Signifying the Mystical as Struggle: Yannaras’ Orthodox Refiguring of Philosophy of Language

Manuel Sumares

ANNALS of the University of Bucharest Philosophy Series

Vol. LXIII, no. 1, 2014
pp. 3 – 15.
Abstract

In accordance with the early Wittgenstein, for Christos Yannaras, the mystical might "show" itself in experience, but which, in propositional terms, remains transcendent and ultimately non-sense. Yet, the struggle at once to "signify" and to "relate to" the ultimately inexpressible persists as integral to human being. Indeed, it defines the specificity of his involvement in the order of Life. With Heidegger's help, Yannaras' philosophy of language, factoring in the reality of Otherness and apophatic thinking, seeks to explore the dimensions of rationality in relational terms. The net effect of his creative thinking on language and rationality is, above all, suggestive in demonstrating the potential of patristic intuitions that underlie Yannaras' philosophy in view of providing an alternative direction for contemporary thought.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, apophaticism, Otherness, Orthodoxy.

In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein set out the conditions of what can be said in the hope of seeing the world aright. For him, the task of philosophy is to adjudicate in the use of language the boundaries between knowledge and nonsense. He clearly advances the issue hanging in the balance in the Preface to the *Tractatus*: his work, he says, aims at drawing a limit not so much between thoughts as such, but in regard to how thought is expressed:

/…/ for in order to able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e., we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense. (Wittgenstein 1971, 3).

As the demonstrations proceed in the work, proposition after proposition, a close reading finds some surprising turns in the argument. For one thing, the
nonsensical, namely, that which cannot conform to the linguistic conditions of the thinkable, constitutes the most interesting and pervasive part of the human experience. For another, the logical space, postulated as the *conditio sine qua non* for saying something sensible, *i.e.*, meaningful, we find to be ultimately nonsense, unthinkable. Like the ethical, the aesthetic, and the mystical, the logical space itself remains beyond meaning and the capacity of language to signify it. And, again, like the ethical, the aesthetic, and the mystical, the logical space can only be shown to the degree that it is actually being deployed in act. Yet, it cannot be properly “said.” But, yet again, all meaning depends on it.

Not an analytical philosopher who would pursue these questions on the terms that Wittgenstein cast them in that early work, Christos Yannaras does nevertheless reflect on the nature of language with manifest reference to notions derived from the *Tractatus*. Besides the persistent reference to “logical spaces,” he manifestly makes serious use, notably, in *Postmodern Metaphysics* and *Relational Ontology*, of famous Wittgensteinian *dicta* like: “The limits of my language are the limits of my world (5.6)”; “The sense of the world lies outside the world (6.41)”; and “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical (6.522).” But he ultimately sets these themes within the context of Heidegger’s recovery of the ontological question, the key concept of which – at least as Yannaras explores it – is the “existential fact.” In regard particularly to the mystical, he proposes,

> There also exists the so-called mystical approach to the interpretation of the logos (*i.e.*, cause and purpose) of the existence of existent things. /.../ The mystical approach relies on the obviousness (the self-evidence, self-manifestation) of the logos meaning as it emerges from the experience of participation in the existential fact. /.../ Mystical experience does not entirely renounce its linguistic expression, but it attempts to express itself indirectly through allegories, poetic images, and metaphors. (Yannaras 2011, 6-7).

