FROM *HOMOOUSION* TO *HOMOHYPOSTATON*:
PATRIARCH METHODIUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND
POST-PATRISTIC TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Dirk Krausmüller, Cardiff University (dkrausmuller@hotmail.com)

Abstract: This article attempts to demonstrate that the ninth-century patriarch Methodius of Constantinople undertook a radical deconstruction of the conceptual framework of traditional Trinitarian theology, which resulted in the subversion of all recognisable differences between the second and the third person of the Trinity. It consists of three parts: a detailed analysis of a Trinitarian excursus in Methodius' *Life* of the Iconophile confessor Euthymius of Sardes, which pays close attention to terminological and syntactical ambiguities; a comparison of this excursus with similar discussions by other authors of the time; and the identification of developments in the Late Antique theological discourse that can explain Methodius' particular understanding of the Trinity.

Following decades of bitter controversy the Second Ecumenical Council declared in 381 that the Christian God was three persons sharing one common divinity. This formula proved to be a lasting success and eventually came to be recognised by all Christian communities. By contrast, the conceptual framework that explained and justified it fared much less well: based on a highly complex and idiosyncratic combination of disparate philosophical notions, it caused great difficulties to later theologians who struggled to make sense of it.[1]

In the sixth century this obscurity resulted in a new controversy when theologians such as John Philoponus proposed a 'Tritheistic' interpretation of the Trinity and the defenders of the traditional view either fell into the 'Sabellian' trap or tried to

---

[1] Contemporary scholarship has proposed several conflicting interpretations. Cf. the most recent interpretation by J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 46; Leiden, Boston, Cologne, 2000), pp. 17-122.

solve the problem by mere *fiat*.[2] Tritheism was finally overcome both in the Mono-physite and in the Chalcedonian churches (although with questionable success), but this does not mean that Trinitarian speculation came to an end. In a previous publication I have argued that it was alive and well in the seventh century when Leontius of Jerusalem proposed a radical reinterpretation of the inner-Trinitarian relations through substitution of the conventional essentialist and static framework with a new voluntaristic and developmental one.[3] In this article I will attempt to show that the discussion continued into the eighth and ninth centuries. These centuries are even less well studied than the immediately preceding period and there has been a tendency to focus on creedal statements and to assume that these statements express the views of the authors who quoted them.[4] It goes without saying that this approach is methodologically unsound. Creedal formulae are shibboleths of orthodoxy and can therefore not be taken as evidence that their content was truly accepted or even understood. For a proper evaluation of an author's views on the Trinity we must instead look at passages where he presents his views in the form of an argument and we must analyse his statements as care-fully as those of authors of the fourth and fifth centuries instead of being satisfied with superficial readings.

In what follows I will focus on Methodius of Syracuse, a monk and patriarchal deacon in Constantinople who rose to prominence as one of the leaders of the re-sistance against official Iconoclasm in the early ninth century and who as patriarch was later responsible for the restoration of the cult of images in the Orthodox Church.[5] Methodius was not only a church politician but also a prolific author of saints' lives and religious poems. I have written elsewhere about his anthropological speculations, arguing that they are highly original reinterpretations of Patristic concepts with the aim of making these concepts relevant in the radically changed world of the Early Middle Ages.[6] Now I hope to show that his views on the Trinity are no less original and that he embarks on a radical deconstruction of the conceptual framework of traditional Trinitarian theology, which results in the subversion of all recognisable differences between the second and the third person of the Trinity. In order to make my case I will analyse a passage in a Trinitarian excursus in Methodius' *Life* of the Iconophile confessor Euthymius of Sardes, establish the function of this passage within its context, compare Methodius' treatment of the

---

[2] For a brief overview of the controversy cf. R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey, L. R. Wickham, *Peter of Callinicum. Anti-Tritheist Dossier* (OLA 10; Leuven, 1981), pp. 20-33.

[3] D. Krausmüller, 'Divine self-invention: Leontius of Jerusalem's reinterpretation of the Patristic model of the Christian God', *The Journal of Theological Studies. New Series* 57 (2006), pp. 526-45.

[4] Cf. e.g. H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, 12.2.1 ; Munich, 1959), p. 308, on John of Damascus.

[5] For Methodius' biography and writings, cf. R.-J. Lilie, C. Ludwig, Th. Pratsch, I. Rochow, F. Winkelmann, *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit,* I.3: *Leon – Placentius* (Berlin and New York, 2000), pp. 233-239, no. 4977, with literature.

[6] Cf. D. Krausmüller, 'Divine sex: Patriarch Methodios's concept of virginity', in L. James (ed.), *Desire and Denial in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 57-65; D. Krausmüller, 'Exegeting the *Passio* of St Agatha: Patriarch Methodius († 847) on sexual differentiation and the perfect "man"', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 33 (2009) 1-16.

topic with similar discussions by other authors of the time, and identify develop-ments in the Late Antique theological discourse that can explain his particular understanding of the Trinity.

I have chosen to start with the in-depth analysis of just a few lines of text because Methodius is an extremely demanding author. His intentions reveal themselves only to the attentive reader who is prepared to fill the gaps in his often incomplete statements.[7] This task is not made any easier by the way in which Methodius presents his argument. It could be said that he was the Heidegger of his time: he coins new words or uses existing words in unexpected ways and he deliberately creates ambiguity at the syntactical and lexicographical levels.[8] In what follows I have attempted to make my case without involving these features so as not to encumber the discussion with long digressions, but it has not always been possible to exclude them altogether.

<div align="center">I.</div>

The passage in the *Life* of Euthymius of Sardes that I have chosen as my starting point is part of an excursus about the divine image in man, which is presented in the form of an exegesis of Genesis 1:26.[9] Methodius starts from the traditional view that the divine image in man is to be identified with his λογικόν but then adds that the formula κατ' εἰκόνα in Genesis 1:26 must not be understood as referring solely to the Word as the second person of the Trinity.[10] This rejection of a well-established interpretation of the verse is based on the following considerations. Firstly there is the grammatical argument that the pronoun ἡμετέραν and the verb ποιήσωμεν do not refer to two persons but at least to three,[11] and secondly Methodius reasons that if man were merely λογικός he would only be the image of the second person of the Trinity, which cannot exist on its own, and supports this contention with the observation that in man, too, the λόγος cannot function without the 'mind' (νοῦς) from which it issues forth and the 'drawing of breath' (ἀερία ὁλκή), which accompanies it.[12] With this comparison Methodius introduces the concept of the *Imago Trinitatis*, which sees Father, Son and Spirit and their relations with each other reflected in the human mind, word and breath.[13]

---

[7] Cf. D. Krausmüller, 'Being, seeming and becoming: Patriarch Methodius on divine impersonation of angels and souls and the Origenist alternative', forthcoming in *Byzantion*.

[8] D. Krausmüller, 'Strategies of equivocation and the construction of multiple meanings in Middle Byzantine texts', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 56 (2006), pp. 1-11.

[9] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 32-35, ed. and trans. J. Gouillard, 'La vie d'Euthyme de Sardes (+ 831), un œuvre du patriarche Méthode', *Travaux et Mémoires* 10 (1987), pp. 1-101, esp. pp. 67-73.651-752.

[10] Cf. e.g. Anastasius of Sinai, *Sermo* II.1, ed. K.-H. Uthemann, *Anastasii Sinaitae sermones duo in constitutionem hominis secundum imaginem Dei necnon opuscula adversus monotheletas* (CC. SG, 12; Turnhout and Leuven, 1985), p. 39, ll. 63-68.

[11] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 69, ll. 681-85.

[12] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 69, ll. 686-91.

[13] Cf. L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and mediator: the theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis, 25; Lund, 1965), pp. 137-39.

This concept, which had already been employed by Gregory of Nazianzus,[14] was very popular in the late Patristic discourse and is regularly found in authors such as Anastasius of Antioch, Maximus the Confessor, Anastasius of Sinai and John of Damascus.[15] In Methodius' case its adaptation results in a shift in the meaning of the terms λογικόν and λόγος: whereas in Late Antique Christian texts the two words had denoted 'rationality' and 'reason', Methodius understands λογικόν in its etymological sense as 'wordliness',[16] and he identifies the human λόγος with the 'uttered word' (προφορικὸς λόγος).[17] This re-interpretation has repercussions for the divine archetype: by linking the distinctions between the three divine persons to articulated speech and by discussing them in the context of creation Methodius gives the impression that these distinctions are bound up with the divine operations *ad extra*, which implies a modalist understanding of the Trinity.

