hidden Neoplatonism that has permeated the West's philosophical and theological anthropology for centuries and only recently has been adverted to both in the field of philosophy and in that of the biological and psychological sciences) (see my book *Terrors of the Person*, pp. 16-19). On pp. 131-133 of *Six Philosophical Sketches* Yannaras himself admits his debt to Heidegger and Sartre with regard to this ontology of personal *ek-stasis*, regarding as his personal contribution the concept of relation through which this *ek-stasis* is realized. But that is precisely what I also say myself about his work on pp. 284-291 of my *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self*, also demonstrating at the same time the one-sidedness of this argument. As for the concept of relation, not even this can be taken as a personal contribution of Yannaras – it already exists *at least* in Heidegger ('Mitsein' and 'Mitdasein', paragraphs 25-27 of *Sein und Zeit*) and subsequently in a whole raft of existentialists, personalists and phenomenologists, etc., such as Marcel, Mounier, Merleau-Ponty, Buber, and Levinas – and naturally in psychoanalysis (Lacan), depth psychology (Binswanger, existential psychologists, etc.) and in sociology (Durkheim, Elias, etc.). A real theological contribution, then, would be not the concept of relation, but the setting of real natural existence, of the full human self, within a relational *ontological* perspective, where natural being itself *occurs* as a personal becoming of communion and relationship, not as supposed *ek-stasis* from itself. We have here a huge change of perspective, a real philosophical revolution of theological provenance: an eschatological ontology, nature in the mode of relation, the transformation of nature.

4 D. Staniloae: a Step Forward and Some Questions

Fr Dumitru Stăniloae is widely and deservedly respected as one of the greatest Orthodox theologians of the 20th century; we are all of us deeply grateful to this brilliant and extremely productive theological pioneer, for opening a series of new fertile perspectives in modern Orthodox theology. He vivified Dogmatic theology, he became one of the most faithful interpreters of Orthodox *life in Christ* throughout the world, he brilliantly translated *Philokalia*, adding his own valuable spiritual comments, discussing seriously with modern thought and other Christian Confessions. This Romanian theologian is a Father of the Church, a man who, along with Florovsky and Lossky, and, up to a point, with Boulgakov, established Orthodox theology in its ecumenical importance and witness. Furthermore, in close connection with the topics discussed in this paper, he is, as far as I know, the first who criticized Lossky³³ both for his separation of individual/atomon from person, and his interpretation of person as ‘free from, and undetermined by, its nature’³⁴, which nature is unfree in itself³⁵. However, it is useful to investigate the way he uses, in parts of his Dogmatics, the same philosophical scheme of *above-under* regarding the ontological construction of man, where now the person-nature dialectic seems to be replaced by a sort of soul-nature dialectic.

According to Stăniloae, the soul is ‘a free conscious spirit’, inserted by God ‘within nature’, and not clearly just a part of it. So, ‘through the human spirit inserted within the world, the divine Spirit is himself at work to bring about the spiritualization of the world through his operation within the

³³ See Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology. Vol. two: The World: Creation and Deification*, (Brookline Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), pp 97-100.

³⁴ *Idem*, pp. 97-98.

³⁵ *Idem*, p. 99.

soul of man, and in a special way, through his incarnation as man³⁶. Here the distinction between soul and grace can still be made, but things become complicated when the author puts the image of God exclusively on the soul³⁷, calling it 'a kind of replication of the creator Spirit on the created plane', 'a kind of *alter ego*' of him³⁸. Thus the human soul seems to be above nature, as it is 'endowed with characteristics akin to those of God: consciousness, cognitive reason, freedom'³⁹ – although, as modern Neurobiology or Neuropsychology teach us, it is impossible to articulate, or even to understand any of the above characteristics in man, without the body, in this life.