In varying the perspective of the relation between the mystical and language within the parameters of existential fact, Yannaras refigures suggestively Wittgenstein’s initial thesis concerning the expressible character of the mystical. Though only indirectly as far as the mystical is concerned, the two sides of the limits that Wittgenstein sought to keep apart are brought by Yannaras into communication. In the vocabulary of Heidegger that Yannaras frequently employs, we might describe the situation as exploring the possibility of introducing the more original and potentially transformative *Logos* into the ontic confines of linguistic analysis. Thereby, we can anticipate that the mystical approach will associate with the eventfulness of the logos capacity to cause and instil purpose, indeed to provide a sense for the world. Moreover, to those who participate in its mode of existence, it is to be celebrated in language that speaks of a relational experience surpassing mere intellectual conceptualisation.
In regard to the kind of language able to bring this experience and this relation to the fore of human rationality, the theology of the Church provides in its liturgical practices ontological paths to the inexpressible that it knows, nevertheless, as love, or better, as having an erotic love for her. In sum, the language of the mystical will be the language of desire, i.e., the divine *Logos*, God, translated into Lacanian psychoanalysis as the “Other” and space within which the rationality of desiring human subjects is formed. Yannaras will weave into Wittgensteinian linguistic questions the Heideggerian interest in existential fact; in turn, Yannaras will see this as intrinsically relational, namely, the condition for rationality driven by desire. But in doing so, Yannaras is – we believe – effectively situating a thematic that largely dominates Western philosophy within the distinctively Orthodox conviction that we engage the uncreated and divine essence only through the created, itself permeated with uncreated energies. As witnessed by the Church and delivered in Tradition, the experience is participatory and the human reality that emerges is a confederated one, rooted in divine theophanies and gathered together in the theandric Christ.

Notwithstanding the decidedly, and potentially polemical mystical tone of the proposal, Yannaras’ Orthodox refiguring of philosophy of language does constitute a challenge to the Western thinking about the thematic, which – as Wittgenstein defined it – constitutes a primary form of human life and thereby influences all else. It is precisely its challenge and possible shortcomings that we should like to explore in the following – and perhaps envisage as a path of inquiry worth furthering. In reconstructing Yannaras’ thoughts on the mystical and the struggle to signify it, we believe that we are addressing the core thesis of his theological philosophy and hope to give a fair account of its import for theistic metaphysics in our time. It will require to begin with establishing apophaticism as the new common ground in contemporary philosophy in order to prepare for a reworking of the notion of the logical space and, finally, to see the signifying of the mystical as related to the birthing and re-birthing of the human subject.

Apophatic Thinking and Linguistic Potential: Unorthodox Limitations and Orthodox Possibilities

The idea of a consequential breakdown of philosophical foundationalism, exemplified successively by medieval realism and modern rationalism has many adherents. But to read its history in relation to a reappearance of apophticism, as Yannaras does, is not usual and, of itself, sets the problem against the more distant background of the patristic insistence about the unknowability of God, namely the issue of divine essence and energies. For him, the apophatic refers generically to an “epistemic gap” between experience and the attempt to know it, *i.e.*, the inability to
translate adequately into conceptual terms what one actually knows through participatory belonging to what is effectively experienced (Yannaras 2011, 56). In *Postmodern Metaphysics*, Yannaras creates distinct categories that very much reveal how he conceives a fundamental metaphysical option that forms around the theme of apophaticism, succinctly put, apophaticism comes to us in one of two ways: either it is “unorthodox” or it is “orthodox.”

He calls the first “intellectualist-methodological,” moreover a category that would fit Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* especially well. The world is “intellectualist-methodologically” contemplated; it is one implicitly governed by chance and is, on its own, inherently senseless. Whatever sense is advanced about it is largely self-constructed, *i.e.*, through the creation of epistemological models of interpretation. Each model deploys its own regulated process in articulating the structure of the real but none is definitive. That is, though all cogently supported by the axioms governing the methods, they remain, nevertheless, incompatible between themselves.