While being of questionable orthodoxy, such a position would still be well within the parameters of the Late Antique Christian discourse. However, detailed analysis of one sentence within the excursus shows that this is not Methodius' last word on the topic and that he aims at subverting the very framework on which traditional Trinitarian theology is based:

ἀλλὰ τί φησιν ἡ γραφή, μᾶλλον δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ· ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν; ἔχει γὰρ ἀληθῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα διὰ τοῦ λογικοῦ ὡς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου δημιουργηθεὶς λογικῶς, ὅπερ λογικὸν ἀληθέστατα χωρὶς νοῦ τοῦ ὡς πατρὸς καὶ ἀερίας ὁλκῆς τῆς ὡς πνεύματος καθὰ ἔφαμεν οὔτε κινεῖται οὔτ' ἐνεργεῖ πώποτε ἐπειδὴ καὶ ὁ δημιουργὸς θεὸς λόγος ἐκ νοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς προβέβληται καὶ εἰς ζωοποίησιν τῶν ἁπάντων ἐγνώρισται ὡς συνδημιουργὸν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ ὅπερ εἷς θεὸς σὺν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ὡμολόγηται.[18]

---

[14] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* XXIII.11, ed. and trans. J. Mossay, *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 20-23* (SC, 270; Paris, 1980), p. 302, ll. 4-8: μίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ... φύσιν θεότητος ἀνάρχῳ καὶ γεννήσει καὶ προόδῳ γνωριζομένην ὡς νῷ τῷ ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ λόγῳ καὶ πνεύματι.

[15] Cf. e.g. Anastasius of Antioch, *Expositio dogmatica* I.31, ed. S. N. Sakkos, *Anastasii I Antiocheni opera omnia genuina quae supersunt* (Salonica, 1976), p. 26, ll. 22-24: λόγος γὰρ χωρὶς πνεύματος οὐκ ἔστιν, ὡς οὐδὲ νοῦς χωρὶς λόγου· νοῦν δέ φαμεν τὸν πατέρα τοῦ λόγου, νοῦν ἐν ᾧ ὁ λόγος μεθ' οὗ τὸ πνεῦμα; Maximus, *Ambigua* 7, *PG* 91, 1088A: ὡς νοῖ τῷ μεγάλῳ καὶ λόγῳ καὶ πνεύματι τὸν ἡμέτερον νοῦν τε καὶ λόγον καὶ πνεῦμα ... προσχωρήσαντες; John of Damascus, *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus*, 30, ed. B. Kotter, *Johannes von Damaskos, Schriften*, IV: *Opera polemica, Liber de haeresibus* (PTS, 22; Berlin, 1981), pp. 215-16: κατὰ πόσους τρόπους λέγεται τό κατ' εἰκόνα ... κατὰ τὸ γεννᾶν τὸν νοῦν λόγον καὶ προβάλλειν πνεῦμα. Cf. also the eighth-century Pseudo-Athanasian *Sermon on the Annunciation*, 4, *PG* 28, 921C: καὶ ὥσπερ πάλιν εἰς τὸν κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γενόμενον ἄνθρωπον ἀποβλέποντες ἅμα τοῦτον νοῦν καὶ λόγον καὶ πνεῦμα καθορῶμεν.

[16] Gouillard translates λογικόν as 'la faculté de verbe', but states in footnote 135 on page 70: 'On aimerait traduire par "verbéité".'

[17] Twice in the excursus Methodius uses the formula προφορικὸς καὶ σοφὸς λόγος, cf. *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, pp. 69-71, ll. 707-8, The notion of 'wisdom' is usually closely related to rationality but since it is combined with 'articulate' it is more likely to refer to Proverbs 10:13: ὃς ἐκ χειλέων προφέρει σοφίαν ῥάβδῳ τύπτει ἄνδρα ἀκάρδιον.

[18] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 69, ll. 692-98.

But why does Scripture or rather the God and Father say: 'Let us make man according to our image and according to our likeness'? For man has indeed the (sc. status of being) according to the image through his 'wordliness' as having been created by the God Word in a 'wordly' manner, which 'wordliness', as we have said, neither moves nor operates at any time without the mind as father and the drawing of breath as spirit, since the creator God Word, too, is projected from the mind, that is, the Father, and recognised is for the vivification of all things as being co-creator with the Father and the Son that which is confessed as one God with the Father and the Son.[19]

This sentence consists of two parts, a main clause and a subordinate clause introduced by the conjunction ἐπειδή. The main clause merely sums up the results of the previous discussion. By contrast, the subordinate clause introduces an aspect that Methodius had not yet set out in detail, namely the inner-Trinitarian relations that provide the starting point for the divine image in man. At this point one would expect a straightforward exposé of Trinitarian theology. However, this is not what Methodius presents us with. When one reads the sentence for the first time one immediately recognises several oddities. The subordinate clause starts as a statement about the Word and then switches to the Spirit but in such a way that this shift is not immediately obvious. The second verb, ἐγνώρισται, follows the first, προβέβληται, with which it is correlated, without any reference to a new subject and a reader will assume that it still refers back to λόγος, in particular since both verbs are used in the third person singular of the perfect passive. That we are dealing with a new subject only becomes clear when we read beyond ἐγνώρισται and even then this subject is not named but can only be inferred by a process of exclusion: once we come across the Dative υἱῷ we know that we are dealing with a third entity beside the Father and the Son, which our knowledge of the Christian creed then causes us to identify with the Holy Spirit. There can be no doubt that this ambiguity is created deliberately: nothing would have been easier than to insert a subject τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα either immediately before or immediately after εἰς ζωοποίησιν τῶν ἀπάντων ἐγνώρισται.

Indeed, further analysis reveals that Methodius creates ambiguity not only through misleading syntax but also through the use of equivocal individual expressions. The most obvious oddity is the verb προβέβληται, which defines the relationship between the Father and the Word through comparison with the relationship between 'mind' (νοῦς) and 'uttered word' (λόγος προφορικός) in a human being. The verb προβάλλειν fits well into this context since it can have the meaning 'to utter' and is thus synonymous with προφέρειν,[20] This is evident not only from numerous

---

[19] Cf. Gouillard's translation: 'Puisque Dieu le Verbe créateur lui-meme a été émis par l'intellect Père et puisqu'a été révélé pour la vivification de l'univers, en tant que co-créateur avec le Père et le Fils, *Celui* qui a été confessé comme un seul et même Dieu avec le Père et le Fils.'

[20] According to the *Lexicon* of Liddell & Scott this use is first attested in the imperal period, cf. e.g. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, III.8.3, ed. F. Vogel (Leipzig, 1888), vol. I, p. 276, l. 9: φωνὴν ὀξεῖαν προβάλλοντες.

Late Antique and Byzantine theological texts,[21] but also from Methodius' *Encomium* of Agatha where he defines 'words' (λόγοι) as 'projections of thoughts' (νοημάτων προβλήματα).[22] When we look at the context of the sentence under discussion we find that 'projection' is not the only way in which this relationship is conceptualised because Methodius also speaks of the mind as the 'begetter' (γεννήτωρ) of the word.[23] Such mixing of metaphors was common enough at the time: Photius, for example, once castigates the Monophysites as 'begetters of outlandish … projections' (ἐκφύλων ... προβλημάτων γεννήτορες).[24] As long as we limit the discussion to the human sphere Methodius' statement thus seems to be entirely appropriate. However, it must be remembered that προβέβληται appears in a specifically Trinitarian context where it denotes the relation between the Father and the Son. Early Christian authors such as Justin or Eusebius used γεννᾶν and προβάλλειν interchangeably in their discussions of the relationship between Father and Son, evidently prompted by the Johannine appellation 'Word' for the Son.[25] This un-selfconscious use of the two terms, however, came to an end in the later fourth century when the status of the Spirit became an issue. From then on the verb προβάλλειν denotes exclusively the procession of the Spirit from the Father whereas the relationship between Father and Son is unequivocally expressed through γεννᾶν. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, states that there is 'the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: the one being generator and projector … and the others either product of generation or product of projection' (ὁ πατὴρ καὶ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα· ὁ μὲν γεννήτωρ καὶ προβολεύς ... τῶν δὲ τὸ μὲν γέννημα τὸ δὲ πρόβλημα).[26] Later Patristic authors simply repeat this formula, which by then had become fossilised,[27] both in creedal statements and also in the particular context of the *Imago Trinitatis*.[28] This remarkable terminological consistency is, of course, not accidental: it is demanded by orthodox Trinitarian theology. The Cappadocians had conceptualised the Trinity as one substance in three

---

[21] Cf. e.g. Theodore of Stoudios, *Antirrhetici*, I, *PG* 99, 329A: προβληθήσεται ὁ λόγος.