Stăniloae is right when he notices a soul-body hierarchy within man, but he tends to identify the creation of the soul with the insertion of the Spirit in man, in the very moment of his creation, following a similar Losskian claim⁴⁰. The 'moment' of the soul's creation and the 'moment' of grace seem thus identical, although there is substantial evidence in the Patristic texts, and especially in Maximus, that not simply the soul but the human being as a whole is created in the grace of the Spirit, as we shall see. Man is thus defined as an 'incarnate spirit', and, subsequently 'our person is spirit that is capable of feeling and of knowing through the senses'⁴¹. This person/soul/spirit sometimes seems to come into contact with God immediately and directly, while in Palamas, for example, grace is carefully and repeatedly mentioned, as the only means for the *embodied soul* to participate in God. I do not claim that the Romanian theologian would disagree with Palamas on that, but, on the other hand, grace seems sometimes to be almost identified with the soul in Stăniloae: 'Even after the Fall, man was left with

³⁶ Idem, p. 78.

³⁷ Idem, p. 67.

³⁸ Idem, p. 68.

³⁹ Idem, p. 79.

⁴⁰ Idem, pp. 82, 206.

⁴¹ Idem, p.72.

soul, with at least some sort of divine grace'⁴². Thus 'the spiritual breathing of God produces an ontological spiritual breathing on man, namely, the spiritual soul, which has its roots within the biological organism and is in conscious dialogue with God and with its fellow human beings'⁴³. A double question very naturally arises here: first, does this soul possess *by nature* the ability of this 'conscious' dialogue, regardless its moral/gnosiological disposition, and second, and most important, if this soul, for some reason stops this dialogue, does it remain a 'spiritual' soul? Furthermore, what does the author mean by this repeated assertion of a 'conscious' dialogue, when, as this soul is closely connected with the body and what Freud called *the instincts*, it is impossible for it not to have an unconscious basement, where the light of consciousness cannot be immediately shed, and it is, consequently, impossible that every unconscious event can be fully elucidated? Of course this dialogue is a *conscious intention* of man, but it is not made only through consciousness; being in God surpasses consciousness.

Thus it seems that Stăniloae tends to use, in his anthropology, the same *above-under* ontological scheme, although he criticizes the form that this scheme takes in Lossky. However, a phrase such as the following could have been possibly written either by Lossky, or even Yannaras or Zizioulas: 'Man cannot become wholly mechanical like nature, but he does become sinful when he falls under the sway of nature, just as he becomes virtuous and spiritually strengthened when he asserts his own mastery over it'⁴⁴. According to what we have seen above, it is obvious that Maximus the Confessor could never have written such a phrase, even if by 'nature' we mean the cosmic nature: man becomes sinful by, precisely, *ignoring* nature .

Of course Stăniloae never separates this nature (for the explanation of the way of creation of which he uses his own

⁴² Idem, p. 84.

⁴³ Idem, p. 85.

⁴⁴ Idem, p. 107.

term: 'materialized principles') from soul/spirit/grace, like the above Orthodox personalists, and, in general, he has a much more positive account of it, in comparison with the other authors above. In this sense, his work must finally, as I think, be appreciated as a clear step *beyond* modern theological entanglement in philosophical transcendental subjectivism. He even speaks of a 'spiritualization' of nature, through the soul, although it is not easy to follow him when he speaks, at times, of the spiritual life, in a rather intellectualistic way, as a 'life of understanding and also of communion with God', so that 'to the extent that the understanding is developed, so, too, is communion developed and *vice versa*'⁴⁵. Although communion with God means in deed a progressive understanding of many things in and through Him, it is also obvious that, starting from St Paul and concluding with Aquinas and Palamas, there exist an infinite number of things that surpass human understanding in man's communion with God, and thus communion with him definitely surpasses our understanding.

Maximus' answer to the question concerning human essence is different, as I tried to show elsewhere⁴⁶. For him man is neither his soul, nor his body, or even just an addition of these two elements, but he is 'his wholeness', i.e. 'something beyond them, and around them, giving them coherence, but itself not bound with them'. It is precisely this 'wholeness', as a gift and as an invitation, which is created by the Logos through the Spirit. With these genial claims Maximus' thought overcomes all the idealism and existentialism inherent in modern Orthodox theology, by inserting freedom and dialogical reciprocity in the very constitution of human being that is absolutely psychosomatic, but nonetheless in a state of a free dialogical becoming. He thus creates an *apophatic anthropology*, which is, as I strove to show in my *Eucharistic ontology*, decisively

⁴⁵ Idem, p. 84.

