

## Chapter Two

# The Father, the Ontological Principle of the Triune and One Being of God

Having studied Zizioulas' understanding of the patristic usage of the key terms *ousia*, *hypostasis* and *tropos hyparxeōs*, I turn in this chapter to his reading of the scriptural, *lex orandi* and patristic data from which he deduces the assumption of the Father's *monocausality* in the Trinity. Zizioulas holds that, although this assumption is already present in Athanasius, it is only with the Cappadocians that it is clarified in an ontological perspective free from subordinationist traits.

### *Data Learned from Scripture: God Is Father*

Zizioulas refers, albeit very briefly, to the fact that Scripture tends to identify the term 'God' with 'Father', an important fact for a biblically nourished theology. Having said that, the question remains how to understand this identification theologically: is it a primitive, undeveloped stage in the understanding of dogma or, as Zizioulas believes, a capital dogmatic datum?

### ***Old Testament: God is the God of the Covenant, Absolutely Transcendent, Free and Personal***

With regard to Old Testament divine revelation, it should be noted that Zizioulas does not address the question of the identification of God with the Father. He limits himself to pointing out five characteristics of Israel's conception of God. First of all, God is characterised by *absolute*

*transcendence*. God exists before the world and it is not possible to link his existence to it.<sup>1</sup> The second characteristic is *absolute freedom*. God is not bound by any cosmic principle of justice or order.<sup>2</sup> As a third feature, the God of Israel is *personal*: he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, always related to humanity, in relation to which he defines his identity as God the saviour.<sup>3</sup> The fourth characteristic concerns his *revelation in history*, centring on a covenant with a people.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the fifth characteristic concerns his *revelation through the commandments*. Ultimately, knowledge of God emerges not primarily from observation of the cosmos, but from God's interaction with man and history.

### ***New Testament. The God of Jesus Christ is the Father***

Zizioulas observes that the expression 'God the Father' is very frequent in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> Quoting Karl Rahner, he states that this is an exegetically indisputable fact and means that 'God' indicates the 'Father'.<sup>6</sup> The question that arises is the following. Is this due to a still embryonic, if not absent, theological understanding of God as Trinity in the Christian communities from which the New Testament writings sprang, or to Jesus himself because of a *kenōsis* that also involved the intellect, and therefore knowledge of the divine mystery? Or are we in the presence of a relevant dogmatic datum, indicating precisely the doctrine of the ontological monarchy of the Father?<sup>7</sup> The scriptural question must be set aside at this point, since Zizioulas does not go into it further, except indirectly, in relation to the *lex orandi* and patristics.

1. Cf. *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, pp. 40–41.

2. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

3. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 42.

4. The existence of the cosmos only reveals that there is a Creator (cf. *ibid.*).

5. Zizioulas cites Galatians 1:3; Philippians 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; James 1:27; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 John 3; Jude 1 (cf. *Communion and Otherness*, p. 114).

6. Cf. K. RAHNER, *The Trinity*, trans. by J. Donceel (Cambridge: Burns & Oates, 1970); K. RAHNER, 'Theos in the New Testament', in K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, Volume 1 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), pp. 79–148; cf. also J. GALOT, 'Le mystère de la personne du Père', *Gregorianum* 77, no. 1 (1996), pp. 5–31.

7. Even the hypothesis of a still very embryonic understanding of the trinitarian mystery in the New Testament does not exclude that a more developed understanding should not be based on the dogmatic datum of *ho Theos* identified with the Father. In this regard, Koutloumousianos argues that the Fathers introduced the attribution of the term 'God' to the divine