[22] Methodius, *Encomium of Agatha*, 16, ed. E. Mioni, 'L'encomio di S. Agata di Metodio patriarcha di Costantinopoli', *ABoll* 68 (1950) p. 58-93, esp. p. 84, l. 29.

[23] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 71, ll. 717-19: τὸ κατὰ τὴν θείαν εἰκόνα δοθὲν ἡμῖν καὶ δημιουργηθὲν λογικὸν τοῦ οἰκείου νοὸς ὡς γεννήτορος ὑποφαίνει τὰ ἐκτυπώματα.

[24] Photius, *Letters*, 285, ed. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, vol. 3: *Epistularum pars tertia* (Leipzig, 1985), p. 102, ll. 122-23.

[25] Cf. e.g. Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*, 62, *PG* 6, 617C: τοῦτο τὸ τῷ ὄντι ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς προβληθὲν γέννημα; and Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical Theology*, I.8, ed. E. Klostermann and G. C. Hansen, *Eusebius, Werke*, IV: *Gegen Marcell, Uber die kirchliche Theologie, Die Fragmente Marcells* (2nd ed., Berlin, 1972), p. 66, ll. 25-27: προβαλέσθαι γέννημα.

[26] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio*, XXIX.9, ed. P. Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 27-31 (Discours théologiques)* (SC, 250; Paris, 1978), p. 180, ll. 14-17.

[27] Of course, προβάλλεσθαι is not always used in such contexts. Many theologians preferred the Biblical term ἐκπορεύεσθαι, without doubt because προβολή had been used by the Gnostics as a technical term for 'emanation', cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.2.6, *PG* 67, 465A.

[28] Cf. e.g. John of Damascus, *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus*, 30, ed. Kotter, *Schriften,* IV, pp. 215-16: τὸ γεννᾶν τὸν νοῦν λόγον καὶ προβάλλειν πνεῦμα.

hypostases and had defined hypostasis as 'substance with idioms' (οὐσία μετὰ ἰδιωμάτων).[29] Accordingly, it was essential to distinguish the idioms clearly from each other and to avoid terminological ambiguities. Patristic theologians therefore took pains to emphasise the difference between the second and the third person of the Trinity even when Scripture appears to use the same terms to express their relation with the first person. The sixth-century author Anastasius of Antioch, for example, states in his first *Dogmatic Exposition*:

> μὴ θαυμάζωμεν δὲ λέγοντος τοῦ κυρίου ἔξοδον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τὴν ἑκατέρου πρόοδον· ἐγὼ γάρ, φησιν, ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἥκω, καὶ πάλιν· τὸ πνεῦμα ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται· καὶ γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐξελθεῖν καὶ τὸ ἐκπορευθῆναι ταὐτὸν ἐνταῦθα σημαίνει, τῷ πνεύματι γοῦν τὴν ἐκπόρευσιν μᾶλλον κατ᾽ ἐξαίρετον ἥρμοσεν ὥσπερ ἑαυτῷ τὴν γέννησιν.[30]

> Let us not wonder that the Lord called 'exit' the coming forth of either person from the Father, for he says: 'I have come out of the father and am come', and again: 'the Spirit, which comes from the Father'. Here 'coming out' and 'having come out' mean the same thing. Yet he rather attributed 'coming out' specifically to the Spirit, just as 'birth' to himself.

It is evident that Methodius takes exactly the opposite approach when he gives the Son a characteristic that had for hundreds of years been reserved for the Spirit but it is not yet clear why he should have done so. One possible explanation would be to assume a *lapsus calami* in particular since Methodius was, of course, aware of the 'correct' version: in the *Life* of Euthymius he speaks of the 'inconfoundibility of the persons' (τὸ ἀσύγχυτον τῶν προσώπων),[31] and in his *Passio* of Denys he lets the saint profess his faith in 'a Father … the ingenerate, a Son, alone generate … and a Spirit that proceeds from the Father' (πατέρα ... τὸν ἀγένητον υἱὸν γεννητὸν μόνον ... καὶ πνεῦμα τὸ προϊὸν ἐκ πατέρος).[32] However, such an explanation cannot account for the deliberately ambiguous syntax and it is also gainsaid by further equivocation at the level of individual expressions.[33]

---

[29] For later references cf. Thalassius the Libyan, *Centuriae*, IV.88, *PG* 91, 1468B: ὑπόστασιν δὲ ὁρίζουσιν οὐσίαν μετὰ ἰδιωμάτων, identified as πατρότης, υἱότης and ἐκπόρευσις; Theodore of Stoudios, *Antirretici*, I.1, *PG* 99, 329B.

[30] Anastasius of Antioch, *Expositio dogmatica*, I.1.27, ed. Sakkos, p. 25, ll. 3-8.

[31] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius of Sardes*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 69, ll. 674-75.

[32] Methodius, *Encomium of Denys*, 10, ed. J. C. Westerbrink, *Passio S. Dionysii Areopagitae Rustici et Eleutherii uitgegeven naar het Leidse Handschrift Vulcanianus 52* (Alphen, 1937), p. 54, ll. 21-25.

[33] Further study may well reveal that Methodius' views are not as idiosyncratic as they might first seem. The eleventh-century theologian and spiritual author Nicetas Stethatos deals in his writings extensively with the *Imago Trinitatis* and expresses ideas that are strikingly similar to what we have found in Methodius. Nicetas' treatise *De anima*, for example, contains in chapter 24 a passage where the soul is characterised as 'having a mind as its purest part, father and projector of the word' (νοῦν ἔχουσα μέρος αὐτῆς τὸ καθαρώτατον πατέρα καὶ προβολέα τοῦ λόγου), ed. J. Darrouzès, *Nicétas Stéthatos, Opuscules et lettres* (Sources Chrétiennes, 81, Paris, 1961), p. 86, ll. 6-7. This statement contains two oddities: firstly, there is no reference to the Spirit, and secondly the term προβολεύς, which traditionally defined the relationship between the first and

That such equivocation is not limited to προβέβληται becomes obvious when we turn to the part of the sentence that seems to refer to the Holy Spirit. After προ-βέβληται one might expect a similar verb to express the way in which the Spirit is related to the Father, as is indeed often found in Patristic texts in statements such as 'from the Father the Son has been born and the Spirit goes out' (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱὸς γεγέννηται καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐκπορεύεται).[34] Had Methodius opted for such a straightforward statement the implications of an attribution of προβολή to the Word would immediately have become evident to his readers. Instead, he chooses to employ the verb γνωρίζειν, which while being correlated with προ-βέβληται and also appearing in the perfect passive, does not denote an inner-Trinitarian relation. However, this does not mean that there is no connection between the two words; for ἐγνώρισται conjures up the concept of 'characteristic property' (γνωριστικὴ ἰδιότης), which permits the recognition of the divine persons as distinct entities.[35] Since the second part of the sentence seems to identify the subject of ἐγνώρισται as the Spirit, contemporary readers would surely have been reminded that one of the terms to denote this 'mark' (γνώρισμα) in the case of the Spirit is 'projection' (προβολή, προβάλλεσθαι), which as we have seen has just been applied to the Word. Therefore one can argue that Methodius chose this verb in order to indicate in a rather more oblique way that he deviated from the earlier Patristic consensus with its insistence that the characteristic idioms of each person are not communicable or interchangeable.[36]

Moreover, it must be recognised that the prepositional phrase εἰς ζωοποίησιν τῶν ἁπάντων is ambiguous. While in many texts the Holy Spirit is called 'life-

---

the third persons of the Trinity, is used alongside πατήρ to characterise the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity.

[34] Pseudo-Athanasius, *Dialogi duo contra Macedonianos*, *PG* 28, 1304C.

[35] Cf. e.g. Emperor Justinian, *Contra Monophysitas*, 180, ed. E. Schwartz, *Drei dogmatische Schriften Iustinians* (Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Abteilung, NF, 18; Munich, 1939), p. 39, l. 6: τὰς γνωριστικὰς ἰδιότητας.