For the most part, the proponents of intellectualist-methodology are happy to allow for the relativity of their theory-bound proposals. Voicing the basic stance of the intellectualist-methodologist, Yannaras formulates it this way: “Without sacrificing methodological consistency, I do not make an absolute of it, nor in consequence do I tie it to a single methodological constant.” (Yannaras 2004, 85). We find ourselves in the realm of heuristic models and metaphors; they deal with the onticity of the physical world that remains underdetermined by the attempts of human reason to express it. Therein consists its apophatic character, one that has become self-conscious in the example of post-Newtonian physics in which indeterminacy and un-definability mark the sphere of the signified. The work of signifying must resort to paradoxical and less precise expressions like “wave-particle,” the function of which resembles, revealingly for Yannaras, theological terms such as *theanthropos* and *mêtoparthenos*. But the decisive point is that the quest for univocal scientific language yields to paradox and poetic images; they thus accentuate at the same time the greater freedom of the observer in relating to the evidence in a more personal way. Even contemporary science, he argues, does not close its mind to the poetic expressiveness of the world that it intends to explain. A step further, namely from the ontic to the ontological, would make the world appear, in its otherness, not only as a field to explore but also relational, even invitatory.

The significance of personal experience may be discerned, because it does not refer to specific referents, but to the dynamics of the relation with the referents, with the inexpressible personal otherness of the referents.

The new language of post-Newtonian science seems to bring us nearer to the significance of the experience of the modally infinite, nearer to the language of art and love. (Yannaras 2004, 154).
A possible path for postmodern metaphysics to follow, the orthodox insistence on the relational and the participatory comes into view. This will carry with it the characterisation of “significative-experiential,” that Yannaras proposes in a relational ontology focused on the dynamics of the existential fact. Here, the ontic plane, occupied by the descriptive natural sciences, is transcended, situating us now in a domain more akin to that cultivated by “lovers and artists,” i.e., that of a freedom consisting in experiential probing, or soundings, a struggle to signifying that which cannot be rendered entirely objective, but is, nonetheless, known. Implicitly honouring the orthodox essence/energies distinction, the significative-experiential approach to language values human desiring for transformative self-transcendence. Operating above the ontic, the logical space in which the signifying will take place implies an un-circumscribable otherness, constituting the true measure of personal freedom.

Within the framework of Postmodern Metaphysics, the fate of apophaticism is seen then as emerging in modern and postmodern thought but also radically disengaged from the orthodox wisdom from which it actually derives. In a much earlier work, inspired by a Heideggerian “destruction” of modernity’s obsessive fixation on efficiency and control and the desire for a renewed opening to ontological experiencing of the pre-conceptual, we are given a fuller account of what is at issue. Like Heidegger, Yannaras would underscore the virtual erasing of an original experience of being such as found in the pre-Socratics and the concomitant rise of onto-theology underlying the development of the Western mind. However, far more decisive and far more tragic for Western society is the deliberate marginalisation of the philosophical potential contained in the Christian revolution as experienced powerfully by the Apostolic Church, but liturgically “repeated” (in the Kierkegaardian sense) and thought through by the Church Fathers of all times. Indeed, the relational ontology, as Yannaras conceives it, finds a visible manifestation in the Christian ecclesia, a privileged expression of an ontology constituted by relations and by personhood. Apophaticism is seen rightly when situated into that sphere of reality opened to view by the experience of the Church, modelled as she is by the Triadic God; it is seen wrongly, or insufficiently, when not. However, in Yannaras’ work, the theme harkens back to an earlier book, On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite, published originally in 1976, but might be still read profitably alongside the more recent publications by the authors of Radical Orthodoxy and those by David Bentley Hart.

The meaning that Heidegger attributes to “the death of God” theme as a consequence of the long process of Western metaphysics and the forgetting of the ontological question perhaps underestimates, in our view, the earnestness (and perverseness) of Nietzsche’s counter-gospel for a new humanity. But it is the Heideggerian reading that Yannaras takes to reinforce his own critique of Western Christianity and, indeed, Western civilisation itself. In this regard, he
sees Nietzsche as a prophet of the inadequacy of how the Christian God is conceived in a theology, which, in accentuating rational conceptualisation, has left us without a God who effectively saves us from death and corruption. “The historical development of both natural theology and apophaticism in the West culminates in the proclamation of the ‘death of God’.” (Yannaras 2005, 45-46). In other words, its apophaticism is unorthodox. No wonder God is absent, argues Yannaras, and no wonder nihilism has become the real cultural situation of the West. “Responsibility for the death of God of the Western-European metaphysical tradition lies nowhere else than with Western Christendom itself.” (2005, 43). Nietzsche’s apophatic statement translates then in the destruction of a metaphysical idol, but not the God revealed in Christ.

