##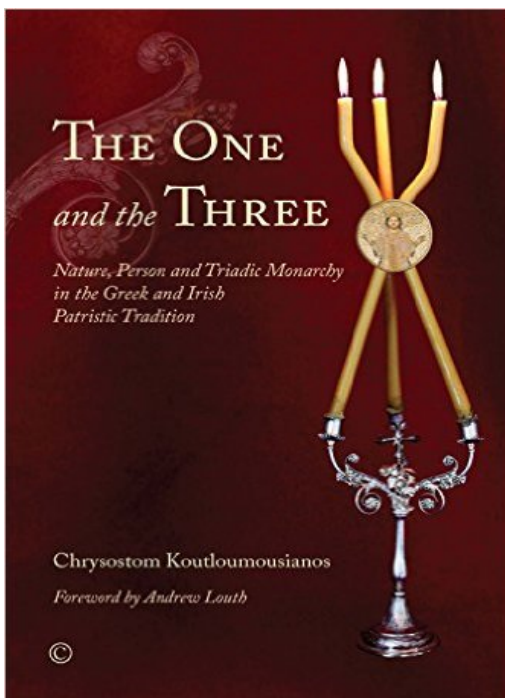 Chrysostom Koutloumousianos, *One and the Three: The Nature, person and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition.* Cambridge, UK: James Clark and Co. 2015.

By Lasha Tchantouridzé

In this timely volume, Fr. Chrysostom, Senior Elder of the Koutloumous Monastery on Mount Athos, discusses complex issues of substance and personhood of the Holy Trinity. His argument is a direct response to one developed by His Eminence John (Zizioulas), Metropolitan of Pergamon. Metropolitan John's thesis developed in his *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, privileges personhood of God over His substance. Professor Zizioulas' intentions were clearly noble as it is an unfortunate trend of our age that the human person is reduced to the means of achieving the ends of either state, market or some ideological chimeras. By elevating the person of God, Zizioulas also elevates the human person, and addresses a series of ecclesiological issues in the process. However, this thesis of his much liked and discussed in the West, which stressed the supremacy of personhood in the Holy Trinity, has also produced rather undesirable theological corollaries. Fr. Chrysostom details them in the current volume by offering deep historical and philosophical analysis of his own, and by referencing the Cappadocian fathers of the church, and their Irish brothers.

Koutloumousianos demonstrates that by privileging personhood in the Holy Trinity, Zizioulas essentially ended up with a 'monarchical' argument that ascribes fundamental ontological attributes to God the Father. This form of reductionist vision personalizes the Holy Trinity as God the Father, as according to Zizioulas, the Father understood as a person and not as a substance formulates what God is. This personalistic Trinitarian formula does not entirely disregard the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit, but it does give them somewhat subordinate ontological standings.

For the ancients, God is both monadic and triadic – the Christian fathers did not arrive to such conclusions through philosophical disputes, but through their common revealed experience. There are limits how much human mind can comprehend of the Godhead, and the church fathers left ample space for God's mysterious essence, not because they lacked philosophical apparatus to debate unknowable, but because they saw such intellectual exercises useless and potentially damaging. What we know now as "the persons" within the Trinity, the Greek fathers defined as the three hypostases, and distinguished from God's one essence (*ousia*). Koutloumousianos cites Cappadocians, and later saints – among them fathers of the Irish church, to show that for them the internal order of the Trinity was unknowable, and that in their view, such internal matters were known only by the Trinity itself. The Cappadocians did not define internal relationship within the Trinity; similarly they did not attempt to ontologically privilege hypostasis of God the father over the essence of the Trinity. This nuance should be stressed, as the Greeks did not do it not because they lacked conceptual apparatus or philosophical education or because their language lacked flexibility. Indeed, well-educated Greek-speaking scholars of late antiquity were much better equipped to engage in such theological speculations than intellectuals of any other historical period.

Professor Zizioulas relies on the Cappadocian fathers to support his particular thesis of personalistic primacy within the Trinity; interestingly, Koutloumousianos relies on the same Cappadocian fathers to show how and where Zizioulas misunderstood or misinterpreted arguments of church fathers. In addition, Koutloumousianos consults with the pre-Norman Irish theological

tradition and discovers that early Irish theologians were in agreement with the Cappadocian fathers when it came to triadological doctrine and inter-Trinitarian relations. In the opening chapters of the volume, Koutloumousianos asks whether Zizioulas' strict monarchical logic derives from systemic reading and analysis of the Cappadocian fathers, and in later chapters he demonstrates that, in fact, quite the opposite appears to be correct: classically trained and educated 4th century Greek fathers of the church could not have possibly insisted on the ontological supremacy of 'person' within the Trinity. The Greeks of classical and neoclassical periods were obsessed with the idea of measure and moderation. The Cappadocians, their contemporaries, as well as the scholars of preceding and successive generations in the Hellenistic world were educated with the books of ancient Greek philosophy and mythology. One of the highest virtues for the ancients was Μεσότης, moderation, which was part of the Hellenistic ethical discourse since at least the times of Homer, and received a systemic exposition in Aristotelian ethics. Koutloumousianos notes that this idea of moderation or middle point (qualitative category, not related to spatial or temporal distance) was brought into Christian theology and philosophy by Greek-speaking fathers and scholars of the early church. The author notes that the Christians in late antiquity understood their faith to be removed from the two extremes: the disorganized polytheism of the Greeks and the "rigid monotheism" of the Hebrews. The principle of moderation was used by the church to define the faith and defeat two extreme heresies, Arianism and Sabellianism – Arianism argued for unequal parts or the Trinity, while Sabelliamism rejected any sort of differentiation within the Godhead.