[36] This interpretation can be substantiated when we also take into consideration the prepositional phrase εἰς ζωοποίησιν τῶν ἁπάντων. The syntax requires that it refer to the verb ἐγνώρισται, which it precedes. However, the construction is decidedly odd as can be seen from the translation 'is recognised for the purpose of vivifying all things' (this problem is glossed over by Gouillard who translates: 'a été révélé pour la vivification de l'univers'). Indeed, when Greek authors use this verb they invariably construe it with a dative or with a prepositional phrase. Here I will only give two examples: Gregory of Nazianzus states in his twenty-third *Oratio* that we conceptualise God as 'one and the same … nature, which is recognised through eternity and birth and procession' (μίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτήν ... φύσιν θεότητος ἀνάρχῳ καὶ γεννήσει καὶ προόδῳ γνωριζομένην), cf. above note 12; and the author of the Pseudo-Cyrillian treatise *De sancta trinitate* avers that 'the father is characterised by and recognised from his having a Son' (ὁ πατὴρ ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν υἱὸν χαρακτηρίζεται καὶ γνωρίζεται), cf. Pseudo-Cyril, *De sancta trinitate*, *PG* 77, 1149C. In order to make sense of Methodius' sentence we therefore need to supply such an element to which the prepositional phrase εἰς ζωοποίησιν τῶν ἁπάντων would then refer. This could have been 'to be', but it could equally have been 'to project', which is after all the characteristic property of the Spirit. Accordingly one could add ἐκ τοῦ προβεβλῆσθαι or τῷ προβεβλῆσθαι to εἰς ζωοποίησιν τῶν ἁπάντων ἐγνώρισται and thus arrive at the reading 'has been recognised by its having been projected for the purpose of vivifying all things', which drives home the point that the verb προβάλλειν, which has just been applied to the Son, is usually reserved for the Spirit.

giving' (ζωοποιόν), vivification was not considered to be a characteristic of the third person of the Trinity alone. The Old Testament contains passages such as II Esdras 19:5: 'You are yourself the only Lord: you have made the heaven and … the earth … and you vivify everything' (σὺ εἶ αὐτὸς κύριος μόνος· σὺ ἐποίησας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ... τὴν γῆν ... καὶ σὺ ζωοποιεῖς τὰ πάντα),[37] which Patristic authors interpreted as referring to all three divine persons and therefore to the divine nature. Cyril of Alexandria, for example, asserts in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* that 'the creator of all things vivifies … all things since he is life by nature' (ζωογονεῖ ... τὰ πάντα ζωὴ κατὰ φύσιν ὑπάρχων ὁ πάντων δημιουργός),[38] and Anastasius of Antioch speaks even more explicitly of God as 'life and living and vivifying substance' (ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ζῶσα καὶ ζωοποιὸς οὐσία).[39] For this reason the champions of the full divinity of the Spirit in the late fourth century regularly refer to this operation in their attempts to 'prove' its consubstantiality with the Father and the Son. Accordingly the Spirit can be identified not only as συνδημιουργόν but also as συζωοποιόν as it is indeed by Cyril of Alexandria who calls it 'co-creating and co-vivifying' (συγκτίζον καὶ συζωοποιοῦν).[40]

This argument can be taken even further. In those instances in the New Testament where vivification is mentioned in combination with 'spirit' this spirit is identified not with the third but with the second person of the Trinity. This is explicitly stated in I Corinthians 15:45 where the formula 'vivifying spirit' (πνεῦμα ζωοποιόν) refers to the incarnated Son as the 'last Adam' (ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ),[41] and is certainly also the most obvious reading of John 6:63 and II Corinthians 3:6 where the spirit is juxtaposed with the flesh or the letter.[42] The use of this formula in the context thus does not only not introduce a specific operation of the Spirit but also reminds the readers that the name 'spirit' (πνεῦμα) itself is not exclusively used to denote the third person of the Trinity since Scripture teaches both that 'God is spirit' (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός) and that 'the Lord is the spirit' (ὁ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν).[43] One could even argue that Methodius' refusal to insert an explicit reference to the third person of the Trinity is meant to highlight the fact that there is not a single term that can be exclusively attributed to it. Here, too, his approach is diametrically opposed to that of other theologians: Anastasius of Antioch had been forced to concede that all three persons can be called both 'holy' and 'spirit' but had then

---

[37] Cf. also John 5:21: ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ἐγείρει τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ ζωοποιεῖ, οὕτως καὶ ὁ υἱὸς οὓς θέλει ζωοποιεῖ.

[38] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, ed. P. E. Pusey and T. Randall, *Commentary on the Gospel according to S. John, by Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria*, vol. 2 (A library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, 43; Oxford, 1885), p. 445, ll. 10-16.

[39] Cf. e.g. Anastasius of Antioch, *Expositio dogmatica*, I.1.13, ed. Sakkos, p. 21, ll. 1-2.

[40] Cyril of Alexandria, *De sancta trinitate dialogi septem*, VII, *PG* 75, 1116B.

[41] Cf. I Corinthians 15:45: οὕτω καὶ γέγραπται· ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν· ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιόν.

[42] John 6:63 is a statement about the Son's descent into this world: here spirit clearly denotes the Son's divinity. In the case of II Corinthians 3:6 the connection with the Son is established in verse 17 of the same chapter.

[43] John 4:24; II Corinthians 3:17.

insisted that the combination of the two terms is only found in the case of the third person of the Trinity.[44]

At this point we can conclude that in the first part of the subordinate clause Methodius has constructed a statement that ambiguates attributes of divine persons and thus erodes the conceptual framework on which traditional Trinitarian theology was based. As we have seen he creates a context where all specific markers of the third person of the Trinity, its name, its operation and its mode of existence, are attributed, either explicitly or through implication, to the second person of the Trinity.[45]

II.

The argument that has been presented so far has been based on the unstated assumption that Methodius' attempts at ambiguation are limited to the Spirit and do not affect the Word or Son. However, is this really the case? Here we need to consider that a statement such as ὁ λόγος ... προβέβληται can only be interpreted as referring to the second person if we accept that a 'name' is more unequivocal than a characteristic property. However, from the allusion to I Corinthians 15:45 we can conclude that this is not so in the case of the Spirit, and Methodius offers us no reason why we should consider this to be different in the case of the Word or Son. Accordingly we can argue that the term Word could also refer to the third person of the Trinity, which is 'projected' from the Father.

In order to substantiate this hypothesis I will look more closely at the verb ὡμο-λόγηται, the third perfect passive after προβέβληται and ἐγνώρισται. This verb will initially be taken to mean 'is agreed' or 'is confessed' and will conjure up the phrase 'confession of faith' (ὁμολογία τῆς πίστεως),[46] in particular since the subject appears to be 'one God' (εἷς θεός). However, here one needs to consider that it occurs in a context which is saturated with composita containing the element ὁμο-, such as ὁμοδύναμος, ὁμοούσιος, and ὁμοφυής.[47] I would argue that by creating this cluster Methodius signals to his readers that ὁμολογεῖν is morphologically similar to such words and that he thus alerts them to the existence of the adjective ὁμόλογος. Such an interpretation may seem far-fetched but here we need to take into account a dimension of Methodius' texts that I have already mentioned at the beginning of this article, namely that words are not used in their

---

[44] Anastasius, *Expositio dogmatica*, I.1.60-61, ed. Sakkos, p. 35, ll. 19-29.

[45] Such a reading is further insinuated to the reader by the fact that it would make much better sense to take ἐκ νοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς προβέβληται ... εἰς ζωοποίησιν τῶν ἁπάντων together as one statement. Of course, such a reading is ruled out by the presence of the copula καί but readers cannot help but notice that it would be much more 'natural' than the one required by the syntax. This is not the only case of such an oddity in the text, cf. Gouillard, 'Vie d'Euthyme', p. 69, note 134.

[46] Cf. e.g. Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 9, ed. Gouillard, p. 35, l. 179.