## *Data Learned from the Lex Orandi and Patristics: God as the Aitia of Trinitarian Being*

Zizioulas starts from the consideration of the scriptural understanding of the divine fatherhood in a trinitarian framework as formulated in Matthew 28:19.<sup>8</sup> The *Sitz im Leben* of the formulations expressing the divine fatherhood in a trinitarian framework is liturgical, especially baptismal. Zizioulas also observes that the idea of God as Father did not arise from 'abstract speculation' about God, but from 'ecclesial experience' and within a trinitarian framework of reference.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the focus shifts from Scripture to the *lex orandi* and the patristic testimony. With regard to the *lex orandi*, it may be observed how Zizioulas recognises, particularly in the anaphoras of the liturgies of Basil and Chrysostom, the reference of the term 'God' to the term 'Father' in the trinitarian framework, and how he recognises a theological deepening of this datum in the formulations of the Eastern Creeds. With regard to patristics, Zizioulas reads the scriptural and liturgical data as the elaboration of a precise trinitarian-patrocetric dogmatic understanding.

### ***The Ancient Eucharistic Prayers and the Eastern Creeds: One God, the Pantocrator Father***

In relation to the *lex orandi*, Zizioulas notes that the ancient Eucharistic prayers were addressed exclusively to the Father and comments as follows:

If the one God is not a particular *hypostasis*, our prayer cannot be addressed to the one God but only to the Trinity or to the 'Triunity'. But monotheism belongs to the *lex orandi*. In praying to the Trinity, we must be praying at the same time

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substance as a clearer way of safeguarding the oneness and Trinity of God, suggesting that such an attribution constitutes an almost – so to speak – pre-trinitarian formula (cf. KOUTLOUMOUSIANOS, *The One and the Three*, p. 37). The point is that the data of the *lex orandi* and the Fathers do not at all indicate an abandonment of the attribution of the term 'God' to the Father. If anything, it is very appropriate to see how the attribution of the term 'God' to substance, to the Father, as well as to the Three, can be brought back to a perspective of coherent understanding.

<sup>8</sup>. 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

<sup>9</sup>. Cf. 'The Father as Cause', p. 114.

to the one God. If the one God is not a particular *hypostasis*, the one God is left out of our prayer, since we can only pray to a particular *hypostasis* and not to a ‘Triunity’ of some kind. It is not accidental that all of the early eucharistic prayers were addressed *to the Father*. The gradual introduction of the Trinity into these prayers was never meant to obscure the truth that, in praying to the Trinity, we are ultimately praying to the one God, the Father.<sup>10</sup>

Zizioulas points to the testimony of the Eucharistic prayers of both Basil and Chrysostom, which are addressed to the Father, presented as the ‘only truly existing one’,<sup>11</sup> and supports his thesis by appeal to some specialised studies.<sup>12</sup>

For the moment I shall leave aside (until the section entitled ‘Intra-trinitarian *Taxis* under the Sign of *Meta* and *Syn*’) a second aspect of the *lex orandi* that Zizioulas considers, namely Basil’s doxology. For now I shall consider how he sees in the Eastern Creeds a significant theological deepening of the attribution of the term ‘God’ to the Father.

Zizioulas analyses the question of the idea of God the Father in the ancient Creeds<sup>13</sup> and begins his reflection by focusing on the attribute present in the expression ‘God the Father almighty’, that is,

<sup>10</sup>. Ibid., pp. 136–37.

<sup>11</sup>. Cf. «Τὸ εἶναι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου», pp. 18, 22.

<sup>12</sup>. J.A. JUNGSMANN, *Public Worship* (London: Challoner Publications, 1957) and P.F. BRADSHAW, *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997) (cf. ‘The Father as Cause’, pp. 136–37). Zizioulas points out that it was only under the influence of the Franco-Gallican liturgy that some prayers addressed to Christ arose. In his view, the anaphora is the prayer *par excellence* and those of the first centuries had no doubt in addressing it only to the Father (cf. *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, p. 68). This point is also recognised by one of his greatest critics, J.-C. Larchet, who observes, however, that this is limited only to the Eucharist, as Christ’s sacrifice offered to the Father, whereas other prayers are in fact addressed to the Trinity, to Christ or to the divine nature (cf. LARCHET, *Personne et nature*, pp. 300–1). On Zizioulas’ conviction that the prayer *par excellence* is the Eucharistic prayer and fully expresses the salvific economy, that is, the work of Christ and the Church, and all that exists, which will be offered to ‘God the Father’, see ‘The Father as Cause’, p. 137, where Zizioulas cites 1 Corinthians 15:24 and Ephesians 2:18.