Further, Koutloumousianos sees a danger in John Zizioulas' understanding or the person of bishop, which he posits analogously with the person of the Father within the Holy Trinity. According to Zizioulas, the bishop is "the one in whom that many united would become one." Koutloumousianos cautions that …"if a bishop is to be placed ex officio on the seat of God the Father, the assumption above, by giving particular emphasis to the role of a hierarchical 'primus,' paves the way for excessive exaltation and cloaks him with dominating authority, even if his status is described in relational terms" (p. 7).

Two further issues need to be stressed in relation of this volume and its subject, both related to the use of concepts and language. Koutloumousianos rightfully points out that Zizioulas argument privileging personhood over substance, among other things, carries a strong flavor of awkwardness. This flavor will be much more pronounced if Zizioulas ideas are translated into other languages, such as English. Zizioulas, whose native language is Greek, thinks in terms of *hypostases* and *ousia*, very much elegant and abstract Greek concepts, which when translated into English and applied to the Holy Trinity become 'person' and 'essence.' 'Essence' (or 'substance' in various philosophical interpretations) is sufficiently abstract and will probably remain so in most languages, but 'person' is problematic: although it is understood in abstract terms, the word itself triggers empirical associations, especially among members of mass audience that is not spending much time in philosophical contemplations. *Hypostasis,* as applied to the persons of the Holy Trinity, literally means the 'underlying state' – existence that is responsible for all other existence. There is no such word in English to express exactly the same meaning, thus 'person' should suffice. This term; however, describes more external manifestation than underlying state, given especially the fact that in the original Latin *persona* was used to denote 'character' or 'mask,' 'false face,' especially in the Roman theater. Perhaps, it should be added that there are languages that are even less capable reproducing the original meaning of *hypostasis*; therefore, an argument insisting on the ontological privileges of 'person' within the Holy Trinity will be very difficult to communicate and accept as true in many languages.

The second point is related to erroneous translation of Greek concepts into English, which has become a disturbing trend recently, especially whenever philosophical and theological ideas describing the Holy Trinity are concerned. One particular concept is 'cause' and its usage when discussing triadology. For instance, the current volume contains the following sentence:

> So far, the concept of 'cause' in the Trinity has been demonstrated as vital part of the patristic triadology, for it offered a valuable philosophical key to the understanding of the divine unity that avoided heretical extremes (pp 31-32).

In Greek philosophical reasoning, the meaning of the concept "cause" originated with Aristotle's treatment of four ontological 'causes.' Aristotle used the Greek work αἴτιον (*aition*), which originally had a meaning of something being "responsible" for something else. Aristotle used *aition* as the concept that explained something in relation with something else. In the context of the writings of the Cappadocian fathers, "Father" explains "Son" and vice versa, both conceptually and ontologically. The same understanding applies to the Holy Spirit in relation with the other persons of the Holy Trinity. It should be obvious that the concept of "Son" cannot exist without a corresponding concept of "Father," just like the concept "bicyclist" makes no sense without the concept of "bicycle."

The Greek *aition* subsequently acquired a stronger meaning of causality, perhaps with the translation of Aristotle's works into Latin, his four ontological *aition* became 'causa movems, 'causa finalis,' etc. thus acquiring a status of the arguments on the origins of the universe. Latin language is far less flexible and diverse than Greek, and 'cause' is the best approximation of Aristotle's *aition.* From Latin the concept entered European languages, among them English. With the advent of the scientific age, "cause" acquired a strong meaning primarily used science and engineering to signify cause-effect relationships between phenomena. Establishing causality was the main preoccupation of science in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This relationship in science between a cause and its effect necessarily takes place in space and time – the temporal aspect being especially important, as without it no cause-effect relationship can be scientifically established – the cause must precede its effects or the cause and its effect must be separated by a time interval or the effect belongs to the future of its cause (quantum field events represent potential exceptions from this necessarily one way relationship). Similar understanding of 'cause' is characteristic for everyday usage as well. However, such cause-effect relationship cannot possibly work logically within the Trinity, as (a) the Trinity exists beyond our space-time continuum, and (b) if there were a causal relationship between the Father and the Son, it would imply that the Son was created in time, and as such, it was not co-eternal with the Father. This would essentially be an heretical Arian position, and clearly it is *not* a

view that Koutloumousianos endorses, but it is an unfortunate result of clumsy translation from Greek into English.

Overall, Chrysostom Koutloumousianos' *One and the Three: The Nature, person and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition* is an outstanding volume, well researched, and with very strong arguments. It gets very technical and difficult to follow in some places, and requires careful reading. Despite shortcomings in terminology and translation, it is a great addition to contemporary debates in ecclesiology and triadology.

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In memory of
Eka Tchanturia
1963-2016
Memory Eternal!