[47] Cf. Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 67, l. 668: ὁμοδύναμον, and p. 69, l. 676: ὁμοούσιον … ὁμοφυές.

conventional sense but given meanings that are suggested by the components of which they are made up.[48]

For the sake of brevity I will mention only one example here, which comes from a passage in Methodius' *Encomium* of Agatha, where the posthumous activity of the saint is described. There Methodius tells his audience that the martyr has reddened her face and her dress with the blood of the lamb 'in order to flood the dyes of fresh colour towards others who approach her' (ἵνα ... θαλασσεύῃ τοῖς προσερχομένοις ἑτέροις τὰς τῆς εὐχροίας βαφάς).[49] The curious expression θαλασσεύῃ ... βαφάς is otherwise unattested but there exists a verb θαλασσοβαφεῖν, which means 'to dye purple'.[50] There can be no doubt that Methodius derived θαλασσεύῃ ... βαφάς from this verb because in the same context he uses the synonymous ἁλιβαφία in its conventional sense, 'dyeing purple', and the un-equivocal term πορφύρωσις.[51] Here we thus have a case where Methodius de-constructs a term and uses its constituent parts in their literal meaning. This gives an idea of the complexity of his texts and goes at least some way to showing that a derivation of ὡμολόγηται from a form ὁμολόγος is indeed possible.[52]

What would be the purpose of such manipulation in the excursus in the *Life* of Euthymius? Even if ὡμολόγηται is formally similar to other compounds with ὁμο- there is, of course, a crucial difference: the other terms refer to the common divinity, which confers on each of the three divine persons not only the same οὐσία and

---

[48] This finds its explanation in the great importance of lexicography and etymology for the theo-logical discourse of the seventh to ninth centuries. The author of an anonymous sermon on the An-nunciation, for example, employs arguments based on etymology and frequently borrows technical terms from the etymological discourse, cf. e.g. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Sermon on the Annunciation*, 3, *PG* 28, 921A: ἰσία λέγεται κατ᾽ ἐτυμολογίαν τροπῇ τοῦ ι εἰς ο, καὶ πλεονασμῷ τοῦ υ στοιχείου οὐσία διερμηνεύεται. It is suggestive that one etymological lexicon of the ninth century is attributed to an author named Methodius, cf. R. Reitzenstein, 'Zu den Quellen des sogenannten Etymologicum magnum. 2) Das etymologische Werk des Methodios', *Philologos* 49 (1890), pp. 400-420.

[49] Methodius, *Encomium of Agatha*, 3, ed. Mioni, p. 78, ll. 10-11.

[50] Cf. e.g. Philo of Byzantium, 2, ed. K. Brodersen, *Reiseführer zu den Sieben Weltwundern. Philon von Byzanz und andere antike Texte* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1992), p. 26: ἄλλων δὲ πορ-φυρίζει τὸ χρῶμα καὶ τοῖς διὰ κογχυλίων θαλασσοβαφουμέναις ἐξομοιοῦται.

[51] Methodius, *Encomium of Agatha*, 3, ed. Mioni, p. 78, ll. 3-4: ἁλιβαφία ... τὴν ἐσθῆτα ... φοινίσσουσα, and p. 78, ll. 9-10: τῇ πολλῇ ἐπιχρώσει τῆς πορφυρώσεως.

[52] Indeed the same passage contains an even closer parallel to the excursus in the *Life* of Eu-thymius in the characterisation of Agatha's red dress as ἐξομολογικὴ στολή, cf. *Encomium of Agatha*, 3, ed. Mioni, p. 78, l. 10. This phrase, which is evidently inspired by Biblical phrases such as ἐξομολόγησιν ... ἐνεδύσω in Psalm 103:2, is virtually untranslatable: it could refer to Agatha's status as a 'confessor' (ὁμολογήτρια), cf. *Encomium of Agatha*, 25, ed. Mioni, p. 89, l. 14: ἐκ θε-λήματός μου ἐξομολογήσομαι αὐτῷ; but it could also have the meaning 'promise', cf. *Encomium of Agatha*, 33, ed. Mioni, p. 92, ll. 36-37: καὶ ἔχει ἡ ἐξομολόγησις - ὡς ὁρᾶτε - τὴν ἔκτισιν καὶ λέλυται τὸ χρέος μοι ἀπένθεν, and would then refer to God's promise to the martyrs to give them a full reward in Revelation 6:11, which is there accompanied by the gift of a στολή. Moreover, Methodius does not use the regular adjective ἐξομολογητική but instead employs the otherwise unattested form ἐξομολογική, which suggests to the reader that it is derived from λογικός and which thus introduces a third theme, namely that in the case of Agatha the colour of the dress takes the place of 'words' (ῥήματα) as a means of communication with the faithful, cf. *Encomium of Agatha*, 3, ed. Mioni, p. 78, ll. 11-12: τῇ τῶν ῥημάτων ἀνελλειπεῖ ὀχετηγίᾳ αὐτῆς.

φύσις but also the same δύναμις, while λόγος evidently belongs to the hypostatic
sphere. A claim, however, that the third person of the Trinity is λόγος in the same
way as the second person is λόγος can only lead to further erosion of the accepted
Trinitarian framework.[53]

In order to substantiate this hypothesis we need to return one more time to the
terms that Methodius uses in the excursus in order to express consubstantiality: there
we not only find the term ὁμοούσιον but also ταυτοούσιον and ταυτοουσιότης,[54]
which suggests not only that the two terms are interchangeable but also that the
two elements ὁμο- and ταυτο- are equivalent. That this is indeed the case can be
seen from a passage in Methodius' *Life* of Theophanes:

> τότε δὴ προσομολογεῖ αὐτῇ εὐθύμως καὶ ἀναφθέγγεται εἰπών· ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν
> ἀληθινὴ καὶ γνησία σύμβιός μου εἶ σὺ ὦ κυρία καὶ ἀδελφὴ κοινωνός τε τοῦ
> βίου καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς αἰῶνα τὸν μέλλοντα· ἡ δὲ ταυτολογία τοῦτον καὶ τῷ
> ὁμοίῳ ὅρῳ ἀμείβεται εἰποῦσα ὅτι· ταὐτὸ κἀμοὶ ὁ κύριός μου.[55]

> Then he confessed to her fervently and spoke up: 'From now on you are my true
> and genuine spouse, my lady and sister, and my companion for life both now and
> in the life to come.' And she responded to him with the same words and with a
> similar definition: 'The same is true for me as well, my lord.'

In this passage the young saint outlines his vision for a chaste marriage and his
bride signals her agreement. The unanimity of the couple is reinforced on the formal
level in the clauses that introduce the two statements: they both contain twenty-
one syllables. The parallelism is most obvious in the elements ἀναφθέγγεται
εἰπών and ἀμείβεται εἰποῦσα, which both consist of seven syllables, but it
extends also to the first parts of the two clauses: the two correlated expressions
ταυτολογία and τῷ ὁμοίῳ ὅρῳ each take up a part of the preceding verb προσ-
ομολογεῖ, which signals to the readers that ταυτο- and ὁμο-, as well as λόγος
and ὅρος, are synonymous, and thus suggests an equivalence between ὁμολογία
and ταυτολογία. This is a clear example of how Methodius provides his readers
with clues that help them make sense of his writings. I would therefore argue that
in the *Life* of Euthymius, too, the readers are meant to consider ὡμολόγηται as
equivalent to ταυτολόγηται. Late Antique rhetorical treatises define ταυτολογία

---

[53] I would argue that Methodius has even construed an immediate context that would make his
readers aware of such a possibility: in the first half of the sentence the υἱός was referred to as λόγος,
which allows us to rephrase τῷ υἱῷ ὡμολόγηται as τῷ λόγῳ ὡμολόγηται and thus emphasises
the fact that ὁμολογεῖν is derived from λόγος. This reading has at least some basis in the convent-
ional use of the verb ὁμολογεῖν, which does not only have the meaning 'to confess' but can also
be used in the sense of 'correspond' or 'conform', cf. Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*
(Oxford, 1968), s.v. ὁμολογέω.

[54] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 67, l. 671: τῆς μιᾶς φύσεώς τε καὶ ταυτο-
ουσιότητος, and p. 69, l. 695: τὸ ταυτοούσιον καὶ ὁμοφυὲς καὶ ἰσοβούλητον.

[55] *Life of Theophanes*, 13, ed. V. V. Latyšev: *Methodii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Vita S.
Theophanis Confessoris* (Zapiski rossijkoj akademii nauk. viii. ser. po istoriko-filologičeskomu
otdeleniju, 13.4; Petrograd, 1918), p. 10, ll. 3-7.

as 'a setting side by side of words that mean the same thing, as when we say "they are fast and swift"' (λέξεων ... ταὐτὸ σημαινουσῶν παράλληλος θέσις ὡς εἰ λέγοιμεν ὀξεῖς εἰσι καὶ ταχεῖς).[56] Therefore one can conclude that Methodius regards the terms λόγος and πνεῦμα as synonymous.[57]

At this point we can sum up the results of the discussion so far: Methodius has eroded all markers of the individuality of the third person of the Trinity and he may well have done the same as regards the second person. This means that there are still two persons, but they can both be called and characterised in the same way. It is evident that this deconstruction of traditional Trinitarian theology also removes the basis for the notion of an *Imago Trinitatis* in the human being, since there are no longer functionally distinguishable entities at the level of the divinity for which the human mind, speech and breath could serve as an analogy.[58]

This raises the question: why would Methodius have embarked on such an extraordinary course? In order to find an answer I will now extend the discussion to the context in which he develops his Trinitarian speculation. This context is a defence of religious imagery against the Iconoclasts. In his argument Methodius starts with a belief that both Iconophiles and Iconoclasts have in common, namely that the written and spoken word is an acceptable vehicle for transporting Christian belief, and then tries to show that word and image are equivalent so that acceptance of one necessarily entails acceptance of the other. This argument is summed up in the following statement:

ὡς γὰρ ὁ λόγος εἰκὼν τοῦ νοήματος - τὰ γὰρ ἐννοηθέντα ὑποφαίνει καὶ διαδείκνυσιν - οὕτως καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν λόγος τοῦ πρωτοτύπου καθίσταται διὰ γραφῆς βοῶσα τοῦ ἀρχετύπου τὰ ἰδιώματα.[59]

As the word is the image of the thought – for it reveals and shows what has been thought – thus the image is also the word of the prototype, proclaiming the idioms of the archetype.