<sup>13</sup>. See, for example, ‘The Father as Cause’, pp. 113–18.

on 'almighty'. Does this refer to 'God' or to the 'Father'? If, as we have seen, Zizioulas notes that the expression 'God the Father' is frequent in the New Testament, he also points out that the expression 'Almighty Father' is not present in either the New or the Old Testament.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the expressions 'Almighty God' or 'Almighty Lord' are present in the Old Testament (in the Septuagint) and also in the New (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 1:8; etc.). So why was the formula 'God the Father Almighty' introduced? According to Zizioulas, it originated under the influence of the Septuagint and probably as a response to Gnosticism, which did not recognise the direct involvement of the Father in creation. The expression 'Almighty God' therefore refers to *oikonomia*, to God's creative work, while the expression 'God the Father' refers to *theologia*, to God's being in itself. In this regard, Zizioulas quotes Cyril of Jerusalem who observes that the word 'Father' can only be used improperly to indicate God's relationship with humanity;<sup>15</sup> indeed, Jesus' distinction already mentioned between 'my Father' and 'your Father' is indicative of this.

In addition, Zizioulas highlights two aspects distinguishing the Greek outlook from the Latin that further clarify the issue. The concept of fatherhood can be apprehended according to an ontological or moral content: the former is peculiar to the Greek Fathers and will be examined later; the latter is more characteristic of the Latin Fathers.<sup>16</sup> The concept of omnipotence is expressed in the Latin world by the term *omnipotens* which indicates the power to act, *potestas*; in the Greek world by the term παντοκράτωρ (and not παντοδύναμος) which indicates the capacity to embrace, to contain, to establish relationships of communion and love.<sup>17</sup> Omnipotence is not a matter of *potestas* or *actus* but of *communio*. Zizioulas cites Irenaeus, who refers to the Father

<sup>14</sup>. Zizioulas cites in his support KELLY, *Early Christian Creeds*, pp. 132f.

<sup>15</sup>. Cf. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catecheses* 7.4f. (PG 33, 608f.); ATHANASIUS, *Oratio contra Arianos* II.32 (PG 26, 213f.); II.24–26 (PG 26, 197f.); III.66 (PG 26, 461f.); 'The Father as Cause', p. 114.

<sup>16</sup>. For Augustine, God is God through power, Father through goodness (cf. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Sermo* 213.1 [PL 38, 1060]). For Tertullian, God has not always been Father (cf. TERTULLIAN, *Contra Hermogenem*, III.4 [CChr. SL 1, 399]) (cf. 'The Father as Cause', p. 114). While it is true that the Latins presented divine paternity in the sense that for Zizioulas is 'moral', this does not mean that the ontological sense is absent in them.

<sup>17</sup>. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 116.

as the one who ‘contains all things’,<sup>18</sup> and Theophilus of Antioch, who translates παντοκράτωρ as ‘all-embracing’.<sup>19</sup>

The most important aspect for Zizioulas is the difference between the Western and the Eastern Creeds with regard to the presence, in the latter, of the term ‘one’ – ἓνα – before the term ‘God’. The Western Creeds read ‘*Credo in deum patrem omnipotentem*’, the Eastern, ‘Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἓνα Θεὸν πατέρα παντοκράτωρα’. For the Son, the expression ‘one Lord Jesus Christ’ is frequently used; for the Holy Spirit, ‘one Holy Spirit’. According to Zizioulas, it is difficult to establish the reason for the addition in the Eastern Creed of the term ‘ἓνα’ before the term ‘πατέρα’. He is not convinced either by the hypothesis that the Eastern Creeds are more theological than the Western ones, or by the hypothesis that the former are more focused on God’s being and the latter on action *ad extra*. In any case, according to Zizioulas, this fact cannot escape the theologian. It is dense with dogmatic content, since it is read as an attestation of the connection of divine unity to divine paternity.<sup>20</sup> This is confirmed by Kelly:

R [the Roman Creed] stands apart from later creeds because of its failure to emphasize the oneness of God the Father. ... Almost without exception the Eastern practice is to assert belief in ONE GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY. ... The main exceptions to the latter point are the Egyptian creeds of Arius, St Macarius and, possibly, of St Alexander of Alexandria; and it is not surprising to find the Egyptian church reflecting Roman liturgical oddities.<sup>21</sup>

This Eastern perspective would have been exposed to Arian interpretations, according to Zizioulas, or Sabellian, according to Kelly. They could be avoided, according to him, either by attributing the expression ‘one God’ to the common substance or by deepening the doctrine of the ontological monarchy of the Father, as the Cappadocians did.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; ‘*omnia continet*’ (IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Adversus Haereses*, II.I.5 [PG 7, 712B]).

<sup>19</sup> ‘The Father as Cause’, p. 116); τὰ πάντα ... ἐμπεριέχει (THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH, *Ad Autolyicum*, I.4 [PG 6, 1029B]).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. ‘The Father as Cause’, p. 117.

<sup>21</sup> KELLY, *Early Christian Creeds*, p. 195.

Having said that, it is necessary to verify how Zizioulas reads the patristic doctrine of the ontological monarchy of the Father. Before focusing on the Cappadocians, the privileged sources of reference, we shall consider some of Zizioulas' reflections on Athanasius, whom he regards as linked to the Cappadocians in a relationship of *continuity within discontinuity*.

### ***Athanasius: The Father as Pēgē and Archē of the Trinity***

Zizioulas does not overlook the fact that the idea of God as Father was present both in classical Greek philosophy and in pre-Nicene and Nicene theology, especially that of Athanasius.<sup>22</sup>

With the Nicene Creed it was made clear that the Father's paternity towards the Son is eternal and that it is this that grounds God's paternity towards the world. With Athanasius, the Father is understood as the only principle of the Son, without the possibility of a principle prior to the Father: not only sonship, as Zizioulas points out, but also paternity belongs to the divine essence. In fact, in relation to the monarchy of the Father, Athanasius uses the terms *archē* (principle or origin) and *pēgē* (source), terms also present in the West but with a more impersonal meaning, unlike the Cappadocians who introduce the term *aitia* (cause) which, although derived from Neoplatonism, is profoundly redefined.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 'The Father as Cause', pp. 113–18. Plato had already used the term Father to indicate 'the supreme being in whom everything has its origin' (W. KASPER, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), p. 145; PLATO, *Timaeus*, 27d-29d); in Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, the Father is 'the supreme reality beyond being' (KASPER, *The God of Jesus Christ*, p. 145); in Stoicism, God as Father expresses 'the unity of nature between man and the world, the parental bond that binds all human beings together' (ibid.). In the pre-Nicene period, the attribution of God as Father is linked to the fact of creation, as in CLEMENT OF ROME (*1 Clement*, 19.2–3), to the relationship between God and Jesus, as in IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (*Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4). Justin connects the idea of God the Father with the generation of the Son (JUSTIN, *Apology*, II.6.3–5), therefore, the Creator is the Father who generates the *Logos* but, as in Tertullian, it is clearly stated that the Father has not always been the Father. The eternity of the Father's being, on the other hand, is affirmed by Origen (ORIGEN, *In Ioannem*, II.2.17–18), but with a subordinationist emphasis. Only the Father is 'God in himself' (αὐτόθεος), the Son and the Holy Spirit being God insofar as divinity is communicated to them by the one who is God in himself.

<sup>23</sup> 'One Single Source: An Orthodox Response to the Clarification on the Filioque', in *The One and the Many*, pp. 41–45, at p. 42.