Once again, the underlying rule is that apophaticism refuses to accept that linguistic semantics can ever satisfy whatever it endeavours to know in cognitive acts of representing a given reality, for between the signifiers and the experiential knowledge lies an unbridgeable gulf. It “refuses to exhaust the content of knowledge in its formulation,” i.e., it refuses to exhaust the reality of the things signified in the logic of the signifiers (Yannaras 2004, 84). Nevertheless, the intrinsically frustrated struggle to bring signifiers into a complete correspondence with what is signified actually obscures but not eliminates an ultimately more promising connection between the two poles: semantic suggestiveness in regard to the reality that it expresses is better understood as the dynamic indeterminacy of relationships that underlies the workings of human reason before that which it endeavours to know. In sum, the primary mode of connecting knower and known is not conceptual but relational, i.e., existential, participative, and personal. What we call truth is only achieved through the struggle to attain relations concomitantly with a greater degree of rationality (Yannaras 2011, 9).

The underscoring of the fundamental status of the relational and the participative as expressed in the notion of significative-experiential enables Yannaras thus to recognise in the more ancient, and yet richer, version of apophaticism in Dionysius the Areopagite than the one that Heidegger advanced. (Yannaras 2005). The unknowability of God does not for the Areopagite finally translate into His absence, for God’s erotic love for mankind seeks to engage his human creation and deify it; Heidegger’s ontology, albeit admirable in its appreciation of the onto-theological trap into which the West has fallen, remains uncommitted and non-participatory in relation to an unknowable and, for all practical purposes, an absent God. As it is practiced in the West and as can be noted in both Heidegger and Wittgenstein, the use of apophaticism concerns itself with restraining the scope of rational knowledge, based merely on conceptual capacity. It remains forgetful of knowledge as involving fundamentally the experienced immediacy of relatedness with that to which the rational knower is engaged.
The contribution that Yannaras makes in this regard is to underscore that the existential fact of the human subject lies in his acute sense of self-conscious otherness. The experience of this fact invites him to transcend ontic relationships and to enter into the ontological opening constituted by the dynamics of personhood. Under the sign of ontological difference, Yannaras rethinks the kind of analogical thinking applicable to a viable metaphysics as sustained by the factor of otherness, *i.e.*, by analogical relationality, the apophatic quality that escapes ontic description, immersed as it is in the constitution of correlated otherness of the Triadic God. “It is an apophaticism of *divine being*, insisting upon essential otherness that underlies any analogical correlation of the uncreated God with created beings.” (Yannaras 2005, 28). The experienced immediacy of relatedness with the other constitutes the only authentic foundation at once for a full theory of knowledge and philosophy of language, both ultimately open-ended and implying a sense-producing struggle.

The Qualitative Leap of Relational Rationality and the Postulate of the Un-Circumscribable Logical Space

As we have mentioned, Yannaras follows Wittgenstein in thinking that the sense of the world lay outside the world. However, in his own rendering of it, Yannaras would conceive the onticity of the natural world as ontologically located within the dynamics of relationality and eros, *i.e.*, that which lays outside the world. On the basis of what we have seen up until now, we can summarise the position thusly:

1. **ontically, the laws of nature, including those that govern the physical-biological dimension of human nature, cannot be said to have qualities unto themselves;**
2. **whatever meaning they have depends on the bearer of the logos of nature, the human subject;**
3. **the distinctive ontological capacity of human being entails the laborious articulation of the relationality that constitute the world as such and his own being.**

In the world, but not of it, the human existent is beckoned to decide the sense of his life but, in so doing, he decides that of the world as well. He may decide to look principally to his biogenetic relation to the created world and be limited by its onticity and its mortality. These would constitute the parameters within which he cultivates his own sense of self. Or, alternatively, he may decide to delve with more consequence into the space of the Other, motivated by desire to realise his relational existence and achieve a mode of likeness to the uncreated. Human persons are, thereby, bearers of hypostatic energy that signify nature with their own *logos*, bound analogically that of God’s.
In regard to this, very reminiscent of Kierkegaard (but probably via Heidegger), Yannaras underscores the leap involved in the yearning for freedom from the impersonal natural order. The vocation to participate more fully in the interpersonal demonstrates his will-for-freedom and brings to light the complicity of language and desire.