---

[56] Cf. Phoebammo, *De figuris*, 1.3, ed C. Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart, 1835), pp. 487-519.

[57] In the discussion so far I have considered the meanings of the verb ὡμολόγηται and its possible variant ταυτολόγηται in isolation. However, we must also ask whether such an interpretation can make sense in the context of the relative clause ὅπερ εἷς θεὸς σὺν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ὡμολόγηται of which it is a part. At first sight the syntax seems to be straightforward: the element εἷς θεός is the subject of ὡμολόγηται, and the datives τῷ πατρί and τῷ υἱῷ are correlated through καί and therefore both dependent on the preceding preposition σύν. However, this is not the only possible reading because one could see two different statements here, namely ὅπερ εἷς θεὸς σὺν τῷ πατρί (sc. ἐστι) and ὅπερ ... τῷ υἱῷ ὡμολόγηται, because in the sense of 'correspond' the verb ὁμολογεῖν is construed with the simple dative. Of course, it is impossible to prove beyond doubt that this interpretation is correct but given Methodius' subtle manipulations in the first part of the subordinate clause we should be reluctant to stop in this case at the superficial level of meaning.

[58] This may, however, not be as much of a contradiction as it first seems: here we need to remember that Methodius had always presented his distinction in terms of operations *ad extra*.

[59] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 32, ed. Gouillard, p. 67, ll. 658-660.

The exegesis of Genesis 1:26, which we have been discussing so far, is then introduced as Biblical corroboration of this claim. As we have seen in our analysis of this exegesis, Methodius defines the εἰκών of God in man not only as λόγος but as λόγος in conjunction with νοῦς and ἀερία ὁλκή. However, he does not lose sight of the point that he is trying to prove as can be seen from the following statement that he makes in the course of his exegesis:

τὸ κατὰ τὴν θείαν εἰκόνα δοθὲν ἡμῖν καὶ δημιουργηθὲν λογικὸν τοῦ οἰκείου νοὸς ὡς γεννήτορος ὑποφαίνει τὰ ἐκτυπώματα καὶ προφορᾷ τῇ διὰ γλώσσης ἐπὶ τὸν ἀκούοντα μεταδίδωσιν πνεύματος ὁλκῇ καὶ πλήξει τῇ ἀερίῳ τυπουμένου.[60]

The 'wordliness', that has been created and has been given to us according to the divine image shows the impressions of the mind as begetter and through utterance by tongue passes on to the listener the spirit that is being formed through the drawing and beating of air.

Therefore it is not surprising that Methodius concludes his Trinitarian speculations with a restatement of the original hypothesis:

εἰκὼν γὰρ ὁ λόγος καὶ λόγος ἡ εἰκὼν καὶ ἔστιν καὶ διαδέδεικται διεξοδικωτέραις ταῖς ὑφηγήσεσιν· ἐξ οὗ καὶ ἡ γραφομένη εἰκὼν τῷ διὰ στόματος λόγῳ ἴση πέφυκεν.[61]

The word is image and the image is word and has been shown to be such through rather effusive explanations for which reason the painted image, too, is equal in nature to the word that comes out of the mouth.

These passages show that Methodius makes his statements about the Trinity in order to support an argument in favour of religious imagery. However, the link between the two themes is not limited to this level; it also extends to the manner in which Methodius presents his argument and therefore can help to elucidate the reasons that caused him to ambiguate the inner-Trinitarian relations.

In order to see how this is possible we need to have a closer look at the introductory passage to the excursus about the divine image, which I have just quoted. There Methodius highlights the functional similarity between word and image – both make manifest things that would otherwise remain hidden – but he does not make his point by introducing a third more general category such as for example 'sign'. Instead he takes the functional similarity as the starting point for attribution of the appellation εἰκών to λόγος and of the appellation λόγος to εἰκών. And in very much the same way he also does not appeal to the common trait of 'communication' but instead ascribes to εἰκών the verb βοᾶν, which in its strict sense can only refer to λόγος.[62]

---

[60] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, ed. Gouillard, p. 71, ll. 717-721.
[61] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 35, ed. Gouillard, p. 73, ll. 741-742.
[62] In a similar way Methodius identifies the dye of Agatha's dress with her speech, see above note 52.

It is evident that this approach is very similar to the way in which Methodius treats λόγος and πνεῦμα in his statement about the Trinity. There, too, he starts from a functional similarity, the origin in the Father, and then applies to the λόγος the verb προβάλλεσθαι, which in traditional Trinitarian terminology refers to the Spirit, and as I have tried to argue he also insinuates that the Spirit can be referred to as Son and Word and vice versa. In the case of λόγος and εἰκών the aim of Methodius' manipulations is to show that the two phenomena are equivalent. Therefore one can argue that his Trinitarian speculations have a similar purpose, namely to safeguard the unity of the Trinity. Here, too, Methodius does not establish a link between the divine persons through introduction of the divine substance as a more general category, but instead seeks to establish it through mutual attribution of 'hypostatic' characteristics to the two persons that originate in the Father.

At this point one could object that Methodius repeatedly speaks of the consubstantiality of the Trinity. However, this does not permit us to assume that he employs the concept in its traditional sense. In the concluding passage of the excursus Methodius uses the phrase ἴση πέφυκεν to express the relation between λόγος and εἰκών. This phrase evidently conjures up the adjective ἰσοφυής,[63] which is synonymous with the term ὁμοφυής that Methodius uses in the Trinitarian excursus to denote the consubstantiality of the three divine persons. This means that the two phenomena are considered to be 'consubstantial' but not by virtue of having a common substrate: the consubstantiality is rather sought in analogies at the phenomenological level. There can be no doubt that Methodius wished his readers to apply this understanding of consubstantiality to the Trinity as well because the statement about the ἰσοφυΐα of εἰκών and λόγος is followed by a statement about the Son as εἰκών, which contains the same verb πέφυκεν.[64]

III.

Methodius' speculations are so far removed from the Patristic consensus that one might consider them to be utterly idiosyncratic. However, it can be shown that they are part of a wider debate. In order to make my case I will first look at three texts from the eighth and ninth centuries, a *Sermon* on the icon of Mary 'the Roman', Epiphanius of Kallistratos' *Life* of Mary, and the *Letter* of the three Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilus, which contain descriptions of the appearance of Christ. In each case Christ's features are compared with those of his mother Mary: the anonymous author of the *Sermon* states at the end of a list of common features that

---

[63] Methodius uses the adjective ἰσοφυής elsewhere in the text, cf. *Life of Euthymius*, 20, ed. Gouillard, p. 49, l. 397: τὸ ἰσοφυὲς ἑαυτοῖς δι' ἀγαθῆς προαιρέσεως πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ.

[64] Methodius, *Life of Euthymius*, 35, ed. Gouillard, p. 73, ll. 744-45: καὶ ὡς ἔφημεν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου ὁ θεὸς καὶ λόγος ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ πέφυκεν. In the remainder of this sentence the Father and the Spirit are again added to the Son to take account of the *imago Trinitatis*.

