

Johannes Zachhuber, *The Rise of the Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020, 384 pp.

This book presents an important contribution to the early Christian studies: Johannes Zachhuber (henceforth Z.) offers an erudite overview and a comprehensive analysis of what we can define “Patristic” or “Christian Philosophy”. The history of this idea has its roots in the theological speculation developed in the period from the Cappadocian Fathers (IV century) until John of Damascus (VIII century). The pivotal objectives of this research are to explore the Patristic thought in light of the late antique background, with a focus on the philosophical nature of the Christian writers between the IV and VIII centuries, and to understand the Patristic theology as one of the most important philosophical schools in the late antiquity, with its own history, its own tradition, and its own contents. In this regard, the research takes into account the following two main issues: 1) the Trinitarian thought and the Cappadocian Father’s new ontology as the earliest and genuine version of the Christian philosophy, which Z. names as the “classical theory” in the course of the research; 2) the Christological debates about the meanings of individuality and human-divine nature of Christ after the IV century as the apex of the groundbreaking philosophical and Christian doctrine on the basis of the Cappadocians’ ontology. The fascinating interplay between the aforesaid issues expresses, according to Z., the heartbeat of the philosophical Patristic theory.

The book consists of 3 main parts and 10 chapters. The part I (chps. 1-3) deals with the historical context of the Cappadocians and their Christology; the part II (chps. 4-6) discusses the philosophical hints of the cases against the Chalcedonian philosophy; finally, the part III (chps. 7-10) has to do with the transformations of the Cappadocians’ theory in the period between the VI and VIII centuries, with a

particular attention to the main philosophical positions in defence of the Chalcedonian formula.

In the opening chapter (chp. 1) Z. outlines the plan and the originality of the research. First, he criticizes those studies which overestimate the dependence of the early Christianity upon the ancient pagan schools, e.g. Von Ivánka, especially upon Plato and Aristotle in antiquity, Plotinus and Proclus in late antiquity. Following the results of the recent scholarship, e.g. G. Karamanolis, Z. claims that the early Christian writers are to be included in the late antique cultural context and studied in the same way as we generally study the ancient philosophers. Secondly, Z. argues that the ambiguity concerning the philosophical or theological nature of the Patristic thought is eliminated by the historical contextualisation. Indeed, the disciplinary divide between philosophy and theology originates from the period of the Universities in the Middle Ages; on the contrary, during the imperial era, many pagan authors consider the Christian theology as a kind of philosophy, while the Christians themselves classify their inquiry as the highest and most authentic kind of philosophy.

The chps. 2 and 3 of the book are entirely devoted to the foundation of the Christian philosophy on the basis of the Cappadocian Fathers in the IV century (Basil of Cesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) until the Christological controversies and the Council of Chalcedon.

The chp. 2 focuses on the theoretical bases of the Cappadocians' philosophy regarded as the most influential philosophical system in the history of the Eastern Christianity. These bases are found in some significant positions of the early Christianity, as the original contribution of Origen of Alexandria to the notion of hypostasis, Athanasius' and Apollinarius' strategy of harmonization between the Nicene terminology and the Origenist tradition, and ultimately the Cappadocians' struggle against Eunomius in respect to the ontological status of the second Person in the Trinitarian formula. Z. highlights that the core of the Cappadocians' philosophy is the conceptual

theorisation of “essence” (*ousia*) shared by many individuals or “hypostases” (*hypostaseis*) which explicates its existence through them – this is the theoretical heart of the Cappadocians’ Trinitarian ontology, which a new metaphysical paradigm originates from. The philosophical structure formulated by the Cappadocians is based on a new conception of the relationship between *ousia* and hypostasis, which Z. accurately illustrates with two different perspectives, called “abstract” and “concrete” accounts. The former corresponds to Basil’s logical and linguistic theories, whereas the latter corresponds to Gregory of Nyssa’s physical and metaphysical arguments concerning the concrete individual existence grounded upon the universal being.

The chp. 3 considers the philosophical extent of the Cappadocians’ theory in relation to the Christological questions arising in the course of the first half of the V century, until the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Here Z. refers mainly to Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret of Cyrus, two leading personalities of the theological debates at that time, and proves that the Cappadocians’ paradigm is not merely accepted in the Christological controversies, but it provides the very ontological foundation of the discussion about the human-divine nature of Christ. For Z., the Cappadocians’ philosophical doctrines, mainly the ontological coordination within the Trinity and the relation between the individual and the universal, both in the “abstract” and in the “concrete” accounts, became a “classical” benchmark in the Christian world in the V century.