⁴⁶ In my book: *Closed Spirituality...*, ch. 2,3.

eschatological and historical at the same time. Unless this anthropology is properly understood, modern Orthodox theology will never be able to go in deed far beyond modern Western philosophical subjectivism, which thus seems to mark, totally or partially, at least two generations of Orthodox theologians.

5 Conclusion: Personal Nature in a Destiny of Freedom

To conclude, according to the Greek patristic tradition heaven or hell are born from the personal and free ('in accordance with nature' or 'contrary to nature') choice alone of creatures, not from created nature which is universally resurrected – and precisely for this reason heaven and hell are active realizations of freedom, not simply decisions of passive reward or punishment on the part of God. Heaven is the free choice ('in accordance with nature') of the dialogical and participatory development of created nature in Christ, for all eternity, as 'ever-moving stasis', according to Maximus, of the creature within God – whereas hell is the free choice ('contrary to nature') of refusal of the dialogical liberation of nature in the absolute meaning of the Incarnation: here God is encountered, with malicious envy and hostility, according to Maximus, 'in knowledge but not by participation' (PG 90, 796ABC). This is a peculiar refusal of the Resurrection through the rejection of the participation that would have allowed the Resurrection to be transformed into a full and conscious communion and cooperation with God. If heaven appears also to be a supernatural judicial reward, this happens because of God's limitless response to the human desire for participation – and if hell also appears to be a punishment, this is mainly on account of the intense bitter resentment that lies in the unparticipated knowledge of God. Thus the judicial element of Christian eschatology can be translated in ontological terms, and avoid its conception as juridical.

And to be sure, it is a fundamental testimony of patristic theology that the Kingdom of God, and heaven in particular, are eikonized ontologically in the Holy Eucharist. Saint Symeon the New Theologian, an ascetical writer of authority and stature, describes the good things of the Kingdom ‘which God has prepared for those who love him’ as follows: ‘among the good things stored in heaven are the body and blood itself of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we see every day and eat and drink – these are acknowledged to be those good things; without them you will not be able to find any of the things mentioned, not even one, even if you go through the whole of creation.’ This scholion, clearly based on the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, is astonishing precisely because it removes any kind of ecstatic or monophysite temptation. And Saint Symeon continues: “You have heard that communion of the divine and spotless mysteries is eternal life and that those who have eternal life are the ones the Lord says he will raise on the last day, not like the others at all events abandoned in the tombs, but like those who possess life, raised from life to eternal life, while the rest are raised to the death of eternal punishment” (*Ethical Discourses* 3, 167). Eucharistic participation in Christ is the foundation of a freely willed movement towards God, and is the present realization of the personal choice (“in accordance with nature”) of that dialogical reciprocity that saves and perfects nature, whereas its denial is the kindling of a (“contrary to nature”) self-loving necrosis within the abundance of life itself. In each case freedom according to the image of God remains: we have, then, either freedom as a dialogical love that liberates nature in a eucharistic relationship, or freedom without love – or rather, without dialogue – which imprisons nature in a malicious self-will and self-activity. The question about the eternity of hell thus does not affect God and his love, because hell will end when the devil wants to end it, when he ceases from his malice against God – because if hell is the absolute narcissistic enclosure within oneself, in an imaginary superiority that denies the reality of corruption and the need for the

transformation of the created, then this situation becomes in the end the soul's ultimate blindness, its self-condemnation to hell.

Hell, then, is the denial of the Eucharist, the tragic freedom of absolute narcissism, that is, the supreme self-torture of a freely chosen enmity against love. As the boundary of heaven, it is lit dimly by its light, and this minimal gleam of rationality that is shed on it besieges the abyss of its irrationality with the compassion of the saints of God; but the battle against this hardened self-deification is indescribably frightening and also inauspicious.

The rest is known to God alone....