There is a leap from urge to desire, from desire to language, from language to the many-faceted nature (the “infinity of parts”) of epistemic potentiality, from a predetermined capacity to perform certain skills to a creative otherness; a leap, finally, from the undifferentiated individual of a natural uniform species to the subject of self-conscious, active (not merely morphic otherness) – that is to say, a leap to the subject of freedom from what is predetermined by nature. (Yannaras 2011, 33).

Within the orthodox schematics of divine essence/ uncreated energies/ created energies that can be found here, we can formulate in general terms what Yannaras has in mind. For him, the created energies operative in the human mode of existence possess the potential for the realisation of freedom that transcends the natural preconditions rooted in the biological. Uncreated grace will constitute the invitatory instances that will seal the entrance into communion of reciprocating free wills.

Beginning again with the created energies, we see that the causal relations at work within the biological can be duly accounted for by scientific description as necessarily present in the higher expressions of human communication. Yet it is precisely the nature of seeking engagement with the other that produces, within the organism, a constant self-organisation reflecting an increasing consciousness that cannot be reduced to scientific explanation. Crucial for the emergence of human communication is the conversion of acoustic images into the symbolic of socially sharable linguistic signifiers tacitly desiring to signify and relate to the Other. “By the word relation we identify the fact that only in humankind does appetitive referentiality encounter in the place of its reference (the space of the Other) a mark of the power to respond to the desire.” (Yannaras 2011, 48). The qualitative leap is thus spawned in the trajectory of intentionality provoked by the otherness implied in human desiring. It represents the possibility of making the created energies into receptors of those that are uncreated. In this case, the energies of the Other, like the divine Logos, act responsively and are received in the linguistic acts and the subsequent intellection.

Rationality, the power to realise relation, is grounded in the primordial desire for its Logos, the fundamental reference for its self-transcending ascent beyond the non-rational desires. These can only exhaust themselves in the onticity of their biological, dimension, inflected by chance and, in and of itself, senseless. For the world to have meaning, it requires the postulation of a logical space that is unbounded and yet intentional in its own right. Such a logical space
constitutes furthermore the condition for making philosophical and scientific investigations of the world possible.

Thanks to intentionality, the whole of the logical space of the world becomes a meaningful question, a question extended into all possible situations of things. For this reason the logical space of intentionality is indefinable.

Uncircumscribed, the logical space of intentionality establishes and perpetually maintains philosophy and science. As zero logical space, chance destroys philosophy and makes science nonsensical. (Yannaras 2004, 70).

Albeit indefinable and un-circumscribed, the indispensable logical space marked by intentionality already implies a relational ontology transcending the natural order, whilst establishing a sphere of freedom that explores the potential for personal existence.

Herein lies the substance of the struggle to signify and to become more fully rational: exploring the resources of its intrinsic freedom that does not confine itself to the finite and merely natural, it can activate dimensions exceeding the natural plane and make viable the postulating of “the modally infinite.”

The experience of the modally infinite /…/ is confirmed fundamentally not in the relationship of humanity with the world, but in its freedom from this relationship. That is, in the ability of humanity to create its own world not subject to the necessities of nature, to form relationships referring not to facts of nature but to its own existential otherness – to create art, culture, history. (Yannaras 2004, 146).