The part II takes into account the theological voices in contrast with the Chalcedonian version of the Christian dogma. This part also aims to shed light on the philosophical nature of those theological systems which are antagonistic to the Chalcedonism and, consequently, give room to them in the history of the Patristic philosophy. The first case which is studied by Z. is Severus of Antioch, especially his “Myaphisitism” (chp. 4) – an expression which Z. prefers in spite of the canonical “Monophysitism”, that assumes the sole presence of the divine nature in Christ –, significant example of the

philosophical transformations occurred in the Patristic tradition after the doctrinal debates about the symbol of Chalcedon. The key idea of Myaphisitism is a new understanding of “nature” (*physis*), which is identified with hypostasis and, therefore, is intended to denote the concrete individuality. As Z. stresses out, the Myaphisitism is not a breakthrough moment in the Christian philosophical tradition opened by the Cappadocians’ thought, but a case of great change within this tradition. Thus, Z. offers a reason for the multiple quotations made by Severus on the authority of the writings of the Cappadocians to which the Myaphisite attempts to accord his own view, not without difficulty.

John Philoponus, analysed by Z. in the chp. 5, is an additional and impressive example of reassessment of the classical theory within the history of Patristics. The revision of the classical model is carried out by Philoponus’ use of the Aristotelian philosophy, namely, a Neoplatonic reading of Aristotle’s *Categories* and the Stagirite’s view about the relation between individuals, species and genera. Following the Aristotelian assumption that only the individuals exist, the Christian philosopher accepts the Myaphisitism in line with the Christological approach of Severus and, as concerns the Trinitarian issue, puts forward an anti-Nicene and anti-Chalcedonian theory, that is, the so called “Tritheism”.

Further, in the chp. 6 Z. explores the cases of Damian of Alexandria, whose original theories belong to the aforementioned myaphisite reassessment of the classical theory, according to which the hypostasis is a “bundle of properties”, inherent to a common “essence” (*ousia*), and of Peter of Callinicus, who defines the hypostasis as a “substrate of properties”. In light of these cases Z. states that Myaphisitism is challenging for the Chalcedonian doctrine and is a sign of that dynamism which characterizes the Christian philosophy in the V and VI centuries. Thanks to some relevant changes in the classical theory, the Miaphysite Christians shift the focus from the metaphysical meaning of the universal being to the significance of the individual existence.

The part III is dedicated to that expression of the Patristic philosophy which rises from the defence of the doctrines formulated in the course of the Council of Chalcedon and re-affirmed in the Council of Constantinople. In the reading of Z., the Christian theologians considered in this section put forward an important contribution to the Cappadocians' classical theory. In the chp. 7, Z. explores the cases of John the Grammarian of Cesarea and Leontius of Byzantium, two writers who carry the Chalcedonian flag against the opponents of the doctrine formulated in the Council of Chalcedon. Regards John the Grammarian, Z. highlights the significance of the classical theory in the field of Christology, particularly in its "abstract account". Thus, the human and divine natures of Christ are claimed as universal substances realised in a unique hypostasis, namely, that of the Logos. Concerning Leontius, Z. points out that he remains consistent with the classical paradigm in respect to the relation between universal (*ousia* and *physis*) and particular (*hypostasis* or *prosopon*), though his writings attest to a singular theory of Christological "hypostatization" (*enhypostaton*) according to which divinity and humanity participate in the totality of Christ.

A further development of the Christian philosophy about the subsequent reception of the Council of Chalcedon is examined by Z. in the chp. 8.: he evidences that in this period it is possible to acknowledge the most interesting evolutions in the Patristic philosophy as the result of a indepth reassessment of the Cappadocians' theories and, in addition, as the consequence of the widespread use of the Aristotelian logic in the Christological debates. In this context key roles are played by Pamphilus the Theologian, who speaks of the ontological duality of substance and accident instead of the Cappadocians' relation between *ousia* and hypostasis, of Theodore of Raithu, who admits the existence of an individual *ousia*, and of Leontius of Jerusalem, who defines the hypostasis in terms of individual property as the ontological basis of Christological argument. Z. includes these Christian writers in what he calls the "hidden revolution" of the VI and VII centuries.

As far as the chp. 9 is concerned, according to Z., the apex of the Patristic thought in the Chalcedonian version is found in the philosophical systems of Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus. Z. believes that these are the founders of a new stage in the history of Christian thought, whose legacy reaches up to the Modern Age, since they are responsible for an epoch-making synthesis between the Cappadocians' classical theory and the well-known *Corpus Dionysiacum*. On the one hand, Maximus suggests a throwback to the bases of the Cappadocians' Trinitarian ontology in light of the equivalence *ousia*/universal nature and hypostasis/individual existence. On the other hand, John emphasizes the classical difference between essence or being and individuality, and furthermore he suggests an anti-Aristotelian and anti-pagan "ontology of hypostasis", with reference to the great Patristic Cappadocian tradition in that multi-religious scenario such as Umayyad Caliphate at the turn of the VII and VIII centuries.

The final chp. 10 contains an overview of the major achievements of the research and an outlook of the historical-philosophical and historical-religious outcomes which the book intends to develop in the fields of Patristics and early Christian studies. As it is evident from the research of Z., the post-Chalcedonian Christological doctrines, which originate from the speculation of the Cappadocian Fathers, are an undoubted novelty in the history of the Western thought. At the very end of the book, Z. suggests four possible scenarios of the reception of the Patristic philosophy: Byzantium; the Islamic world; the Western Middle Ages; the Early Modernity, and underscores that the study of these issues would increase the significance of Patristics for the worldwide humanistic culture.

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