Christ was 'simply like the appearance of his mother' (ἀπλῶς ὡς ὁ τῆς τεκούσης χαρακτήρ),[65] Epiphanius concludes with the statement 'for in all respects he shared with her and was likened to her' (κατὰ πάντα γὰρ αὐτῇ ἐκοινώνει καὶ ἐξωμοίωτο),[66] and in the *Letter* of the three Patriarchs we find the similar formula 'showing the imprint of the idioms that are similar to those of his mother' (τῆς μητρῴας ἐμφερείας τὰ ἰδιώματα χαρακτηρίζων), which is then explained as 'having the colour of wheat in his appearance according to the appearance of the mother' (σιτόχροιον τῷ εἴδει κατὰ τὴν μητρῴαν ἐμφάνειαν).[67] In all three texts the similarity is thus clearly seen in 'hypostatic' terms and Christ is presented as being 'in the image' of Mary. This impression is reinforced by another comparison: Christ is described as having 'cheerful eyes' (ὀφθαλμοὺς χαροπούς), which is how the Bible characterises David, Christ's human ancestor.[68] What is conspicuously absent from these statements is the concept of a consubstantiality 'with us', that is, humankind, of which Mary, David and Christ's human dimension are individual realisations.

At this point it could be objected that the *Letter* of the Three Patriarchs at least contains a further passage where this shift has not taken place: there we are not only told that Christ 'expressed the idioms of the likeness to Mary' but also that he 'showed the shape of the race of Adam' (καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἀδαμιαίου γένους μόρφωσιν ἐμφαίνων).[69] At first sight this seems to refer to human nature as such: John of Damascus, for example, says in his *Sermon* on Holy Saturday that Christ 'bore in himself the whole nature of the first Adam' (πᾶσαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν τοῦ πρώτου Ἀδὰμ φέρων φύσιν) and mentions in the same context that he 'became consubstantial with us as a human being' (ὁμοούσιος καὶ ἡμῖν ὡς ἄνθρωπος γεγονώς).[70] Accordingly, μόρφωσις could be regarded as a synonym for φύσις as was indeed often the case with μορφή.[71] Yet when we look more closely at the context this interpretation is called into question. As we have seen the parallel statement about Christ's resemblance to his mother is phrased in a very similar manner: it contains the noun ἐμφάνεια, which is derived from the verb ἐμφαίνειν, and with εἶδος also a synonym of μόρφωσις.[72] There, however, the reference is to

---

[65] *Sermon on the Image of Maria Rhomaia*, ed. E. v. Dobschütz, *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, 3: *Beilagen* (TU, 18.3, NS, 3; Leipzig, 1899), p. 247**.5.

[66] Epiphanius of Kallistratos, *Life of the Godbearer*, ed. Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, vol. III, p. 302**, ll. 20-21.

[67] *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, ed. Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, vol. III, p. 303**, l. 11.

[68] Epiphanius, *Life of the Godbearer*, ed. Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, vol. III, p. 302**, l. 8-10; cf. I Kings 17:42.

[69] *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, ed. Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, III, p. 303**.4-5.

[70] John of Damascus, *Sermo in Sabbatum sanctum*, 12, ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. V: *Opera homiletica et hagiographica* (PTS, 29; Berlin and New York, 1988), p. 127, ll. 7-8: πᾶσαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν τοῦ πρώτου Ἀδὰμ φέρων φύσιν (and before, p. 12, ll. 6-7: ὁμοούσιος καὶ ἡμῖν ὡς ἄνθρωπος γεγονὼς συμφυὴς καὶ ὁμόφυλος).

[71] Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), s.v. μορφή.

[72] Cf. also the whole sentence in the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, ed. Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, III, p. 303**.3-5: τῆς μητρῴας ἐμφερείας τὰ ἰδιώματα χαρακτηρίζων καὶ τὴν τοῦ Ἀδαμαίου γένους μόρφωσιν ἐμφαίνων.

a specific hair colour and thus to a 'hypostatic' characteristic and not to the common properties of man as a species. This suggests that in the case of Adam, too, the author of the *Letter* of the Three Patriarchs locates the similarity on the level of individual appearance. Indeed, a similar 'hypostatic' understanding of Christ's relation to Adam can be found in the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius of Sinai and of Pseudo-Athanasius, which date to the seventh and eighth centuries. When Anastasius responds to the question whether the resurrected will recognise each other he says that this is not possible because all men will look like Adam before the fall.[73] To support this view he adds a reference to the Fathers who defined resurrection as 'the restitution to the primeval state of the first man' (τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἀρχαῖον τοῦ πρώτου ἀνθρώπου ἀποκατάστασιν).[74] This is a telling misunderstanding, for the Fathers to whom Anastasius refers had, of course, not conceived of this restitution in terms of outward appearance.[75] The shift is even more obvious in the treatment of the same question by Pseudo-Athanasius. This author also denies the possibility of mutual recognition after the resurrection and explains that we will all look 'like one man' (ὡς εἷς ἄνθρωπος), that is, like Adam from whom we are all descended: 'each image of a man is like to the image and form and height and shape of Adam' (πᾶσα ἀνθρώπου εἰκὼν ὁμοία τῆς τοῦ Ἀδὰμ εἰκόνος καὶ πλάσεως καὶ μεγέθους καὶ σχήματος).[76] Significantly, however, he creates a further link between the appearance of the resurrection body and the appearance of Christ, which shows that we are in the presence of the same conceptual framework as is set out in the *Letter* of the Three Patriarchs.[77]

We can thus conclude that these texts reflect a coherent framework according to which the individual appearances of Christ, of Mary, and of Adam play an important rôle in defining the relation between Christ's human part and other human beings and also in conceptualising a common humanity. This raises the question: why did Methodius and some of his contemporaries no longer seek unity at the level of substance but rather at the level of hypostatic idioms or, in Patristic terms,

---

[73] Anastasius of Sinai, *Quaestiones*, 19.11, ed. M. Richard and J. Munitiz, *Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones* (CC. SG, 59; Turnhout, 2006), p. 34, l. 95 – p. 35, l. 102: οἷος γέγονεν ὁ Ἀδὰμ τοιοῦτοι πάντες οἱ ἀπ᾽ αἰῶνος κεκοιμημένοι ἀνιστάμεθα.

[74] Anastasius of Sinai, *Quaestiones*, 19.11, ed. Richard and Munitiz, p. 35, ll. 102-104.

[75] Cf. e.g. Cyril of Alexandria, *De recta fide ad Theodosium imperatorem*, 36, *PG* 76, 1188B: ἀναμορφούμεθα γὰρ ὡς εἰς εἰκόνα τὴν θείαν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν οὐ σωματικὸν ὑπομένοντες τὸν ἀναπλασμόν· κομιδῇ γὰρ εὔηθες οἴεσθαι ταυτί.

[76] Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum Ducem*, 22, *PG* 28, 612B: καὶ ὥσπερ ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς ὁ θεὸς ἕνα ἄνθρωπον ἐποίησεν οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ πάντες ὡς εἷς ἄνθρωπος ἐπανιστάμεθα.

[77] Pseudo-Athanasius affirms that all men will be resurrected as 'a thirty year old perfect man ... just as Christ was baptized in his thirtieth year, cf. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones*, 22, *PG* 28, 612B: τριακονταετῆ τέλειον ἄνθρωπον ἀνιστάμενον καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τριακονταετὴς ἐβαπτίσθη. This statement is obviously based on Ephesians 4:13 and Luke 3:32. Similar passages are found in later hagiographical texts such as the tenth-century *Life of Nephon of Rhinocorura*, 90, ed. A. V. Rystenko, *Materialy z istorii vizantijs'ko-slov'jans'koi literatury ta novy* (Odessa, 1928), p. 98, ll. 23-24.

why did they focus on the ὁμοϋπόστατον instead of the ὁμοούσιον?[78] The study of the post-Patristic discourse is still in its infancy and any attempts at explanation must therefore be provisional. Nevertheless, I would argue that the development, which resulted in Methodius' position, had already begun in the fourth century with the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. As is well known the Cappadocians countered Eunomius' claim that God's substance is defined by his ἀγέννητον by arguing that ἀγέννητον is merely an attribute and says nothing about God's being. In order to support their position they advocated a total disjunction between qualities and substrate. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, stated that for a satisfactory definition of a substance one needs to know not only qualities but also the substrate 'around which' (περὶ ὅ) these qualities are found, and then denied that this was possible.[79] According to the philosophical terminology of the time this reduces all attributes to the status of accidents whereas the core of being becomes completely unknowable.[80] Such a conceptual framework leaves no room for the traditional Aristotelian view that specific differences are constitutive of substance and are therefore not to be equated with mere accidents.[81] This disjunction had a decisive influence on later discussions, as can be seen in a famous passage in Leontius of Byzantium's *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* where οὐσία is juxtaposed with συμβεβηκός and the latter is defined as 'all qualitites, both those, which are called *substantial*, and those, which are called *para-substantial*' (πᾶσαι αἱ ποιότητες αἵ τε οὐσιώδεις καὶ ἐπουσιώδεις καλούμεναι).[82] In the seventh and eighth centuries the assimilation of substantial qualities to accidents was taken even further. In his *Ambigua* Maximus restates the Cappadocian position that 'the multitude of that which is seen around them is not sufficient for the complete knowledge of things' (οὐκ ἀρκεῖ πρὸς τελείαν γνῶσιν τῶν πραγμάτων τὸ πλῆθος τῶν περὶ αὐτὰ θεωρουμένων) and then continues with the statement that 'as regards being-itself no being is that which is and is referred to as the aggregate of the things that we think of or refer to as around it; but that around which those things are is something else apart from them' (οὐδὲν τὸ σύνολον τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι ὅπερ ἐστὶ καὶ λέγεται τὸ ἄθροισμα τῶν ἡμῖν περὶ αὐτὸ νοουμένων τε καὶ λεγομένων ἀλλ' ἕτερόν τι παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ περὶ ὃ ταῦτά ἐστι).[83]