The more personal the relationship, the more supra-natural and properly personal the network of causality within which subjectivities engage with one another, the more the experience of the modally infinite becomes identified with the logical space that determines the signifier, anthropos, with that created being generated in the space of the Other i.e., “God.” The uncreated causal principle of the created inspires love and erotic yearning precisely because the signifier “God” bears this very meaning, for, in conformity with the experience of the Church, God is love and erotic yearning. She further sees Him as the One whose freedom from necessity is such that He may choose to exist in the mode of human nature without ceasing to be God. In the face of such a revelation, the Church would eventually employ hypostatic signifiers – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – to express the inexpressible. She seeks to relate the ultimate causal principle in God (the Father)’s unlimited freedom to beget life-giving Logos, whose Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent to manifest divine being in that which is not-God. The Church thus draws upon language of created rational beings but dramatically inflected by Christ’s witnessing to the uncreated Father/God to Whom He is related as Son.
The Church adhered consistently to the apophatic character of the linguistic formulations of its experience, refusing to exhaust the truth in its formulations or to identify the knowledge of things signified merely with the understanding of the signifiers. (Yannaras 2011, 78-79).

The signifiers employed to express this set of relations are assumed by the Church’s own participation in the reality of the Triadic God. In the context of this relational ontology, the words drawn from ordinary life are given a capacity to signify the meta-physical and to be approached only analogically and relatively, but actually approached experientially through participation. That is, the experience of the relation is real. In lieu of propositions structured around formal inferences, poetic imagery and languages of art constitute more apt means of symbolic expression in this regard.

We have already acknowledged with Yannaras the epistemic gap between our understanding of the signifiers and what may be experienced and known metaphysically. The signifiers are densely determined by the criteria and principles of specific epistemological and cultural paradigms. Metaphysical language is thus necessarily relative to those paradigms and the propensity to justify them. However, the metaphysical experience in relation to the Other as such is nevertheless highly personal and its communicability will call upon a relational language that wishes to express the sureness of the erotic relation, its confirmation that it is true and a foundational belief for the meaning of the rest.

Criteria concerning the experience will evoke the desire to give oneself to the Other, overcoming the impulse for individual self-preservation and domination. Rather a self-offering is aspired to with the clear sense that freedom is achieved and personal integrity is assured in the experience. Mystical knowledge of God is thus a matter of engaging with God’s kenotic nature and prolonging it in acts. The epistemological confirmation resides then precisely in its reciprocity, assuring that the otherness of the Other may be approached as such and making communion based on mutual self-giving possible. A culture informed by this experience will have a language (like that of the liturgical language of the Church) capable to incite in its poetry and its art the erotic impulse to relate to the divine energies that effectively create a new circumstance for those who participate in it. The anagogic aspirations inhering in human rationality sustains in faith and hope the experience of the modally infinite and the private absolute, suggesting a yearning to seek a relational mode of existence that might overcome death and participate in the uncreated.

The issue for Yannaras seems to hang on following through on the rationality that is at once relational and ontological, i.e., in the reception and cultivation of those energies originating from the uncreated and transforming the mode of existence into that related to un-circumscribed divine freedom. “The death of the created human entity, an entity capable of the reciprocity of relation, could rationally be taken as a positive step toward some kind of assimilation (mutatis mutandis) to the mode of the freedom of the uncreated”
The ecclesial experience gives witness to death as strictly defined as a rejection of a relation with God and fear of death being an irrational impulse to self-preservation. The language of the New Testament writings defines the Church’s transforming experience but cannot substitute it. They proclaim in a language understood by all that salvation from death and decay has come in the Person of Jesus the Christ, the language itself cannot be made to replace the experience, always already in excess of linguistic limits. However, the struggle to signify the mystical assumes the relational into the erotic that underscores the distinctiveness of Christian aesthetics of beauty and God as radically invitatory.

