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Book Review
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Theologically Reading Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas: Orthodox, Ecumenical and Modern by Nikolaos Asproulis. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025. xiii + 234 pp. ISBN 978-1-0364-5005-2.

In *Theologically Reading Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas*, Nikolaos Asproulis offers us an intellectual *vita* for John Zizioulas's theological legacy and interpretation of the Orthodox understanding of church doctrines. He structures his theological presentation of Zizioulas's theological biography on three conceptual, pillar-like, dimensions: Orthodoxy, ecumenism, and modernity. Asproulis opts for this triadic presentation on the basis of his conviction that Zizioulas is one of the contemporary Orthodox theologians who was immensely versed in, and referentially learned about, the confessional and creedal doctrines of the church, especially those contained in the councils of 381 and 451 A.D. On the other hand, Zizioulas, according to Asproulis, "stands out as one of our times' most open and dialogical Orthodox theologians" (p. xi), since Zizioulas's ecumenical engagement is characterized by dialogues, not just with early patristic theology, but also with the theologies of other Christian traditions. Finally, Asproulis demonstrates the validity of his opting for his tripod's third leg, 'modernity,' by pointing to Zizioulas's focal concern about connecting the Orthodox patristic heritage to modern existential challenges and his endeavor to construct a soteriological connectedness between the past and the present for the sake of humanity's future: "Zizioulas developed his theological synthesis to address humanity's existential quests" (p. xiv).

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In his tripartite exposition, Asproulis pauses carefully at the methodological aspects and dimensions of John Zizioulas's theological concentration on eschatology and ontology from an ecclesiology-centered perspective. Zizioulas founded his centralization of the eschatological nature of God's salvific history of communion (*ecclesia*) on a strong and frank patristic personalist and trinitarian ontology gleaned directly from patristic orthodoxy. And, since Zizioulas's focus on the futural *eschaton* of God's ultimate communion did not divert him away from the divine, communal relation with humanity and creation in the present and contemporary conditions of humanity, Asproulis pays attention to the impact of Ziziloulas's eschatological-ontological preconceptions on theological anthropology, personalist theology, and the nature-person dialectic with its pneumatological nature. Asproulis takes these existence-based hermeneutics of eschatological-ontological theologization to their ultimate practical applicability when, in the last chapter of the book, he offers a theological understanding of the application of Zizioulas's project to five areas of reasoning and practice: political theology, pluralism, gender issues, climate crisis, and the theology-science dialogue. Asproulis eloquently articulates the crux of Zizioulas's theological legacy in the following words:

At the end of the day, what matters [for Zizioulas] is if our theology can fulfill human being's thirst for *theosis*, which is communion with the life of the trinitarian God, more specifically, a mutual and reciprocal encounter with God the Father in Christ through the Spirit in the banquet of the kingdom (p. xvii).

If Asproulis in the early sections of his book displays Zizioulas's theological legacy in a conscientiously descriptive manner, he offers an analytical deconstruction of Zizioulas's abovementioned theological crux in the ensuing parts of the volume. Probably one of the most accredited analytical arguments he offers is found in section 3.2.5, chapter 3, part 1, where he speaks about the hermeneutic premises of the relation between the Trinity, the Church, and the *eschaton* in Zizioulas's scheme. According to Asproulis, Zizioulas's understanding of the triadic equation of 'Trinity-Church-*Eschaton*' is grounded in his understanding of the escha-

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tological nature of the Eucharist. For Zizioulas, Asproulis argues, the Eucharist is not just a '*synaxis*' (a liturgical holy day), but primarily a *movement* towards the future, towards the *eschaton*. This eschatological dimension secures the Church's emancipation from imprisonment in any historical period and its continuous derivation of its hypostatic, personal-communal nature from the triune hypostatic reality of the God of the eschatological kingdom. The Eucharist, then, is the central, chronology-free *locus* for "the church's synthesis and link to the Trinity and the kingdom" (p. 120). This is, according to Asproulis, what makes the church "both an icon of the Trinity and an icon of the *eschaton*" (p. 122).

Ultimately, inviting in John Zizioulas's theology, according to Asproulis, remains his attempt at reasoning theologically about the modern, present human condition from the perspective of relational and personalist ontology. Asproulis is deeply aware of the place this ontology occupies in Zizioulas's overall theological *vita*, and he knows well the controversies and debates this ontology aroused among theologians and readers of Zizioulas's writings, starting from *Being as Communion*, to *Communion & Otherness*, and finally, in *Remembering the Future*. Aiming to transcend the logic of constituting being by means of nature, which according to him has dominated Western theology, Zizioulas spoke throughout his texts about an 'ontological revolution' centered in the 'being as communion' axiom of the trinitarian ontology of the patristic tradition. Zizioulas not only injected this ontology with hypostatized aspects of relationality that are derived from the Trinity, but Asproulis demonstrates that Zizioulas equally baptized his interpretation of patristic trinitarian ontology with serious eschatological dimensions and perspectives. According to Zizioulas, these eschatological aspects are manifest in the divine revelation of relational and personalist ontology in creation, thus in the realm of natural scientific reasoning. Science itself now perceives the ontological presence of relationality in nature, time and space, and in biology. In this tracing of the marks of relational-personalist ontology in the scientific, empirical realm of the natural order, Asproulis detects a unique Zizioulan attempt at offering a praiseworthy "thoughtful and constructive interpretation" of "the rich

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tradition of the undivided church," which demonstrates for Asproulis that "as a child of his time, [Zizioulas] engaged in continuous *dialogue* with the difficulties and challenges posed by the surrounding environment, addressing the *existential* demands of humanity" (p. 213).

The richness, multi-dimensionality, and quite diversified perspectives of Asproulis make his monograph a very serious invitation for scholars and readers who are already deeply and comprehensively versed in John Zizioulas's versatile writings and sophisticated discourses. This is a book which one needs to read with a sharply attentive and piercing mind, usually expected only from trained readers. This is not to discredit the book. To the contrary, it is a reliable and serious contribution, providing food-for-thought to stimulate other experts in the field to examine further and more rigorously one of the most seminal and influential Orthodox theologians in his generation.

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