Athanasius' belief, in line with Nicaea, that the Son was begotten from the substance of the Father and not simply from the Father, in Zizioulas' view, is due both to a certain substantialist approach and to the need to distinguish between creation and the eternal generation of the Son. It may be asked, however, whether the simple equation Athanasius = substantialist (and Cappadocians = personalist) is not too schematic. G.L. Prestige, for example, believes that for Athanasius, as for Nicaea, the formulation of the generation of the Son 'from the substance of the Father', which aimed at protecting the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, is exactly equivalent to the affirmation of the generation 'from the Father',<sup>24</sup> for when the emanationist interpretation of an *ousia* that divides or precedes the persons is excluded, it becomes difficult to distinguish the generation 'from the Father' from the generation 'from the substance of the Father'. As we shall see, for Zizioulas the expression preferred by the Cappadocians, namely 'from the Father', is a development of the personalist perspective. Nevertheless, the maintenance of the connection between *ousia* and generation, if this does not imply the affirmation of the priority of an impersonal substance over *hypostaseis*, has the merit of showing how the substantivist level is integrated into the personalist one. This again is the view of Prestige, who writes in relation to Athanasius: 'He [the Son] thus belongs to the *ousia* of the Father and is offspring out of it. ... The Son is a presentation of the divine substance by derivation and in real distinction.'<sup>25</sup> Generation from the *ousia* of the Father does not necessarily undermine the understanding of the derivation of the Son, or of the Holy Spirit, as a process of personal distinction, nor does it attribute a causative role to the *ousia*. In Athanasius the generation of the Son from the Father's *ousia* is the product of the Father's will. It can therefore be assumed that the doctrine of the monarchy of the Father, albeit within a framework of understanding still marked by a certain substantialism, is already present in Athanasius.

***Basil of Caesarea: The Father, the One who gives to Another the 'Archē tou Einai'***

Zizioulas points out first that the framework of dogmatic history in which the Cappadocians, and Basil *in primis*, are inserted is characterised, on the one hand, by the Athanasian heritage (i.e. the affirmation of the relational character of substance) and, on the other, by the challenge posed by Sabellius, with his postulation of a single *prosōpon* ('person'

<sup>24</sup> Cf. PRESTIGE, *God in Patristic Thought*, p. 195.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 217–18.



or 'role') in God,<sup>26</sup> and also by Eunomius with his identification of the ingenerate Father with the divine nature, with the consequent exclusion of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Godhead.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the question of the ontological monarchy of the Father, Zizioulas concentrates more on Nazianzen, since among the Cappadocians he is the one who has most developed a reflection on this aspect,<sup>28</sup> but he also cites the teaching of Basil of Caesarea. In *De Spiritu Sancto*, Basil concentrates on the question of the consubstantiality of the Three, through the 'personalist' register of co-glorification, while in *Contra Eunomium* he deepens the assumption of the causality of the Father in the trinitarian existence. The Basilian testimony is, moreover, of great importance, since it is undeniable that the bishop of Caesarea was responsible for setting the general direction of the theological line followed by Nazianzen and Nyssen.<sup>29</sup>

### The Unity of God in Relation to *Ousia*

Zizioulas acknowledges that the Cappadocians understood the substance of God with reference to divine unity.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore difficult to conclude that he does not recognise in the Fathers any place for nature or that he attributes to it a negative meaning, theorising a separation or dialectical relationship between person and nature in God. The

<sup>26</sup>. 'The Trinity and Personhood', in *Communion and Otherness*, pp. 156–59.

<sup>27</sup>. Cf. 'The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today', in *The One and the Many*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>. Zizioulas explicitly states that he refers in particular to Nazianzen (cf. 'The Father as Cause', p. 131). It is difficult to agree with Najib Awad when he states without further argument that it is Basil who emphasises the monarchy of the Father, in opposition to Nazianzen, who instead follows Athanasius in attesting to the centrality of the doctrine of *homoousion* (cf. N.G. AWAD, 'Between Subordination and Koinonia: Toward a New Reading of the Cappadocian Theology', *Modern Theology* 23, no. 2 [2007], pp. 181–204).