The experience of such beauty associated with the kenotic God is a transcending one, actively engaging in unbounded desire, revealing a personal otherness that is unique and responsive to human desiring by offering it a new life. The measure of the divine beauty that awakens life is yet another criterion of a non-illusory experience of God. The triadic God of the Christian experience becomes the implicit measure of existential authenticity. Explicated from an ontological perspective, the measure discerns the rapport between the uncreated and the created: the qualitative dimension of freedom from the limitations of time, space, and movement standing against the predeterminations and limitations that defines atomic onticity and constitutes, in comparison, a sense of “fall,” that is not meant to have the last word.

In Conclusion

Yannaras’ Orthodox refiguring of the philosophy of language as originally formatted by Wittgenstein and, in a different key, by Heidegger operates on the basis of a retrieval of three distinct, albeit complicit, conceptual spheres that are central to patristic thinking and that converge on the idea of signifying the mystical. Briefly summarised, apophaticism points to the priority of participation in the uncreated energies of an unknowable God; the divine, uncreated energies are experienced, but the divine essence from which they come is beyond every conceivable concept. Nevertheless, the humility derived from apophatic disciplining of thought and the priority given to relatedness creates for human reason a logical space for its signifiers now understood as un-circumscribable divine logos, expressed and rendered meaningful in the language and worship of the Church that celebrates God’s love for humankind.
and the invitation for an appropriately loving response in return. Within the purview of apophaticism, the divine logos, and the experience of the Church the range of verifiable meaning furthers considerably what both Wittgenstein and Heidegger envisaged as possible for language.

Yet, if the specificity of the Christian experience is to be highlighted in regard to language, it remains to be asked whether Wittgenstein and Heidegger lead in the right, i.e., Orthodox, direction. This would be particularly the case with Heidegger, but Wittgenstein would not be exempt from following the more pagan approach to philosophy by prioritizing the experience of the world and yet depriving the world of its own redemption in the divine economy of grace. To put the matter differently and following Michel Henry in his expression, with the Christian Revolution the philosophical question does not become one about the forgetfulness of being, i.e., the ontological difference, but the forgetfulness of our divine affiliation – sons in the Son? And does not this render the real ontological interrogation less about the revelation of being, less about ecstatic ontological leap into a communion of persons, leaving the ontic order behind, and more about receiving a gift from a self-donating God who is Absolute Life? If we must speak of the ecstatic, would it not be better conceived within the economy of divine self-donation? And would not the patristic mind be more in tune with the recognition of Life as more urgent ontologically speaking and privileged than that of worldly experience? – or better, to see the latter in the perspective of the former, the fullness of the implications of the Incarnate Word and its hypostatic glorifying of matter?

Yannaras’ deployment of apophaticism, his reworking of logical space, and his courageous affirmation of the singular ontological status of the Church are certainly helpful in putting important postulates of modern and postmodern philosophy in a new and yet ancient perspective and provide these with renewed possibilities. This is already a considerable achievement. But, particularly given his uncompromising critique of Western options in philosophy and the life of the Church, is he radical enough on this score? Has he bought too much into the Wittgensteinian and Heideggerian format of philosophy of language and not enough into the Word that precedes human words about the world and, in fact, creates it whilst it speaks? If this comes into view in liturgy, and most notably in the Eucharist, ought we not to allow that these things too give rise to thought,

---

2 Curiously, several essays dedicated to the man-as-priest-of-creation theme and Byzantine liturgical art, published in Freedom of Morality, do accentuate the sense of cosmic liturgy and the redemptive transfiguration of matter. But the theme is practically lost in the more recent Postmodern Metaphysics and Relational Ontology that we have been following in this essay. Nevertheless, the following passage from an additional note to his “Ethos of Liturgical Art” is noteworthy for underscoring the art of introducing created matter into divine life: “Such forms of art embody man’s struggle for the truth of matter and the world, a struggle and an ascetic effort to bring about the communal event of personal freedom and distinctiveness.” (Yannaras 1984, 264).
and even philosophical thought, about the nature of relationality and the power of language, originating in the un-circumscribed, to realize truth and beauty and to delight?

BIBLIOGRAPHY