The term ἄθροισμα, which is used here, denotes an unstructured 'heap' and had traditionally been reserved for hypostatic idioms. Porphyry, for example, states in

---

[78] For a juxtaposition of the two terms in a statement about Christ's relation to the Father and to David, cf. Leontius of Jerusalem, *Contra Nestorianos*, II.1, *PG* 86, 1533B.

[79] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*, XXVIII.9, ed. Gallay, p. 118, l. 15.

[80] Cf. e. g. Aristotle, *De anima*, 402a7-8, ed. D. Ross (Oxford, 1961): ἐπιζητοῦμεν δὲ θεωρῆσαι καὶ γνῶναι τήν τε φύσιν αὐτῆς (sc. τῆς ψυχῆς) καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν εἶθ' ὅσα συμβέβηκε περὶ αὐτήν.

[81] Cf. e.g. M. V. Wedin, *Aristotle's theory of substance: the Categories and Metaphysics Zeta* (Oxford and New York, 2002).

[82] Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, *PG* 86, 1277D.

[83] Maximus, *Ambigua*, *PG* 91, 1225CD.

his *Isagoge* that 'such things are called individuals because each of them is made up of idioms whose aggregate could not ever come into being in another one identically' (ἄτομα οὖν λέγεται τὰ τοιαῦτα ὅτι ἐξ ἰδιοτήτων συνέστηκεν ἕκαστον ὧν τὸ ἄθροισμα οὐκ ἂν ἐπ' ἄλλου ποτὲ τὸ αὐτὸ γένοιτο),[84] and this definition is then reproduced in Patristic texts where hypostasis is characterised as an 'aggregate of accidents' (ἄθροισμα συμβεβηκότων).[85] By contrast, Maximus now applies this term to the properties of species. This shift is even more obvious in the writings of John of Damascus. In his treatise *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus* John states that it is impossible for a nature to exist without its natural idioms, which constitute it and which distinguish it from the other natures, and then adds the comment 'the aggregate of which will not be seen in another species' (ὧν τὸ ἄθροισμα ἐν ἑτέρῳ οὐ θεωρηθήσεται εἴδει).[86] Here this definition of nature is immediately followed by the traditional definition of hypostasis as being constituted and distinguished from other hypostases through hypostatic idioms 'the aggregate of which cannot be seen in another hypostasis' (ὧν τὸ ἄθροισμα ἐφ' ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως θεωρηθῆναι ἀμήχανον).[87] This sequence shows clearly that John of Damascus saw no categorical difference whatsoever between substantial and hypostatic qualities: both are unstructured assemblages. Under these circumstances it comes as no surprise that some late Patristic authors no longer define οὐσία in Aristotelian fashion as a combination of genus and specific differences but rather give long descriptive lists. For example, in a Pseudo-Athanasian *Sermon* on the Annunciation, which can be dated to the eighth or to the early ninth century, the human οὐσία is defined as the ἄθροισμα of the following idioms: 'created, … intelligent, rational, animate, corporeal, passible, soluble, subject to time, mortal, capable of being born, corruptible, capable of growth, changeable, alterable, capable of feeling sorrow, and whatever else can be said equally about a human being by way of selection and analogy' (τὸ κτιστόν ... τὸ νοερὸν τὸ λογικὸν τὸ ἔμψυχον τὸ σωματικὸν τὸ παθητικὸν τὸ ῥευστὸν τὸ χρονικὸν τὸ θνητὸν τὸ γεννητὸν τὸ φθαρτὸν τὸ αὐξητικὸν τὸ τρεπτὸν τὸ ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸ λυπηρὸν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα κατὰ ἀναλογίαν καὶ ἐκλογισμὸν ἐπίσης ἐπὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον λαμβανόμενα).[88]

Unlike the Cappadocians, the author of the *Sermon* on the Annunciation use the term οὐσία for the οὐσιώδεις ποιότητες and not for the substrate, which is now identified with hypostasis.[89] However, this shift in the meaning of nature and hy-

---

[84] Porphyry, *Isagoge*, ed. A. Busse, *Porphyrii Isagoge et in Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* (CAG, IV.1; Berlin, 1887), p. 7, ll. 21-23: ἄτομα οὖν λέγεται τὰ τοιαῦτα ὅτι ἐξ ἰδιοτήτων συνέστηκεν ἕκαστον ὧν τὸ ἄθροισμα οὐκ ἂν ἐπ' ἄλλου ποτὲ τὸ αὐτὸ γένοιτο.

[85] Cf. Anastasius of Antioch, *Dialogue with a Tritheite*, ed. Sakkos, p. 99, ll. 651-652: ὑπόστασίς ἐστιν ἀφοριστικοὶ χαρακτῆρες τῷδέ τινι καὶ μόνῳ προσόντες ἤγουν ἄθροισμα συμβεβηκότων; and Maximus, *Opuscula*, PG 91, 276AB: ἄτομόν ἐστιν κατὰ μὲν τοὺς φιλοσόφους ἰδιωμάτων συναγωγὴ ὧν τὸ ἄθροισμα ἐπ' ἄλλου θεωρεῖσθαι οὐ δύναται.

[86] John of Damascus, *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus*, 1, ed. Kotter, p. 173, ll. 1-4.

[87] John of Damascus, *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus*, 1, ed. Kotter, pp. 173-174, ll. 6-10.

[88] Pseudo-Athanasius, *Sermon on the Annunciation*, 3, PG 28, 921A9-14. For the date, cf. M. Jugie, 'Deux homélies patristiques pseudépigraphes', *EO* 39 (1940), pp. 283-289.

[89] This conceptual framework can be traced back to the sixth century. Leontius of Byzantium, for example, states in his *Epilyseis* that 'the appellation 'Christ' does not signify nature but hypostasis

postasis was primarily due to the constraints of the Christological model developed by the defenders of Chalcedon and did not affect the underlying framework, which is remarkably consistent: a core of being that is beyond human understanding is juxtaposed with accidents. In this framework one can still say that some accidents can be found in all members of a species but this fact does not give these accidents a special status nor permit the conclusion that their totality forms a distinct entity: as we have seen they are nothing more than an 'aggregate' of essentially unconnected features. As a consequence, any likeness short of identity must be considered in-complete and unity can only be achieved if it includes the hypostatic dimension as well. I would argue that this is the context for Methodius' Trinitarian speculations and that his strategy of mutually attributing names and definitions to the Son and the Spirit (as well as to image and word) was a well-considered response to the erosion of the concept of substance. Although he makes his case by exploiting existing terminological ambiguities and would therefore undoubtedly have claimed that he was merely explicating what had already been implicit in traditional Trini-tarian theology the solution he arrived at was clearly highly original. And yet it would have been very easy to miss this originality: indeed, Jean Gouillard, the editor of the *Life* of Euthymius, considered the whole passage to be derivative.[90] With this article I hope to have shown that far from being fossilised the theological discourse of the late and post-Patristic period produced new and exciting ideas. These ideas are developed within a conceptual framework whose roots can be traced back to the fourth and fifth centuries but which would itself have been completely alien to earlier theologians.

---

around which (sc. the hypostasis) the natures are seen <and> in which (sc. the natures) the person is separated out' (τῆς Χριστοῦ προσηγορίας οὐ φύσιν ἀλλ' ὑπόστασιν σημαινούσης περὶ ἢν αἱ φύσεις ὁρῶνται καὶ ἐν αἷς τὸ πρόσωπον ἀφορίζεται), cf. Leontius of Byzantium, *Epilyseis*, *PG* 86, 1928A.

[90] Cf. Gouillard, 'Vie d'Euthyme', p. 16.