<sup>29</sup>. Cf. for example, MILANO, *Persona in teologia*, p. 125.

<sup>30</sup>. Cf. 'The Father as Cause', p. 118. A few years prior to this writing, he had expressed himself in a somewhat misleading way: 'If we speak of the one God as the one *ousia* that is shared by three persons, we make the Trinity logically secondary from an ontological point of view' ('The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today', in *The One and the Many*, p. 10). As will be seen, the Cappadocians do speak of the unity/oneness of God with reference to the one substance, but, as Zizioulas points out in 'The Father as Cause', on the basis of the monarchy of the Father.

point is that, according to Zizioulas, the Cappadocians insisted on the Father, rather than the divine *ousia*, as the *principle/cause* (*archē/aitia*) of the trinitarian existence,<sup>31</sup> and for this reason he does not go on to cite patristic statements on substance in relation to divine unity. Basil first emphasises the connection between *ousia* – also expressed by the term ‘divinity’ (*theotēs*) – and divine unity. He expresses himself as follows: ‘in the confession of the one Godhead in everything and for everything unity is safeguarded’,<sup>32</sup> since faith teaches us ‘distinction in *hypostasis* and union in *ousia* ... the concept of commonality refers to *ousia*’.<sup>33</sup> However, unity is also described, in a second move, in terms of the equality of the divine persons and their mutual indwelling: ‘The Son is in the Father, the Father is in the Son; since the latter is such as the former is, and the former is such as the latter is, and in this their unity lies.’<sup>34</sup> A first fundamental datum is therefore that, if the unity of God is referred to *ousia*, the substantialist and personalist registers are so deeply connected that they presuppose each other.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. ‘The Father as Cause’, p. 119. Note BASIL OF CAESAREA, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 18.45 (PG 32, 149BC) and Fr Chrysostomos Koutloumousianos’ comments on it (KOUTLOUMOUSIANOS, *The One and the Three*, p. 27). Basil refers unity to the *koinon tēs physeōs*, yet it is not so clear that he traces the monarchy of the Father back to nature. In worshipping the God from God (process of derivation), we confess the proper character of *hypostaseis* (distinction and *taxis*) and remain faithful to the monarchy. The latter can mean either consubstantiality (the *hypostaseis*, although derived, are consubstantial) or the principality of the Father (in the process of derivation the monarchy is affirmed to be of the Father). The latter reading seems more likely than the former. In this sense it is the monarchy of the Father that grounds consubstantiality, the being one of the Father and the Son *kata to koinon tēs physeōs*. Note that the accusative with κατὰ indicates conformity (‘according to’, ‘in accordance with’), not agency (‘by means of’/‘by virtue of’) as in the case of διὰ. The Father and the Son are said to be ‘one’ according to identity of substance, not in virtue of it.

<sup>32</sup> [Ω]στε δι’ ὅλου καὶ τὴν ἐνότητα σώζεσθαι ἐν τῇ τῆς μιᾶς θεότητος ὁμολογία (BASIL OF CAESAREA, *Ep.* 236.6 [PG 32, 884B]).

<sup>33</sup> [Τ]ὸ κεχωρισμένον ἐν ὑποστάσει καὶ τὸ συνημμένον ἐν τῇ οὐσίᾳ ... ὁ μὲν τῆς κοινότητος λόγος εἰς τὴν οὐσίαν ἀνάγεται (BASIL OF CAESAREA, *Ep.* 38.5 [PG 32, 336BC]).

<sup>34</sup> Υἱὸς γάρ ἐν τῷ Πατρὶ, καὶ Πατὴρ ἐν Υἱῷ, ἐπειδὴ καὶ οὗτος τοιοῦτος, οἷος ἐκεῖνος, κάκεῖνος οἷοσπερ οὗτος, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τὸ ἓν (BASIL OF CAESAREA, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 18.45 [PG 32, 149B]). As we have seen, Basil continues: